



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**History and Transformation: A Case Study of Jhule Lal in Sindh, Pakistan**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research paper explores the historical evolution and transformation of Jhule Lal in Sindh, Pakistan, examining the contrasting perspectives of Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims. It delves into the ongoing process of reshaping the shared Jhule Lal complex by both communities. Sindhi Hindus hold greater influence, as they control the entire management and decision-making process, while Sindhi Muslims lack power and authority, requiring Hindu consent for unilateral decisions. The Jhule Lal complex, situated adjacent to the Balanbo Sahib area, consists of a primary shrine, a mosque, and the Jot's room/temple. Previously, Muslim followers visited the Balanbo Sahib area for rituals, but this practice ceased following its transformation. Hindus introduced a Shiv temple, an equestrian statue, and adorned the main gates with Hindu symbols. The study identifies a significant shift in the shared Jhule Lal complex in 2017, wherein Hindu patrons declared Jhule Lal as a Hindu Pir within the main shrine. Conversely, the Muslim community's transformation efforts are also evident in this study, with Muslim patrons placing the Holy Quran inside the shrine and affixing Islamic religious stickers on the shrine walls. Additionally, Muslims have revitalized the mosque within the complex.

**Keywords:**      Jhule Lal, Shared Somplex, Sindh, Sindhi Hindus, Sindhi Muslims, Transformation

**Introduction**

Jhule Lal shared Complex is situated in Matiari district, approximately 50 kilometers away from Hyderabad in Sindh. This region of Sindh was under the oppressive rule of Mirk Shah during the 10th century. Mirk Shah was a tyrannical ruler who issued a harsh ultimatum to the Hindu population: "Convert to Islam, leave Sindh, or face certain death." In response, the Hindu community requested some time to contemplate his demand of embracing Islam. They embarked on a forty-day ritual on the banks of the Indus River, seeking deliverance from the cruel despot who sought to impose the Islamic faith upon them. On the banks of the Indus River, they fervently prayed for assistance. During this critical juncture, a miraculous event occurred. An individual with a white beard, seated atop a Palla fish, emerged as if an avatar from the Indus River. He reassured the Hindus, proclaiming that their savior and guide would be born in the home of Rattan in Nasarpur, named Jhule Lal, and would vanquish the despotic ruler. Jhule Lal went on to perform numerous miracles, rescuing the Hindus from the genocidal intentions of the ruthless ruler.

In an unexpected twist, Mirk Shah, recognizing the power and benevolence of Jhule Lal, beseeched Jhule Lal for protection of his people and possessions. In response, Jhule Lal commanded the waters to recede and the fires to be extinguished. This act of mercy saved Mirk Shah and many other Muslims, who subsequently joined the Hindus in venerating Jhule Lal. Jhule Lal serves as a symbol of religious coexistence and tolerance among the Sindhi Hindu and Sindhi Muslim communities in Sindh. He constructed both a Mandir (temple) and a Masjid (mosque) in the same location. Following his passing, a shrine was also built between the temple and mosque in accordance with his wishes, which were embraced by both Hindus and Muslims. This arrangement became a testament to religious harmony,

peace, and tolerance in Sindh (Kalhor, 2018). To this day, Jhule Lal continues to draw both Hindus and Muslims in Sindh, Pakistan (Ramey, 2008). Jhule Lal's devotees are known as Daryapanthis.

Following the partition of India in 1947, a majority of Sindhi Hindus migrated to India. Jhule Lal became the primary deity and a symbol of religious identity for Sindhi Hindus in India (Falzon, 2004). Despite the mass migration, Sindhi Hindus in Sindh still maintain their devotion to Jhule Lal. They travel from India to attend the annual Urs, a religious gathering held on March 15th each year. The Urs lasts for three days, with Hindus celebrating initially, followed by Muslims at the same shrine. After the 1947 partition, one million Sindhi Hindus relocated from Sindh to Ulhasnagar, Mumbai, facing numerous challenges, including economic difficulties and a sense of religious isolation. Ram Pajwani, an educator, artist, writer, and activist born in district Larkana, Sindh, played a pivotal role in uniting Sindhi Hindus under the banner of Jhule Lal by establishing a new complex dedicated to Jhule Lal in India. Through his efforts, Jhule Lal was revitalized as the primary deity and Sindhi god for Sindhi Hindus in India (Paracha, 2015).

The Sindhi Hindus who migrated from Sindh did not forsake their Sindhi culture, as they had established their identity rooted in Sindhyat, which emanated from the Sindhu River since their god took form from its waters. Ram Pajwani initiated a significant movement to unite all Sindhi Hindus in India who had relocated from Sindh. His efforts bore fruit as he authored numerous Sindhi books and played a pivotal role in elevating Sindhi to the status of an official national language in India. He also contributed to the development of Sindhi films, the creation of Sindhi websites and television channels, and the establishment of Sindhi schools. In recognition of his exceptional service in promoting the Sindhi language in India, the Indian government bestowed upon him prestigious medals and awards.

Ram Pajwani's achievements extended beyond language and culture. He successfully revitalized Jhule Lal as a figure of religious, social, political, and cultural significance in India. Jhule Lal possessed a charismatic personality, attracting even the ministers of despotic rulers and other Muslims, who became his devoted followers. He advocated for the rights of both the Hindu and Muslim communities and preached a message of love and brotherhood. Furthermore, he asserted that Hindus and Muslims were all human beings created by the same divine entity, referred to as Allah by Muslims and Ishwar by Hindus. His objective was to foster unity between Hindus and Muslims, promoting harmony, peace, tolerance, spirituality, the pursuit of truth, and guiding them towards recognizing the oneness of God (Khan, 2008).

## Literature Review

A remarkable illustration of shared sacred spaces in the Indian Subcontinent is exemplified by Jhule Lal, where both Hindus and Muslims engage in worship. Within this complex, a shrine, temple, and mosque coexist harmoniously. Similar instances of shared sacred spaces, where Hindus and Muslims peacefully worship together, can also be found in the Thatta and Badin districts of Sindh, without any conflicts arising over the dual identities of these saints (Kalhor, 2018).

Rita posits that post-partition, Jhule Lal narratives have portrayed Muslims as responsible for the victimization of Sindhi Hindus in Sindh. Jhule Lal is seen as the defender of Sindhi Hindus against the oppressive Muslim ruler. When Sindhi Hindus arrived in India after partition, they faced rejection, and Jhule Lal emerged as a unifying figure, akin to a Hindu deity (Kothari, 2007). Devout followers of Jhule Lal are known as Daryapanthis. Hindus regard Jhule Lal as a savior, leader, and champion against Islam, as he protected them from the forced conversion efforts of the despotic ruler, Mirk Shah. However, it's

worth noting that while Hindus in Sindh embraced Sufism, they did not adhere to the fundamental principles of Islam (Anand, 1996).

The contention is made that Jhule Lal was a true Muslim and a devout saint of Almighty Allah. Hindus tirelessly serve, worship, and maintain the Dargha (shrine) of Jhule Lal, leading people to perceive him as a Hindu saint. The argument is presented that if Muslims were to serve and care for the Dargha of Jhule Lal, this perception could shift among pilgrims (Shaikh, 2002). The village of Jaheja is renowned for the shrine of Shaikh Tahir, a figure with multiple identities. Hindus revere him as Jhule Lal, while Muslims know him as Shaikh Tahir. He perpetually resided in a state of divine connection, spending his early life in the forest. One day, he held seeds in his hands for sustenance, and when a camel from a passing herd sought shelter at his hut, he believed that God resided within the camel. Shaikh Tahir beseeched God, offering to share his humble meal. Although initially frightened, the camel led him to a transformative spiritual experience. News of his divine encounter quickly spread, and after his passing, his shrine became a prominent pilgrimage site. A grand fair is held at the shrine every year, attracting people from all over Sindh who celebrate it fervently (Qani, 1975).

It is noteworthy that Shaikh Tahir was a devout follower of Shaikh Bahauddin Zakaria Multani. He began as a Hindu boy earning his livelihood through labor. However, his life took a spiritual turn when he approached Shaikh Bahauddin Zakaria to learn about God's teachings. The spiritual master recognized his potential, and upon his return to Sindh, Shaikh Tahir embraced the teachings and became a lifelong devotee. He resided in Jahejo village until his passing (Vafae, 2005).

The Zindah Pir, also known as the Khwaja Khizir temple or the Asthan of Jhule Lal, was constructed by Muslim devotees in Sukkur. It is the place where Jhule Lal intervened in a critical situation. According to the legend, Jhule Lal jumped into the Indus River from Jahejo village and miraculously appeared in Sukkur to rescue a Muslim merchant's daughter from the clutches of the tyrannical Dalurai king, who sought to forcibly marry her. Jhule Lal, by altering the course of the Indus River, successfully saved Shah Hussain's daughter. In honor of this act, a shrine was erected known as Zindah Pir or Khawaja Khizir at Sukkur (Thakur, 1959). In ancient times, the Indus River used to flow through Nasarpur in Sindh. Jhule Lal was believed to have incarnated from the Indus River in the year 1007 Vikram Samvat according to the Hindu calendar. However, the course of the Indus River shifted from Nasarpur in 1758 (Aadwani, 2006). Jhule Lal engaged in a theological debate in the court of Mirk Shah, asserting the existence of a single God, the creator of all humanity. Muslims refer to Him as Allah, while Hindus call Him Krishna (Waswani, 2017).

Sindhi Hindus celebrate their New Year, known as Cheti Chand, in observance of Jhule Lal's birth, which falls on Cheti Chand day. The Jhule Lal Fair is also commemorated during this time. Devotees of Jhule Lal, referred to as Daryapanthis, offer rice, milk, and flour into the Indus River as part of their worship (Sothro, 2017). The story goes that Ratan Chand discovered an infant child in a floating wooden box on the banks of the Indus River at Nasarpur. Since Ratan was childless, he joyfully adopted the child, naming him Uderano/Jhule Lal (Gaho, 2002).

There is another prominent temple dedicated to Jhule Lal, where Muslim devotees revere him as Zindah Pir or Khwaja Khizir in Sukkur. This is where Jhule Lal supposedly dived into the Indus River from Jahejo village and reappeared on a rock at Sukkur, where the temple was subsequently built. Both Muslims and Hindus gather to pay their respects at the Jhule Lal temple in Sukkur (Thakur, 1959). Following the partition of India in 1947, a significant number of Sindhi Hindus migrated to India, where Jhule Lal assumed the role of the primary deity and a symbol of their religious identity (Falzon, 2004). According to Hindu belief, Jhule Lal's real name was Mangal, and he was the son of Ratan. He resided in Nasarpur, where a Muslim Qazi attempted forced conversions. Jhule Lal engaged in a

theological debate with the Qazi, emerging victorious. In a bet, Jhule Lal challenged the Qazi to sit on a piece of cloth (shaal) on the Indus water. If he didn't drown, it would prove his power. The Qazi accepted the challenge, but as he began to drown, Jhule Lal saved him (Baig, 2014).

Varun Devta (Darya Shah) is highly revered in Sindh, with enemies of Jhule Lal fearing his sword and horse. Jhule Lal served as a savior and source of hope for disheartened Hindus. He advised Muslims against forcibly converting Hindus, emphasizing that Islam promotes peace, tolerance, and harmony. He emphasized that there is no compulsion in religion, a principle consistent with the Holy Quran. Jhule Lal believed that Hindus and Muslims are all creations of the same one God (Aajwani, 2007). Regardless of whether he is known as Jhule Lal or Shaikh Tahir, this saint is a true legend, a peacemaker, and a significant historical figure in the subcontinent. It is essential to explore and preserve this heritage for future generations, and the Sindh government should take steps to safeguard this invaluable legacy (Bukhari, 2002).

### **Material and Methods**

In this study, a qualitative research approach was employed to conduct an in-depth case study of the Jhule Lal shared complex situated in Sindh, Pakistan. The research primarily relied on firsthand information collected through extensive fieldwork. The study utilized ethnographic research methods, which included participant observation, informal discussions, and in-depth interviews to explore the intricate aspects of the Jhule Lal shared complex. The primary focus of this research encompassed both the custodians of Jhule Lal, representing both Hindu and Muslim communities, and the devoted individuals who frequented this shared religious space. The research adopted a qualitative research approach to examine deeply into the multifaceted dimensions of the Jhule Lal shared complex. Qualitative methods were deemed appropriate for capturing the rich cultural, religious, and social aspects of this unique religious site.

The chosen research design was a case study, with the Jhule Lal shared complex serving as the specific case under investigation. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of a single, distinct entity, providing a comprehensive understanding of its dynamics. Participant Observation: Extensive participant observation was carried out within the Jhule Lal shared complex. Researchers immersed themselves in the daily practices, rituals, and interactions, closely documenting their observations.

Informal Discussions: Informal conversations were conducted with key stakeholders, including custodians and devotees. These open dialogues aimed to unearth personal beliefs, experiences, and perspectives. In-Depth Interviews were conducted with selected custodians and devoted individuals. These interviews followed a predetermined set of open-ended questions to elicit comprehensive narratives about their connection with Jhule Lal and their views on interfaith harmony. Historical records, texts, artifacts, and pertinent documents related to the Jhule Lal shared complex were meticulously analyzed to glean insights into its past and present.

The primary participants of this research comprised the custodians of Jhule Lal, representing both the Hindu and Muslim communities. These custodians played pivotal roles in the maintenance and functioning of the shared complex. Additionally, devoted individuals who frequented the Jhule Lal shared complex were included in the study to gain a holistic understanding of the religious practices and beliefs held by its visitors. Ethical standards were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the research objectives and voluntarily agreed to participate. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were diligently preserved, and cultural and religious sensitivities were respected at all times. By employing this robust research methodology, the study aimed to

unravel the complexities and nuances of the Jhule Lal shared complex, shedding light on its cultural significance and its role in fostering interfaith harmony within the diverse landscape of Sindh, Pakistan.

### **Historical Account of Jhule Lal**

Parwani recounts the legend of Jhule Lal, a river god known by various names such as Aamar Lal, Udero Lal, Jhule Lal, Zinda Pir, and Darya Shah. The story unfolds in the mid-tenth century, during the reign of the devout Muslim ruler, Mirkh Shah. Mirkh Shah was a staunch advocate of Islam and mandated its exclusive practice within his domain. He issued a decree instructing all Sindhi Hindus to convert to Islam, creating a sense of apprehension among the Hindu population. In response to this directive, the concerned Hindu community approached the despotic ruler, Mirkh Shah, seeking additional time to deliberate on this weighty matter. Mirkh Shah, in a rare display of leniency, granted them the requested time. Faced with this respite, the Sindhi Hindus congregated at the banks of the sacred Indus River, where they engaged in fervent prayers and worship to Varuna, the river god.

In a moment of divine intervention, the river god emerged from the depths of the Indus river, reassuring the worrisome Hindus. The river god conveyed that a divine savior would be born in the village of Nasarpur, into the household of Ratan and Devki, who would protect them from their plight. True to this prophecy, Devki gave birth to a son named Jhule Lal. When news of the child's birth reached Mirkh Shah, he ordered his minister, Yousif Ahio, to eliminate the infant. However, upon reaching the child's cradle, Ahio witnessed a miraculous sight—the cradle rocked by itself. As time passed, the child grew, his beard turning white, and he began performing incredible feats. Witnessing these miracles, Minister Ahio had a change of heart and refrained from harming Jhule Lal. Instead, he informed Jhule Lal that Mirkh Shah desired to meet him.

Jhule Lal, accompanied by Ahio, journeyed to meet Mirkh Shah in Thatta. There, he confronted the despotic ruler, questioning his forced conversion of Hindus to Islam. Jhule Lal argued that Islam, as a religion, advocated peace, love, tolerance, harmony, and respect for other faiths. He emphasized the commonality of their belief in one God, referred to as Allah in Islam and Ishwar in Hinduism. Mirkh Shah found Jhule Lal's arguments compelling and was inclined to heed his counsel. However, religious fundamentalists within Mirkh Shah's court accused Jhule Lal of sorcery and attempting to impose his own faith. Influenced by these advisors, Mirkh Shah ordered Jhule Lal's imprisonment.

In an astonishing turn of events, Jhule Lal transformed into the elements themselves—wind and water. The entire state of Thatta was submerged in water and consumed by fire, all through the miraculous power of Jhule Lal. Defeated and humbled, Mirkh Shah eventually became a devoted follower of Jhule Lal. In his later years, Mirkh Shah sought solace in the village of Jahejo, near Hala, and aimed to purchase land from Shaikh Maman. To his surprise, Shaikh Maman gifted him the land, now known as Udero Lal village, located 50 km from Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan. It is in this village that Jhule Lal is believed to be buried. Remarkably, a temple and a mosque stand harmoniously side by side within the same complex at Udero Lal village. Both Hindus and Muslims revere this divine figure, with Muslims referring to him as Shaik Tahir and Hindus affectionately addressing him as Jhule Lal.

Muslims hold the belief that Jhule Lal initially belonged to the Hindu faith but later converted to Islam under the guidance of Bahudeen Zakria. Parwani further adds that Sindhi Hindus have their own perspective, considering Jhule Lal to be an incarnation of the Indus River (Sindu). They believe that he emerged from the Indus River and traveled atop the Palla fish, an indigenous species of the Indus River. When Jhule Lal was born in Nasarpur, the cradle he rested in rocked by itself. This phenomenon is seen as reminiscent of the gentle waves of the Indus River, drawing parallels with the story of Varuna, who also emerged from

the Indus River. The narrative of Jhule Lal is closely associated with the teachings of the Bhagwad Gita and is linked to Lord Krishna in a similar context (Parwani, 2010).

### Transformation of the Jhule Lal Complex by Hindus

In 2014, a female Hindu Gaadinasheen, the custodian of the Jhule Lal Shrine, initiated a physical transformation of the second section of the Jhule Lal complex. Prior to her, her father, Preetam Dass, had been the primary custodian but had not undertaken any changes to the Jhule Lal complex. Additionally, Syed Attauallh Shah Bukhari, a Muslim native of the village, expressed his concerns:

“He noted that Hindus were introducing new developments, including the construction of a separate Shiv temple and an equestrian statue of Jhule Lal. This was being done to assert that these structures had existed since the inception of the Jhule Lal complex. He raised apprehensions about further expansion and physical alterations, suggesting that it aimed to emphasize Hindu supremacy and gradually Hinduize the shared shrine of Jhule Lal. He argued that the Dargah (shrine) and religion should remain distinct entities and that the ongoing physical transformation of the shared space by Hindus needed to be halted. He feared that this transformation might lead to future problems and conflicts for the younger generations of both Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims. He expressed his bewilderment at why the Hindu Gaadinasheen was tampering with a long-standing shared space of tolerance that had existed for generations. In his view, Dargahs and saints should not be considered anyone's exclusive property” (Personal interview, 28 April 2019).

### Declaration of Jhule Lal as Hindu Pir

On 30 September 2017, a significant event related to the transformation of Jhule Lal took place at the Jhule Lal shrine. According to Muslims, the Hindu Gaadinasheen attempted a complete transformation of Jhule Lal into a Hindu deity by placing a declaration signboard inside the tomb of Jhule Lal. This signboard was inscribed in the Sindhi language and proclaimed, "Sheri Amar Udero Lal/Jhule Lal Sain Hindu Peer Ghore Sudho Hin Qubay Sahib mien Samaeyal Ahe" (Jhule Lal is a Hindu deity who is immersed into the tomb with his horse). Furthermore, Ghulam Abass Shaikh, the Muslim Gaadinasheen of the Jhule Lal, expressed his perspective:

He mentioned the economic disparity between the Hindu and Muslim communities, with Hindus being more influential and prosperous. He stated that Hindus had attempted to physically alter the primary shared space of the Jhule Lal complex because of their greater power and support, including backing from the Sindh government. He also noted that Hindus were well-educated and adept at presenting their case effectively. In contrast, he highlighted the challenging circumstances faced by Muslims in India, where they were continually oppressed by Hindus. He pointed out that Hindus in Pakistan enjoyed significant prosperity and government support, with a strong lobby and backing from influential authorities (Personal Interview, 20 September 2019).



The Hindus affixed the declaration board designating Jhule Lal as a Hindu Pir at the main entrance gate of Jhule Lal's shrine on 30 September 2017.

As per Mujawar's account, Hindus clandestinely entered the Jhule Lal shrine after all its gates were closed at 9 pm. They surreptitiously installed the declaration signboard during the night, evading notice. When Muslims arrived at the shrine early in the morning for their prayers, they were taken aback to find the Hindu Pir signboard affixed to the main entrance gate of Jhule Lal's shrine. This news quickly spread among the Muslim community, and thousands gathered at the shrine of Jhule Lal, led by Ghulam Abbas Shaikh, the Muslim sajjadanashen of Jhule Lal. The growing angry crowd posed a situation that was becoming increasingly uncontrollable. The conversion of Jhule Lal into a Hindu deity was met with strong resistance from the Muslims. Additionally, Syed Mahfooz Ali Shah expressed his viewpoint:

There had always been a dispute regarding the identity of Jhule Lal between Hindus and Muslims. Hindus consistently attempted to physically transform the Jhule Lal shrine into a Hindu Pir, but Muslims never allowed this transformation because Jhule Lal is regarded as a Muslim saint. According to Muslims, if Jhule Lal were a Hindu, they would not have been visiting his shrine to pay homage. In 2017, Hindus installed a declaration notice board at the shrine asserting that this saint is a Hindu Pir. This action infuriated Muslims, leading to protests against the Hindus. Allah Dino (A.D) Khawaja, who was the Inspector-General of Police in Sindh, played a significant role in supporting the Hindus due to his upbringing in a Hindu household as a Muslim. When Hindus installed this declaration board declaring Jhule Lal as a Hindu Pir, the Superintendent of Police in District Matiari initially refused to entertain the complaints of the Muslims. Tensions between Muslims and Hindus escalated, and riots seemed imminent, but the police realized that the situation could spiral out of control, compelling them to remove the declaration board designating Jhule Lal as a Hindu Pir (Personal interview, 3 January 2020). Muslims were determined to remove the Hindu deity signboard, prompting direct intervention by the Sindh government. Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah swiftly took notice of the situation and instructed the Sindh police to intervene promptly. SSP District Matiari, Syed Imdad Ali Shah, visited Jhule Lal's shrine without delay.

Bhool Chand, a senior Hindu member of the Sheva Mandly of Jhule Lal shrine, stated: Jhule Lal is considered one of ours, but the management of all aspects is predominantly handled by the Hindus. We believe that we did not commit any wrongdoing when we affixed the declaration board asserting Jhule Lal as a Hindu Pir. The Muslims, specifically the Shaikhs, lacked genealogical or evidentiary proof to substantiate their claim that Jhule Lal is a Muslim saint. If they assert that Jhule Lal was converted to Islam, why have the station and village not been named after a Muslim name like Shaikh Tahir? However, our desire is for peace and tolerance. In the eyes of God, Hindus and Muslims are equal. Regrettably, they appear to be inclined toward disrupting peace, which could lead to animosity and turmoil in the future. If they persist in their claim that Jhule Lal is a Muslim saint, it could result in communal and religious violence (Personal interview, 3 October 2019).

The police assumed control of the shrine and summoned prominent Hindus along with the Muslim Sajjadhanasheen, Ghulam Abbas Shaikh. Muslims insisted that the declaration notice board designating Jhule Lal as a Hindu deity be taken down, or they would take matters into their own hands. The Hindus, however, refused to remove the notice board. During a press conference in 2017, both Pir Ghulam Mujdad Sarhandi and Muslim Sajadansheen Ghulam Abbas Shaikh made the following statements:

"This is a conspiracy against the Muslim Dargah of Jhule Lal, who advocated the message of peace, tolerance, and harmony among the Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims of Sindh. He is a Muslim saint, and we seek to live in peace while promoting the message of this saint's tolerance. However, Hindu Mata, who hails from Bombay and is an Indian

national, appears to be intent on sowing discord among the Sindhi Hindus and Muslims of Sindh. Whenever she visits, she brings new plans aimed at inciting riots among Hindus and Muslims in Sindh. She replaced the declaration board of a Hindu Pir in place of the Muslim Saint. We will never tolerate such evil acts that promote bloodshed among Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims. Sindh is the land of Sufis, love, harmony, and coexistence, and we yearn for peace. However, she seems to have an Indian mindset that rejects peace. We hereby warn her to refrain from any attempts to alter this Dargah. It should remain in its historical condition, as it has for generations. Nevertheless, Hindus, as followers of this Muslim saint, may continue to visit and worship here" (Press conference at the shrine of Jhule Lal on September 29, 2017).

Ultimately, the police decided that the declaration board designating Jhule Lal as a Hindu Pir should be removed to prevent potential riots between Hindus and Muslims, and the shrine of Jhule Lal should remain in its old and unaltered state. Neither Hindus nor Muslims would be allowed to install anything at the primary (first part) Jhule Lal shrine. The removal of the Hindu Pir notice board was carried out by the police department, finally quelling the anger of the Muslims. However, this incident left a lasting mark on the ongoing dispute between Hindus and Muslims regarding Jhule Lal. Sarfraz Shaikh, a Muslim Mujawar at Jhule Lal's shrine, further contended:

"Hindus insulted the Dargah of Jhule Lal when they installed the signboard designating him as a Hindu Pir, suggesting that Jhule Lal is a Hindu Pir buried with a horse in the tomb. Hindu Gaadinasheen is responsible for all this turmoil. She was the one who placed the Hindu deity notice board to assert that Jhule Lal is a Hindu deity, preventing Muslims from considering him a Muslim saint, Shaikh Muhammad Tahir. If her efforts had succeeded, no Muslim would have been allowed to enter the shrine of Jhule Lal. Hindu Gaadinasheen made a grave mistake in declaring Jhule Lal as a Hindu Pir, further fueling animosity between Muslims and Hindus. She holds an Indian extremist mindset, much like Shiv Sena members who demolished the 16th-century Babri Masjid in India in 1992. She is neither a Sufi nor interested in promoting tolerance and harmony in Sindh, unlike her ancestors" (Personal communication 2020).

Furthermore, Ramesh, a Hindu member of the Sheva Mandly, explained:

"We made the right decision by affixing the declaration of the Hindu Pir board for Jhule Lal, which stated, 'Jhule Lal was immersed in the land with a horse, and he is a Hindu deity.' It was the 9th Muharram Sharif. A Muslim Shaikh misled Syed Imdad Shah, the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) of District Matiari, regarding the declaration of the Hindu Pir Jhule Lal. A large number of Muslims had gathered on the occasion and presented several demands to the Hindus. We acquiesced to all their demands because our intention was not to establish our identity but to assert the factual and true identity of Jhule Lal. If you visit the shrine, you'll find that a Muslim Shaikh placed 'Labbik Hussain' text on the main gate. We Hindus are also followers of Hussain. During the conflict surrounding the declaration of the Hindu Pir board, when SSP Imdad Shah summoned us, all the elderly white-bearded Hindu men attended his call. He insulted all these elderly and senior Hindu citizens, accusing them of causing trouble and sowing discord among Muslims and Hindus. He made the wrong decision by siding with the Muslims and removing the declaration board designating Jhule Lal as a Hindu Pir. On another occasion, he admitted his error when he met me in Hala, acknowledging that he succumbed to Muslim pressure. He apologized, and I asked him to leave it to Jhule Lal, who watches our every action" (Personal interview, 6 April 2019).

The Hindu Gaadinasheen of Jhule Lal, using her authority, has been attempting to alter the shared space of Jhule Lal. She wields significant power, surpassing that of the Muslim Sajadansheen of Jhule Lal, and her legal background as a barrister gives her the ability to strategically employ Hindu signs and symbols to declare Jhule Lal as a Hindu Pir. She is well-versed in developing a strong case supported by evidence and Hindu symbols,



ensuring victory in any legal proceedings regarding Jhule Lal's identity. In contrast, the Muslim Sajadansheen asserts that he possesses documented proof confirming the shrine's Muslim ownership. He cites an official British registry from 1938, which bears his grandfather's name, Haji Gul Muhammad Shaikh, as evidence of their rightful ownership. The Muslim Sajadansheen challenges the Hindus to present any documented proof they may have, maintaining that the entire property of Jhule Lal's shrine belongs to the Muslims. He warns that if the Hindus continue their attempts at dominance, he will pursue legal action against them based on his British official documents

In another section of the Jhule Lal Complex, there is an ancient sacred well called Balanbo Sahib, where both Hindus and Muslims perform water rituals. These rituals hold deep significance for their respective followers, with the water believed to possess healing properties for Muslims and a sacredness akin to Ganga water or abe-zamzam for Hindus. Muslim Shaikh Mujawar Afaque Shaikh points out that, in addition to the Hindus, the Hindu Gaadinasheen is determined to exert control over the entire Jhule Lal Complex. She has made physical alterations to Balanbo Sahib, constructing a Shev temple and a room for an equestrian horse. Furthermore, she has transformed the gate with Hindu symbols, conveying the message that Jhule Lal exclusively belongs to Hindus, not Muslims. Regardless, he asserts that they will vehemently oppose any attempt to change the main shrine of Jhule Lal. They are prepared to take legal action, involve the Sindh police, and protest against the Hindu Gaadinasheen's efforts to convert Jhule Lal into an exclusively Hindu space .



After the transformation, Balanbo Sahib (sacred well) is seen on the left side, and on the right side is Shiv temple which has been constructed at another part of the Jhule Lal complex in March 2016 that was not present before.

In 2016, the Hindu Gaadinaheen of Jhule Lal made significant changes to the area surrounding Balanbo Sahib. She erected a Shiv temple adjacent to Balanbo Sahib. As a result of this construction, Muslim devotees of Jhule Lal refrained from visiting Balanbo Sahib to partake in the water rituals from the well. Muslim Shaikh Mujawars and other Muslim brothers appealed to Mata Sahib, urging her not to alter the original space of Balanbo Sahib. They emphasized that her father had always discouraged physical transformations, advocating for the continued use of Balanbo Sahib by Muslim followers. Her ancestors had warmly welcomed Muslim devotees of Jhule Lal who found solace in performing their water

rituals there. However, the transformation has deterred Muslim followers from visiting Balanbo Sahib .



Inside view of Shev Temple10, March 2019

The caretakers of the other Jhule Lal temples in Sindh were deeply displeased with the Hindu Gaadinasheen and strongly objected to her actions of altering the Balanbo Sahib site and constructing the Shiv temple. They believed that Jhule Lal held a unique and distinct position among the Hindu avatars, and her decisions were causing disruption. Babo Suresh, the custodian of the Jhule Lal temple in Mirpurkhas, Sindh, expressed his concerns, saying that Mata Sahib, the Hindu Gaadinasheen, did not reside permanently in Sindh and visited sporadically from Bombay, India. He also noted that she did not engage much with the Sindhi people and had delegated her authority to caretakers who did not adequately tend to the shrine in her absence. He believed that her decision to construct the Shiv temple was unwise, as Jhule Lal held a special place in the hearts of Sindhi Hindus, being seen as their River god, Sindhi Bhagwan, and Avatar, who had saved them and given them a new life .

The construction of the Shiv temple and statues at the Balanbo Sahib site had deterred Muslim followers from visiting. Aneeta, a Muslim woman and a follower of Jhule Lal from Nawab Shah, expressed her reluctance to go there due to the presence of the temple. She mentioned that her male family members also discouraged her from going there, especially with the introduction of the temple. In the past, when there was no temple, her family used to perform water rituals at Balanbo Sahib, but now they avoid it .

Additionally, on 10th January 2020, Hindus erected a new main gate with various figures at another part of the Jhule Lal shared space shrine complex, a feature that was previously absent. The gate included a statue of the Pallo (fish) at its top, the Om symbol at its center, a trident (triśul) on the top corner posts, and the ancient religious icon Swastika on the lower corner posts. Among these Hindu symbols, the phrase "Juhle Lal Bera Ee Paar, Dargah Shiri Amar Jhule Lal" (he who calls Jhule Lal, all his wishes would be fulfilled) was inscribed in Sindhi. This gate stood in front of the main entrance of Jhule Lal's shrine.

Ghulam Abbas Shaikh, the Muslim Sajjadanashen of Jhule Lal, expressed concerns that the Hindu Gaadinasheen's actions were disruptive and did not promote peace and tolerance among Sindhi Hindus and Muslims. He believed that her mindset was influenced

by Indian extremist thought, and her elders had previously maintained the shared space of Jhule Lal without such transformations. He feared that these changes would lead to significant discord among Sindhi Hindus and Muslims and emphasized their determination to prevent further alterations to the shared space.



Before the transformation, the other part of the Complex of Jhule Lal's entrance gate was without the Hindus symbols on 15 May 2019, which is in front of the first part of the main Complex of Jhule Lal's shrine and besides the Balanbo Sahib



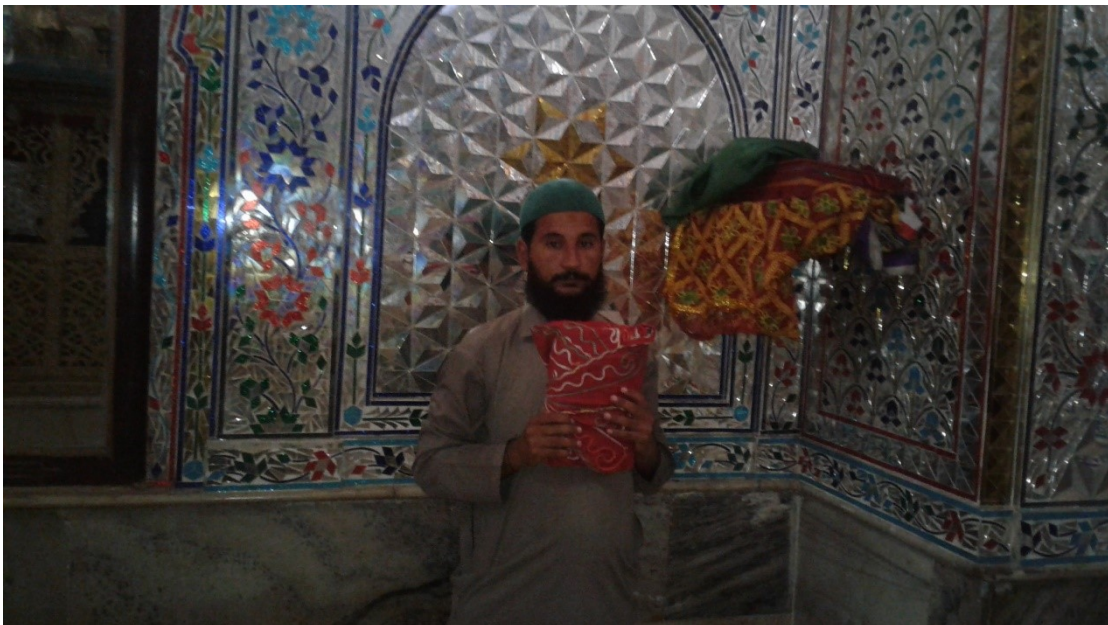
Close view of the gate, the statue of the Pallo (fish) was fixed on the top of the gate, and Om was written on the center of the gate, a trident (trīsul) was made on the posts on the top corner, and Swastika is made on the below posts of both right and left corners of the gate that was not present on 15 May 2019.

The transformation process of the central first part of the Jhule Lal shared space shrine complex has not been carried out by the Hindus, despite their attempts to do so over time. However, the Muslims have consistently resisted these efforts to prevent any

disturbances in law and order. The intervention of the Sindh police has been crucial in maintaining peace and preventing communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims regarding the shared shrine of Jhule Lal. From the Hindu perspective, they believe that Muslims are attempting to change the identity of Jhule Lal and declare him a Muslim saint, with the intention of taking over the entire Jhule Lal Complex.

### **Muslims Transformation of Jhule Lal**

Recent developments have been observed in the main shrine of Jhule Lal by the Muslims, where religious text stickers and various religious symbols have been placed inside the shrine. A Molvee, who visits the shrine daily in the morning, recites the holy Quran within Jhule Lal's shrine. Additionally, a mosque has been constructed recently, as it did not originally exist, providing a place for Muslims to offer their prayers. The Hindus, including the Gaadinasheen of Jhule Lal, Mata Sahib, have not raised objections to these changes. They respect the presence of the holy Quran in the shrine, considering it the sacred book of Allah, and they have also not opposed the construction of the mosque. They emphasize that Jhule Lal's shrine is open to all, welcoming both Muslims and Hindus to come and pay their respects to Lal .



Muslim Mujawar of Jhule Lal Sarfraz Shaikh shows the holy Quran (sacred book) placed in the main shrine of the Jhule- Lal.

Muslims countered these claims by arguing that the holy Quran had been placed in the shrine for generations, and Hindus were making false statements. Vikram Dass, a Hindu devotee of Jhule Lal, suggested that the Muslim Shaikh Mujawars were primarily interested in collecting donations. They feared that if Jhule Lal were depicted as a Hindu Pir, it might hinder Muslims from entering the shrine, impacting their ability to collect funds. Hence, Muslims consistently portrayed Jhule Lal as a Muslim saint and introduced the holy Quran to the shrine, which was not present previously. They also affixed the Muslim Qalama on the main entrance gate and attached numerous Islamic inscriptions within the shrine to establish Jhule Lal as a Muslim saint. These Islamic inscriptions were a recent addition to the shrine.

The differences in beliefs and practices regarding Jhule Lal between Hindus and Muslims are significant. Despite sharing the same physical and religious space, they have established separate shrines. Muslims have incorporated the Quran into their space instead of the traditional burning lamp, considering Jhule Lal a saint rather than an incarnation of

Allah. They have portrayed him as a legendary figure and named him Shaikh Tahir (C. Ray 2012). In response, Hindus contended that Muslims introduced religious inscriptions inside Jhule Lal's shrine, which was a recent development. The first Muslim Qalama, "La ilaha illallah Muhammad-ur-Rasulullah," was placed at the main entrance gate of the Jhule Lal shrine and also displayed inside. Khem Chand, a Hindu follower of Jhule Lal, explained that Sindhi Hindus, who are a minority, chose to remain in Sindh after the partition of India in 1947 because their revered deity, Jhule Lal, is considered a Sindhi god who emerged from the Indus River (Sindhu). He noted that recent religious fervor had grown, and some Muslims sought to depict Jhule Lal as a Muslim saint for economic reasons. These Muslim Shaikh Mujawars were influenced to avoid cooperating or befriending Sindhi Hindus and added Islamic religious texts to the shrine to support their claim of Jhule Lal as a Muslim saint. These Islamic texts were not present in the shrine before .



Muslim's first Qalma Teyab was fixed inside the shrine Jhule Lal's by Muslims

Muslims affixed various Muslim texts and image stickers inside Jhule Lal's shrine, including phrases like "Ya Allah," "Ya Rasulallah," "La baik," "Ya Rasulallah," "Mashallah," as well as images of the Kabba and the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Muslim Mujawar Nazeer Shaikh firmly stated: "The Qalma Sharif was placed on the main entrance gate of the Jhule Lal when the shrine was originally constructed, and we have not added it recently. Hindus are making false claims and spreading falsehoods. If Hindus have any doubts, they can consult the elderly mason who will attest to the truth. We firmly believe that Jhule Lal is a Muslim saint. Unfortunately, we are in a weaker position because Hindus oversee all the management and have control over the Jhule Lal's shrine complex" (Personal Interview, 10 November 2020). Muslims hold a strong belief that Jhule Lal's grave and shrine were established in accordance with Muslim traditions. The burial of Jhule Lal followed Islamic customs, including the ritual bath (gosal) and the funeral prayer (Janaza namaz), which saw the participation of a significant number of Muslim devotees. However, Hindus have a differing perspective. They assert that Jhule Lal's resting place is not a grave but rather a Dargah (sacred shrine). Ramesh Lal, a Hindu Shevadar, argued:

"We refer to Jhule Lal as a Dargah, not a shrine. It's like a 'Jeyareh Samadi' or a 'Living Samadhi,' a concept where a Hindu spiritual master, before his passing, instructs that his samadhi should remain alive, and he would continue to reside there. His samadhi is prepared accordingly, and he remains there perpetually. I can provide an example from the case of Shah Inayat Juhak Shif saint, where a Hindu relative named Dada Bohgre was buried in a manner following Muslim customs, and his grave still exists there. He expressed a desire

to be buried at Shah Inayat Dargah after his death, so his funeral prayer was conducted by the Gaadnaheen of Shah Inayat Dargah, and he was interred there. Hindu graves can be constructed, and the deceased can be buried in accordance with their wishes. Many Hindus are buried at the Dargah of Shah Inayat Jhok Sharif" (Personal Interview, 6 April 2019).

## **Conclusion**

The primary shared space Jhule Lal's complex has remained a focal point for ongoing physical alterations. The Muslim Shaikh Mujawars stay within the shrine's main complex from morning till evening, diligently collecting revenue. They only depart when the shrine's gates are closed by the Hindus, who hold the key to the Jhule Lal shrine. Muslims stay on-site to greet visitors, firmly asserting that Jhule Lal is a Muslim saint, not a Hindu one. In contrast, Hindu attendants inform their followers that Jhule Lal is a Hindu deity. Muslim devotees abstain from entering the Hindu Jot room. Previously, the mosque within the complex was non-functional, and Muslims prayed in an open area. However, it became operational in 2014, with the installation of a loudspeaker and the hiring of a religious caretaker to maintain the mosque and call the Azan (call to prayer) five times daily. Muslims now organize annual religious events in the mosque, making it fully functional. Located within the main complex, the keys to the mosque are held by the Molvee (Muslim clergy). Both Hindus and Muslims have accused each other of attempting to transform the Jhule Lal shrine. Hindus allege that Muslims have done so by affixing holy texts and placing the Quran within the shrine's main area. During fieldwork within the main complex, it was observed that Jhule Lal's grave adhered to a Muslim style, with the Holy Quran placed in one corner. The first Kalama was inscribed on the main entrance gate, and other Islamic inscriptions adorned the shrine and the graves of four elderly Muslim Mujawars located on the left side of the shrine's entrance. No Hindu Samadhi was found within the main shrine of Jhule Lal. The mosque and Jot room/temple stand adjacent to the shrine of Jhule Lal. Hindu devotees predominantly visit the Jhule Lal shrine and then proceed to the Jot room for worship. In contrast, Muslim followers of Jhule Lal pay homage at his shrine but do not enter the Jot room. Following the transformation of the second part of the Jhule Lal shared space complex, Hindus have endeavored to alter the primary section of the complex where Jhule Lal's grave is located. Their efforts have encountered staunch resistance from Muslims, including noisy protests that risked inciting communal riots between Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims. To maintain law and order, the Sindh police intervened effectively and averted the outbreak of communal violence. In a policy declaration, the police outlined that the first main complex should remain unchanged, with strict penalties for any group attempting to alter it. The Sindh police have resolved to take disciplinary action against those who breach these rules in accordance with existing laws and directives from the Sindh government. The policy affirms that Hindus can continue to oversee the management of the Jhule Lal main complex, and both Muslim and Hindu devotees can freely pay their respects at the shrine of Jhule Lal.

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