

Who are Zikris? Analyzing Zikris of Pakistan

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Abstract

The Zikris represent a distinct community, primarily localized in the Makran region of Balochistan, Pakistan. Despite being an offshoot of the Hanafi school of thought, the Zikri community has historically remained at the periphery of academic discourse, often overlooked or misunderstood by both scholars and the broader public. Much of the tension surrounding their identity stems from the critiques of orthodox Muslim clergy, who primarily targets the Zikri departure from the traditional five-daily prayers (Salat), as the community places its central spiritual emphasis on the continuous, meditative remembrance of God (Zikir). Furthermore, the Zikris maintain a robust spiritual autonomy, operating under their own dedicated leadership and adhering to specific textual traditions that differ from Sunni clerical authority. The primary aim of this research is to bridge the gap in existing literature by exploring the internal religious beliefs and daily spiritual practices of the Zikri sect within the contemporary Pakistani context. The study finds that while the Zikris face significant external pressure regarding their Islamic identity, their faith is characterized by a resilient adherence to ancestral spiritual teachings and a unique liturgical structure. Ultimately, the purpose of this article is to document and validate the Zikri experience, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of sectarian diversity and providing a voice to a community that has long been rendered invisible by mainstream theological narratives.

Key Words: Islam, Zikris, Beliefs, Makran, Balochistan, Pakistan

Introduction

Zikris are the followers of Hanafi school of thought (Mirzai, 2017) and are an offshoot of Mahdavis (Hasan, 2020), who are the followers of Saiyyid Mohammad of Jaunpur (b. 1443 d. 1505). He was born in India in Uttar Pradesh. He was the one who repeatedly claimed to be the Mahdi (Hasan, 2020), but his final confirmatory claim was made in 1499-1500 (Zafar & Javaid, 2019). For Jaunpuri, his mission was to purify Islam from impurities. His movement was popularized as Mahdavi Movement (Zafar & Javaid, 2019).

In India, zikris are called Mahdavis but in Pakistan they are called zikris (Mahmood, 2017), and it is because the zikris emphasize on the doctrine of zikir, or utter remembrance of God. In Pakistan, majority of the zikris are residing in southern part of Balochistan, especially in the coastal region of Balochistan (Notezai, 2021). Besides Makran region, zikris are also residing in Karachi, interior Sind, Lasbella, and Wadh in Pakistan as well as Iran and in some of Gulf States. The holiest city for zikris is Turbat (Kech) because when Jaunpuri travelled to Afghanistan (Belal, 2021), he stayed in Turbat at a mountainous place which was later known as Koh-e-Murad (Ko'ay

Murad), i.e. the valley/mountain of wishes (Ali, 2019). The zikris established their rule in Makran region which lasted almost for a century, from 1628 to 1740 (Zafar & Javaid, 2019). Zikrism flourished under the patronage of Buladai rulers of Balochistan. However, the zikri rule ended when Makran was attacked and conquered by Mir Naseer Khan I, the Khan of Qalat (Jaffar & Raza, 2018). The policies of the Khanate remained unfavorable for the zikri community because the Sunni ulama had considerable influence in the politics of the Khanate, and they spoke against the zikris (Noori, 2010).

The British government in India protected the zikris. The zikri issue was sidelined as in the nineteenth century; the ulama focused their energies towards the Ahmadis, the followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmed of Qadiyan (1835-1908), who became the founder of Ahmadiyya movement in India after claiming prophethood (Talbot, 1999). After the creation of Pakistan, the issue of zikrism raised its head when the ulama started demanding to declare all those as non-Muslims whose religious beliefs were different from the mainstream Sunni school of thought, including the zikris. When the Ahmadis were declared as non-Muslims in 1974, the zikri community got alarmed (Sher Muhammad, 1987), while the ulama of Balochistan got encouraged to get the zikris declared as non-Muslims.

As zikris believe in the Mahdihood of Jaunpuri, they are subject to criticism from religious groups in Pakistan. Although there is consensus among the Muslims that the awaited Mahdi will come at the end of time near the Day of Judgment, and the coming of Mahdi is confirmed by both the Shias and Sunnis, so the zikris are considered as non-Muslim by certain religious groups. The most prominent groups which oppose the zikris include Jama'at-i-Islami (JI) and Jamiat-e-ulama-e-Islam (JUI). During the Zia regime, the zikris were targeted, and the opponents received the patronage of the government. It created a lot of hatred for the zikris among the common people. Justice was denied to the zikri community because the Shariat benches in the country had Sunni judges. During the Zia era, a demand was again put forward by local Sunni ulama of Makran region to the government to declare the zikris as non-Muslim, but it did not materialize (Haqq, 1992).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research framework designed to provide an in-depth, nuanced exploration of the religious identity and spiritual practices of the Zikri community in Makran, Balochistan. Given the sensitive nature of sectarian identity of the Zikris, a qualitative approach has been adopted.

Research Design and Data Collection

The research utilizes an ethnographic and phenomenological approach, combining primary and secondary data sources:

- **Primary Data (Fieldwork):** Data is gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with Zikri community members, spiritual leaders, and elders in the Makran region. This allows the study to document first-hand accounts of their liturgical practices, the significance of Zikir, and their interpretation of spiritual texts.
- **Secondary Data (Textual Analysis):** The study involves a rigorous analysis of existing Zikri literature, historical manuscripts, and religious texts. This is complemented by an examination of contemporary scholarly work, archival records, and critiques from orthodox clergy to understand the evolution of the sectarian discourse.

Advent of the Zikris in Makran

Makran is located near Iran border and centuries ago, it was a part of the Persian Empire. The travel route of Mohammad Jaunpuri and the rulers of Makran played a vital role in bringing and nourishing the Mahdavi faith in Makran. Various authors give one or the other argument to

explain the arrival of Mahdavi faith in Makran. Malik Muhammad narrates the story in these words:

It is commonly said that Abu Saeed was the ancestor of Buladai who were the native of Hillmand-Garm Sair.¹ They migrated to Makran and settled there. From the beginning they were the follower of zikri faith and they introduced it in Makran but it is also said that the Malik family of Makran was initially from Hillmand-Garm Sair. After entering Makran they established their rule. They were zikris by faith and due to their efforts Zikrism was propagated in Makran and then in Jalawan (Dehwar, 1985).

Taj Mohammad defines the spread of Zikrism in Makran as such:

Historically, it is believed that the Zigris are the followers of Syed Mohammad (c. 1442-1505 AD) originally from Jaunpur, India, who is considered to be the Mahdi. According to Zigri tradition, he came to Makkoran and took abode at "Koh-e-Morad" a holy place in the suburb of Turbat, preached his doctrine, converted the whole of Makkoran, and then disappeared (Breseeg, 2004).

Shay Ragam gives another opinion. His views are mentioned below:

It is said that in Balochistan, the foundation stone of Mahdavi movement was laid by famous religious scholar Mian Abdullah Niazi. This person came to Afghanistan. No factual data prove his coming to Balochistan but it seems that Mian Niazi had contact with Abu Saeed Buladai who became the first zikri ruler of Makran. It is said that Abu Saeed Buladai met Mian Abdullah Niazi at Garm Seel (Sair) in Afghanistan. The argument that Mahdavi movement was initiated by Mullah Rehmat, Dost Muhammad or Mullah Muhammad Attock is not correct (Ragaam, 1993).

Zikris believed that the Mahdi himself came to Makran while he was going to Afghanistan (Noori, 2010). This fact cannot be denied or rejected that he travelled to Afghanistan via Baluchistan (Noori, 2010). This argument is valid because when Jaunpuri left for Afghanistan, he passed through Persia via Khurasan, and at that time, Baluchistan was a part of Iran, which was called Iranian Baluchistan or Greater Baluchistan.

Zikri Rule in Makran and its Emergence as a Centre of Zikrism

Buladai is a tribe of Afghanistan. One of the tribesmen got converted to zikrism, and later with the help of his zikri followers, established his rule in Makran in 1628. Thus, the zikris almost ruled Makran for about a century, during which Makran emerged as a centre of Zikrism in the seventeenth century.

Abu Saeed Buladai was of Arab descent and came from Oman. He met Jaunpuri when the latter came to Farah in Afghanistan in late fifteenth century. According to zikri sources, he was inspired by the teachings of zikris and converted to it. Later, he came to Makran for trade as a merchant, and settled there. In Makran, he stayed at a place called Bulaida, and that was why he came to be known as Abu Saeed Buladai. At that time, Makran was ruled by Malik Mirza who was a very cruel and merciless ruler. It is said that he used to capture his opponents and castrate them (Noori, 2010). Zikris were also not spared by him as they were in minority.

After conversion to zikrism, Abu Saeed gathered some followers in Bulaida and declared his independence from the rule of Malik Mirza. He named his kingdom as Bulaida. He was supported by the tribe of Gichkis² on the condition that after killing Malik Mirza, the kingdom would be divided into two parts: Kech (Turbat) would be ruled by Abu Saeed, while Panjgur would be ruled by the Gichkis. In 1628, Malik Mirza was killed by the joint forces of Buladai and the Gichkis,

¹ It is situated near Farah in Afghanistan.

² Gichkis were the Rajputs who migrated to Panjgur and settled at a place called the Valley of Gichk, and thus came to be known as Gichkis.

and consequently, Abu Saeed Buladai became the ruler of Kech (Turbat), who gave Panjgur to the Gichkis as promised. After some time, the Gichkis demanded more land from Abu Saeed on the plea that the latter is having more area under him than them. Abu Saeed rejected their demand on the basis of the agreement made between the two. Being disappointed from him, the Gichkis violated the treaty and attacked Kech but they were defeated. Their leader, Mar Singh Gichki, was killed and Panjgur was captured. In this way, the whole of Makran region came under the sway of the zikri rulers.

The rule of the zikris in Makran can be divided into four phases. Their rule followed the theory of Ibn Khaldun which is called *Asabiya*.³ The first phase was the era of their mushrooming; the second phase was their golden era; the third phase was characterized by decline, and the last one by the fall of the zikri rule in Makran region. The zikris were present in Makran even before the rule of Abu Saeed, but they were very few in numbers. They had been converted to zikrism by Jaunpuri when he went to Afghanistan via Balochistan. However, it was under the rule of the zikri ruler named Abu Saeed that the number of zikris increased and it became the state religion in Makran.

The Buladai rulers who succeeded Abu Saeed added the word *Shay*⁴ with their names such as Shay Hasan, Shay Ahmed, Shay Qasim I, Shay Abdullah, Shay Zehri, and Shay Qasim II. Second phase of the zikri rule started from the rule of Abu Saeed till the reign of Shay Qasim II. It was the golden era for the zikris. In this period, not only the doctrines of zikris flourished but they also propagated their teachings among the masses. Art, poetry, music, and folklore of zikris were also promoted. Under zikri rule, Zikri-Baloch culture flourished owing to the patronage of the rulers. Through their war ballads in Balochi, a number of zikri poets, including Hamal Jihand Hoat and Malik Dinar Gichki, throw light on the history of Baloch resistance to the Portuguese and Iranians. In the words of Inayatullah Baloch:

Some zikri rites of worship are conducted in Balochi; in consequence, zikri poets and religious scholars have enriched Balochi literature. In fact, because they attach religious significance to sites there, the Zikris have developed a special reverence for the land of Balochistan. For them Balochistan, and especially Turbat, is the *Gul-e-Zamin* (Flower of the earth). This patriotic attitude on the part of the Zikri Baloch is the forerunner of modern Baloch nationalism (Baloch, 1997).

The third phase was characterized by the downfall of the ruling family. As every rise hath a fall, the same happened with the Buladais. Their *asabiya* was weakened and they were no abler to sustain their rule. Shay Qasim II was the last ruler of Makran who was defeated by the Gichkis. Shay Qasim sought help from Nadir Shah, who sent his army to help the Buladais but they were defeated by Malik Dinar Gichki and he imprisoned Qasim. Zikris narrate the downfall of their rule in these words:

When the last ruler of Buladai, Shay Bilal⁵ left Zikrism, then in 1729 A.D. Malik Dinar killed Shay Bilal and occupied the territory of Kech.⁶ After this, Shay Omar became the ruler of Kech. Shay Omar is alleged to have been involved in the conspiracy of murdering his father. Besides this, he was also involved in martyrdom of many zikri leaders (Saiyyid Abdul Karim was one of them) by deceit. In the meantime, Shay Qasim Buladai (who was supporter of zikris) with the help of zikris dethroned Shay Omar and captured Makran but due to interference from Naseer Khan of Kalat, Shay Omar had to abdicate the throne. This incident is said to have happened in 1740 (Noori, 2010).

³ *Asabiya* means unity, solidarity, oneness, etc.

⁴ Zikri religious leaders are called Mullai or Shay in Balochi, which is derived from the Arabic word *Shaykh*, meaning an elder.

⁵ Shay Bilal was the deputy/Amir of Shay Qasim II in Gwadar.

⁶ Here Kech refers to Gwadar.

Zikris under the Khanate in Kalat

Mir Muhammad Naseer Khan I (r.1749-1794) became the ruler of Kalat/Qalat when the rule of zikris in Makran was at the verge of collapse. Naseer Khan I had political motives to extend his kingdom at all costs. He started intervention in the politics of Makran which was ruled by the zikris. The zikri rulers feared that he might use or manipulate the religious issues, since the zikris were often declared as infidels by the traditionalist ulama. During the initial attacks of Naseer Khan I, the zikri rulers were helped by the rulers of Afghanistan, Nadir Shah (r. 1736–47) and Ahmed Shah Abdali (r. 1747-73). The rule of Nadir Shah was a cemented curtain for Naseer Khan I. The successor of Nadir Shah, Ahmed Shah Abdali during the end of his regime became a friend of Naseer Khan I. He assured with Naseer Khan that he would not interfere, which gave an opportunity to Naseer Khan who attacked and captured Makran (Noori, 2010).

When Naseer Khan attacked Makran and surrounded the fort of Malik Dinar Gichki, the latter decided to fight outside the fort but most of the people did not see eye to eye with their ruler. At dusk, the zikri ruler, Malik Dinar launched a guerilla attack on the forces of Naseer Khan and then camped at Nasirabad.⁷ On the other hand, Naseer Khan attacked the fort ⁸ and ordered a general massacre of the zikris. Malik Dinar was chased and killed in Nasirabad. Later on, Mir Dostain Mirwani was appointed as governor by Naseer Khan in Turbat (Noori, 2010). The zikris, who were in hiding due to the fear of Naseer Khan, organized themselves under the command of Mir Shahdad and launched an attack on Makran and killed Mir Dostain.

Naseer Khan appointed Shay Omar Gichki as the new governor of Makran on the condition that he would not favor the zikris and would hamper them. Omar accepted the terms of Naseer Khan, and implemented the policies of the Khanate.⁹ Omar was welcomed and accepted by the zikris but were unaware of the fact that Omar was a traitor¹⁰ for them. Omar adopted an overt policy towards zikris and dealt with them with an iron hand. Zikris were attacked and killed while they were on their way as a caravan (Noori, 2010). Sometimes they were attacked by arrows and sometimes by spears. Sunni's Shariah¹¹ was introduced which was contrary to the zikri legal system. Zikri legal system was based on Balochi tribal customs. After the death of Naseer Khan, his successors did not continue his policies, Ahmad Yar Khan (1933-1948) being an exception.

The last phase began with the sufferings of the zikris. It starts from Naseer Khan under the rule of Khan of Kalat and up to the present day. It was the time when the zikris were chased, persecuted, tortured, killed, and murdered. Till that time zikris were parts of the Muslim society but attacks of Naseer Khan labeled them as non-Muslim. This era was not only a dark era for the zikris but it was also a black spot on Baloch culture and on their tradition of religious tolerance.

Zikris and their Fundamental Beliefs

Every religion has its pillars to stand upon, which differentiate it from the rest of the religions. Sects blossom within religions but with certain differences. Zikris are generally considered non-Muslims whereas they claim themselves to be a sect of Islam, though with their own interpretation to the religious problems. A zikri scholar, Esa Noori has defined his sect in these words:

As other Islamic sects and religious scholars have unique beliefs which give them their identity, in the same way zikris have their unique beliefs which are practiced by zikris after every prayer and on which zikri faith stands and have become its identity... it has three basic components, first Al-Wahiat, second Nabuwat, third Imamat (Noori, 2010).

⁷ Nasirabad is a place in Turbat.

⁸ The fort is known as Mereye Kalat.

⁹ Khanate refers to the state of Kalat and his terms and policies.

¹⁰ Here traitor refers to the fact that Omar was no more a zikri.

¹¹ Islamic laws.

Al-Wahiat means the Oneness of Allah, His Omnipotence, His Sovereignty and being Universal. It means God is unique and one, and no one is comparable with Him, He is all in all. This reflects zikri faith in Allah and in all His attributes. This belief is in accordance with the people of the book. Hence, it shows zikris are the people of book.

Nabuwat is related to the Prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) and accepting that he is the seal of the Prophets. Let see what the zikris say about Prophethood:

In second place, it is belief in the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH). Without having belief in the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH), one cannot enter in the fold of Islam because zikris believe that Holy Prophet (PBUH) is the last messenger of Allah and after him no prophet will come...in this regard many scholars criticize that for zikris Muhammad means the Mahdi because the name of Mahdi was also Mohammad...how is it possible that at the same time, the same being is considered as prophet and as Mahdi (Noori, 2010).

Imamat means the leadership, and Imam means the leader or the one who leads. It has two parts. First part deals with the Holy Quran. The Holy Quran being a divine book and last revealed book which is free from distortion as it is safeguarded by Allah. Zikris are bound to follow the Holy Quran in their lives and should not deviate from it. The second part, Imamat deals with the coming of the Mahdi. Every Muslim believe in the coming of Mahdi, and then the second coming of Jesus Christ, but for zikris Mahdi has already come who was born in India in Jaunpur, and whose name was Saiyyid Mohammad Jaunpuri.

These are the arguments by the zikris to explain their fundamental beliefs, and prove Zikrism as a sect of Islam. However, according to the non-zikris, i.e. Sunni religious scholars, the zikri beliefs are different from the Sunni Islam. For instance, the zikris have a different interpretation of some of the five pillars of faith, which are the following: (i) Tauheed (Oneness of Allah); (ii) Salat (five daily prayers); (iii) Saum (obligatory fasting during the holy month of ramazan); (iv) Zakat (obligatory alms or charity); and (v) Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in a life time).

Tauheed refers to the belief in the oneness of Allah. The zikris believe in Tauheed as the Sunni Muslims, and therefore the zikris are not criticized on the issue of Tauheed. Salat in Arabic or namaz in Persian refers to ritual prayer. It is pointed out that the zikris have dispensed namaz and they concentrate only on zikr, and so they are non-Muslim (Ahmed, 1986). Moreover, according to the Sunni religious scholars, the zikris do not consider namaz obligatory. Instead of it, they recite zikr (a formula for repeating the various names of Allah) (Baloch, 1997). When the non-zikris dub the zikris as non-Muslims, they defend their position in these words:

It is said that zikris negate Namaz... when zikris perform zikr and namazi offer namaz then both are Islamic fundamentals. They perform Qayam,¹² Raku,¹³ and Sajud¹⁴... but still blame each other as infidels... There are verses in the Quran relating to salat as well as zikr (Baloch, 1997).

Esa Noori put forward these arguments:

Opponents blame zikris that they have disregarded namaz, although it is an allegation. In fact, zikris offer prayer as in every sect it is offered in a different way so zikris also offer namaz in a different way, and call it zikr-e-Elahi which is the name given to it in the Quran (Noori, 2010).

One of the zikri sources, however, mention that the Isha and Zuhr prayers are performed without sajda or prostration, but Maghrib, Tahjud and Fajr prayers are performed with prostration (Muhammad, 1985). This debate can be very well summarized by the words of a zikri scholar,

¹² Standing in an upright direction when offering prayer.

¹³ Leaning and making an angle of 90 degrees and holding knees with hands.

¹⁴ Prostrations before God are called *sajud*.

Shay Ragam, who argues that the zikris offer congregation prayers three times a day, but unlike Shias they do not offer Zuhr and Asr, as well as Maghrib and Isha together. The zikris offer fajr, Zuhr and Isha in congregation, while the rest of the two, Asr and Maghrib prayers are not offered in congregation (Ragaam, 1993). The above discussion shows that there are different opinions among the zikris regarding their fundamental religious practices.

Regarding fasting or sawm, the zikris are said to have dispensed the fasting of holy month of Ramazan (Haqq, 1992). It is believed that the fasting of Ramazan is not obligatory for the zikris, but it is mandatory to observe fasts on the first three days of the month of Zil Hajj. The zikri sources defend their position by arguing that the above assertion is incorrect. If zikris do not fast, it is their individual act. The zikris consider the fast of Ramazan obligatory, and many zikris observe fast. Besides Ramazan, they also keep fast on 13th, 14th and 15th of every month, which are also called Ayam-e-Baiz. In addition, the zikris also observe fast on every Monday. Regarding zakat, it is believed that zikris do not pay zakat, and instead they pay Ushur, which is 10% tax on the wealth.

As far as Hajj or pilgrimage to Makkah is concerned, it is believed that the zikris go to Koh-e-Murad, where they perform the rituals of Hajj such as circumambulation (tawaf), running from one corner to another (sa'ee), and animal sacrifice, etc. Instead of going to Makkah, they consider Koh-e-Murad as their holy pilgrimage centre (Haqq, 1992). The zikri scholars have, however, repudiated this charge against them. They also assert that the founder of Zikrism, Saiyyid Mohammad Jaunpuri not only performed Hajj in Makkah, but also declared himself to be Mahdi at that place (Noori, 2010).

It is also said that the zikris are not Muslims because their Kalima is different, which is as follows: La Ilaha Ill-Allah Nur Pak Nur Muhammad Mahdi Rasul Allah, i.e. There is no God but Allah, and the Light of Muhammad is pure, and Mahdi is the prophet of God. According to another sources, other versions of their Kalima are slightly different which talk about certain other attributes of God, but they all assert the prophethood of Mahdi.¹⁵ Regarding the Kalima of the zikris, Azhar Munir argues that the Shias have also added the words that 'Ali is the wasi or the deputy/representative of the Prophet of God' in their kalima. Despite that, for most of the Sunnis, the Shias are not non-Muslims. Then why the zikris are branded as non-Muslims if they too have added some words in the kalima (Munir, 1993). Other zikri scholars have also challenged the view that the zikri kalima is different from the Sunni kalima (Munir, 1993).

Zikr-Khana as a Sacred Place for Worship

The zikris do not use the term masjid or mosque for their place of worship. Instead, they perform zikr in their holy buildings called Zikr-khana or Zigrana but without facing a particular direction. They believe that the holy Kabbah (the House of God) is in every direction. Therefore, they sit in circles while performing zikr.

Koh-e-Murad as a Pilgrimage Centre of the Zikris

In the south of Turbat city, about 2 miles (3.2 km) there is a small mountainous region called Koh-e-Murad, which is also pronounced as Ko'ay Murad. It is the region where most of the zikris are residing, and it is their sacred place where they perform their ziarat or pilgrimage. The critics of the zikris argue that it is basically a substitute for Hajj in Makkah. However, the zikri community defends its position by maintaining that they call it their ziarat, and not Hajj. Moreover, those who visit Koh-e-Murad do not add the title of Haji with their names (Baloch A., 1979).

¹⁵ Other versions are as follows: (i) *La Ilaha IllAllah Al-Mulk Al-Haqq Al-Mubin Nur Muhammad Mahdi Rasul Allah Sadiq Al-Wahid Al-Amin*; (ii) *La Ilaha IllAllah Almulk Alhaq Almobeen Nur Pak Nur Muhammad Mahdi Murad Allah*; and (iii) *La Ilaha IllAllah Noor Pak Noor Muhammad Mahdi Rasool Allah*. Aitesham ul Haq, *Zikri Din Ki Haqiqat*, 15; and Haq, *Zikri Masala*, 26.

Koh-e-Murad has a great historic importance for the zikris because they believe that Mahdi Jaunpuri stayed there, and spent some time in worshipping God (Baloch A. , 1979). Scholars argue that Koh-e-Murad is a misnomer. G. S. Bijrani explains it in these words:

Ordinary men call it Koh-e-Murad but the word is not Koh-e-Murad. It is Ko'ay Murad which means the street/bazar of wishes. It means whosoever comes in this bazaar of wishes; he can fulfill his wishes from here. Actually the word is ku but in Balochi it is pronounced as kuway or Ko'ay Murad (Baloch A. , 1979).

Some sources assert that Koh-e-Murad is named after Mullah Murad Attock, but according to the zikris, this assertion is incorrect, as for them Koh-e-Murad¹⁶ means the valley of wishes, since the term murad literally means wishes and desires. However, the area is popularly known and pronounced as Koh-e-Murad.

Every year on 27th of Ramazan, the zikris visit Koh-e-Murad for their pilgrimage. This pilgrimage has also a commemorative purpose which is related to Mahdi. Koh-e-Murad is fortified by a bricked wall and has gates at its opening. To enter this place, first one has to be physically clean. One should perform ablution and must cover his/her head and should also be bare foot. One cannot take worldly belongings with him/her while entering the area. Once one starts climbing the mountain, he/she cannot come back without completing the journey or reaching the mountain peak. The top of the mountain is called Muhray Sar. Zikr or prayer has to be performed upon reaching the top. However, the zikr/prayer has to be in congregation. After zikr/prayer, one may leave if he/she wishes so (Baloch A. , 1979). Owing to the threats from the non-zikri religious scholars, the zikris do not allow everyone to enter Koh-e-Murad. One has to prove his/her identity, for which one needs to bring any zikri with him/her.

The Religious Practice of Choghan

Choghan is a continuation of dairias (the practice of sitting in circle for performing ritual zikr) and is a common religious practice of the zikris. Mostly, it is practiced during the holy nights such as the Night of Barat, the Night of Qadr in the month of Ramazan, and the night of the ninth Zil Hajj, and also on any day or night in order to remember God. A circle is formed and in the mid of the circle, a person having a God-gifted voice stands and sings hymns. The people standing in the circle repeat the words of the hymns with the singer. During Choghan, the zikris move in a circular position, with to and fro movements.

The practice of Choghan is not very old, neither it is a part of Baloch culture. The beginning of Choghan is not known as there is no historical evidence of its origin. Most probably, it developed almost 150 years ago (Noori, 2010). In the past, the zikris used to perform Choghan in holy nights

¹⁶ The alternative of *Khana Kabbah* is Koh-e-Murad, means the mountain of wishes... at the feet of Koh-e-Murad, there is a ground which is called *Gul wa Din*. On 9th Zil Hajj before *Arafat*, *Waquf Arfa* is celebrated here and on 10th Zil Hajj *Tawaf*/circling of Koh-e-Murad is done. But now for safety, on 27th Ramazan *ziarat*/visit is done. On the western corner of Koh-e-Murad, there is a pitch which fills with rainy water. At its side there is a shell, which is filled with water by the visitors and they drink it. This is *Kausar*. In the north of Koh-e-Murad, there is a tree which resembles with the tamarind tree. It bears fruit which are also eaten; it is called the tree of *Tauba* (*Shajre taubah*). In the west of Koh-e-Murad, there is a cave, it is said that Mahdi has passed 40 days there. It is the cave of Hira and during the days of hajj, zikr is held there. There is a canal near Turbat which is named as *Hazai*. It is dry now and a well has been dug there which is called *Sheeren Do Qurm* (two sweet rivers). Here Mahdi has poured water with miracle. It is alternative of zam zam. In the south west of Koh-e-Murad, there is another pitch which also fills with rainy water. From under the water, bubbles rises and form foamy water. It is called foamy water (*Guj-e-aab*). It is drunk as being sacred. On a steeply mountain, there is a line whosoever crosses it. He will cross Pull-e-Sirat (bridge of Sirat) Zia ul Haq Siddiqui. *Zikri Mazhab ka Tafsili Jaiza: Balochun ka aik Batil Mazhab* (Multan: Majlis Tahafuz Khatam-e-Nabuwat, 1989), 19.

while sitting in circles and were protected by guards who were also zikris, and who also participate in the ceremony or zikr. There are different gatherings of Choghan for the men and women.¹⁷

Conclusion

Saiyyid Mohammad (b. 1443-d. 1504) of Jaunpur was born in the present day Uttar Pradesh, India. He was a renowned religious scholar of the fifteenth century. From his childhood, he had thirst for knowledge, and he received his religious education under the guidance of renowned scholars of his times. At the age of fifty-six, in 1499, he made his final claim to Mahdihood. His movement to purify Islam was popularized as Mahdavi movement, and thus his followers, who are known as the Mahdavis or the zikris, insisted on the ritual practice of zikr. They faced criticism when their leader declared himself as the Mahdi. Mohammad Jaunpuri had a series of discussions with the Sunni ulama in India, but they were unable to come to any conclusion. Thus, he was forced to leave the places where he settled one after another. Before his arrival in Afghanistan, he stayed in Makran at a place known as Koh-e-Murad, thus converting the people of that place to zikrism. Finally, he died in 1504 at Farah, a town in Afghanistan, and was buried there.

Later on, the zikris established their rule in Makran region which lasted almost for a century, from 1628 to 1740.

During the Zia regime, a plethora of literature was published against zikris under the patronage of the government, which created a lot of hatred for the zikris among the common people. Justice was denied to the zikri community because the Shariat benches in the country favored the viewpoint of the traditionalist Muslim scholars. The judges in these benches represented the Sunni version of Islam. During the Zia era, a demand was again put forward by local Sunni ulama of Makran region to the government to declare the zikris as non-Muslim. Zia promised to resolve the issue of zikris very soon but his regime came to an end when he died in a plane crash in 1988. In the post-Zia era, religio-political parties and sectarian organizations spread sectarianism and hatred in the country. Zikris, who are helpless and weak, and in minority, have often been blamed for denying the finality of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). However, the zikris argue that they believe in the finality of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and consider Mohammad Jaunpuri merely a Mahdi. The organization of zikris, All Pakistan Muslim Zikri Anjuman, has time and again published and made announcements that they (zikris) are Muslim and believe in the finality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and also believe in the Holy Quran as the last revealed Book. The zikri leaders and scholars have also argued the Koh-e-Murad is a sacred pilgrimage center for them, and not an alternative to Kabbah in Makkah. Despite that, the Sunni ulama consider the zikris as non-Muslims, and they have also objected to the use of the word Muslim by the zikris and for their organization. It seems that the aim of the Sunni ulama is to emulate the precedent of the Ahmadis in Balochistan. In Balochistan, besides the funding of government to the Sunni ulama, the ulama are also financed by the smugglers to denounce the zikris and dubbed them as non-Muslims. It is meant to safeguard the interests of the smugglers, and also to force the zikris either to leave the sea business, i.e. of fishing, or to prevent the zikris from raising voice against the illegal business of the smugglers.

As such it is difficult to predict the future of zikris in the country, but presently their persecution in Makran region has been minimized due to the fact that zikris are Baloch in terms of ethnicity. Owing to the upsurge of Baloch nationalism in recent years, the division among the Baloch in terms of religion is considered as a state policy to divide the Baloch and to halt their Nationalist

¹⁷Zikris during their pilgrimage or on any holy day or night organize a festival in which a singer lady while standing praises the Mahdi with her charming voice. The language she uses is a mixture of Balochi and Persian. The male members make a circle around the lady and in dancing condition repeat the words. This festival sometime continues for hours and also for the whole night; although the *Banahu* (Singer) changes from time to time. This is called *Choghan* which in fact looks like a type of *Sama* of Sufis. Haq, *Zikri Masala*, 43.

movement. From the perspective of Baloch nationalists, the persecution of zikris means favoring the state policy. Therefore, in recent years, the hatred against the zikris has been minimized, especially in Makran. However, the zikris residing in rest of Pakistan particularly in and around Karachi, and other parts of Sindh are still facing problems due to their controversial religious beliefs and practices.

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