

The Mosque of the Mianwals

by Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro- October 9, 2020



About 26 km west of Khairpur Nathan Shah, in Dadu district, is located the historical Jamia Mosque of Garhi which is believed to have been built by Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro in 1660 AD, who was known as a luminary of the Kalhoro dynasty due to his popularity, preaching and piety. This mosque and seminary of Garhi became the centre and identity of the Mianwal movement in seventeenth-century Sindh.

After the martyrdom of his uncle Shah Ali alias Shahal Muhammad Kalhoro in 1657, Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro (d.1692) became the new leader of the Mianwal movement in 1658 and he shifted

his headquarters from Fatehpur in Larkana to Garhi in Dadu. He was the celebrated spiritual as well as political ruler of the Kalhora dynasty who laid the foundation of his capital Garhi in Kachho, in the plains of Dadu district. Many people from different tribes became his disciples and with their help, Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro brought all of the areas of Kachho and some parts of Kachhi district in Balochistan under his control. As a result of this, he emerged as a major religious as well as political leader and came into conflict with the tribes that were supported by the Mughals.

The Panhwars who were the lords of Kachho opposed the rising power of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro and they supported the Mughal Empire. As such, they sought to crush the uprising of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro against the Mughals and their local supporters. Some tribesmen from the Panhwar tribe supported Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro and others opposed him. Notably, Mir Jalal Khan Panhwar, Adam Khan Panhwar and others supported Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro.



Closer view of mosque domes

Achieving legendary status, Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro's followers were known as faqirs. His capital Garhi was named after a woman from whom Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro purchased the

land. At first, Mai Garhi was not willing to give her land to Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro. But she gave in when she was assured by Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro that the “land would be mine, but it would carry your name.” Hence the capital of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro carried the name of Mai Garhi. After that, Mai Garhi became an ardent disciple of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro.

The Mianwal Faqirs offered increasingly tough resistance to the Mughals who suffered defeats at the hands of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro and his followers

One night some people took away the cattle of Mai Garhi and fled to Karoo Chakoo (Karkh) near Khuzdar in Balochistan. The disciples of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro, under the command of his son Mian Deen Muhammad Kalhoro (d.1699), followed them. After a brief encounter, near Karoo Chakoo, the posse retrieved the cattle. However, the whole operation didn't come without a cost. In the clash, some of the faqirs were killed. They included Bagho Khan Chandio, Gaji Shah Khoso and others. Bagho Khan Chandio was buried in the necropolis of Mian Nasir Mohammad, while Gaji Shah was buried near Chhini Johi and Shah Panjoo Sultan in Mehar.

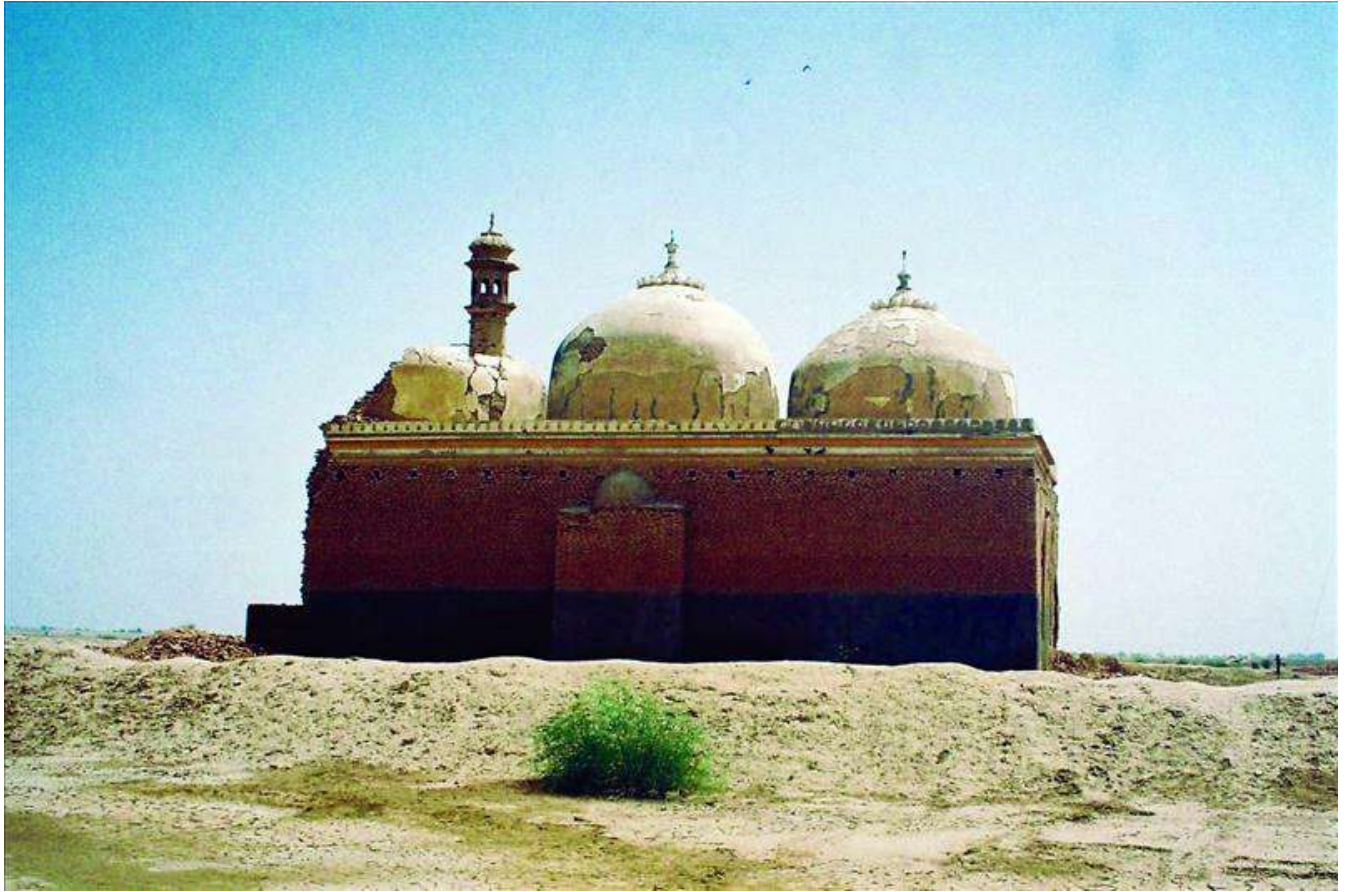


Jamia Mosque Garhi before renovation

At the same time along with the mosque, he also laid the foundation of the religious seminary. He used to teach his disciples in Garhi seminary where many eminent faqirs studied and they later established their dairas (communes) to preach the thought of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro in Sindh and Balochistan. Many of the disciples of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro took part in the construction of the Jamia Mosque Garhi. According to Professor Abdullah Magsi, the author of *Jan Jan Hui Jairi*, Jamo Faqir Khoso, who was the grandson of Suleiman Faqir Khoso, the ancestor of Suleimani lineage of the Khosa tribe, was a disciple of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro. Several individuals from the family of Suleimani Khosas played an important role in the Kalhora dynasty. Jamo Faqir Khoso also participated in the construction of Jamia mosque Garhi. He was very close to Mian Nasir Muhammad due to his virtue and righteousness. Jamo Faqir Khoso was a very aged and ardent disciple of Mian Nasir Muhammad. Despite his old age, he actively participated in the construction work of the Jamia Mosque of Garhi. He died during the lifetime of his mentor and was buried in the necropolis of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro.

The eastern, western and southern walls have yet to be rebuilt

This growing religious and political power was unacceptable to the Mughal nawabs of Bakhar, Sivi (Sibi) and Sewistan (Sehwan). The Mughal faujdar of Sewistan Mir Yaqub Ali Khan Rizvi (d.1680) was ordered to control the growing influence and power of the Mianwal faqirs who were becoming formidable force under the leadership of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro.



Western view of Garhi Jamia mosque

Mir Yaqub Ali Khan Rizvi along with the Mughal governors of Bakhar Mustafa Khan and Sivi Mirza Khan son of Bakhtiar Khan alias Jeevan reached Phulji in 1669. According to *Tazkira Mir Yakub Ali Khan Rizvi*, about 20,000 soldiers were stationed at Phulji to arrest Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro. But Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro retreated to Khirthar. After some time, he was invited for peace parleys and was arrested by deceit. He was sent to prison at Gwalior.

Imprisoned for some years, one night he fled from jail and reached Sindh. He reorganized his movement and began to rule from his capital Garhi. Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro annexed many areas to his dominion. The frequent attacks by the supporters and troops of Mughal nawabs of Sewistan, Sivi and Bakhar could not crush his movement and his power.



Painting in the Garhi Jamia Mosque

The Mianwal Faqirs offered increasingly tough resistance to the Mughals who suffered defeats at the hands of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro and his followers – mainly comprised of Dahote, Chaddar, Vighias, Solangi, Khuhawar, Taggar, Chandia, Magsi, Laghari, Lund, Awan, Jamali and other tribes.

Muslims and Hindus equally venerated Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro. During his reign, he built a number of mosques in the territory under his control. Among these, the Jamia Mosque Garhi was prominent, that later became the prototype for mosque architecture in Kachho and beyond.

Garhi Jamia mosque is a three-domed structure which is accessed through three arched entrances. The interior of the mosque is adorned with floral designs. The mosque had been renovated from time to time. It was first renovated in the 1980s by the efforts by late Dr. Nabi Bakhsh Baloch, the eminent scholar of Sindh. Later late Haji Munwar Abbasi also had it renovated. However, the mosque was in shambles in 2000.

In 2006 due to sincere efforts by Mian Ameer Bakhsh Kalhoro of Khanpur in Dadu district, the Garhi Jamia mosque was renovated. But there still remain many things to be renovated. The eastern, western and southern walls have yet to be rebuilt. In the time of the monsoon, many areas of Kachho get inundated. A protective wall around the mosque should be built – as it has been flooded many times in the past. But this is beyond the financial capacity of one person: Mian Ameer Bakhsh cannot do anything more!

The Garhi Jamia mosque is a historic mosque of the Kalhora period and important in the annals of Sindh. It should be preserved by the Endowment Fund Trust for the preservation of the Heritage of Sindh or by the Culture, Tourism and Antiquities Department of the Government of Sindh – before it becomes history!

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