

## THE SHIKARPUR SAGA: A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

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### Abstract:

*This paper is an attempt to understand past and present of Shikarpur, one of historical city of Sindh. Besides geographical importance, this research evaluates historical analysis of causes of downfall and deteriorating conditions of the historical city, which was known as 'Paris of Sindh'. This study also put light on different dynasty rule in the city. Moreover it highlights different majestic buildings and beauty of the city. This is purely qualitative research. In this research secondary data has been analyzed to support view point. Based on the arguments conclusion have been drawn.*

**Key words:** Shikarpur, Historical, Paris of Sindh, Dynasty rule.

### Introduction:

District Shikarpur, located nearly 29 km west of the right bank of the Indus River of Sind Province was once considered the “*Paris of Sind*”. Shikarpur, once a booming commercial center, providing routes via Silk-road, for South Asian goods to Central Asian countries connecting Qandahar, Uzbekistan, Moscow and Middle East through Iran, is now on the brinks of destruction due its terrible tribal disputes and conflicts. In the not so distant past, Shikarpur was gate way for South Asia to the world and was to the old Sind what Karachi is today for Pakistan. It had a very high quality of perfume industry, rich culture due to modern art and architecture and very high quality educational institutions. This city, which was once the center of culture and civilization and hub of commercial and economic activities owing to its trade links with Central Asian countries through historic Bolan Pass, is now in a state of shambles and desolation. Its glory and sheen is now story of past.

This geographical importance of Shikarpur can be gauged from the words of Postin. T. Captain in his memoir *Personal Observation of Sind* (1843), London. He writes “Shikarpur, the greatest mart of Sind, the city of greatest commercial importance beyond the Indus from its extensive banking influence over the whole of Central Asia as well as other countries, is situated on the high road to Kandahar, by the great pass of Bolan. Its position will always give it a direct influence over the trade of Indus and the countries beyond it”. (Moryai 1996: 117)

The city earned its reputation in the sub-continent for its aesthetic beauty, outstanding administrative setup, institution for learning, well-endowed hospitals treating patients from far-flung areas, underground drainage system, brick paved roads, well-known eight gates and all-embracing wood work in houses. Pir Ali Muhammad Shah Rashidi in his book, *Uhe Deehan, Uhe Sheehan* (Those Days, Those Lions) says that: “Shikarpur... as I recall from my early childhood memories was a heaven for fun-loving affluent people. The people of Shikarpur, their traditions, customs and the way of life were diverse from people of other parts of Sind. The greatness of the city was at its high position. Sindhi-Wakhi Bhaibhand (A class of Hindu business community) was prevailing; they were occupied in trade with far-flung regions right up to Samarkand and Bukhara. They bring all the wealth earned from abroad to Shikarpur and spent it there. They owned impressive houses. They would not spare anything to beautify the city and would not hesitate to indulge in charities. They had set up very large hospitals in Shikarpur. In their last days in Sind, they had established the only medical college in northern Sind, in Shikarpur. All these charitable institutions were run with their money.”(Rashidi 2004: 239)

Despite having such a rich and affluent history, today’s Shikarpur has lost its past grandeur and gives a view no less than a misery struck and backward city. Partition of India had bad impact on the city as Hindu merchant and traders, who owned and decorated the city, migrated to India. This vacuum in the city was filled by the local Muslims who started to migrate from villages to city. As a result, city’s demographic structure changed abruptly. Though still there is Hindu population in the city, about 6% (District Census Report, 1998: 25), but it is largely inhabited by the Muslim population.

Many factors have contributed to the downfall of this city such as change in demographic structure of the city due to rural-urban migration with Hindu population’s exodus, mismanagement and maladministration and poor attention of the government authorities. In my view the most important factor responsible for the downfall of the city’s affluence and splendid history are the tribal conflicts. Despite the fact that Shikarpur city might have witnessed small skirmishes among different groups in its hey days but since the last two decades the district is badly affected with the emergence of tribalism which perpetuates tribal conflicts among the different tribesmen

Lastly, but mainly, due to poor law and order situation of the city because of frequent, fierce and vicious cycle of different tribal feuds among different tribal groups which had disturbed and unbalanced the social equilibrium and smooth sailing of society.

This paper focus on what was it that made Shikarpur modern city of Sind and center of commercial and business activities. Moreover, what was/is it that led the city to this critical position near to collapse?

### **Significance of the Study:**

Peaceful environment is essential for the evolution and progress of any society. Thus, progress and evolution can be ensured through maintaining peace and order in the society, so this study tries to trace out the reasons and effects behind and of these savage conflicts in Shikarpur district in order to address them to restore peace in the society. This study will also be significant in understanding the social relationship of the people.

This study has significant scope in the ethnographical and sociological literature as there is hardly any research based work available in this field in the city, particularly on these conflicts. Thus, there is not as such literature available at academic level to trace out the reasons and effects of these brutal conflicts on the social fabric/integrity of the district.

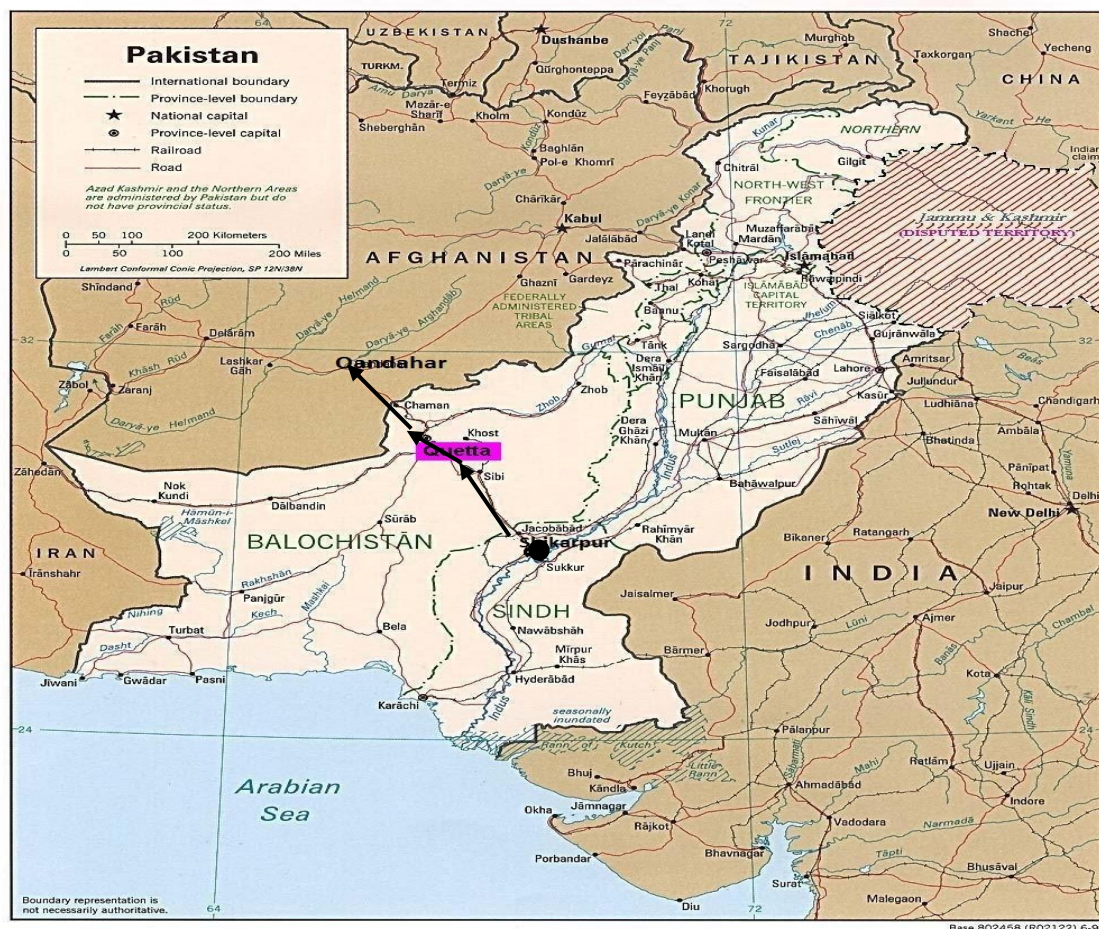
This study will help the policy makers, if seriously taken, in building and restoring peace in the area by recommending some solutions to limit internal violence as essential for the existence of humanity.

### Research Objectives:

The main objective of this study is to trace out the historic glory of District Shikarpur and find out the reasons that were responsible for making Shikarpur as “Paris of Sindh”. Moreover, this paper explains factors that are responsible for making this once historic and commercial city into a state of shambles and destitute, nearly at the verge of collapse.

### Research Methodology:

Keeping in view the nature of study, qualitative methods have been used. After going through the available literature on the subject under study, mostly data collected through field surveys and “participant observation”. It is widely believed that in a participant observational study the researcher actually witness social behavior in its natural setting.



**Trade Route through Bolan Pass from Shikarpur via Sibi to Qandahar**

### **Geo- Strategic Position of Shikarpur:**

It would not be wrong to say that Shikarpur was once to the old Sind what Karachi is today to Pakistan, which is the commercial hub of the country. Noting the strategic position of Shikarpur E. A. Langely remarked “Shikarpur is located on the high road to Qandahar through the Bolan Pass and this must always give it an important influence on the trade of the Indus and the countries beyond”(Langely 1860: 269). Admitting this fact Postan in his *Personal Observation Of Sind* pointed that “Shikarpur was designated one of the gates of Khorasan, because it is in the direct route from the Indus to that country by the great transit of the Bolan, which offers the only means of communication with the upper country and has therefore always been, and must continue to be adopted as the commercial line of interchange” (Postan, 1843: 269).

Keeping this fact in mind one is clear that it was mainly due to its geographical and strategic location which made Shikarpur as commercial emporium of South Asia in eighteenth and nineteenth century providing it status of Paris of Sind.

### **Political History of Shikarpur:**

Due to the strategic position, Shikarpur remained the “main foci of trade and political power in Sindh and became the largest and most prosperous town of Upper Sindh” (Boivin; 2008: p. 43).it was ruled by different political dynasties from time to time and “remained under the direct control of the Afghans between 1747 and 1824” (Boivin; 2008: p. 43). So it is necessary to have brief look on these different political dynasties.

### **Shikarpur under Dauoodpota: The Founders:**

It is well established fact that Shikarpur was “founded in 1617 by Bahadur Khan Dauoodpota” (Memon, 1988: 97; Boivin; 2008: p. 43), Shikarpur remained under control of Dauoodpota (1617 to 1701) when Yar Muhammad (1701 to 1718), Kalhora ruler, of Sindh, snatched it in fighting against Dauoodpota rulers. In *Tareekh Sind Kalhora* Ghulam Rasool Mahar discusses this deadly fight. “It was severe fighting between Dauoodpota and Kalhora which took lives of many people. In actuality, It was bloodbath of many innocent people” (Mahar, 1963: 182).

### **Shikarpur under Kalhora:**

Kalhora dynasty ruled Sind from 1701 to 1782 (Sindhi, 2002:66).As mentioned earlier, it was founded by Yar Muhammad Kalhoro. “During the time of his rule the great saint of Sindh, Shah Inayat Shaheed, was assassinated by the *Zamindars* (landlords) of Sindh. In this story, Mian Yar Muhammad supported the Delhi ruler” (Sindhi, 2002; 66). As a result he was “titled as “Khuda Yar Khan” by the Mughals (Sindhi, 2002:66).

Yar Muhammad was died in 1718 and his son Noor Muhammad became the ruler while at the same time whole India was ruled by Mughal dynasty. Mughal rulers supported and patronized Kalhora rule in Sindh and in 1736 Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhoro was officially entitled as ruler of Sindh (Hakro 2009: 11). Kalhora made Hyderabad as their capital. It was marriage of convenience between the two dynasties of the sub-continent. During this period Shikarpur town saw noteworthy progress and development under Kalhora rule.

Kalhora Dynasty was succumbed to Nadir Shah, Persian King, when he invaded India in 1739 and put whole India, with Shikarpur, under Persian Empire. During his incursion, Nadir Shah was successful in gaining support of Dauoodpota, who were deprived of power earlier in Shikarpur by Kalhora rulers. Though Kalhora remained rulers of Sind till 1782 but Shikarpur was snatched from them by Durrani and transferred it to Dauoodpota. Thus it was the “beginning of Pathan settlement in Shikarpur city”(Sindhi, 2002:67).

### **Shikarpur under Durrani:**

One of the generals of Nadir Shah, General Ahmed Shah Abdali, took control over Afghanistan and laid the foundation of Durrani Sultanate in 1747. With this he also made Shikarpur as part of Durrani Kingdom (Hakro, 2009: 15). Ahmed Shah Durrani made Shikarpur as part of Sibi province under an Afghan Governor while capital of Kingdom remained in Kabul. Thus all this shows that, “it (Shikarpur) continued for a century or more to be a bone of contention between the Dauoodpota and Kalhora rulers until Ahmed Shah made it part of Sibi Province”(Sindh Gazetteer, 1958: 40). It was also the commercial interest of Durrani rulers, with expansionist intention, which forced them to intervene in the political and internal matters of Sind in order to put and exercise their control over Shikarpur owing to its strategic location.

With the arrangement of Shikarpur with Sibi province the new era of development and progress started as Afghan Kings were quite successful in establishing peace through Bolan Pass. Though the trade through Bolan Pass was started earlier during Kalhora rule but they have no control over further route of Bolan Pass in Afghanistan. Durrani kingdom not only encouraged trade through this strategic route but they also attracted Hindu traders (Banias) of India by providing them security and protection. With this the outcome was encouraging as Hindu contributed a lot in progress and prosperity of the city.

Their standard of commercial reliability was so high that it gave importance to their trade throughout India from Calcutta to Kandahar. They amassed huge amount of wealth as they were not only traders but were also revenue collector under the Afghans. They consumed large junk of their wealth on the development of the city. In this way Shikarpur attained its high mart under Durrani dynasty to the extent that “from Shikarpur were supplied the funds which set on foot those successive inroads into, and invasion of the neighboring countries... until the monarchs lost their credit, and the restless nobles, no longer occupied in foreign expeditions, directed their ambitions against each other and to throne” (Mubarak, 1987: 182).

Nawab Mansoor Ali Khan was the last Durrani governor of Shikarpur who ruled from 1821 to 1824. After that Durrani rule in Shikarpur was put to an end by Talpurs. Mansoor Ali Khan handed over keys of eight famous gates to Talpurs who made Kazim Ali Shah as Naib of Shikarpur (Hakro, 2009: 17).

### **Shikarpur under Talpurs:**

Talpurs, who ruled Sind from 1772 to 1843, defeated Kalhora, the rulers of Sindh, in battle of Halanni in 1782 (Majeed, 2002: 95). Though Talpurs rule started many parts of Sindh after battle of Halanni but yet Shikarpur remained under the control of Durrani Kingdom till 1824 when Nawab Mansoor Ali Khan of Durrani Kingdom was defeated by Talpurs. After the possession of Shikarpur city by Talpur rulers its trade suffered badly partly due to political distractions in Afghanistan and largely due to political chaos and instability in Sind. There were internal strife's and clashes in Talpur family which further worsened matters for them to rule over Sind.

Taking advantage of the already deteriorated and depreciated situation of the rule, Britishers, who had already took control over many parts of India, invaded and snatched power from Talpurs in Sind, including Shikarpur, in battle of Miani and Daboo in March 1843 under command of Charles Napier.

### **Shikarpur under the British Empire:**

After conquering Sindh in 1843, the British brought administrative changes and brought Sind under Bombay Presidency from 1847 to 1936 when it was separated from it through 1935 Act. According to British administration of Sind, Shikarpur was one of the three districts in Sind others were

Karachi and Hyderabad. Shikarpur city was made as the headquarter of the district. During this period it remained dominant in commercial, business and cultural activities over other parts of upper Sindh like Khairpur, Sukkur, Larkana, Kashmore, Jacobabad, etc. It was at that time “Shikarpur was administratively largest district of Sind covering whole area of Upper Sindh with fourteen Talukas” ( Hakro, 2009: 18), which were: (1) Shikarpur (2) Ratodero (3) Larkana (4) Qambar (5) Dokri (6) Mehar (7) Naseerabad-Warah (8) Kukur (9) Sukkur (10) Obaro (11) Rohri (12) Pano Aqil (13) Ghotki (14) Mirpur.

Moreover, British’s also established military cantonment in Shikarpur and put their troops over there due to fear of attack from the Afghan Kingdom. Later on this cantonment was shifted to Jacobabad in 1861. This military base was used and still being used for military purposes not only for the country, Pakistan, but also for other countries and particularly for America. It has remained an important military base for world powers, like Russia and America during cold war era. Likewise, famous Shamsi Air Base, which has been serving for the military purposes of America and was closed for American troops and navigation installment after NATO strikes in September 2012 on Pakistan army, is also over there.

The district headquarter of Shikarpur was changed to Sukkur in 1883 and finally in 1901 Sukkur was made district by putting Shikarpur under its administration (Hakro, 2009: 18). This badly affected on commercial activities in Shikarpur city.

British divided India in 1947 by demarcating two independent states India and Pakistan but Shikarpur was remained under administrative set-up of Sukkur district. It was in 1977 when Shikarpur was reconstituted as separate district and consisted of whole area of old Shikarpur. Now at present the district has following administrative set-up:

### **What made Shikarpur as Paris of Sindh?**

Shikarpur once seat of trade and commercial activities acquired status of *Paris of Sind* due to its grandeur owing to its strategic position on the map of Sind. During the eighteenth century Shikarpur became the core center of manufacturers including brass and metal goods, carpets, cotton, cloth, embroidery, art and architecture. Mentioning the commercial position of the city Burton remarked that “this city, the center of merchants, money changers and bankers is built on a low alluvial soil...” (Burton; 1877:246) The city possessed majestic buildings, houses, colleges and charitable hospitals.

The town was enclosed with fort of deep and thick invincible wall- *Alam Pannah*-with eight *Dar*-gates. They were given names after their openings towards different towns. Lakhi Dar, Hazari Dar, Hathi Dar( towards the direction of the area where elephants of rulers were stationed), Khanapuri Dar, Sivi (now Sibi) Dar ( in direction to Sibi and Baluchistan) while other three Dar, Wagoo Dar, Naushero Dar and Karan Dar within city ( Hakro, 2009: 17).

Its great bazaar called as *Dhak Bazaar* (Covered Market) covered with wood roof of 900 yard because of summer heat, remained famous throughout Turkmenistan, Central Asia and Southern Asia (Mughul, 1988: 100). The first ever Central Asian Bank was present in the city in Bajaj Street of Shikarpur where currencies of the trading countries were easily and reliably exchangeable. Pointing the importance of Dhak Bazaar R. Burton mentioned “Shikarpur possesses one curiosity- a Central Asian Bazaar, the first thing of the kind we have ever seen. It is the main street of the city, a long narrow, tall walked passage, darkened and guarded against the sun raises by mats laid upon...”( Burton, 1877: 247). This market had shops on both sides. At that time only Bukhara, Samarkand and Istanbul cities had such kind of markets. This commercial hub of the city made it “certainly wealth superior to that of any other city in Sind” (Langely, 1860: 162). There was branch

of Central Bank of Asia in Bajjaj Street of Shikarpur where exchange of currency and other money related activities were happened.

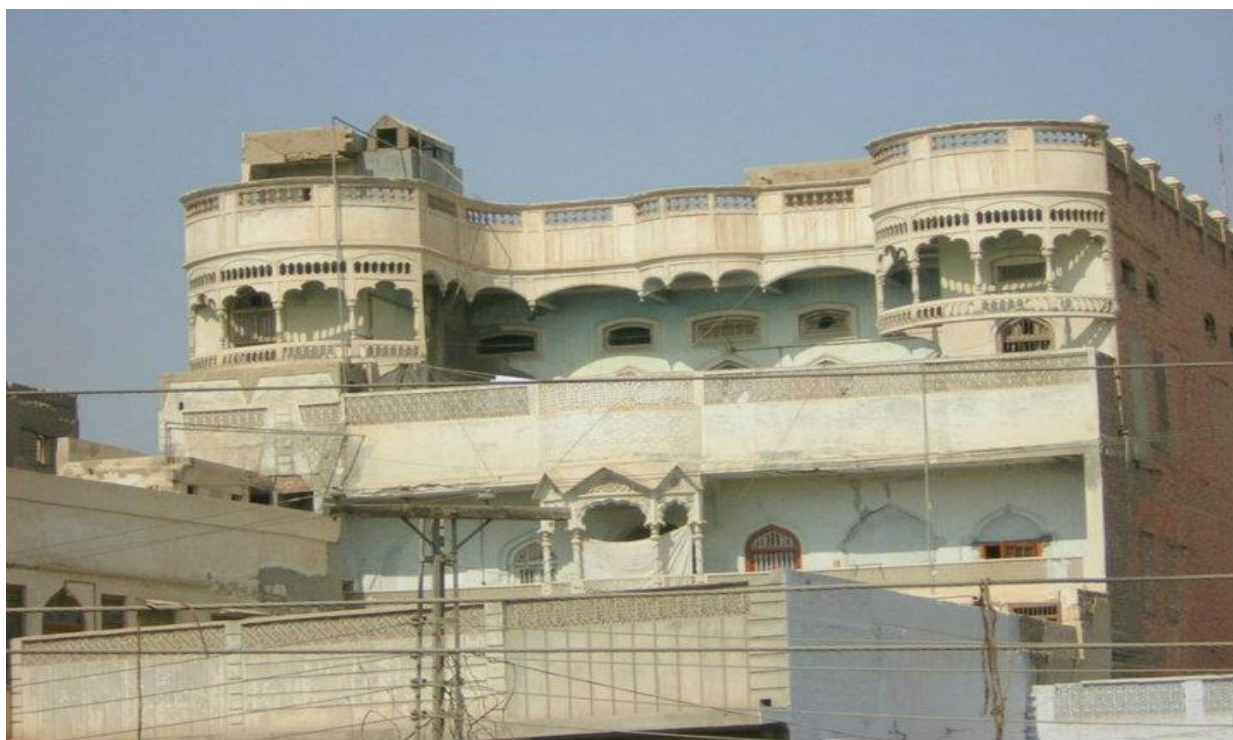


### **Famous *Dhak Bazaar* (Covered Market) of Shikarpur**

The population of the city was dominated largely with the Hindu community. They were mainly traders, bankers and money dealers. Before this, the population was Muslim in majority but due to beginning of commercial activities through trade with Central Asian countries many Hindus migrated and settled in it. Moreover they were “encouraged by Taimur Shah, Durrani Kingdom’s Monarch, in late eighteenth century”. Concentration of population shifted to Shikarpur city from other parts of India and particularly of Sindh as H.T Sorely remarked “one fact is certain that between 1740 and 1800 there was a great shifting of the population of Sindh with the chief concentration altering from Thatta, Hyderabad and Karachi to Shikarpur” ( Sorely, 1996: 29).

While the people of Shikarpur were known for their trade and business activities at the same notion they were equally benevolent with having humanitarian characters. Moreover, they were equally served as an important source of information about the political and social conditions of other countries where they go for trade. “They visit countries, and keep up acquaintance with current political occurrences which are but very partially known to their rulers” (Memon, 1988: 103).

What they earn through trade and business, they use it on themselves, on their home towns, on architecture and importantly on charity and welfare projects. Their living style was not an ordinary one. They lived in pomp and show by bearing majestic and standardize pattern of life. They contribute a lot on art and architecture of the city. There were wood carving on doors, windows and balconies of the houses which attracted the visitors.



### **A glance at one of the majestic building of Shikarpur**

There were good charitable hospitals, and many welfare trusts. “It is interesting to know that the first ever hospital in Upper Sindh at that was in Shikarpur established by Hindu trustee Rai Bahadur Udhavdas Tarachand Hospital”(Qayoom, 1996: 256). It was inaugurated by H.T.Sorely, the then Collector of Sukkur. Early ceremonial activities were performed by Governor of Bombay Sir Braboraeen. All modern facilities were available there rampantly. All, rich or poor, male or female, were treated equally and alike. The noteworthy thing of this hospital was that the trustee of it, Rai Bahadur Udhavdas Tarachand, have inscribed his name on the ground at the entrance gate hall of the hospital as his name could be crushed through the footsteps by visitors and patients alike and to show that he was nothing but a man who could be trampled through walking. This is rare example of humility and sagacity in the world.

“The first ever eye hospital in Sind was built in Shikarpur in 1893 known as Sir Henry Holland Eye Hospital. Every year hospital administration invites Dr Holland, an eye specialist from British, to Shikarpur for free treatment of eye patient. There was another famous charitable hospital, Hiranand Ganga Bai Hospital which also served the same purpose” (Qayoom, 1996: 257).

Shikarpur remained center of intellectual and educational activities. Historical records shows that “between 1770 and 1842, at least twenty four libraries existed which had a huge collection of books and manuscripts” (Hakro, 2009: 25). In pre-partition days, Shikarpur used to have mobile libraries where books were driven on carts around the town, which were borrowed and returned by the local population. Shikarpur marched ahead in education even in early twentieth century. According to one survey there were about seventy graduates in the city of Shikarpur in 1930, while at the same time rest of Sind had only seven graduates only. Shikarpur had the prestige of holding first ever college in Sind as two Hindu traders, Chela Singh& Setal Das, donated 100,000 and 30,000 respectively for the construction of building which was completed in 1932 and was

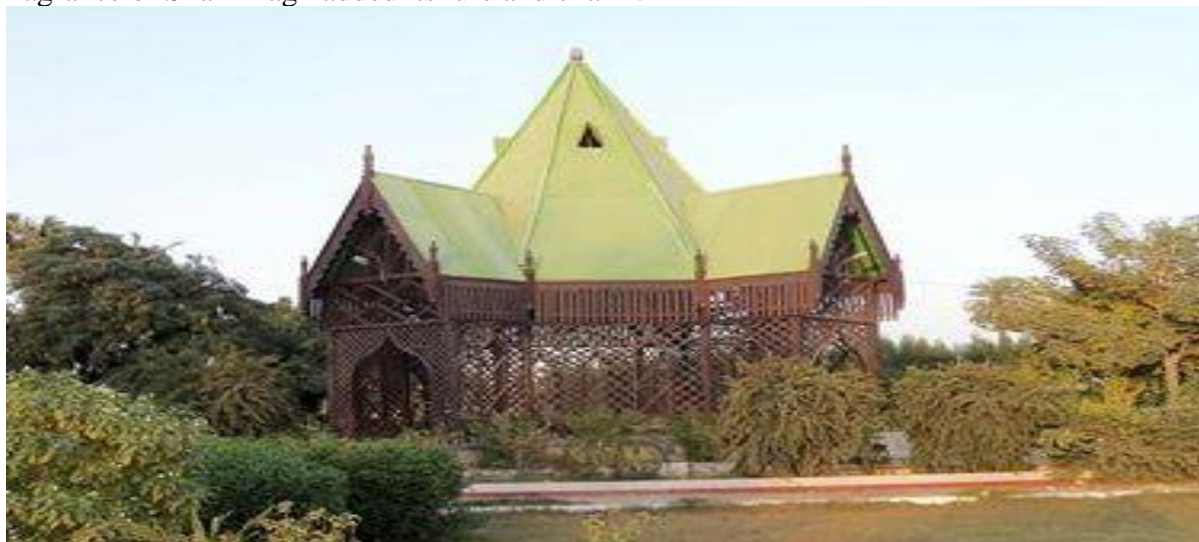
inaugurated by Governor of Bombay Presidency. This college is now famously known as C & S College.

In the field of literature Shikarpur remained in forefront than other regions of Sindh at that time. The famous Sindhi poet Sami, who belongs to “Trimurti- Shah, Sachal and Sami of Sindhi poetry”, belonged to district Shikarpur. Shikarpur also produced the famous personalities which served the lot not only of Sind but also at country level like Illahi Bux Soomro (Speaker of National Assembly- 1997 to 2001), Sheikh Ayaz and Bhai Chain Roy (Sami), Masroor Bedal, the great unparallel poets of Sindh.

Lakhi Dar of Shikarpur remained famous throughout its glorious days. There was saying that “while in Shikarpur if one has not seen Lakhi Dar he has not seen Shikarpur”. This was the center of the city. It was place where once flocks meet together, make gossip peacefully, eat and drink and go back to their homes peacefully. *Moti Kulfi* of Lakhi Dar was very delicious. Besides it, Shikarpur was, and still it is, famous for its Pickle- *achar*- and Sweats. We can still find shops out of Shikarpur district having their name “Shikarpur Sweet” and “Shikarpuri *Achar*”.

*Sindh Wah* (Sindh Canal), branch of Indus River, was famous not only for irrigating large land of the area but mainly because of public festivities and celebration at its shore particularly at summer season. There was hardly any Shikarpuri who did not know swimming (Rashidi in Morai’s, 1996: 249).

In addition to it, Shahi Bagh of Shikarpur remained attractive place not only for local people but also for the Royal families. There is saying that ‘British Queen once decided to visit Shikarpur. Owing to this fact, district administration decided to build garden in its honor in 1871 and was given name as Shahi Bagh” (Abro in Morai’s, 1996: 281). It possessed stunning variety of plants and flowers. Shahi Bagh also served as the place for different festivals in the city. It was famous for its flowers and their fragrance. This is fact that making Shikarpur as Paris of Sind, beauty and fragrance of Shahi Bagh added its lure and charm.



**Shahi Bagh of Shikarpur**

#### **Present Condition of Shikarpur:**

The present day Shikarpur is far off from what it was in past. It has now lost its valor and vigor. Glory of Shikarpur is now past history. Now it is no more Paris of Sind. Shikarpur now gives the sight of downtrodden and caricatured district of Sind. Now it is no more in leading position in commercial, educational and cultural activities. It has lost all what it had in past. At the moment,

the position now is reverting day by day. In fact it is most mimicked and mocked society of Sind. Perhaps, it would be no wrong to say that the city is the most backward society in Sind grappled with a lot of problems common to them are poverty, illiteracy, corruption, mismanagement, ignorance and importantly hazardous precarious law and order situation. Equilibrium of society is in frayed position because of deadly and dangerous tribal conflicts among different tribal groups. These conflicts have destroyed and routed the basic structure and social fabric of the society.

After the partition of India, many Hindu families who contributed their lot in making Shikarpur as Paris of Sind, shifted to India. Others, who were there or still abiding, became defensive to save their life and limb due to emerging religious intolerance in the city. These Hindus were the main assets of the city and owned and preserved Shikarpur as their hometown. These professional and business communities were replaced by ignorant and illiterate people with rural migration. Bourgeoisie class, which Shikarpur possessed during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was drowned out from the city finding no safety and security to their business activities and to their life.

Once the commercial emporium of eighteenth century by possessing bourgeoisie society, it is now most of the demolished devastated city of twentieth century. Once hub of commercial activities it is now hub of vicious circle of tribal conflicts. Peace and placid atmosphere of the city is now replaced with "might is right" maxim. People feel proud if having any weapon in their hand as it is now considered symbol of power in the district. People often discuss what type of weapon he has? How much it is costly? Where from you got it? How to get it? Etc. Now the fear of death is always knocking the doors of every citizen on the very next moments. No one feels secure and safe. Anything, at any time, with anyone can happen.

Though the city has same Shahi Bagh but its beauty is faded away. Now it is safe place for dacoits at night who easily distribute their property gained through robbery. Lakhi Dar gives pity look.. Now old historic buildings give gloomy and depressing picture. No one care and overhaul them.

### **Conclusion:**

The city is indeed in tragic, terrible and shambles situation. There is dire need to protect, safeguard and improve the dint and sheen of the district. Possessing such a splendid history, the city deserves to be owned and something workable way-out is, indeed, need of hour.



### **Gloomy scene of the tattered building of Shikarpur**

City still possesses same strategic location with having commanding route to South-East Asian countries. Still center of great game is Central Asia and its adjoining countries. Shikarpur has land route through Bolan Pass to these regions. In fact arms and ammunition, aid and assistance to NATO forces in Afghanistan have been reaching there through National Highway which crosses through Shikarpur. This fact of its strategic location was already discussed by C. Massion when he realized the decline of Shikarpur in start of the twentieth century. He was quoted by Dr Mubarak Ali as saying that “though Shikarpur has been crossing from its peak of prosperity to decline, but yet its position on the map of the world, being in the middle of rich countries, will hold back in its total decay., and, it may not be remain as the money-mart of Central Asia as it used to be but yet it will definitely long stay behind as a commercial market of its surrounding regions and countries” (Mubarak, 1987: 138).

Nothing is permanent except ‘constant change’. So one should not hapless or in state of despondency rather be hopeful hopeful one day Shikarpur will regain its lost glory and status. Peace, harmony, progress and prosperity will again be witnessed and it will re-emerge Shikarpur as commercial hub of Sind, Pakistan.

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