



The Hindus in Sindh

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The Hindus in Sindh

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In his book on the Hindu pilgrimage of Hinglaj, Jürgen Schaflechner highlights the « wide range of castes, ethnicities, classes, beliefs, languages and many other formative identity characteristics » that make the Hindu community (Schaflechner 2018 : 1). According to the official census, there are 2.5 million Hindus in Pakistan, almost all of whom live in Sindh. These population statistics are disputed by Hindu institutions, starting with the Pakistan Hindu Council, which considers that there are about 10 million Hindus in Sindh. At the time of partition in 1947, about one million Hindus emigrated to India. This migration had a major demographic consequence: the former untouchables, presently named Scheduled castes, became the majority in the Hindu community of Sindh, about 90% of the whole according to Schaflechner. The Hindus of Sindh have recently attracted research attention, as several university research projects have been devoted to them since the early 2010's (Mahmood 2014, Schaflechner 2018, Thontya 2019, Kamran 2020), as well as the work completed by Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro (Kalhoro 2018).

The origins of today's Hindu community of Sindh are the subject of much controversy. The lack of sources has allowed the development of more or less fanciful theories, often resulting from the ideological pressure produced by nationalist Hindu movements. According to this narrative, the Muslims would have destroyed a flourishing Hindu civilization in Sindh in early 8th century, and compelled the Hindus to run away. The first part of this article will take stock of the issue. As it is presently known, the Hindu community of Sindh was under construction probably from the eighteenth century, when the Lohanas would have migrated from Punjab to Sindh. The specific making of the community was completed in late nineteenth century, through different processes some of which were direct consequences of British colonization. This issue will be addressed in the second part.

The third part will scrutinize the space left for the Hindus in independant Pakistan between the institutional apparatus, and the pressure put by the Islamic political parties. While the freedom of worship is enshrined in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, untouchability explicitly prohibited, as well as the protection of the religious minorities guaranteed by the state, the Hindus are regularly threatened by radical Muslims who use different strategies to force them to convert to Islam. Hence, the ongoing migration of Pakistani Hindus to India. After a general survey of the Hindu cults and groups in present day Sindh, the diversity of the Hindu community of Sindh will be highlighted through two cases studies, hence the fourth and fifth parts, which follow the two main colonial categories still used in the Pakistan census : the Hindu *jatis* (castes) and the scheduled castes.

1. The myth of the Hindu past of Sindh

Hindus and Buddhists in pre-Muslim Sindh

A most controversial issue in the Indian Subcontinent is related with how did the local population become Muslim (Eaton 1993). The statement that that all the ancestors of Sindhi Muslims in Sindh were Hindu who were converted by force by the Muslims is not new, and

not restricted to Sindh, and it was for example a main credo of neo-Hindu movements from the 19th century, starting with the Arya Samaj (Fischer-Tiné 2018). In a BJP ruled India, such narratives became the official narrative of the coming of Islam to South Asia. With a focus on Sindh, the region that was the gateway to Islam, it is necessary to start with the deconstruction of a first myth : the Muslims have destroyed a flourishing Hindu civilization in Sindh.

The Indus River or Sindhu is mentioned in the Rig Veda (between 1700 and 1100 B. C.), and it is usually considered as being a proof of the settlement of the Aryas in the area. For example, in his famous *Sindh ji Hindun ji tarikh*, the Sindhi literati Bherumal Advani (1876-1950) wrote a whole chapter on the *Rig Ved zamano*, or the period of the Rig Veda, as well as another short one on the Vedic times (Advani 2006 : 29-47). This was the first book totally devoted to the history of the Hindus in Sindh, and till date the only one, published just before partition in 1946-1947, before the author migrated to India. Advani starts the history of Sindh with the Aryas, ignoring Mohenjo Daro and the Indus civilization.

Two main sources can be consulted for answering the issue of what were the religions in pre-Muslim Sindh: the travelogue of the Chinese pilgrim Huiyen Tsang (Huiyen Tsang 1906), and the famous *Chach Nama* (*Chach Nama* 2017). The first work provides a depiction of the main religious forces in Sindh about half a century before the Arab conquest, while the second is a narrative of the last years of pre-Muslim Sindh, and of the conquest of the kingdom by the young Arab general, Muhammad bin Qasim in 711. The Chinese pilgrim Huiyen Tsiang was born in 603, and his travels to India lasted from 629 to 645, when he went back to China. This testimony is therefore crucial as it dates from 50 years before the Muslim conquest.

Huiyen Tsang distinguishes between Sin-Tu, which is central Sindh, Mu-Lo-San-P'ulu, the territory of Multan as capital, and 'O-Tien-P'O-Chi-Lo, which is the delta of the Indus, namely southern Sindh. Only Multan is said to be predominately Hindu, Sin-tu and 'O-Tien-P'O-Chi-Lo are mostly Buddhist. Huiyen Tsang provides the names of the schools of each religion, Hinduism and Buddhism, which are in majority in Sindh. Among the Hindus, the inhabitants of Multan worship the sun as main deity, but in Southern Sindh, they belong to the Pashupata, a Shivaite sect (Acharya 2018). The Chinese monk coined them as heretic. The period between the 4th and 8th century was the high time of the Pashupatas in North India. They required exclusive faith in Rudra(-Shiva), which meant that a Pashupata had to worship Rudra, putting aside all other deities and ancestors, and regard him as the sole lord and cause of the world.

It should be noticed that the Pashupata path presents similarities with the much later Sufi order of the Qalandariyya. For example, the latter were known for their provocative behaviour, which can go so far as to take the systematic opposite side of the *sharia*. In the second state of the initiation, the Pashupatas also behave in a provocative way, insulting passersby, and so on. While in the fourth stage, the Pāśupata uses to live in cremation group, while the qalandar will live in burial grounds (Boivin 2008 : 24-25).

The Buddhists belong to the Sammatiya school. Furthermore, since Buddha himself, here named Taghata, travelled frequently in the country, emperor Ashoka (c. 304-c. 232 B. C.) built many *stupas*. The Sammatiyas would have flourished in the 7th century, and according to their dogma, they held a distinct theory of the *pugdala*, the person. For them, a man possesses the five basic qualities accepted by Buddhism, but there is another dimension in him that makes him greater. They were hardly criticized by other schools of Buddhism, arguing that this theory was challenging the main concept of *atman*, universal self.

The Hindu rule and the Muslim conquest

Another main source is the *Chach Nama*, a thirteenth century work in Persian, narrating Chah's rule, that of his Brother Chandra and his son Dahir, and Muhammad bin Qasim's conquest of Sindh. In the *Chach Nama*, the Buddhists are named « Samani ». In a passage, Chach is talking with a Samani who claims that for him, as a *nasik*, a monk, the service of Buddha (Budh) and the seeking of salvation in the next word are better than all worldly achievements (*Chach Nama* 2017 : 35). According to the text, Chach is quite respectful toward Budh, and he went to provide funding for laying a fresh foundation of the Samani temple. After Chach's death, his brother Chandar becomes king and being himself an ascetic, he reinforced the « religion of *nasiks* and *rahibs* » (*Chach Nama* 2017 : 39). It is reasonable to assume that the first term concerns the Buddhist ascetics, and the second the Hindu ascetics, to whom Chandar belongs.

What can be clearly understand from Hiuen Tsang is that the Buddhists were in majority in Sindh, about a century before the Muslim conquest. The importance of Buddhism in Sindh is further underlines by the Rais, a Buddhist dynasty who ruled Sindh for long, before Chahch took power only in 632. Historians have addressed this question by asking themselves whether the Arab conquest had not been facilitated by an opposition between those in power who were Hindus and the dominant economic classes who were Buddhists (Asif 2016). For some, many of the Sindhis who requested pardon from Qasim were Buddhists, because for them, Muslims were welcome in the extent to which they would have freed them from a possible Hindu yoke.

Regarding Hinduism as depicted in the *Chach Nama*, there is no truly detailed description of temples. About the temple of Multān, only the reader learns there was an idol « made of gold, with two eyes of red rubis in his face » (*Chach Nama* 2017 : 190). The temple of Alor, named Nobhar, shelters a equestrian statute in marble or alabaster, with golden bracelets on his arms, set with jewels and rubies (*Chach Nama* 2017 : 179-180). The temple is said to be Budh's temple, but no one has even seen an equestrian statue of Buddha. The longest description is that of the temple of Debal but unfortunately it is confusing. We have details about its dimensions, as well as a banner that is considered a talisman (*Chach Nama* 2017 : 81). The temple has a dome and a green silk flag. The total height of the building is about 20 metres, and this is also the length of the banner when it is deployed. Indeed, the temple is in the custody of a Brahmin, and « 700 beautiful women » want to set themselves on fire so as not to fall into the hands of the Arabs (*Chach Nama* 2017 : 84). They were « placed under the protection of Budh ».

Maybe that the real question is to know to which form of Hinduism the Chachs belonged. The text is not precise enough to allow us to respond in a clear-cut way, but a remark by Mirza Qalich Beg, who translated the *Chach Nama* in English, could provide a beginning of an answer. Indeed, in a letter that Dahir sent to Qasim, we find the following formulations : « In the name of the great God, the lord of Unity and the God of Selaij (Cahch's father) » (*Chach Nama* 2017 : 86). In another passage of the book, when Qawfi, one of Dāhir's sons, wants to know if his father is still alive, he comes to a sorcerer who is a « Hindu jogi » (*Chach Nama* 2017 : 177). Thanks to the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, we know that the Pashupata sect of Shivaism was dominant among the Hindus of Sindh. Already, for Derryl McLean, Chach's belief in « the One God, incomparable and without equal, the Creator of the world » is « certainly comprehensible within a Pashupata system » (McLean 1987 : 17).

2. The making of modern Hinduism

Hindus before the colonial period and the question of conversion

For more than a thousand years, i.e. until the colonial period, sources relating to Hindus are scattered and fragmentary. However, this period is crucial, as it was when the population of Sindh gradually became Muslim. This part will tackle the deconstruction of a second myth about the Hindus of Sindh: the Hindus of Sindh were forced to convert to Islam. According to the *Chach Nama*, it is clear that Muhammad bin Qasim's aim was never to convert the whole population of Sindh to Islam. In most cases, he spared them and established the system of *jizya*, the tax the non-Muslims had to pay to be protected (*zimmi*), which implies that he allowed them to retain their religion. As the Jews, the Christians, and the Zoroastrians, the Hindus and the Buddhists were classified as *Ahl-e kitab*, the « People of the Book ».

The dynamics of conversion began in the 12th century and ended around the 16th century, by which time the population of Sindh had become predominantly Muslim. Two categories of actors were at the origin of these dynamics: the Ismailis and the Sufis. It is likely that the process was initiated by the Ismailis, and taken up by the Sufis, who eventually supplanted them. It was not a question of conversion as such, in the sense of a brutal and total change of religious affiliation. It was a long-term process, and the first phase was allegiance to a spiritual master, without the need to "convert". The Sufis arrived massively in the Indus Valley once the Mongols had swept over the Near East. The Sohrawardiyya order was probably the first, with Baha al-Din Zakariyya (c. 1270-1262) settling in Multan. The fact that this figure is still very much present in Sindhi folk poetry testifies to the important role he played in local society.

According to historian Ansar Zahid Khan, the majority of the Sindhi population would have accepted Islam before the arrival of the Mughals, in early sixteenth century (Khan 238). In Sindh, the sixteenth century was a troubled period, which began with the arrival of Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri (1443-1505), who proclaimed himself the *mahdi*, in Islam the saviour who will come for the Day of the Judgement. It was followed by the invasion of the Arghuns and Tarkhans, two groups coming from Central Asia who governed Sindh one after the other. It was in this context that the Naqshbandi Sufis developed their networks in Sindh, as well as the Qadiris. But once again, the lack of sources does not allow us to know in detail the evolution of Hinduism in the province. The chronicles covering the following period, from the 16th to the 18th century, are no more loquacious, and it is therefore necessary to wait until the arrival of the British, to begin to have a more detailed account.

The British convincingly state that Sufism, mainly through vernacular poetry, provides a religious infrastructure for the majority of Sindhis, regardless of their religion. It was Hindus who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, published the mystical works of the great Sufi poets and were the first exegetes. Furthermore, the Hindus practised the cult of the *pirs*, the Muslim saints. In mid 19th century, a British officer, Richard F. Burton (1821-1890), noted that the Agha Khan, the spiritual leader of the Ismailis, had Hindu devotees and that sometimes, Muslims were disciples of gurus. In Karachi, Hughes, a British official who wrote the province's first *Gazetteer*, reports a three-day festival dedicated to a Hindu saint on the 1st of Chaitra Shudh Paksh, with 16,000 Hindu and Muslim participants, open to all the classes of the indigenous population (Hughes, 1876: 351).

According to the 1901 census, the Hindus were 25% of the whole population of Sindh, with about 0, 8 M for 2, 5 M of Muslims. Among them, the Lohanas are a little bit more than half of the total, with 0, 420 M, and with other traders caste such as the Bhatias or the Khatris, 0, 45 M ; followed by three untouchable castes : the Menghwars, also known as Dheds with 70, 000, the Bhils with 36, 000, the Kohlis with 32, 000 ; then we find the Rajputs with 26, 000, and the Brahmans with 10, 000 (Aitken 1907 : 155). Many other smaller castes were registered. The Lohanas were divided into two groups: the Amil, who were generally civil servants in the service of British administration, and the Bhaibands, a term that refers to the different categories of traders, bankers and brokers.

Religiously, the Lohanas were Hindus, but as Burton noted repeatedly, the Hinduism they practised would be difficult to be accepted as such by other Hindus: « It can be observed that they show a general tendency towards the faith of Nanak Shah, and that many castes have so mixed the religion of the Sikhs with the original Hinduism that it is difficult to discern the dividing line » (Burton, 1851: 309-10). The Lohanas were mostly Nanakshahis and Daryapanthis (see below). A few number were goddess worshippers, and a smaller number Vallabhacharis, Swami Narayanis, and Ramanandis (Aitken 1907 : 163 & 186). They consumed meat, with the exception of cows, and drank alcohol. The Amils formed an hypergamous subdivision of the caste, and they took brides from the Bhaibands, but will not give them brides.

The Brahmans were made up of two distinct castes: the Pokarnas and the Sarsudhs. The former instructed Hindus in religious matters. This was their only activity. They did not eat meat, drank alcohol, and married only within their caste. The Sarsudhs had a way of life close to that of the Lohanas. They ate meat and worked in British commerce or administration. The Rajputs did not bear any distinctive mark, despite their royal origin. They lived like the Sarsudh Brahmans. The remarriage of widows was widely practised except for the Bhatias and Pokarna Brahmans. The untouchables castes were followers of the Devis, for which they were known as Shaktis, and they also worshipped « Rajput heroes », such as Ramdev Pir and Pabu (Aitken 1907 : 164).

An informal legal situation

The specificity of the Hindus of Sindh, which has been observed through their religious affiliation, is further confirmed by their informal legal situation. In 1898, a judge pointed out that the Hindu law applicable to Sindh had never been definitively determined (*Selected Decisions* 1910: 11). In this respect, two points should be noted: on the one hand, the common people among Hindus did not agree on the law to be applied to them, and on the other hand, a number of clerics were a priori unregulated. On the first point, we can distinguish three main parties that did not seem to follow the caste divide. One party maintains that it was the Mitakshara legal school that prevailed. The « Hindu Udivided Family » was a collection of early 19th-century interpretation of classical Hindu jurisprudence (Davis 2018). This school, which was the most widespread in South Asia, governed Hindus of all allegiances, but also Sikhs and Jains.

A second party, represented by a Brahman, asserted that the Mitakshara school should be implemented with the Dattaka Mimansa, a treaty on adoption. A third party claimed the reformed version of the Mitakshara school known as the Mayukha school was the most relevant (*Selected Decisions* 1909: 484-488). Sources are lacking to enter into the intricacies of these legal schools. However, the questions asked in court were very concrete. Most often they were questions of inheritance, especially whether or not girls could inherit. According to

the Mitakshara law, they could not, while the reformed Mayukha school allowed it under certain conditions. The Mayukha school was clearly a modernist reading of Mitakshara.

The second point concerns the different categories of Hindu clerics, who are not subject to common law: "[...] the plaintiff and Biharidas, being bayragis (ascetics)," a report states, "are not subject to the ordinary rules of Hindu law, but to a specific custom" (*Selected Decisions* 1909: 487). The result was that if a Hindu who turned away from worldly affairs cut himself off from his family and joined a sect that was governed by different laws of inheritance from those to which he previously belonged, he will not be able to claim an inheritance from his family. However, not all Hindu clerics had the same status. The Bayragis were not considered as authentic *sanyasis* (ascetics). One judgment stated that the Bayragis constituted a "lower caste" and that, unlike the *sanyasi*, who were governed by the *Shastras* (sacred Hindu scriptures), the rule of succession from master to disciple was far from being established (*Selected Decisions* 1909: 338).

In addition, the recurrent problem of succession was more acute when material income was attached to a sanctuary. The question is then how to distribute it among the spiritual heirs of the gurus, who are the devotees, and his direct heirs - i.e. the members of his family. In 1902, a judgement established that the daughters of Thakurs, the name of the priestly caste of Udero Lal (see below), who had married merchants (*banyas*) could not officiate as Thakur, i.e. "initiate a shevak (disciple) by the ceremony of reciting a mantra and blowing in his ear et cetera", and thus receive offerings (*Selected Decisions* 1910: 415). But nothing prevented a *banya* (trader) from dedicating himself to religious life, and therefore from succeeding a Thakur.

One of the main consequences of British colonization was a return to the religious roots: the indigenous elites undertook to reform and renew the reading of their religious tradition. The first step was to bring it into line with Western knowledge. In Karachi, the movement of community reorganisation was late in coming. Associations were founded at the end of the 19th century. In 1875 the Brahmo Samaj had a temple (*mandir*) in Hyderabad and another in Karachi (Aitken, 1907: 167). Around the same time, the Arya Samaj established itself in the province. It opened branches in Karachi, Hyderabad, Thattha, Larkana, Sukkur and Shikarpur. But although it had a larger membership, its actions were smaller than those of the Brahmo Samaj (Hatcher 2018).

Dayaram Jethumal (d. 1887) had founded the Sindh Sabha, « The Association of Sindh », in 1882, two years before the establishment of the Indian National Congress in Bombay. He died in 1887 and gave birth to the D. J. College. Sindh Sabha was open to all communities and sought to improve the living conditions of the population. At that time it was considered a "quasi-political association". From 1890, it owned two newspapers published by Hiranand Chokiram Advani. Government decisions were discussed in the first, the *Saraswati*. The second, the *Sudhar Patrika*, was specifically aimed at women. Dayaram Gidumal had established the *Sindh Times*. After the establishment of the Congress in 1884, Sindh Sabha translated A. O. Hume's speeches into Sindhi. In a letter to the governor of Bombay, Sindh Sabha presented itself as "a public association representing all classes of His Majesty's subjects in the province" (Gidumal, 1903: 284).

From the end of the 19th century onwards, many Hindu castes organised themselves into associations. In Karachi, a Social Reform Association had been established in 1888 by Hiranand Showkiram (1863-1893). The objectives of the association were to prevent child

marriages, reduce the expenses of marriage, develop women's education and improve their status (Gidumal, 1903: 340). But women were among the most vocal in their opposition to the programme. Hiranand established three schools for girls, whose funding covered almost all the association's expenses. Despite the support of the *panchayat*, the caste council, the association soon had to file for bankruptcy (Gidumal, 1903: 343). Finally, it is worth mentioning the existence in Karachi of various European-inspired philanthropic and deist societies such as the Freemasonry and Theosophical Society. Their influence on Hindu, Muslim and Parsis intellectuals was not negligible. The Theosophical Society was founded in Karachi on 21 December 1896. One of its members, Jethmal Parsram (1885-1948), was a disciple of Annie Besant (1847-1933).

3. Partition and the Pakistani State: The Hindu minority among a Muslim majority

In the meantime, the confessionalization of the nationalist struggle had progressed in Sindh, following the general evolution of the Indian subcontinent. Karachi remained, however, a cosmopolitan city with a focus on business. Within the province, sporadic riots had broken out in the north, in Larkana in 1928 and Sukkur in 1930 (Khuhro, 1998: 73-76). The activism of Hindu organisations such as the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha was increasing (Fisher-Tiné 2018). The former practised *shuddi*, a ceremony aimed at converting Muslims to Hinduism, and in Larkana, in northern Sindh, the Arya Samaj decided to reconvert the Sanjogis to Hinduism (Boivin, 2020 : 241).

Towards the partition

The growing antagonism between Hindus and Muslims was fuelled by the fact that an important part of Hindu activity was usury. In 1896, a British administrator had established that 42% of the arable land was owned by or mortgaged to Hindus (Thakur, 1959: 40). Then, in 1936, the Sindh Agricultural Commission had established that 87% of Muslim families were in debt to Hindu loan sharks. Gradually, the spread of the nationalist discourse of the Muslim League was combined with the feeling that Muslims, the majority in Sindh, would be relieved of their debts in a Muslim-dominated country. An important turning point in this community crystallization was reached during the Manzilgah affair, which was followed by the assassination of Baghat Kanwar Ram.

The Manzilgah affair indicates that the growth of communal antagonism was embodied in symbolic places, which were most often places of worship. Manzilgah consisted of a complex of two buildings, an inn and a mosque, located on the banks of the Indus River in Sukkur. It was said to date from the time of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. The British had transformed it into a residence, having windows drilled into the tombs. Later, the place was used by Hindus when they made the pilgrimage to Sadh Bela, on an island in the river just opposite (Khuhro, 1998: 169). In Sukkur, the neighbouring town, Hindus were in the majority and dominated the municipality.

In October 1939, the Muslims decided to organise a *satyagraha*, or 'force of truth », the name given by Gandhi for peaceful rallies, and to occupy the Manzilgah mosque. On 1 November, Bhagat Kanwar Ram (1885-1939), a very popular singer and poet, was murdered in Sukkur railway station. Rumour had it that the crime had been commissioned by Sufi master (*pir*) of Bharchandi, a local Sufi *dargah*, in retaliation for the beating of his own son by Hindus in August. The riots that followed resulted in the deaths of 142 Hindus and 14 Muslims (Boivin,

2020 : 240). The general climate, both in Sindh and throughout the Indian Empire, was deteriorating day by day. So much so that the majority of Hindus were convinced that their interests would not be guaranteed in a predominantly Muslim state like Pakistan. After Pakistan and India became independent in August 1947, a dramatic event precipitated the migration of Hindus to India. On 1 September 1947, sabotage derailed a train near Nawab Shah, and an armed mob threw itself at Sikhs, killing 15 and wounding 17 (Khuhro, 1998: 320). By early November 1947, 246,000 Hindus had already left Sindh by sea, air or rail. By 1 January 1948, it was estimated that nearly 500,000 had taken refuge in India. Hindus in the interior were benefiting from special trains chartered by the Sindh government.

On January 6, 1948, riots unleashed by Muslim refugees, the mohajirs, which were pouring into the capital of the young state, forced the Hindus to speed up their exodus. Two hundred Sikhs from Inner Sindh, who had to be evacuated by boat, were settled in a temple in the city centre. During the night, a crowd of 8,000 mohajirs surrounded the temple enclosure, set fire to it and forced the Sikhs out. The death toll varies between 42 Sikhs killed and 82 wounded according to the daily *Dawn* (8 January 1948). The Indian government had chartered ships from Bombay and by December, with the introduction of extra trains, 140,000 Hindus were crossing the border. Migration declined steadily except at the end of 1949, when Hindu-Muslim clashes in Shikarpur and Sukkur caused a new influx. Between 1947 and 1952, it is estimated that of the 1, 400,000 Hindus living in Sindh, 1, 250,000 had migrated to India. Gandhi had given them almost 62 km² in neighbouring Katchch (Gujarat), where they founded the city of Gandhinagar. About 500,000 refugees were accommodated in camps, almost half of which were located in Bombay.

Hindus, the Pakistani political system and the impact of Islamisation

The most unexpected consequence of the exodus was that Hindus from outcastes became the majority since the refugees in India belonged to high castes such as the Lohanas, Bhatias and others. This did not mean that the Scheduled castes, to use the British classification still used by the Pakistani government, would gain leadership in the Hindu community. The Hindu community was again divided into two separate groups: the Hindu *jatis* (castes) and the Scheduled castes, the new name given to untouchables, or outcastes, who were considered to be too impure in the Brahmanical system to be included in the caste system. In doing so, the Government of Pakistan was not only replicating the British nomenclature of the colonial era, but also the discriminatory pattern of Hindu law.

Nothing in the legal status distinguished Hindus from other religious minorities, Christians, Parsis and Sikhs, especially since in principle, at the time of its foundation in 1947, Pakistan was a secularist state. Its founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, had expressed his vision unambiguously in a famous speech to the Constituent Assembly on 11 August. He said that everyone was free to go to the temple, mosque or any other place of worship in the state of Pakistan. He foresaw that Hindus would cease to be Hindus, Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in a religious sense, but in a political sense, as citizens. But national, regional and international burdens, and above all the intrinsic ambiguity of the nature of Pakistan created for Indian Muslims, would lead to an increasingly recurrent use of Islamic referents.

The Constitution of Pakistan stated that the Hindus, as other religious minorities, are free to practice their religion, that they can have the State protection if needed, and that untouchability is abolished. Nevertheless, since the creation of Pakistan, the Islamist political parties, such as the Jamat-e Islami, have created disorder, sometimes through violent actions, for Pakistan to become a « true » Islamic State, what means the country should be governed

by *sharia*, the Islamic law. This strong pressure has provoked an Islamisation of the population, sometimes through the State, when for example learning the Quran was made compulsory for all, including the non-Muslims, or when Sufi environment is submitted to a so called de-hinduization, when for example the bells to be rung when entering a *dargah* are removed, because it was said to be a non-muslim action. And above all it has allowed the development of a movement of forced conversions of young Hindu girls, as well as a continuous movement of migration of Hindus towards India, as we'll see below.

The issue related to forced conversions is a very intricate one, as shown by Jürgen Schaflechner's investigations. The current process is what he names FCM, or forced conversion and marriage, through which a young girl is first kidnapped, converted by force to Islam, and married with a Muslim. One of the most active places where this is operated is the *dargah* of Bharchandi Sharif, located in northern Sindh. The local *pir* Mian Abd al-Khaliq, who is currently member of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, claimed that Hindu girls either fall in love with a Muslim boy, or they want to become Muslim, and in both cases, fearing their family's reaction, they come to take refuge with him at Bharchandi Sharif (Schaflechner 2020 : 189-190).

An element that facilitated this process was that Hindu marriage, and also that of other religious minorities, was not legally recognised in Pakistan. Therefore, an already married Hindu woman who was kidnapped, converted and forcibly remarried had no documents to prove that she was already married. On February 15, 2016, the Provincial Assembly of Sindh passed the Hindu Marriage Bill 2016, applicable to Hindus and other non-Muslim citizens. The Sindh Bill was moved in the provincial assembly by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader and Sindh Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Nisar Ahmad Khuhro.

But the multiplication of complaints filed by Hindu girls' parents has led a Hindu to file a bill against these practices. Consequently the « Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Act, 2015 » has been adopted by the provincial assembly of Sindh. The punishment for forcing somebody to convert consists of a minimum term of five years of imprisonment, and a maximum term of life imprisonment. The Islamist political parties, including the Jamat-i Islami, condemned this law as anti-Islamic, and against the constitution, and threatened the governor with organizing the siege of the assembly. The said governor finally refused to ratify the law. Then on October 8, 2019, a new version of the law was presented to the provincial assembly of Sindh, and it was rejected.

The religious discrimination towards the Hindus convince them to migrate to India. In her study devoted to Pakistani Hindu refugees in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, Natasha Rajeha states it is only a factor among others. The majority of migrants belong to Scheduled castes, and they told her they are called infidels in Sindh, and forced to read Islamic books at schools, but she finally concludes : « Oppression along caste, class and religious lines, as well as kinship and cultural ties across the borders motivate Hindu to leave Pakistan for India. (...) ». While the migrants are mostly Scheduled castes who worked as daily wage agricultural labourers, they think « they will experience less discrimination and be able to access expanded work and education opportunities » (Raheja 2018 : 338). In any event, about 2, 000 Hindus would migrate every year to India (Raheja, 2018 : 335). Finally, a few cases of return to Sindh have been reported, mainly concerning Scheduled castes who are said to have suffered even more caste-based discrimination in India.

4. The *darbar* of Uderolal and the competition among the Daryapanthis

The construction of the Daryapanth and the polarity of Udero Lal darbar

In a desert country such as Sindh, it is understandable that the Indus river was the object of the greatest attention, and that the local populations even went so far as to worship it. Tradition dates the appearance of an incarnation of the river, or a form of divinisation of the river in human form, back to the 11th century AD.

A Muslim king named Mirkh is said to have threatened local Hindus with conversion from Islam. They went to the banks of the river Indus, where they implored their god to save them. After some time, a voice coming from the river stated a miraculous child was to be born. In 1008, he was born in Naserpur in the family of Ratan Rai, and named Udero Lal. He quickly asserted extraordinary powers, so much so that the king sent his vizier to investigate this miraculous child. The vizier was convinced by his miracles of his superhuman quality, as the king who had summoned him. In one version, Udero Lal is said to have sprung from the river, followed by his army, and the frightened king renounced his disastrous project of conversion by force and became his disciple. Udero Lal's disciples were both Hindus and Muslims. Once he had completed his duty, Udero Lal considered it was time for him to disappear. He asked his cousin Pugar to take over the leadership of the river sect, the Daryapanth, and that in order to praise him, the Muslims build a shrine (*qabr*) and the Hindus a temple (*samadhi*).

The official account of Udero Lal places his appearance on earth at a special moment in the history of Sindh : he would have been on earth from 1008 to 1020 in the common calendar. Chronologically, it takes place during a period when two events of prime importance occur in Sindh. The first concerns the beginning of Mahmud Ghaznawi's destructive raids on Sindh, and the second is the rise to power of the Somras. Mahmud Ghaznawi (971-1030) invaded Multan in 1005, while Sindh was under Ismaili rule. The Ismaili ruler has entered an alliance with the Hindushahi ruler, but both forces were defeated by Mahmud. He asked a tribute to the Ismaili ruler, and in 1010, he invaded Multan again and this time, he killed a great number of Ismailis. The Ismaili mosque was used for the storage of henna (McLean 1989 : 138-139). In 1025, After he plundered Somnath, Mahmud went to Mansura, where the Ismailis had taken refuge. He would have destroyed the city, where the first Somra king, known as Khafif I, was killed.

But once again, there is a shortage of sources. The first accounts of Udero Lal's life did not appear in writing form until the end of the 19th century, which means that before then the tradition was oral. The first reference to the religious complex (*darbar*) of Udero Lal appears in an 18th century historiographical relationship whose author is Mir Ali Sher Qani (1728-1788) (Qani 1957 : 389-390). It refers to a certain Shaykh Tahir, the name by which the Muslims venerate the saint whose tomb is housed in part of the *darbar*, and the Hindus venerate a deity named Udero Lal. Nowadays, Udero Lal is better known as Jhule Lal, and this site represents a singular case in Pakistan where the same holy place is co-managed by Hindus and Muslims.

It is therefore frequently presented as a model of religious harmony and shared sanctuary. However, on closer inspection, the mechanisms implemented for its functioning and depicted below would result more from what Robert Hayden has called « antagonistic tolerance », according to which holders of two different religions shared a space because for different reasons, they compelled to share it (Hayden 2002).

What do Hindus and Muslims share at Udero Lal darbar

In Uderolal *darbar*, Hindus are much more present than Muslims in terms of surface area and of rituals. The complex is divided in two main spaces : the first one is controlled by the Hindus, and restricted to them, and the second hosts a Hindu temple, a Muslim tomb, and other intermediary spaces. The Hindus pay visit to the Muslim grave, but the Muslims do not go to the Hindu spaces. The vast majority of the rituals are performed by the Hindus, generally in the part reserved for them. The only action that is conducted jointly by the Hindu head, Mata Bina, and the Muslim head, Ghulam Abbas Shaykh, is to place a *chador* on the tomb of Shaykh Tahir. However, Muslims do not strictly speaking organise an annual festival, as is the case in Sufi *dargahs* dedicated to Muslim saints.

On the Hindu side, the liturgical year is marked by two annual festivals, the second being the replica of the first one six months later. The largest annual festival is called Chetichand, word for word "the new moon (*chand*) of the month of Chet", Chet being the first month in the Hindu calendar: it commemorates both the Hindu New Year and the birthday of Jhulelal. Chetichand brings together several thousand people at the *darbar* of Udero Lal. It is a festive moment where musicians and singers perform, and the dance named *chej*, which is performed with sticks only by men who are said reproduce the undulation of the Indus River waves.

On a more strictly ritual level, the day is punctuated by two highlights. The first is marked by the blessing of Mata Bina. She sits on a platform, surrounded by her sister and her niece, and the devotees line up for several hours to receive her blessing, which is accompanied by the gift of a *dagho*. The *dagho* is an object for transferring the spiritual master's charisma that is widespread in South Asia, within all religions, including Sufism. Each religious site has a specific one. In the queue made of Mata Bina's followers, men come before women. The second moment is that of the most important ritual: the offering of the *bahrano* to Jhulelal.

The *bahrano* is the name of the offering par excellence in Jhulelal's path. It is an assortment of food, such as fruit, ground rice and sugar placed on a tray with the flame of an oil lamp in the middle, symbolising the divinity itself. If a temple is located near the Indus, as is the case of Jinda Pir in Sukkur, the *bahrano* is deposited directly on the river. Otherwise, as in Udero Lal, the *bahrano* is thrown into the well where Jhulelal would have disappeared. Devotees from all parts of Sindh and India have brought their *bahranos* with them, but Mata Bina is the first to officiate. She recites prayers, at the same time as she sprinkles the faithful. She can then throw the *bahrano* into the well, while singing the praises of Jhulelal. Then, one by one, the faithful will perform the same ritual, minus the blessing. The ceremony will continue late into the night.

It should be noted that the rituals are only performed by Hindu *jatis*, in the first instance by Lohanas and other merchant castes. The Scheduled castes are allowed to attend in the background, to listen to the music and look at the dance show. But they don't go to collect Mata's blessings and *dhago*, neither they make *bahranos* and throw them into Jhulelal's well.

Udero Lal darbar and the competing authorities

The sharing of authority between Muslims and Hindus is legitimized by Jhulelal's narrative. Ghulam Abbas Shaykh belongs to the Shaykh community, to whom Jhulelal had asked to build a *qabr* for worshipping him. How did the Hindu head, Mata Bina, become the « holder of the throne » (*gaddi nashin*) of Udero Lal *darbar*? Are her authority and the polarity of Udero Lal accepted by all Daryapanthis? According to tradition, we have seen that Jhulelal had entrusted his cousin Pugar with the task of organising his cult before his occultation. His descendants

constituted a priestly caste whose members were called Thakurs, who had a monopoly of the cult. The Thakurs ran the temples of Jhulelal in all the localities of Sindh where they were located, and of course they ran the *darbar* of Udero Lal. At a date difficult to specify, but probably after the partition, the last *gaddi nashin* of Udero Lal who was a Thakur, named Uddardas, died without an heir. He adopted Pritamdas, who was his wife's brother.

Pritamdas was not a Thakur. After him, he was succeeded by women, including his own wife, his daughter and two of his granddaughters, Mata Bina being one of them. The family had emigrated to Bombay at the time of the partition and now Mata Bina is staying twice in Udero Lal: for Chetichand, and for Asu. Asu is the name of a month in the Hindu calendar where Chetichand's celebrations are replicated identically six months later. At each stay, Mata Bina stays about a month and apart from conducting the rituals in Udero Lal, she receives her devotees and travels through Sindh to visit other temples of Jhulelal. This is for example the case of the Jhulelal temple in Naserpur, which is endowed with special importance since it is there that Jhulelal is said to have been born. But today, the temple is occupied by a Punjabi refugee family, who nevertheless let Mata come with some worshippers to perform rituals.

It is difficult to know how many temples dedicated to Jhulelal are currently active in Sindh. On the other hand, no more temple is managed by a Thakur for the good reason that they all emigrated to India in 1947. The new caretakers, who are invested with all the priestly functions that the Thakurs had, are generally given the qualification of *maharaj*. In India, where the cult of Jhulelal has experienced an important development among the Sindhis who have emigrated, the Thakurs are a very small minority and the great majority of the temples are run by *maharajs* (Boivin and Rajpal 2018). However, the Thakurs retain a certain aura within the Daryapanthis, a specific and hereditary charisma which comes from the fact that they are the descendants of Pugar, and through him, indirectly related to Jhulelal himself.

Returning to Sindh, the central authority of Mata Bina and the *darbar* of Udero Lal is challenged by the *gaddi nashin* of the Mol Sharif complex dedicated to Jhulelal, but which differs from Udero Lal by its association with Nanakshahi referents, namely Sikh followers who did not follow the mainstream school known as Khalsa. This complex, located in Kohistan, in West Sindh, in a fairly remote locality, was founded 50 or 60 years ago, and since its foundation it has always been run by women. The current *gaddi nashin* is a young woman named Mata Dipa. Although she recognises the importance of Udero Lal and Mata Bina, she nevertheless acts independently, having her own agenda.

5. Ramdeo Pir in Tando Allahyar and the religions of the scheduled castes

As we saw above, although untouchability has been officially abolished in both Pakistan, status discrimination continues to be practiced among Hindus. Regarding the scheduled castes, it does seem that the majority of Dalits are of Marwari or Gujarati origin, but a more in-depth study would be necessary to establish on the one hand the list of untouchable groups. The situation of these groups has in any case changed considerably since the partition in 1947. They have experienced a diversification of their activities, often associated with rural exodus, and have extended their presence throughout Sindh province, although they are still particularly numerous in Thar Parkar, the eastern part of Sindh.

However, their numerical domination has not allowed them to achieve a new status, nor to improve their daily living conditions through more rewarding professions. A part of them

want to be called Dalit, « oppressed », a name they borrowed from India. In this respect, it is remarkable that Muslims and Hindus of higher status perpetuate caste-based discrimination, and especially untouchable status. In religious terms, the untouchables are distinguished by their cults, which can be divided into two main groups: on the one hand, Shivaite cults in which devotion to one or more Devis is particularly accentuated, and on the other hand, the cult of Rajput heroes.

Devis and Matas

In Hinduism, most of the Hindu gods have a wife or several wives, and they are usually known as *devi*, or goddess. But more specifically, the term Devi is used for the wife of Shiva. She has many names, expressing her many functions and in the common language, she is called *mata*, or mother. The honorific title of *mata* can also be given to a female religious head, as we saw in the case of Julelal. In early twentieth Sindh, the Devi was worshipped by the Dheds, also known as Menghwars, the Bhils, the Jatias and the Odhs. The Bhils, the Dheds and the Odhs were also said to worship divinized heroes, such as Ramdev Pir or Pabuji (Aitken 1907 : 182-185).

The followers of the Devi are named Shaktas, since she is the female energy (*shakti*) of Shiva. Among the different shapes taken by Devi, the most popular figures in Sindh are Kali, Durga, Sitala Mata, Bhawani, Amba, Chandika Devi and Hinglaj Devi (Aitken 1907 : 164). The importance of quotes is not the same everywhere. For example, Sitala Mata, the goddess of the Small pox, has separate temples dedicated to her. Kali is a destroyer but as Shiva's wife, she is called Parvati, and her stone images are usually found in the square of the Shiva temple where the *lingam* is located (Thakur 1959: 115-116).

A main temple near Makkli is devoted to a Devi whose name is different according to who are the followers : Ashapura Devi for some, and Bhawani Devi for others. This place was a stop when the pilgrims were on their return journey from Hinglaj (Schaflechner 2018 : 191-193). Asa or Asha is the goddess of Hope mentioned in the *Harivamsha* (Brodbeck 2018), a lengthy appendix to the *Mahabharata* (ca. 130). The same temple is called Singh Bhawani by the Sindhis, and Ashapuri Devi by the Kutichis. Singh Bhawani, another name for Durga, the goddess seated on a lion, was the most important cult of the Devi in pre-partition Sindh. A temple was built for her in every town or important village. The cult was controlled by the gurus, who performed rituals of the Shaktas (Thakur 1959 : 116).

For the Devi's followers, the most important festival is Navratri, the 'nine nights' devoted to a form of the Devi. It is an important festival among for the Hindus, usually devoted to Durga, but in Sindh, a goat is sacrificed for Bhavani, who would be in this case another name for Durga (Thakur 1959 : 158). According Thakur, there was a temple devoted to her in almost all town and important villages in pre-partition Sindh. On the eight night known as *ashtami*, the guru prepared a drink from the hemp-seed. He is the first to drink it from a cup, then the other devotees follow. The ordinary devotee, the one who is not initiated into the secret path, takes it on his palm, and drink. « even untouchables may be allowed to sit if they are Devi worshippers » (Thakur 1959 : 116-117).

Among the Samis, a small scheduled caste of present-day Sindh, the most important night is the seventh. The Samis do not have permanent build temples, and they built clay temples for every Navratri, which are destroyed after. Mata's *murti* is kept in a box. It is said it is her will to be kept hidden, except for the time of the festival. The most important time is the 7th night, when new born babies, as well as new married couple, come to take benefit of the auspicious time provided by Mata. The guru, known here as patel, will sprinkle water on the whole

family. It is believed to purify them and will wash their sins of the whole year (Sindhri forthcoming).

Ramdeo Pir in Tando Allahyar

In the 1907 *Gazetteer*, Aitken claimed that Ramdev Pir, or Ramdeo Pir or Ramdevji, is the god of several untouchable groups. In Sindh, his main temple is settled in the city of Tando Allahyar, not far from Hyderabad. Nevertheless, the main temple devoted to him is located in Ranuja, in Rajasthan. According to local tradition, Ramdev Pir was a Rajput living in the 15th century. He devoted his life to the defense of the poor and the destitute sections of local society, in performing many miracles. Ramdev Pir's worship was transferred to Sindh by Marwari migrants at an unknown period. Today, it is the second Hindu pilgrimage in Pakistan, after Hinglaj. In India, Ramdev Pir is known as the « God of the Untouchables », and as in Pakistan, his followers mostly belong to the Menghwar caste. In Sindh, other scheduled castes such as the Bhils and the Kohlis also worship him, among other deities such as the Devi under different shapes.

The temple of Tando Allahyar is said to have been built by a merchant of the Khatri caste town called Kala Chand about two centuries ago. He went to Ranuja and promised Ramdev Pir that if he gave him a son, he would build a temple in his honour. Nowadays, the most sacred element is *akhand jot*, the "eternal lamp", which the merchant is said to have brought directly from Ranuja. Other sacred objects of worship are the banner (*dhaja*) of Ramdev Pir, the representation of Ramdev Pir (*murti*) and the hearth (*dhuni*) which he used as a medium for meditation (Kamran 2020: 71-74). The *dhaja* is characteristic through the footprints depicted in red on a white background: it is undoubtedly the element that more than any other allows us to identify the cult of Ramdev Pir. The temple is surmounted by numerous *dhajas*, and every pilgrim who goes to the temple carries them with him.

The iconographic representation of Ramdev Pir depicts him as a warrior, in the form of a poster or, more rarely, as a statue. His representation connects him to the iconographic stereotype of saviours, probably inspired by the Rajput universe. Ramdev Pir is on horseback, all caparisoned, with a beard and a crown on his head, surrounded by a halo, and holding a spear in one hand and the reins of his horse in the other. This stereotypical representation gives him other royal attributes, such as the parasol above his head. He is usually in the company of disciples whose posture testifies to the great devotion they have for him. These characters may refer to miracles performed by Ramdev Pir during his lifetime (Boivin 2010). Near Ramdev Pir is usually Dali Bhai, a Menghwar who would have been Ramdev Pir's 'adopted sister'.

The Tando Allahyar complex is made up of several parts: several rooms are planned to accommodate the pilgrims, but also a kitchen and a room for the ritual meal (*bhandaro*). The temple itself, the *mandir*, has two floors. There are seven halls reserved for *satsang*, when the community gathers to sing devotional songs. The main room on the ground floor is the Holy of Holies: this is where the *murti* of Ramdev Pir is located, and where the rituals are conducted by the members of the temple committee. The daily rituals consist of the *arti* which is performed at sunrise and sunset: it consists mainly in lighting the *dhuni*. A Brahman pours oil to revive it, and recites prayers. Then the faithful present start devotional songs (*bhajans*). Afterwards, the pilgrim will go to pray in front of the statue of Ramdev Pir, then in front of the *dhuni*, and finally in front of the memorials (*samadhis*) of the former caretakers of the temple, and they will deposit offerings (*prasad*) of coconuts, or money. One occasion when the faithful come to the temple in large numbers is the new moon, or *bij*.

The annual festival is organized in the Hindu month of Buhro, around 11th of September. Thousands of people come to Ramdev Pir's *mandir* in Tando Allayar. The staunch devotees come by walking barefoot. *Artis* are conducted as depicted above, but two other rituals are arranged. The first ritual is the re-installation of the *dhaja* on the roof. Every group of followers want to have his own *dhaja*. Another main ritual event, and probably the most attractive for the followers, is the ritual of reciting Ramdev Pir's life story. The life story is made of four main parts : the miraculous birth, the performance of miracles in his youth, his wedding with Netal Rai, and when he took *samadhi*. Ramdev Pir is considered as being an *avatar* of Vishnu, and he didn't die but left this world.

The Maheshvari Menghwars and the Barmathi panth

As we saw above, the Menghwars are the most numerous group among the Scheduled castes. The name Menghwar covers a cluster of subcasts and as it is the case for many castes, it is not possible to know how this group was constructed. For the British of colonial India, the Menghwars were « a low caste like all leather-workers in India (and) in Sind, (...) they are engaged in making shoes and weaving coarse cloth ; they also make girths, stirrup leathers, reins and similar articles » (Aitken 1907 : 186). On the religious level, the Menghwars venerate different Rajputs heroes, such as Ramdev Pir, Pithoro Pir or Pabuji. But some Mengwar groups also have their own sect, such as the Barmati panth for the Maheshvari Menghwars.

The Barmathi panth was founded by Guru Matang Dev, and completed by his descendants Lurang Dev, Matai Dev and Mamai Dev, between the 12th and 15th century. It is included in the Shivaite sects, and the name Maheshvari comes from the fact that Shiva, or Maheshvar, is worshipped. The name Barmathi would come from Shiva who created twelve (*bar*) men or spirit (*mati*) from the twelve drops of the sweat that fell from his face while he was performing ascetic austerities. The Barmati panth, however, incorporated Vishnu elements, as indicated by the belief that Matang Dev is Naklanki, the name given to the tenth incarnation of Vishnu, the saviour who will achieve the Kaliyug, the Age of Darkness. The four gurus of the Barmathi panth are buried, and their shrines located in southern Sindh are known as the Char Dham (four places of pilgrimages). Each shrine (*samadhi*) is kept by the descendant of the buried guru (Thontya 2012).

The Barmati panth is framed by the matangs, a priestly group composed by the descendants of Matang Dev. The Maheshvari Menghwars do not have worship places in villages, or in their house. The main religious ritual is to perform the *yatra* (pilgrimage) to a guru's *samadhi*. The *samadhi* of Matang Dev is visited only during the time of the two festivals : the first one is *janam ja yatra*, which is celebrating his birthday, on the 3rd of the month of Magh (mid-January-mid February). The second is *khariyo ji jatar*, which is performed for his death on the 3rd day of the month of Vaisakh (mid-April-mid-May). The rituals are similar. In early morning, the pilgrims (*yatris*) take bath (*sanam*) and pray, then they gather around the *samadhi*. The caretaker starts singing *bhajans*, with other matangs, while the *yatris* give them the tithe (*dan*), between 1 to 100 rupees (0, 05 to 0, 50 euro). Then they enter the *samadhi* and put banners (*dhaja*) or brocades (*par*) on it. It is followed by the singing of *bhajans* depicting either the birth of Matang Dev, or his death. Later on many *bhajans* are sung, and finally, all the *yatris* share blessed food (*prasad*).

Making the pilgrimage allows one to benefit from the auspicious blessings of the gurus. It is also the time when the pilgrim can renew these vows, and on this subject, the last one he pronounces before leaving the site is the promise to return the following year. The *yatras* are

reserved for the Maheshvari Menghwars who, as a result, form a kind of caste sect, with a panchayat as its institution, which is located in Karachi.

Conclusion

The Hindu community in Sindh has very contrasting elements. While the former untouchables represent 90% of the total, their statutory, social and economic situation has hardly changed since the creation of Pakistan in 1947. It is still the caste Hindus, or Hindu *jatis*, to use the official terminology, who control the representative bodies of the community, and who have retained some economic influence through the maintenance of their commercial activities and land ownership. The wealth of some Hindu families is reflected in an active policy of reconstruction of the temples dedicated to Jhulelal. Officially, former untouchable groups are accepted in religious ceremonies, but in most cases they remain on the sidelines, spectators of the rituals rather than actors.

Historical sources show that before the arrival of the Muslims in 711, there was no flourishing Hindu civilisation. A Brahmin named Chach had usurped power from a Buddhist dynasty, and Buddhists demographically dominated the province. As for the conversion of the population to Islam, it occurred over the long term, through the proselytizing activity of the Ismailis and then the Sufis. Massacres of populations did indeed take place, but they concerned both Hindus and Muslims considered as heretics. Later historical sources do not allow us to know the development of Hindus before the arrival of the British. Hinduism as we know it today was built during the colonial period, through an interaction between the colonial power and the Hindu Sindhi elites. However, the British observe that the Hinduism practiced in Sindh contains many specificities.

With a singular legal situation, a weak influence of the Brahmins, and the domination of the merchant castes starting with the Lohanas, the point which remains however the most characteristic is the cult dedicated to the Indus river, venerated under the name of Udero Lal then Jhulelal. The main *darbar* dedicated to him remains very representative of Sindhi religiousness before the partition. The complex is co-managed by Hindus and Muslims, but the majority of the rituals are performed by Hindus alone, who, it should be noted, do not admit scheduled castes. The latter continue to venerate the Rajput heroes, in particular Ramdev Pir, whose main temple is located at Tando Allahyar. Sometimes Menghwar sub-castes formed a new religious community, as in the case of the Barmati Panth, with its own gurus and its own history.

In creating Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah had to guarantee and protect the religious practice of non-Muslim minorities. But the tension created by the Islamist parties calling for the establishment of a theocracy based on Sharia law, which has greatly increased since the 1970s, makes the situation of Hindus very precarious. They are regularly the target of attempts at conversion by force, which provokes regular migration to India. The fact that these campaigns of forced conversions are sometimes led by Sufis, such as the pir of Bharchandi Sharif, counterbalances the idealised image of Sufism as a peaceful and integrative path of Islam.

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