

Religio-festive Trends of the People of Bahawalpur State: 1727-1947

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ABSTRACT

Geographically, the region of ex-Bahawalpur state had been remained an integral part of Hakara Valley Civilization which flourished about 4000 years ago along the shores of River Hakara. After the advent of Islam in the region, it became the epocentre of religious, educational as well as social activities of the Muslim scholars and spiritual guides. They made Uch as principal seat of their religious and social activities which caused to change the socio-religious modes of the local population. In this paper, an attempt is made to analyze the lifestyle and religio-festive trends of the local population. We crave to explore, what changes appeared in their lives and how did they accept this panorama of socio-religious activities? The Muslim and the Hindus were the major communities of the state. Other minorities i.e., Sikhs, Parsies, Christians etc. were not in notable ratio but they enjoyed complete freedom in their religio-social activities.

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Introduction

The nature has graced the land of this universe with their own peculiar features. There are water and mountains, while some parts are dry comprising desert and at places it has fertile plains. With this variety of terrain, obviously there is a variation in the lifestyle of the people of all regions, and the State of Bahawalpur is no exception. Over the years, the people of this area have adjusted their lives according to the changing environments. Studying about the food habits of the people of this region is a unique experience, as cuisine here is rich in taste and is a bit different from the cooking style of neighbouring regions. First, we narrate some of the prime features of their lifestyles and social activities, followed by the religious traditions of the people of Bahawalpur.

Food and Habits

Generally, the people of Bahawalpur State were simple in their life style and “liked simplicity in every aspect of life, even in food manners and disliked the formalities.”¹ There was generally a tradition that “the people ate their meal for two times only”² but in some areas they had meal thrice a day while “the meal of third time was very small. Breakfast was called *Neeran* by them in local language.”³ They consumed all kinds of meat, pulses and vegetables. “They ate the meat of cow, buffalo, goat and sheep but preferred fish. Earlier, people “disliked eating *daal* and if a person used *daal-roti* to save money he was reviled by others. They disgusted pulses at such level that “the word *daal khor* [eater of pulses] was considered as an abuse.”⁴ Besides, “if anyone who was compelled to use it due to poverty he was despised by his neighbours as a miser and as such became

1 Meer Nasir Ali, *Gughrafia Riasat Bahawalpur* [Urdu: Geography of the State of Bahawalpur] (Delhi: Maktaba Rizvi, 1892), 14.

2 Peer Ibrahim Khan, *Sarestan* (Persian MS) (Multan, 1854), 125.

3 *Interview*, Irshad Nabi Shah, Basti Saeed Pur, Bahawalpur, December 12, 2010.

4 Khan, *Sarestan*, 126 & 127.

the subject of scandal.”⁵ But later, the conditions were changed and most of the people adopted pulses as regular feature of their food. At times, non-availability of meat also made them opt for pulses as part of their routine diet. Gram and mash pulse are more preferred in this region as compared to other pulses.⁷ “They used to eat mung pulse, black pulse, *hardal* (leguminous) which was a kind of legume and in shape of plant.”⁸ It also used as herbage for animals while gram pulse and black pulse grew in a small plant. In the same way, the *mung* pulse, chick peas (small legume peas) mash pulse, ravan (a kind of pulse or peas) grew as creeper. This plant was also used for animals’ fodder. The grams were used to eat in both conditions; un-ripen and ripen. “Unripen grams were used with meat and potatoes”⁹ while “ripen-grams and legumes of grams were ground and used to eat as pulse.”¹⁰ The same process was practiced with *mung*, *mash*, *hardal* and *ravan* pulses accordingly. The pulse of green chick peas was made very delicious with doing *tarka* (burnt *ghi* or butter oil with garlic). It was grown in the beach areas of Sutluj River and had large production. It also used for the animal’s fodder.¹¹ The pulses were consumed both in the villages and cities, but the villagers preferred pulses over meat. There was hardly any difference regarding the food habits of the inhabitants of different religions.¹² Some sources, however, hint that Hindus used to eat all kinds of meat except cow flesh because they considered it as deity and called *Gao-Matta*.¹³ Hindu community of this region used to eat “the meat of hunting

5 Shahamat Ali, *The History of Bahawalpur* (London: Leaden Hall Street, 1884), 19.

7 Dilsahd Kalanchvi, *Bahawalpur Di Tarikh Tey Saqafat* [Punjabi: The History and Culture of Bahawalpur], 151-52.

8 *Interview*, Rana Allah Bukhsh, Naharwali Bahawalpur, December 31, 2010.

9 *Interview*, Muhammad Afzal Masood, Ahmad Pur East, April 10, 2010.

10 *Interview*, Muhammad Afzal Masood, April 15, 2010.

11 *Interview*, Rana Allah Bukhsh December 30, 2010.

12 Ali, *Gughrafia Riasat Bahawalpur*, 14.

13 *Interview*, Hajee Gul Muhammad, Basti Tokee Bahawalpur, Jun 12, 2009.

animals and birds of all kinds without distinguishing legitimate and forbidden. They used the meat of wolves, wild cats, jackals, wild rabbits, weasels, lizards and even snakes and swine flesh etc. On the contrary, the Muslims used to eat only legitimate and lawful wild and hunting animals and birds¹⁴ such as rabbits, deer, roes, the white antelope pigeons, doves, red-legged partridge *tiloor* (a bird kind of peacock), waterfowls greyish coloured pigeons (called *lutthy* in local language) and herons (called locally as *koonj*) peacock etc. Besides, gazelle, black buck, partridge, duck and bustard were found in large number. The people of Bahawalpur were fond of hunting. They had expertise in using bow and arrow for hunting birds.¹⁶ The above-mentioned hunting animals and birds were mostly used by elite and royal family¹⁷ and were equally in the access of common people due to plenty of woods and 'Dhars'.¹⁸

The people of Bahawalpur also used almost all kinds of vegetables cultivated in the area or the surroundings.¹⁹ They used cauliflower, cabbage, potato, reddish, turnips, carrots, peas, chickpeas, spinach (*palak*) fenugreek (*Methi*).²⁰ *Sohanjran* [a tree grew in the area which flower used as vegetable in winter also called *batta* in local dialect and is considered one of the delicious dishes of the area. The people of all classes liked to eat it traditionally and frequently. It can be cooked with meat, potato and also separately.²¹

14 Interview, Hajee Gul Muhammad, June 12, 2009.

16 Nazeer Ali Shah, *Sadiq Namah: The History of Bahawalpur* (Maktba Jadeed, 1959), 14 & 18.

17 Interview, Munshee Deen Muhammad, Basti Bindra, Bahawalpur, February 5, 2011.

18 *Dhars*: Vast area of sandy land in dessert which is clean, solid, and firm land area like road. See for more details, Ahmad Ghazali, *Cholistan*, 77-78.

19 Muhammad Aziz-ur-Rehman Aziz, *Mukhtasir Gughrafia Riasat Bahawalpur* [Urdu: A Brief Geography of State of Bahawalpur] (Aziz-ul-Matabe, Bahawalpur, 1941), 34.

20 Kalanchvi, *Bahawalpur Di Tarikh Tey Saqafat*, 151.

21 Interview, Hajee Gul Muhammad, August 15, September 3, 2011.

Muslims' Religious and Social Festivals

Generally, Muslim community celebrated two Eids annually: Eid-ul-Fitr (First of Shawal) Eid-ul-Azha (10th of Zulhajj) with two or three public holidays in the whole State,²² which later was defined as two holidays on *Eid-ul-Fitr* and three on *Eid-ul-Azha*.²³ People used to celebrate these Eids with full fervour and reverence. On Eid-ul-Fitr cooking and eating macaronis or vermicelli's was a tradition prevalent throughout the State.²⁴ It was a peculiar diet of the people of the region. Wearing new and pretty vestures, exchanging Eid greetings and keeping fasts in *Ramazan* was their tradition.²⁵ Eid-ul-Azha is commemorated in the recognition of the sacrifice of Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S) and Hazrat Ismail (A.S). The Muslim community sacrifices cows, buffaloes, sheep, goats and *dunbas* (fat tale sheep) on this occassion.²⁶ As a religio-cultural tradition, the people of Bahawalpur used to visit friends and relatives, shared gifts and sweets and gave *Eidee* [Urdu: money] to kids.²⁷ Mostly, Nawabs offered Eid prayers with common people.²⁹ As Nawab Muhammad Bahawal Khan III "offered his Eid prayer (Eid-ul-Azha) at Khan Pur during his official visit camp with his ministers, *sirdars* and people of the area."³⁰ It is said that "the Khan and his principal *sirdars* went out at 9, O Clock in the morning to pray on the plain where a tent was pitched to serve as an Eid-gah. The people and officials "exchanged

22 *Jantary* (Calendar) (Bahawalpur: Sadiq-ul-Anwaar Press, 1883), 33.

23 *Jantary* (Calendar) (Bahawalpur: Sadiq-ul-Anwaar Press, 1906) 2-4.

24 *Sadiq-ul-Akbar, Weekly*, Bahawalpur, February 8, 1934, 4.

25 *Interview*, Mian Basheer Ahmad, April 25, 2010.

26 *Interview*, Syed Habib Ullah Shah Nakhshbandi, Sajada Nasheen Dar-ul-Sadaat Al Safviya, Saeedpur Sharif Bahawalpur, February 6 & 8, 2011.

27 *Interview*, Mian Basheer Ahmad, April 25, July 28, 2010 and *Interview*, Hajee Mumtaz Ahmad, July 14, 2011.

29 See details, Diaries of Tours of Nawab Muhammad Bahawal Khan Khamis, Vol. 1, 9-11.

30 Lieutenant A. H. E. Boileau, *Personal Narratives: A Brief Visit to the Indus and to Bahawalpur* (N, Grant, 1837), 55.

greetings with respect to the Nawab and presented gifts to him, while the Nawab distributed alms among the poor.”³¹

Besides these eid festivals, “the Muslim community of Bahawalpur State also observed *Eid Milad-un-Nabi* (S.A.W) in the Islamic month of *Rabi-ul-Awal*.”³² For it, there used to be a public holiday in the whole State.³³ This day was celebrated with religious zeal. Processions on the roads praising the Holy Prophet, distribution of sweets, pulao (a dish made with rice and meat) and other food items had been a regular feature of this day.³⁴ Religious sermons by scholars and *mashaekh* (elderly religious personalities) highlight the teachings of Holy Prophet (S.A.W).³⁵ It is worth mentioning that during this time period, Hindus and other religious communities used to participate in the activities of *Eid Millad-un-Nabi*.³⁷ Likewise, the people celebrated ‘Shab e Miraaj’ on 27 *Rajab*,³⁹ and used to keep fast as well.⁴⁰ On the occasion, *naat khawan* (known as *Maloodi* locally) say *maloods* [Punjabi: *naats*] and *Ulema* talk about the glorious merits of the life of Holy Prophet (S.A.W).⁴¹

Likewise, they also celebrated *Shab-e-braat* on 15th of Shabaan. It is said that in this night, Allah Almighty chalks-out plans for the next year about the world.⁴² During this night, special prayers are offered for blessings. With the passage of time, these celebrations gone wayward as children started using gun powder to make explosion during

31 Boileau, *Personal Narratives*, 57 & 58.

32 *Interview*, Mian Basheer Ahmad, April 25, 2010.

33 *Jantary* (Bahawalpur: Sadiq-ul-Anwaar Electric Press, 1933), 3.

34 The way was introduced in the 20th Century; before this, only meetings were held at different places where Ulema and Scholars addressed to the participants.

35 *Sadiq-ul-Akhbaar, Weekly*, Bahawalpur, January 29, 1915, 6 and *Interview*, Mian Basheer Ahmad, April 25 & 28, 2010.

37 *Sadiq-ul-Akhbaar, Weekly*, Bahawalpur, July 2, 1935, 2.

39 *Jantary*, 14.

40 *Interview*, Syed Habib Ullah Shah Nakhshbandi, February 12, 2010.

41 *Sadiq-ul-Akhbaar, Weekly*, Bahawalpur, June 10, 1915, 6.

42 *Interview*, Syed Habib Ullah Shah Nakhshbandi, March 15, 2011.

the whole night. These explosions even caused incidents which at times proved fatal. The son of Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan IV, Sahibzada Rahim Yar Khan met his death in his childhood due to arson in a heap of gunpowder in a room of the royal palace.⁴³ Both the festivals were celebrated at the official level and there were public holidays on both days.⁴⁵

Besides, the Muslim community also observed *Aashora-e-Moharraim* in *Moharram* and last Wednesday of *Saffar*.⁴⁶ *Aashora* was commemorated in the remembrance of the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain (A.S), while last Wednesday was observed in the memory of better health after illness of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W). On the occasion, the people made *chouri* [Urdu: made with fat bread and butter oil] and distributed among relatives, neighbours and friends.⁴⁷ These events were also celebrated at official level and “there were public holidays (8, 9, 10 *Moharram*) and on last Wednesdays were two days (29 *Safar* and 1 *Rabi-ul-Awal*) holidays.”⁴⁸ Later on, last Wednesday of the *Saffar* holidays were decreased to one in the year 1939.⁴⁹

All these festivals of religious nature had great social importance in traditional lives of the people of Bahawalpur. On the occasions, they gathered at a place and could share their pains and pleasures. Because of this social significance, these events became essential part of their social life and traditional habitual manners.

With the religious festivals, the people of Bahawalpur also celebrated a number of other social festivals for their

43 *Interview*, Gulzar Ahmad Ghouri, December 26, 2010, March 02, 2013. See Also, Muhammad Aziz-ur-Rehman, *Hayat Muhammad Bahawal Khan Khamis*, 9.

45 *Jantary* (Calendar), (Bahawalpur: Sadiq-ul-Anwar, Barki Press, Bahawalpur, 1906), 6, 8 & 9.

46 *Interview*, Hajee Mumtaz Ahmad, July 14, 2011.

47 *Interview*, Mian Jameel, February 11, 2009 & October 17, 2011.

48 *Jantary* (Calendar) (Bahawalpur: Sadiq-ul-Anwar, Barki Press, 1926).

49 *Jantary* (Calendar) (Bahawalpur: Sadiq-ul-Anwaar Electric Press, 1939), 5.

entertainment. These events had generated significant economic activities. Generally, the Muslim community held its social fairs at the shrines of the saints, attached with *urs* [Urdu: death anniversary of a saint]. Besides, they used to hold horse and cattle shows which had all the amusements and entertainment.⁵⁰ Except these semi-religious ceremonies, there were no other social fairs or activities of the Muslim community.⁵¹ Through these fairs, people develop social contracts and generate economic activities and livelihood.⁵² These fairs were patronized and supervised by officials and even managed by them. And these were so popular that, sometimes, even, ruling Nawabs inaugurated and participated in these fairs.⁵³ "Different competitions were held on the occasion and prizes were given to the winners by Nawab himself or any noble personality deputed by government of Bahawalpur."⁵⁴ The prominent *Urs* / fairs held in the state area were:

An *urs* and fair was held at Minchanabad of Pir Muhammad from 1873, Roshan din Naushahi, at Gauspur Minchanabad. The *urs* of Khawaja Noor Muhammad Maharvi held (1-3 *Zulhaj*) for three days at Chishtian Hazrat Khawaja Pir Abdul Khalik Ovaisi (25-26 *Zulhaj*) at Chishtian, Sheikh Abdullah Jahanian (9 *Zulhaj*) at Sheikh Wahan Khairpur Tamiwali for one day. Hazrat Shauk Elahi (13-15 *Rajab*) at Mari Shauk Shah Chishtian for three days. Garib Shah and Chattan Lal at Gaddan Khairpur Tamiwali, (15-18 *Sudi Har*) for three days."⁵⁵

Moreover, Hazrat Syed Muhammad Shah known as Baghochi wale Pir (*Zulhaj*) for one day, Hazrat Syed Malook Shah (1693-1761) at Basti Maseetan (Village of mosques)

50 *Interview*, Hajee Gul Muhammad, Jun 12, 2009.

51 *Punjab States Gazetteer*, 198.

52 *Interview*, Hajee Mumtaz Ahmad, July 14, 2011.

53 *Sadiq-ul-Akhbar, Weekly*, Bahawalpur, September 27, 1906, 2.

54 *The Oasis*, Jubilee No. Govt. S. E. College, Bahawalpur, February 1933, 18-19.

55 *Punjab States Gazetteer*, 98-99.

near Bahawalpur for one day. Hazrat Khawaja Mohkam-ud-Deen Sairani (known as sahib-us-sair) (5-7 *Rabi-us-Sani*) at Khankah Sharif railway station Samma Satta in Bahawalpur for three days Hazrat Zahir Pir (every Friday) at Maman Wahan⁵⁶ near Bahawalpur, 3 miles in the East. Hazrat Syed Gohar Hussain Shah (Known as Genhwar Shah near Khakah Sharif 5 kilometre in the southwest of Bahawalpur held in May for two days.⁵⁷ Likewise, *urses / fairs* held of Hazrat Makhdoom Jalal-ud-Deen Surkh Bukhari (19 *Jamadi-ul-Awal*) at Uch Sharif Ahmadpur East for almost a week. *Jetha Bhutta* (First 3 Sundays of *Chet*) at *Talla Wala Khanpur* for 3 days. Sheikh Abdul Sattar (First 3 Mondays of *Chet* on each Monday) at Garhi Ikhtiar Khan (Khanpur for 3 days). Hazrat Makhdoom Hameed-ud-Deen Hakim (Moey Mubarak, 12 *Rabi-ul-Awal*) at Rahim Yar Khan for one day. Pir Wali Muhammad Sultan (Each Monday and Friday in the month of *Chet*) at Badli, in Sadiq Abad for eight days. Pir Mosion Nawab (on the first Thursday and Monday in *Chet*) at Sanjarpur for two days.”⁵⁸

In this context, fairs were also held at the shrines of Hazrat Molana Haji Abdullah (28 Rabi us Sani) in Ahmadpur East for one day, Hazrat Molana Noor Ahmad Paiwaley (19-21 Moharm at Khanpur) for three days. Hazrat Khawaja Shahab-ud-Deen Ovaisi (5-7 *Safar*) at Shah Pur in Hasilpur for three days and Hazrat Chanan Pir known as Channar Pir (Each Thursday of March-April half altogether 7 Thursdays) in Cholistan near Yazman, for seven days and so on many others shrines across the state held such religion events. Besides, horse and cattle show in different areas of the State were held to develop cattle industry. The competitions of various types and races, beauty and fighting were also held and prizes were given to the winners by the fair organizers, official personals, rich persons and even sometimes by the ruling authorities and Nawab himself. Apart, wrestling

56 Kalanchvi, *Bahawalpur Di Tarikh Tey Saqafat*, 182-90.

57 *Interview*, Syed Abdul Ghafoor Shah, November 25, 2010.

58 *Punjab States Gazetteer*, 199-202.

malhenr, *kabaddi*, football, volleyball, chess, cards and other such types of amusements were also part of these fairs.⁶⁰ In the *urs*/fair held at Khankah Jetha Bhutta shaheed at Khanpur on April 7, 1946, an agriculture and cattle show was also exhibited.

Sometimes, Nawabs also participated in cattle shows to appreciate the participants and amused themselves.⁶³ In February 1943, His Highness Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan V paid an official visit to Bahawalnagar, Chishtian and Haroonabad. On March 1, he visited the annual Chishtian cattle fair and the shrine of Hazrat Khawaja Noor Muhammad Maharvi.⁶⁴ This is how they promoted the cattle industry and other segments of amusements. Besides these festivals and fairs, they enjoyed a traditional funny programme which was known as *tamasha* in local term. It was like a theatre having various funny items of amusement, which was held mostly at wedding ceremonies or any other event of pleasure, but, sometimes, they were held only for joy in different areas by landlords and rich persons. Nawab Subhe Sadiq participated in a kind of *tamasha* [Urdu: spectacle] Uch in January 1872 and enjoyed different items. Even, a juggler had got the Nawab's watch and showed that he might break it. Obviously, he tried to break it with his tricks that the participants considered it broken. But in the end, he returned it to His Highness safe and sound.⁶⁵ There were many tumblers (artists) of such kinds of spectacles who were experts in this art.⁶⁶

Festivals of Hindu Community

The Hindu community was the second largest population of the state and enjoyed full freedom to follow their own social and religious traditions. They used to celebrate *Dasehra*,

60 *Interview*, Syed Abdul Ghafoor Shah, November 25 & 27, 2010.

63 *Interview*, Mian Jameel Ahmad, April 27, 2012.

64 *Annual Administration Report of Bahawalpur State: 1942-43*, Baghdad-ul-Jadeed, May 17, 1944, 7.

65 *Sadiq-ul-Akbar*, *Weekly*, Bahawalpur, January 15, 1872, 8, 9 & 11.

66 *Interview*, Mian Basheer Ahmad, September 9, 2010.

Bisakhi and *Sambat* etc.⁶⁷ The *Dasehra* was held generally in October and lasted about 10 days.⁶⁸ These were also patronized by the government of Bahawalpur and three-day (9-11 October) holidays were fixed.⁶⁹ The *Puran Mashi* (14 November, Last day of Hindu Year 31 of *Kattik*) is another festival for which the government had announced one official holiday for the Hindu community. Likewise, “the *Bisakhi* was held on 1st of *Chet* to celebrate New Year (April 13) for one day and the *Sambat* (March 25) to celebrate the day of Vikarmaditya a year. The *Jatr Bij* was held (on the first Friday after the Holi festival) to celebrate the birthday of *Darya Sahib* (or Darya Devta). The *Nand Lal Akadshi* held in *Jeth* and *Har* (3 June) for one day. The *Pardakhanan* held nine days after *Devali* festival and the *Gop Ashtmi* (August 13) was celebrated one day before the *Pardakhana* and devoted to kin worship. The *Sukhram Das Thakkar* held on the last Sunday of *Sawan* and again on the Sunday after the *Dewali* at the tomb of *Sukhram Das Thakkar* near Bahawalpur. The *Dharmal Sewa Panthi* was held on the last Friday of *Sawan*, the *Narsingh Chaudas* (September 1) was held in the *Sarai Bhabran* on the 14th of *jeth* in honour of *Harnakash* and *Narsinghji* and the *Ram Naumi* on the 9th of *Chet* to celebrate the birth of *Raja Ram Chandar*.⁷⁰ *Loharee* and *Mangee* (January 12, 13) for one day each. Similarly, *Basant Punjamee* (January 29), *Sheva Ratree* (February 21), *Somavati Amau’s* (23 April), *Narjle Eka Washi* (June 3), *Rakhry* (August 4), *Somavati Amaous* (August 20), *Dewali* (17-18) and *Katikpur Namashee* (November 1) are celebrated by the Hindu community as religio-cultural festivals.⁷¹ A number of other festivals and fairs were also observed by the Hindu community of State, at small and

67 *Punjab States Gazetteer*, 201.

68 Bakhshish Singh Nijjar, *Punjab under Sultans (1000-1526)* (Lahore: Maktaba Al-Islamia AlSaudia, 1979), 227.

69 *Jantary*, (Calendar) (Bahawalpur: Maktaba Sadiq-ul-Anwaar, 1883), 33.

70 *Punjab States Gazetteer*, 199-201.

71 *Jantary* (Calendar) (Bahawalpur: Sadiq-ul-Anwaar, Barki Press, 1926), 1-2; *Jantary* (Calendar) (Bahawalpur: Sadiq-ul-Anwaar, Steam Press, 1911), 4.

large scales, of which they could develop their social and religious traditions and activities.

Conclusion

The people of Bahawalpur were simple in their lifestyle. They had simple food, simple attires and simple dwellings mostly, while some rich had built nice buildings. Although, they had simple food manners, yet cherished all available food items. Mostly, they consumed meat and vegetables, but also liked pulses. They were polite, civic and respectful to each other as well as to foreigners or strangers. They also had an avidity for social activities i.e., sports, hobbies, fairs and other forms of amusement. Their sports and games were also simple and traditional. They never showed prejudice towards strangers. They had deep interest in religious and social festivities. They observed them with full fervour and religious zeal. These religio-festive activities and trends of the population were appreciated and patronized by the ruling authorities. They were a source of socio-religious harmony, mutual understanding and economic development.