

An Escapade to Saidpur – A Model Village

By Shaikh Muhammad Ali
(The wandering Dervish)

Since my parents came here from Karachi earlier this month, I have been wanting to take them to all the tourist spots in Islamabad (as if there are too many around). This particular visit (amongst others) was to the much trumpeted Saidpur village on a sleepy Sunday last week.

On the way from my ‘ghareeb khana’ (read house) in E-11/4, Islamabad, I was flying on the Margalla road when I remembered to stop at the ‘Takia’ (read resting place) of Shah Abdul Latif (aka Bari Imam). We suddenly traveled back in time when we visualized as to how a tired Bari Sarkar must have sat down under this huge banyan tree after a long walk from his abode in Nurpur Shahan, his native village.



We later moved on to our destination and I almost missed the left turn going to Saidpur. Going to Saidpur was an experience in itself where we again traveled to a time when ancient Hindus inhabited this place and visited the Hindu temple. The general impression we were given was that this village is approximately 450 years old, but I strongly believe that it is much older.

Lately, the Criminal oops Capital Development Authority (CDA) has been trying to bring this ancient village back to its original form and granduer. It is thanks to the writings of the CDA and the newspaper DAWN that most of us (ignorant types) have gotten a chance to discover such places. I believe the place is being re-modeled with the help of Italian and French architects.

The ambiance is beautiful which opens with the 'Autak' (Sitting Area) of Mr. Said (the man after whom the village has taken its name) on the left and a small but simple mosque on the right. It is slightly disturbing to notice that in less than a distance of $\frac{1}{4}$ kilometer there is another mosque, for which there is no need since one would have easily sufficed.

As we proceed, there is a wall walking next to us, a part of which seems to be newly constructed while some parts seem to be rather old. Different stories abound regarding the dates when this wall was built. Further down the road we came to a temple on the left which has been renovated in gaudy colors of yellowish orange. The CDA could have done much better than that. My mother, who hails from Rajputana, India and was brought up in the royal family of Nawab Tallae Muhammad Khan of Palanpur, strongly protested this grotesque rhapsody of colors. On the right is another small piece of architecture which was probably used to keep statues of Shiva, Hanuman Ji or Ganesh Ji for that matter.

Straight ahead there is a bigger chamber which could easily fit a small church, but the natives were apparently using it as a school. I am pretty sure that the local Muslims must have left no stone unturned to desecrate the holy place of the Hindus which is more of a treasure from the past. This rectangular chamber has now been converted into a museum which houses more pictures of the ground breaking of the nascent Islamabad city with foreign dignitaries spading their way through the early days of Islamabad and less of the culture and history of the place under discussion.

Mom and I later moved inside the village while Dad rested and chatted with the locals (he always makes friends with them easily). We visited the creative workshop of the famous Lal Din, the clay potter who used to put life in his art work here. Now, all there remains in his workshop are his picture and his sweaty son who is trying to save his father's profession from extinction while creating half baked pottery. I took a few pictures and bought a few pieces of his handy work.

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We later moved back to the main entrance area where luckily we met the grandson of Lal Muhammad, i.e. Nazakat who incidentally has left the dying profession of clay pottery and has taken to fisheries. He also had a few sad stories to tell about the deterioration in the life patterns in the – model village.



(Sitting from left to right: Villager1, the writer, Nazakat, the writer's father, Villager2)

And how could I have left the place without visiting the 'guzargah' passage of Hazrat Khizar, the Zinda Pir (read living prophet). There are all kinds of legends about this place. I personally feel that this Pir must have visited this village when this was the abode of Hindus and he may have been instrumental in converting a few Hindus to Islam through his message of love, peace and humility; Pakistan being a predominantly Muslim country.

The walk up the hill is rather steep and tiring especially for somebody like me who has given up hiking and mountaineering some fifteen years ago. Nevertheless, after much panting and torture I did manage to scale the small hillock and, to my astonishment, the place had a spiritual air to itself. I was suddenly among the clouds of 'Tassawuf' (Sufism) and the breathtaking view of the village down

below and of the high rises of Islamabad were awe inspiring. After offering ‘fatiha’ (prayers) at the grave beside the ‘baithak’ (Sitting area) and pondering over the inter-twined banyan trees, I retreated down.



After saying my ‘Maghrib’ prayers in the local mosque, I collected my parents, who were both lost in their own orbits of time and space, and called it a day. The memories of this trip haunted all three of us ‘Shaikhs’ for days in a row.

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