The more than a decade-old civil war in the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir, which till today shows no sign of abating, has resulted in the death of an estimated 40,000 people. The communal boundary between Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus in the Jammu province continues to be a gulf of hostility and suspicion separated from the rest of South Asia, with historically been relatively cordial as compared to the rest of North India.

Jammu is popularly known as the ‘City of Temples’, owing to its large number of Hindu shrines. However, Jammu is also home to numerous Sufi dargahs, which are important centres of pilgrimage and togetherness for people of different castes and communities. In this, these shrines play a unique role, there being no other such structures which perform a similar function. In a society where caste and religious differences are so marked, this role of shrines is a particularly important one. For the Hindus and Sikhs who flock to the shrines, the burying grounds are seen as powerful spiritual beings (deities) that can grant them their wishes. For the Muslim devotees, they are considered to be intermediaries (wasiyat or zanjeer), who can plead with God on their behalf in times of need, to have their requests fulfilled.

The following article deals, briefly, with the principal Sufi shrines of Jammu town. It may be noted here that although these are Muslim shrines, they are today, for the most part, frequented more by Hindus than by Muslims. Muslims form only a very small proportion of the population of Jammu town. In the 1947 Partition riots, Jammu town was almost fully burned, and the entire city was occupied by the Raja. It was only from the 1950s onwards that small numbers of Muslims began settling here from other parts of the state.

We now turn to a brief discussion of the major Sufi dargahs in Jammu town.

Pir Raushan ‘Ali Shah

The first major Sufi to come to the Jammu region was Pir Raushan ‘Ali Shah, whose dargah is located at Gumat, in Jammu town. Some believe him to have been one of the Prophet’s companions (sahabah) but Kardar estimates his arrival to have been in the 13th century, before Timur’s invasion of Persia. He is said to have arrived in the region of Jammu and Kashmir (1885-1925) and his ‘bhii’s (water-carriers), accepted him as his follower. The Pir declined, because he was blessed with a very long life.

Pir Mitha

His real name is said to have been Sayyed Shamsuddin, but he is known more popularly as Baba Budhan (‘The Old Baba’) because he was blessed with a very long life. Baba Budhan was born near Lahore in the village of Towalwani, the birthplace of Guru Nanak. Tradition has it that he was a very close friend of Guru Nanak and the two would often meet to discuss spiritual matters. The dargah of the Baba is visited every day by scores of people, mainly Hindus and Sikhs. On Thursdays, several thousands gather here, and at the ‘urs, held on the first Thursday of the local month of Har, the crowds are enormous.

Pir Mitha’s dargah is located on a hillock on the banks of the river Tawi. According to local tradition, he came to Jammu from Iran in 1442 CE during the reign of Raja Ajay Singh. It so happened that one day the Raja’s wife fell seriously ill. The Pir is said to have cured the queen, as a result of which the king and many of his subjects became his disciples. An entire Hindu caste group, the ‘low’ caste bhists (water-carriers), accepted him as their spiritual preceptor. Soon, the Pir’s fame spread far and wide, and many began converting to Islam under his influence. Because of this, the Pir was faced with stiff opposition from some Hindu priests. His most vehement opponent was Siddh Garib Nath, a Shakti Gorkhnathi yogi. However, as the story goes, the two soon became friends.

The association between Pir Mitha and Siddh Garib Nath is particularly interesting. Barniwal writes that after the yogi overcame his initial opposition to the Pir, the two ‘developed a great respect for each other.’ They decided to settle down together in the cave where Pir Mitha lived. This cave is known as Pir Khol, the two ‘developed a great respect for each other.’ They then turned to a brief discussion of the major Sufi dargahs in Jammu town.

Pir Lakhdata

He is said to have performed many miracles, by which the Raja was so impressed that he became his devotee and requested him to settle in his city. When the Pir died, the Raja laid him to rest with full burials Sufis are seen as powerful spiritual beings, and to took his title of ‘Pir’ along with theirs. That is why the cave is today called the Pir Khol and the heads of the Nath yogis who reside there are known as Piris.

Pir Mitha died in 1476 CE and is buried in a locality named after him. Like the other Sufi shrines in Jammu town, Hindus vastly outnumber Muslims. The oil that burns at the Pir’s grave is known as the ‘Pir’s oil’ because he was blessed with a very long life.

Baba Jiwan Shah

Baba Jiwan Shah was born in 1852 at Salehpur Chaprar in the Sialkot district of Punjab, to a Hussaini Sayyed family known for its piety. At the age of 23, upon the advice of his preceptor, the Chishti Pir Sain Baqir ‘Ali Shah, he left his village, spending 12 years in meditation and austerity. In 1864, he went to Jammu town, where he took up residence in a graveyard, meditating inside the grave of Guru Nanak. After 12 years, he went to the city, the rest of his life in the region around Jammu, preaching Islam and acquiring disciples. His dargah is found in Jammu town at a locality named after him.

Baba Jiwan Shah’s disciples came from all backgrounds and included Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and others. Notable among his followers were Maharaja Pratap Singh, ruler of Jammu and Kashmir (1885-1925) and his brother Amar Singh. The holy man died in December 2019. His ‘urs is celebrated every year on this day. For this occasion, food is distrib- ed to the poor and the Holy Qur’an is recited. In addition, every Thursday several hundred followers visit his dargah, Hindus outnumbering the Muslims. The oil that burns in the lamp there is taken as a special ointment to cure ailments. Many childless mothers come here to request the Baba to plead with God for a son for them.

Panj Pir

At Ramnagar, in the outskirts of Jammu town, is the shrine of the Panj Piris, or ‘Five Piris’. ThePanj Pir cult is widespread all over northern India and Pakistan. The composi-
tation of the Panj Pirs varies from place to place. In some cases, it includes both Mus-
lim as well as Hindu figures. The origins of the cult of the five Pandava brothers, heroes of 
the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, as well as the tradition of revering the five mem-
bers of the ahl-ul-bayt, the ‘holy family’ con-
sisting of the Prophet Muhammad, his 
daughter Fatima, her husband ‘Ali and their 
sons Hasan and Husain.

Little is known about the history of the 
Panj Pir shrine in Jammu. Legend has it that 
five brothers of a Muslim family spent many 
years there in meditation and austerities 
and then they all left to go their own ways.1

According to local tradition, one day the 
city of Jammu lost their lives and many more were 
fitted to flee to Pakistan, some Hindus at-
tended that the Panj Pir shrine was actually a Muslim 
dwelling place. In some cases, it includes both Mus-
lim and Hindu figures. The origins of the cult of the 
Panj Pirs varies from place to place. In some cases, it includes both Mus-

The great popularity of the Panj Pir dor-
gh, especially among the local Hindus, is 
because of this great legacy. It is believed to be 
the oldest Muslim place of worship in India. The Panj Pir shrine is looked after by a 
Sufi saint, is buried alongside his spiritual 
preceptor. It is because of this great legacy 
of the Sufis that, centuries after their deaths, 
they continue to play such an important 
role in the lives of their followers, irrespec-
tive of religion and caste.

The Hinduized dargah of a 
Sufi saint at Charmaliyal, 
Jammu.

Notes
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Karan’ in Hemvee Abdullah (Aukhya ko, edited by: 
Muhammad Ahmad Androdi); Srinagar: Jammu and 
Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 
pp. 257-52.
8. Nith, Suresh, Shri Jambavan Gufa Rasheyya Pir 
9. The present head of the Nathpurth monastery at 
Par Khosh or Pir Shams.
10. Interview with Muhammad Aslam, custodian of 
the dargah of Baba Jwan Shah, Jammu, 2 
December 1999.
11. Pandit Tilak Kaj, Hamat Baba Jwan Shah (Hindi 
ms. in the possession of Muhammad Aslam, 
custodian of the dargah of Baba Jwan Shah).
15. A phallus-shaped stone, believed by Hindus to be 
the symbol of the god Shiva.
16. Interview with Kuldip Singh Charak, Jammu, 7 
December 1999.

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