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Africa on The Coast Of Pakistan

By Feroz Ahmed

Africa comes alive each year in the Islamic month of Rajab[1] at the shrine of the Saint Manghopir, 10 miles from Karachi, Pakistan's commercial capital of eight million people. Here the people of African origin, commonly known as *sheedis*,[2] participate in a week-long festival which represents a unique blend of African culture and local religious practices. Men and women, young and old, dance to the fierce beats of the African call-drums, known to them as *mugarman*, sing songs in Swahili mixed with local languages, and make a ritual offering of meat to the head crocodile. If the reptile accepts the offering, the year will turn out to be auspicious for the *sheedis*[3]

While the African roots of the *mugarman* dance, now a centerpiece of Pakistan's dance troupes performing abroad, are widely recognized, little has been written about the history and sociology of the people who have continued this and many other African traditions.[4] When did they come to this region? Did they all come as slaves? When and how did the slavery end? How did their cultural assimilation and partial intermixing with other groups take place? What is their present social status? How do they prefer to identify themselves? Do they have African consciousness? These and many other questions will come to the mind of an Afro-American or an African when he or she learns about the existence of people of African descent in an unlikely place like Pakistan.

It will take wide-ranging research efforts to provide definitive answers to the above questions. However, to piece together a preliminary general account of Pakistan's African heritage, it would perhaps be best to look at the two cultural niches within which the people of African origin reside. Pakistan's ethnolinguistic mosaic consists of four historical nationalities and several linguistic groups within the four present provinces. The two coastal provinces of Sindh and Balochistan have populations with distinctive African features. Those living along the Makran coast of Balochistan and extending east into the working-class area of Lyari in Karachi (Sindh) speak Balochi and identify themselves as Baloch. Inland, in the southern part of Sindh, a Sindhi-speaking but socially distinct community of *sheedis* exists. A small number of them have also settled in the inland provinces of Punjab and Northwest Frontier.

The importation of African slaves by the Talpurs coincided with the heyday of the Eastern slave trade, engaged in by the Omani Arabs.

Sindhi Sheedis

African features can be noticed in the figurines excavated from the ruins of the 5,000-year-old Indus Valley civilization. However, African presence in Sindh is clearly documented from the period when the Arabs conquered Sindh in 711 A.D. and introduced Islam to the Indian subcontinent. Mention is made in the historical accounts of an African warrior by the name of Shuja Habshi whom the conqueror Muhammad bin Qasim pitted against the local ruler Dahir.[5] The Arab rule in Sindh lasted nearly three centuries, during which the Arabs might have brought some soldiers and servants of African descent who may have stayed and intermarried with the local population.[6] The presence of slaves, soldiers, commanders and even local rulers of African descent from the 13th to the 18th century in different parts of India is well documented.[7] The Persian Gulf states, with which Sindh had extensive trade, had had an African presence since the 7th century. Even when the penultimate native rulers of Sindh, the Kalhoras, were overthrown by their troop commanders, the Talpurs, in the late 18th century, they had some African guards.[8] However, it appears quite unlikely that the present-day *sheedi* community has descended from the Africans who may have arrived in Sindh prior to the advent of the Talpur rule.

Thus, the end of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century seems to be the period during which African slaves were brought in large numbers to Sindh. Describing the slave trade in the port city of Karachi at the time of the British conquest of that city in 1839, Alexander Baillie writes:

> *Slavery was an institution; as was the slave trade. Not only were many slaves kept in the town, but Kurrachee was a great depot for supplying the up-country districts. From 600 to 700 were annually imported, of whom about three-fourths were females . . . . According to Commander Carless not less than 1,500 slaves arrived at Kurrachee from Muscat and the African coast in the year 1837.*[9]

The importation of African slaves by the Talpurs coincided with the heyday of the Eastern slave trade, engaged in by the Omani Arabs. The Sultan of Oman ruled over Zanzibar (now part of Tan-

zania) and a large part of the African east coast. Raiding parties captured villagers in the interior of the continent and sold them in the world-famous slave market of the island of Zanzibar, where 10,000 to 20,000 slaves were traded each year in the mid-19th century.[10] Slaves destined for Sindh first arrived in the Omani port of Muscat, from where they were shipped to Karachi.[11] Some may have reached Sindh through owner-to-owner transactions originating from points along the Makran coast of the present-day Pakistani and Irani Balochistans. According to the description given by Richard Burton, these slaves were mainly Swahilis from what are now Kenya and mainland Tanzania.[12] The demand for African slaves in Sindh was probably increased as a result of the granting of vast fiefs to the Baloch warlords and troopers by the Talpur rulers, which whetted their appetite for the luxuries of life.

A National Hero

The slaves in Sindh were not used in productive activities, such as farming. The Talpurs employed them mainly as their palace guards and domestic servants. Many big landlords and rich merchants also owned African slaves for personal service. Young African girls were particularly in great demand as servants of the ladies of the elite households. More mature women were preferred as concubines. According to Burton, the slaves were also employed as "horse-keepers, grass cutters, day laborers, and apprentices to the different trades, as carpenters, blacksmiths, and others."[13] All available accounts indicate that the slaves were generally not subjected to physical cruelties. Their condition and treatment were similar to that of the slaves of the other Muslim lands, where the hardships of the slave status were mitigated by Islamic guidelines for treating slaves.[14]

A few of the slaves, because of their intelligence, loyalty and bravery, became favorites of their masters and rose to eminence. Hosh Muhammad, alias Hoshu Sheedi, was one of them. According to some accounts, his father was in the service of Mir Fateh Ali Khan Talpur, ruler of Hyderabad, and Hosh Muhammad was a *khanazad*, i.e., born and raised in the royal household. To accord respect to such slaves, the Talpurs gave them the family name of Qambrani, derived from Qambar, the freed favorite slave of Ali, son-in-law and cousin of

Young girl at the Manghopir Festival

Prophet Muhammad. Hoshu was closely attached to the Mir's son Sobdar Khan who, having been passed over in succession to the throne, collaborated with the British against his cousin Nasir Khan. Hoshu was said to have been dismayed at the Talpurs' lack of will to resist the British. The Talpur confederacy was in disarray. The rulers of Khairpur had already capitulated, and the ruler of Hyderabad, Mir Nasir Khan, was defeated in the battle of Miani in February 1843. Failing to persuade his master to resist the British, Hoshu jumped into the fray and joined the defiant Mir Sher Muhammad Khan of Mirpur Khas in the battle of Dubo. Hoshu is believed to have played a leading role in that battle.[15] The native forces were defeated and Hoshu died fighting bravely on March 26. Poet Ehsan Ali Shah pays tribute to Hoshu in the following words:

Hoshu his life sacrificed
With love he laid it down
With a hundred brave companions
He fought like a giant
And like a hero died.
On him no blame,
All is from God.
Victory in his hands lies,
To whomsoever He may grant.
Our heroes not an inch they budged
Our heroes them we praise.
(Translation by G. Allana)

Other writers, however, claim that Hoshu did not fight in the battle of Dubo, but was commander of the palace guards at the Fort of Hyderabad, where he was killed while fighting bravely against the British.[16] Many legends have nonetheless developed around the name of Hoshu Sheedi. He is regarded as a clever strategist and a brave patriot, a genuine hero who rose from his humble origins to lead Sindh's last struggle for maintaining its independence. He is viewed as the patron saint of modern Sindhi nationalism, whose battle cry today is the same which Hoshu is said to have raised at Dubo:

My head you may surely take;
But my Sindh I will not forsake.

Numerous articles, stories and poems have been written to pay homage to Hoshu. A complete family tree of his descendants has been compiled, and a lively debate goes on about his place of burial.[17] Hoshu's name is usually appended with the appellative *shaheed*, meaning martyr, and the title "General" is also prefixed to his name.

Ironically, it was the defeat of the Talpur dynasty that paved the way for the emancipation of the *sheedi* people of Sindh. The British, who had captured Karachi four years before their final victory at Dubo in 1843, banned slave trade[18] and slavery in Sindh.[19] They also wreaked hardships upon Sindhi nobles, which made it impossible for many to continue owning slaves.

Most individuals who are regarded as *sheedis* today are racially-mixed. Pure Africans are to be found only in the households of the descendants of the Talpur rulers, such as the family of Mir-Aijaz Ali Talpur in the Tando Muhammad Khan area.

An American Analogy

The conditions of the freed Sindhi *sheedis*, as described by the prominent Sindhi writer Muhammad Siddiq Mussafar, were similar in many ways to those of the freed slaves in the U.S. South.[20] Some stayed with their masters as servants or laborers; others went out into an unfamiliar world to start a new life as free citizens, without the security of feudal patronage. However, they managed to establish their own residential communities in villages and towns, and developed their own social organization. Mutual help and solidarity were the key to their survival. The freed slaves worked as field laborers, domestic servants and craftsmen. The *sheedis* maintained many of their African customs and traditions, the chief among which was the beating of the call-drum (shaped like a kettle-drum) called *mugarman* or *maseendo*, and singing songs and hymns in a language peculiar to them, possibly an admixture of Arabic and Swahili. According to Mussafar, "The *maseendo* for the *sheedis* is not simply an instrument for jumping and dancing; it is the instrument of their soul."[21]

In a quasi-hierarchical system of endogamous *zaats* (occupational castes/clans/kinship groups) the *sheedis* neatly fitted at the bottom of the ladder of Muslim *zaats*. Only the untouchable Hindus were below them. The indigenous slave or quasi-slave groups did not have markedly better social status than the *sheedis*. Reeling under centuries of feudal oppression and foreign invasions, the entire Sindhi population faced the problem of economic rehabilitation and restoration of self-esteem. The *sheedis* had a somewhat harder task. Although there was no ideology of racism, and Islam frowned upon racial discrimination, in a society characterized by *zaat* particularism it was onerous to try to rise when one's low status was advertised by one's skin color and physical features. But the *sheedis* did a remarkable job of establishing stable communities. Little is known about how these communities of freed slaves were established. The process might have started before the arrival of the British, and aided by selective manumission and interbreeding. As in other slave-owning societies, there were two ways of racial intermixing: a) men of other groups taking African women as their wives or concubines; b)offspring of such unions marrying pure Africans of both sexes. Not only did the nobles and other rich men have children from African women, but other Black women and raciallymixed men also married into the indigenous slave or near-slave *zaats*, such as the *Khaskhelis*. The mixed race individuals in Sindh are generally known as *gado* (meaning mixed), while those mixed specifically with the *sheedis* are called *bisar* (two heads). Over a period of nearly a century and a half there has been considerable degree of intermarriage.

Sheedis Today

There are no records to indicate the number of individuals who are regarded as *sheedis*, or who otherwise are of African descent. Viewed from the size of the *sheedi* communities, it may be surmised that their numbers may, at most, be in tens of thousands rather than in hundreds of thousands. Most individuals who are regarded as *sheedis* today are racially-mixed. Pure Africans are to be found only in the households of the descendants of the Talpur rulers, such as the family of Mir Aijaz Ali Talpur in the Tando Muhammad Khan area. There

they work as domestic servants, receiving only the bare necessities of life, but no wages. Beside the Talpur households, the *sayeds* (supposed descendants of Prophet Muhammad) and other *pirs* (spiritual leaders) retain *sheedi* servants. In these conservative families, the *sheedi* women play a crucial role as companions and windows to the outside world for the secluded ladies. Subservience and loyalty in these households is rewarded by protection and paternalism.

Unlike the overwhelming majority of the Sindhis, the *sheedis* have traditionally not been *haris* (peasants). However, many are engaged in modern agriculture as tractor drivers and mechanics. They also work as bus and van drivers, repairmen, artisans and casual laborers. Their proclivity toward dancing and music has led many to adopt it as a profession. The *sheedis* are stereotyped as "born dancers," and it is often said that their women have "springs" in their heels. *Sheedi* women are in much demand as dancers at rural weddings and other ceremonies. Groups of *sheedi* male and female dancers have been organized to perform professionally throughout the province. The *sheedis* are known for their sense of humor, and are popular as jesters at weddings and other functions. The *sheedis* also excel in *malh* wrestling and other sports, but there is little opportunity to develop this talent into a profession.

The religious practices of the Sindhi *sheedis* are based on a combination of Shiite and Sunni Muslim beliefs. They take the mourning for the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, grandson of Prophet Muhammad, quite seriously. During the Muslim month of *muharam*, they wear black clothes and engage in wailing and beating their chests. There is a preponderance of religious themes in their singing.

Beyond Stereotypes

The vast majority of Sindhi *sheedis* are neither domestic servants nor dancers. Most of them do what others do. Many among them have acquired higher education and have become professors, lawyers, doctors, engineers and writers. However, they recognize that like some other *zaats* they are also regarded as "socially backward." Very few among the *sheedis* have emerged as prominent personalities. One who can be singled out is the writer Muhammad Siddiq Mussafar, who is quoted in this article. Mussafar was born in 1879 in Tando Bago where his father, Gulab Khan, had been brought as a slave from Zanzibar via Muscat. Mussafar first became an elementary schoolteacher and then taught at a teacher's training school. He excelled as an educator, writer, poet and editor. Before his death in 1961, he authored more than 100 books, pamphlets and articles and played a leading role in literary activities.[22] He is remembered by every Sindhi for having written the Sindhi equivalent of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star."[23]

With the rise in political consciousness in the society as a whole, and an increase in literacy among the *sheedis*, a new awareness has taken place among *sheedis* about their social status. The paternalistic epithet *dada* (literal meaning grandfather) is no longer appreciated by the educated. While "*sheedi*" is still considered a neutral term, an increasing number of Sindhis of African descent are shunning this word, much as African Americans have discarded the word "Negro." Instead, *Qambrani* has become a popular surname among the educated *sheedis*.[24] Others who do not wish to be identified with the freed slave of Ali call themselves *Bilali*, or the descendants of Bilal, the Black muezzin and companion of Prophet Muhammad. In their quest for social advancement, the *sheedis* are identifying themselves with all the positive symbols they can find. A few years ago a number of Sindhi intellectuals and *sheedi* reformers got together to form an organization for the welfare of the *sheedis*. It was appropriately named the "Shaheed Hosh Muhammad Sheedi Welfare Organization." The dilemma of working for the benefit of a specific group, which is identifiable by its racial features, while not promoting racial separation in society, is reflected in the stated aims and objectives of this organization. While the specific objectives clearly indicate that the purpose of the organization is to help the *sheedi braderi* (community), the preamble urges that "this organization should by no means be considered a racialist organization."[25]

The Black Balochs

The people of African descent in Karachi and along the coast of Balochistan do not seem to face the problem of social identity in quite the same way as some of their Sindhi counterparts do. The exigencies of the rising Baloch nationalism are such that, at political and intellectual levels, all "racially" Baloch people are expected to shun their tribal identities, and all Balochi-speaking people who had been marginal to the traditional social structure are accepted as Baloch. Even though most of the Black people identify themselves as Baloch, in some parts of Balochistan, people of mixed African ancestry, known as *naqib* and *darzadag* (outcast), are still regarded as low-caste. Neither has the term *sheedi*, nor its Balochi equivalent *siah kardag* (black skin), disappeared.

Africans came to the Makran coast as part of the same slave trade from East Africa to Oman and the Persian Gulf as did the Sindhi *sheedis*. Their passage was probably more complicated. The rulers of Oman had recruited Baloch mercenaries for their army since the early 18th century.[26] They also had African slave soldiers, in addition to African slaves on date farms.[27] This may have provided a point of contact between the Makran Balochs and the Africans. In 1782 the ruler of Kalat, who exercised sovereignty over Makran, gave control of Gwadar and adjoining coastal territory to Oman.[28] By the end of the 18th century, the Sultan of Oman, who already controlled many ports and islands along the Iranian coast, acquired lease to the port of Bandar Abbas.[29] The African slaves, who were used in maritime activities in the Persian Gulf, most likely sailed to Gwadar and other ports in what is now Pakistan. Besides, Makrani landlords acquired slaves from the traders who brought their cargoes from the port of Muscat across

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the Gulf of Oman.[30] Slave trade is believed to have continued on the coast after the abolition of slavery in Sindh, despite the various treaties and agreements signed between the British on one hand and the Sultan of Zanzibar and the Shah of Persia on the other.[31]

In the late 19th and early 20th century, severe famines and slave rebellions in the coastal areas of Iran resulted in the freeing of many slaves and the fleeing of a large slave and non-slave population toward the East.[32] Some of them settled in eastern Makran. Most went on to Karachi and inhabited the Lyari Quarters of the old town, where former slaves of Sindhi merchants already lived. The Baghdadi sector of Lyari, in particular, received a heavy concentration of Black people.[33] Lyari became a melting pot of peoples and cultures. Those who had come from Makran were called *Makranis*, those who came from the state of Lasbella were called *Lasis*, and those who immigrated from Kutch as a result of famines were called *Kutchis*. However, for many outsiders the word *makrani* became synonymous with the people of African origin. Both Sindhi and Balochi were spoken in Lyari, but most of the Black people considered Balochi to be their first language. A small group of Blacks from Lasbella spoke primarily the Lasi dialect of the Sindhi language. Black people spread to other parts of Karachi too, especially in the outlying farms of Malir where they worked as agricultural laborers of other Baloch or Khoja farmers.

A Baloch Harlem

Under the British, Karachi emerged as an important port and trading center in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The dock workers, porters and donkey cart drivers, as well as the fishermen and boat crews, came from Lyari. When a small manufacturing sector developed gradually, Lyari provided the work force for it. Roughly by the 1930s, Lyari began to acquire the role of a Baloch "Harlem." In this huge conglomerate of irregularly-built houses of poor and working-class people, with no civic amenities, pursuits not conducive to the tribal society of Balochistan found a fertile breeding ground. Here the ideas of anti-imperialism, nationalism and Marxism flourished among the budding Baloch intelligentsia. Balochi literary movements started, institutions for the development of the Balochi language were established, Balochi script was developed, the first primer for teaching Balochi was prepared, dramas were written and staged, collections of Balochi poetry were published, music groups were formed, and political personalities emerged. The political and cultural products of this Baloch renaissance were constantly fed to Balochistan, which was struggling to find its identity in the post-colonial era.

The late Bilawal Belgium, a popular musician.

It did not matter what the skin color of the leaders and participants of this movement was. They were all Baloch and were treated as equals. And many of the past and present leaders of this movement are of African descent.

A few of the Black Baloch artists acquired national and international fame. Bilawal Belgium (real name Muhammad Bilal) mastered an unlikely instrument — the banjo — on which he made tremendous innovations in Sindhi and Balochi music. Born into a working-class family in 1929, Belgium started his career at Radio Pakistan, and then performed on television and stage. He travelled to many countries as a member of Pakistan's official music groups. He received early encouragement from his mother Mahgi, who was a singer of note, and his father Jhuk, who was a master of the instrument *kuzank*. Belgium died a few years ago, leaving behind a glorious legacy as a creative artist.[34] Because of Belgium's dark skin, hair and full lips, his African origin could not be denied. But there are a number of prominent artists of mixed ancestry who deny their African heritage.

The people of Lyari, especially those of African origin, have all but monopolized the sport of soccer in Pakistan. All the major soccer teams in the Indian subcontinent had players from Lyari, and the winners of prestigious cups were usually Black. Muhammad Umer was one such idolized professional player in the 1950s and 1960s. He earned an international reputation while representing Pakistan 13 times, including five years as captain of the team. Ghulam Abbas and Ustad Sheedoo were among other famous "*makrani*" soccer players. Today, even though they receive no support from the government, there are 370 registered soccer teams of Balochs in Karachi.[35]

Political Role

During the British rule, many eminent leaders emerged as a result of the experiment in local self-government. Among them was Allah Bukhsh Gabole, who became mayor of Karachi. His mother was of African descent, and he himself married a Black woman. His lawyer son, Abdul Sattar, was elected to the National Assembly from Lyari in 1970 and again in 1977 and was a minister in the cabinet of the late Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The people of Lyari remained among the staunchest supporters of Bhutto and were in the vanguard of the struggle against the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Huq. For this they were brutally suppressed and often taunted for being "Negro" by officials from outside the province.[36] In 1986 there was an uprising in the Baghdadi sector which reminded one of the Watts and Miami riots in the United States. Most of the popular slogans and campaign songs of Bhutto's People's Party have emerged from Lyari, from where Benazir Bhutto, the present prime minister, was also elected to the National Assembly.

In Karachi, today, there are an estimated 350,000 Balochs, out of which probably no less than one-half have African ancestry. An overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of Lyari are poor and live in squalid conditions. The darker among them are worse off, for the purity of their skin is directly correlated with the failure to climb up socially. Poverty and unemployment have bred alienation, resentment and crime in much the same way as among the Black underclass in the United States. This, in turn, led to

the stereotyping of the so-called *makranis* as a "criminal class" by the police — a stereotype which is still entertained by many Pakistanis, especially those who are not Sindhi or Baloch.

The people of Lyari serve as a link between Sindh and Balochistan, and represent the militant soul of both nationalities. Many of them have relatives in the interior of Sindh, as well as in Balochistan, particularly in the Makran district. Stretching west from Karachi to the border of Iran 300 miles away along the Makran coast, there are many fishing villages, such as Gwadar, Pasni, Ormara and Jiwani. There, anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of the population has clear African features, while even a larger number with lighter skin have an African admixture. The Makran coast enjoys a kind of special status in Balochistan in the sense that it is a civic rather than tribal society. The Black people mainly work as fishermen, sailors and *hamal* (porters). They are lower than other Balochs on the socioeconomic scale. Many enlisted in the armed forces of Oman during the 1970s. Since the early 1970s there has also been a trend, spurred on by the oil boom, for the Baloch workers to work in the Persian Gulf states. This has changed the economic conditions of many lower-class families, including those of African descent.

In the interior of the Makran district, as well as in the adjoining parts of Balochistan, where Africans were used as slave laborers on date farms, many continue to work today as bonded laborers. The workers performing the poorly paid but back-breaking task of husking fava beans are also Black. Even though the ruler of Kalat, under the pressure of the government of British India, had legally abolished slavery in 1914, owning of domestic slaves was not uncommon until the late 1950s. Even today some landlords and *mullahs* have Black servants who can be defined as slaves, for they do not have the freedom to leave their masters and they are given only the barest of food, shelter and clothing while they remain at the beck and call of their masters for 24 hours a day. On the other hand, a number of mixed-race individuals have acquired considerable social influence and political power. One of these became a minister in the Balochistan provincial government. The Black Balochs are either Sunni Muslims, or belong to the unique *zikri* sect.

Feast at Manghopir Festival

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A local drummer at the Manghopir Festival

African Culture

In the absence of a systematic study, it is difficult to list the elements of African culture which still survive among the people of African descent in Pakistan. The *sheedi* dance, with or without the *mugarman* drum, is the best known remnant of African culture in Pakistan. It is not only performed at the festival of the crocodile, but at numerous shrines in Karachi and Makran, as well as at weddings of Baloch people in these areas. More recently, it has, with some variations, been incorporated as a "folk dance" of Pakistan and is widely performed on television and stage. The *sheedis* in the interior of Sindh still light up fire and dance around it to the rapid beats of the *mugarman*.

Little known to outsiders, but a widely practiced ritual of African origin is the *gwati* exorcism and healing. Individuals, mainly women, supposedly possessed by *jin* or evil spirits or suffering from physical or mental illnesses, are taken to the exorcists who are usually women of African descent. Increasingly, other Balochs, including men, are also practicing the trade as "Gwati's mother." The ritual can last several days, during which dances are performed to drum beats and the spirits are called in a language which is believed to be African. The ritual includes sacrifice of chicken or goat, whose blood is rubbed on the forehead or other body parts of the patient. An elaborate special meal is also served as part of the ritual.

The Black women of Lyari are perhaps the most "liberated" women of Pakistan, and have little inhibition to be seen out in the streets. Nowhere else in Pakistan can one find women dancing in the streets to express their joy at an election victory. The propensity of Black people toward dancing and playing music is viewed as an indication of the continuity of African culture. This, plus their famed wit, has led to the stereotype of *sheedi badshah* (the literal meaning of *badshah* being king), having the same connotation as the "happy-go-lucky Negro."[37] In the everyday speech of many Blacks there are many words of African origin. There is a Mombasa street in Lyari, and Blacks there often jokingly call each other "Bombasas."

Racial Consciousness

The people of African origin in Pakistan, by and large, do not seem to be aware of

A crowd at a political rally in Lyari Quarters in Karachi. Note several men whose faces reflect African ancestry in the front row.

their African ancestry. The educated among them know about it, but most—especially the Baloch—deny that they are descendants of slaves. Those who are at the bottom of the social ladder understand that it is a class rather than a racial difference, for many other groups or individuals of other groups also face the same predicament. Neither slave background nor dark skin is peculiar to the people of African origin. There were Turkish, Georgian and indigenous slaves; and individuals from other groups can be as dark as, or even darker than, those of African origin. This is not a society polarized between a white master race and a Black race of former slaves. Furthermore, the Balochs, in particular, seem to have a reverse "single-drop" theory, buttressed by a belief so strong in patrilineality that it completely ignores maternal heritage. Thus, an individual possessing clear-cut African features may believe quite sincerely that he is nothing but pure Baloch. Because of their cultural integration in a society which is legally, ideologically and, to a large extent, practically non-racialist, the people of African descent do not like to be reminded that they are racially different. However, this society is quite color conscious, especially in matters such as selecting a wife for a man. Therefore, in a society where fair complexion is preferred there is all the more reason for an individual not to emphasize his African heritage.

However, a few Black intellectuals who have pondered over their own plight or the conditions of their group, or have read about the oppression of Black people in the world, have not failed to forge spiritual links with Africa and the African diaspora. Muhammad Siddiq Mussafar has devoted 44 out of 138 pages of his pocket-size book in Sindhi, *The Eye-opening Accounts of Slavery and Freedom*, to the conditions of "American sheedis." While describing the oppression of slaves in Sindh, he says, "it can be said with certainty that the kind of cruelty, hatred and contempt which was shown to the African slaves of America was not meted out to the slaves in Sindh." There are repeated expressions of solidarity with African Americans, and an exhortation to the Sindhi *sheedis* to follow their example of social advancement. Tributes are paid to Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington.[38] Mussafar's rudimentary Pan-Africanism can be dis-

cerned in his book, as well as in a poem entitled "Africa's Gift."

Contemporary Balochi literature, which is characterized by its radical content, is remarkably devoid of "negritude." Even Black Baloch writers and poets emphasize foreign, class and nationality oppression. More recently, however, a young Baloch poet of African descent, N.M. Daanish, has written poems in Urdu about the universal humiliation of Black people.[39]

International exchanges, foreign travel and airing of foreign, especially American, television programs are bringing an increased awareness about Africa and the African diaspora among the people of African origin in Pakistan. Recently a "back to the roots" story appeared in the Pakistani press when a young *sheedi* woman from Sindh married a Ghanaian student and "returned" to Africa with him.

While the social disadvantage suffered by the people of African origin in Pakistan is traceable to their arrival in the region as slaves, the facts of their existence have determined that their quest for equality be posited in the struggles for social justice and for parity among the nationalities. As they look towards the 21st century, their hopes are for a democratic and just society in which people of all ethnic groups can progress and live in dignity. Assertion of a separate Black identity seems to be far from the thoughts of this part of the African diaspora. □

References

[1] In 1989 the lunar month of Rajab fell in February-March.

[2] "Sheedi" is believed to be the mispronunciation by the African slaves of the Arabic word "sayedi," meaning master. It then got attached to them as a group label. Instead of being honorific, it actually represents mockery of the Black slaves.

[3] Some newspapers in Karachi have, in recent years, been publishing articles about this festival each year to time with the occasion. See, for example, Zafar Abass, "Manghopir's 'Mor Sahib'," *The Star*, March 26, 1987.

[4] Khurshid Kaimkhani, a free-lance writer, has written a few short features in the Pakistani newspapers about some aspects of this subject.

[5] *Fatehnama-i-Sindh urf Chachnama* (in Urdu), Hyderabad (Sindh): Sindhi Adabi Board, 1963, pp. 249-250. The Sindhi and Urdu editions were prepared from a 13th century Persian translation of the 8th century Arabic manuscript, describing the conquest of Sindh. The date of Shuja Habshi's martyrdom is given as Thursday the 10th of Ramadan, 93 Hijrah.

[6] Remnants of African features, particularly curly hair, can be observed among a wide variety of subgroups of the Sindhi population, including the high-status *sayeds*, the supposed descendants of Prophet Muhammad.

[7] See, for example, Joseph E. Harris, *The African Presence in Asia*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971, pp. 74-114; Graham W. Irwin, *Africans Abroad: A Documentary History of the Black Diaspora in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean During the Age of Slavery*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, pp. 137-167; J.O. Hunwick, "Black Africans in the Islamic World: An Understudied Dimension of the Black Diaspora," *Tarikh*, Vol. 5 No. 4 (1978).

[8] Ghulam Rasul Mehr, *Tarikh-i-Sindh: Ehd-i-Kalhora* [History of Sindh: The Kalhora Period (in Urdu)], Karachi: Sindhi Adabi Board, 1958, Vol. II, p. 874.

[9] Alexander F. Baillie, *Kurrachee*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 35-36 [original: Calcutta, 1890].

[10] For accounts of slave trade in Zanzibar, the east coast of Africa and the Persian Gulf, see Reginald Coupland, *East Africa and its Invaders*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938; R.W. Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, London: Rex Collins, 1976a; R.W. Beachey, *A Collection of Documents on the Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, London: Collins, 1976b; Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar*, Athens (Ohio): Ohio University Press, 1987.

[11] Sheriff, p. 38; Baillie, p. 35.

[12] Richard F. Burton, *Sindh and the Races that Inhabit the Valley of the Indus*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 253-257, 372-374 [original: London, 1851].

[13] Burton, p. 255.

[14] See Beachey (1976b), pp. 33-40; Hunwick, pp. 20-40.

[15] This account about Hoshu Sheedi is based on an article, "Hosh Mahomed Qambrani: 1801-1843," by G. Allana, originally published in the 1950s, and reprinted in *Hoshu Pichar*, March 1987.

[16] Kadir Bux Nizamani, personal communication, September 1985.

[17] *Hoshu Pichar*, March 1987.

[18] Baillie, p. 36.

[19] Muhammad Siddiq Mussafar, *Ghulami ain Azadi Ja Ibratnak Nazara* [Eye-opening Accounts of Slavery and Freedom (in Sindhi), Hyderabad (Sindh)]: R.H. Ahmed & Brothers, 1951.

[20] Mussafar, pp. 103-106.

[21] Mussafar, p. 122.

[22] Ghulam Ali Allana, *Larh Ji Adabi ain Saqafati Tarikh* [The Literary and Cultural History of Larh (in Sindhi)], Sindh University [Dadu District, Sindh]: Institute of Sindhology, 1977, pp. 235-238.

[23]. *Hoshu Pichar*, March 1987.

[24]. Qambrani Associations have been organized in many towns in Sindh.

[25] *Hoshu Pichar*, March 1988.

[26] Patricia Risso, *Oman & Muscat: An Early Modern History*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986, p. 96.

[27] Sheriff, pp. 20, 35; Risso, pp. 170-171.

[28] Risso, p. 106.

[29] Risso, p. 106.

[30] Beachey (1976a), p. 50.

[31] See Beachey (1976b), pp. 109-113.

[32] Inayat A. Baloch, "Slavery in Balochistan" (manuscript under preparation).

[33] Ahmar Mustikhan, "City Limits: Baghdadi," *The Star* (Karachi), January 12, 1989.

[34] Biographical sketch of Bilawal Belgium, prepared by Rahim Bakhsh Azad by interviewing his heirs, January 1989.

[35] Interview with Haji Jan Muhammad, soccer promoter and coach, Karachi, January 1989.

[36] *The Times* (London), August 18, 1986.

[37] Mussafar, p. 105.

[38] Mussafar, pp. 40-102.

[39] *Awami Adab*, March 1986.

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