

THE HUR MOVEMENT IN SINDH: ORIGINS, IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

1. **Dr Saad Jaffar**
Corresponding Author
saadjaffar@aust.edu.pk

Lecturer Islamic Studies,
Abbottabad University of Science and
Technology, Abbottabad, Pakistan.

2. **Dr. Suneel Kumar**
Suneelkumar@usindh.edu.pk

Lecturer, Department of Anthropology
and Archaeology University of Sindh,
Jamshoro.

3. **Hadiqa Atif**
Hadiqa.atif@kinnaird.edu.pk

Lecturer ,Department of Philosophy,
Kinnaird college for Women
University, Lahore.

Vol. 04, Issue, 01, Jan-March 2026, PP:18-36

OPEN ACCES at: www.irjicc.com

Article History	Received	Accepted	Published
	18-01-26	03-02-26	30-03-26

Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive examination of the Hur Movement, a seminal anti-colonial resistance movement that emerged in Sindh during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Centered on the spiritual leadership of Pir Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi II (Soreh Badshah), the movement represents a unique convergence of Sufi spirituality, anti-colonial resistance, and regional identity formation. Drawing on historical sources, scholarly analyses, and archival materials, this study explores the ideological foundations of the Hur School of Thought, emphasizing its distinctive interpretation of Islamic teachings, its conception of freedom (hur), and its articulation of resistance against oppression. The article traces the movement's evolution from a spiritual community to an organized guerrilla force that challenged British colonial authority in Sindh, examining the leadership of Pir Sibghatullah Shah and his role in shaping the movement's religious, political, and social dimensions. The study further evaluates the socio-political impact of the Hur Movement on Sindhi society, including its contributions to regional identity, resistance narratives, and political consciousness. The

THE HUR MOVEMENT IN SINDH: ORIGINS, IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

consequences of British suppression – including military operations, the passage of the Hur Criminal Act, the imposition of martial law, and the execution of movement leaders – are analyzed for their role in shaping the movement's legacy. Finally, the article reflects on the contemporary relevance of the Hur School of Thought in modern Pakistan, particularly in discourses of faith, resistance, and regional identity. This study argues that the Hur Movement represents a distinctive model of anti-colonial resistance rooted in indigenous spiritual traditions, and its marginalization in dominant historical narratives reflects broader questions about decolonization and knowledge production in postcolonial Pakistan.

Keywords: Hur (Hurs), Pir Pagara, Sindhi nationalism, Sufi resistance, Anti-imperialism, Colonial Sindh, Spiritual-military synthesis.

INTRODUCTION

The historiography of anti-colonial resistance in the Indian subcontinent has traditionally been dominated by narratives centered on urban elites, constitutional politics, and the mainstream nationalist movement led by the Indian National Congress. While these narratives have illuminated important dimensions of the struggle against British imperialism, they have often marginalized or rendered invisible the diverse array of subaltern movements that emerged from the region's villages, forests, and deserts. Among these overlooked movements, the Hur Movement of Sindh stands as a particularly significant yet understudied phenomenon: a sustained, organized resistance that combined Sufi spirituality, guerrilla warfare, and nationalist consciousness into a cohesive challenge to colonial authority.

The Hur Movement, which spanned approximately a century from the 1840s to the 1950s, represents one of the longest-running anti-colonial struggles in South Asian history. Emerging from the spiritual community (taifa) established by Syed Muhammad Rashid Shah in the early nineteenth century, the movement evolved under successive Pirs of Pagaro into an organized resistance force that posed a formidable challenge to British rule in Sindh. At its height under the leadership of Pir Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi II – revered by his followers as Soreh Badshah (the Victorious King) – the movement mobilized thousands of devotees in a guerrilla war against colonial authorities, employing tactics that anticipated modern anti-colonial insurgencies.

*Despite its historical significance, the Hur Movement has received limited attention in mainstream historical scholarship. Colonial-era accounts, most notably H.T. Lambrick's *The Terrorist* (1972), framed the movement through the lens of criminality and fanaticism, portraying the Hurs as a "criminal tribe" whose devotion to their spiritual leader bordered on irrationality. Postcolonial Pakistani historiography, meanwhile, has often marginalized the movement either through neglect or through subsumption within narratives of the Pakistan Movement that do not adequately capture its distinctive character. As scholars and activists have noted, the dominant state and civil society discourses in Pakistan have largely ignored or denied the history and heritage of the Hur movement, raising important questions about decolonization*

and knowledge production in postcolonial contexts.

This article seeks to address this scholarly lacuna by providing a comprehensive examination of the Hur Movement's origins, ideological foundations, and historical significance. Drawing on diverse sources including colonial archives, contemporary newspaper accounts, scholarly analyses, and recent commemorative literature, the study explores the following key questions: What were the religious and spiritual foundations of the Hur School of Thought? How did the movement's leadership, particularly Pir Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi II, shape its ideological and political trajectory? In what ways did the movement articulate a distinctive conception of freedom, resistance, and national identity? How did British colonial authorities respond to the Hur challenge, and what were the consequences of their suppression? And finally, what is the contemporary relevance of the Hur Movement in modern Pakistan?

The study is organized into eight sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 traces the origins of the Hur Movement and its emergence within the context of British colonial expansion in Sindh. Section 3 examines the ideological foundations of the Hur School of Thought, focusing on its spiritual principles, conception of freedom, and articulation of resistance. Section 4 analyzes the leadership of Pir Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi II, exploring his role in shaping the movement's religious and political ideology. Section 5 discusses the evolution of the movement into an organized resistance force, including its guerrilla tactics and organizational structure. Section 6 evaluates the socio-political and cultural impact of the movement on Sindhi society, including its contributions to regional identity and political consciousness. Section 7 examines British suppression and the movement's legacy, analyzing the military operations, legal measures, and the execution of Pir Sibghatullah Shah. Section 8 reflects on the contemporary relevance of the Hur School of Thought in modern Pakistan. The conclusion synthesizes the study's findings and suggests directions for future research.

2. Origins of the Hur Movement: From Spiritual Community to Anti-Colonial Resistance

2.1 The Historical Context: Sindh under Colonial Rule

To understand the emergence of the Hur Movement, it is essential to situate it within the broader historical context of British colonial expansion in Sindh. The British conquest of Sindh in 1843, following the battles of Miani and Dubbo, marked a decisive turning point in the region's history. Under the leadership of Sir Charles Napier, the British East India Company annexed Sindh, incorporating it into the Bombay Presidency and initiating a period of profound socio-economic transformation.

The colonial conquest dismantled the existing political structures of Sindh, which had been governed by the Talpur Mirs since the late eighteenth century. The annexation was accompanied by significant changes in land tenure systems, revenue collection, and administrative structures that disrupted traditional patterns of social organization. The introduction of new systems of land revenue and property rights, coupled with the displacement of indigenous elites, created conditions of economic uncertainty and social dislocation that would prove conducive to resistance movements.

The colonial state's approach to governance in Sindh was characterized by what scholars have termed "colonial modernity": a combination of administrative rationalization, legal codification, and economic extraction that sought to transform

THE HUR MOVEMENT IN SINDH: ORIGINS, IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

indigenous social relations in accordance with British interests. This process was not merely economic but also ideological, involving the imposition of European categories of knowledge, religion, and social organization that often clashed with local traditions.

2.2 The Emergence of the Hur Community: Syed Muhammad Rashid Shah and the Early Pir-Pagaro Lineage

The origins of the Hur community can be traced to Syed Muhammad Rashid Shah (d. 1819), a Sufi spiritual leader who established a following in the region of Sindh. Revered as Rozay Dhani (the Master of Fasts), Syed Muhammad Rashid Shah is regarded as the forerunner of what would become the Pir Pagaro lineage. According to traditional accounts, he gathered around him a community of disciples (mureeds) who pledged their allegiance (bay'ah) to him as their spiritual guide.

The term Hur (Arabic: حر) meaning "free" or "not slave" was adopted by this community to signify their rejection of external authority and their commitment to spiritual freedom. This choice of nomenclature is significant, reflecting a conception of freedom that was both spiritual and worldly: the Hur was one who, having submitted to God and his spiritual representative, could not be subjugated by any worldly power. This understanding would later provide the ideological foundation for the movement's anti-colonial resistance.

The formal establishment of the Pir Pagaro lineage occurred with Syed Sibghatullah Shah I (d. 1831), who became the first Pir to receive the distinctive pagar (turban) that gave the lineage its name. According to tradition, Sibghatullah Shah I received the turban as a symbol of spiritual authority, while his brother Syed Yaseen Shah received the jhanda (flag) and established the separate Jhandaywara lineage. This bifurcation reflected broader patterns of Sufi organization in Sindh, where spiritual authority was often transmitted through both hereditary succession and charismatic leadership.

2.3 The Early Hur Movement: Spiritual Authority and Social Organization

Under the early Pirs, the Hur community developed a distinctive form of spiritual and social organization centered on the institution of peeri-mureedi (spiritual master-disciple relationship). This relationship was characterized by absolute loyalty and devotion, with the Pir serving as both spiritual guide and worldly leader for his followers. The Hur community was organized into a hierarchical structure, with the Pir at its apex, supported by khalifas (deputies) who oversaw the affairs of disciples in different regions.

The spiritual teachings of the early Pirs emphasized the unity of God and the importance of devotion to the spiritual guide as a means of attaining proximity to the divine. The Hur tradition, while rooted in Sunni Islam, incorporated elements of Sufi practice and doctrine that distinguished it from more orthodox interpretations. The emphasis on the Pir's authority, the practice of spiritual devotion (mureedi), and the communal organization of the Hur taifa created a cohesive social formation capable of collective action.

The colonial encounter with the Hur community in the late nineteenth century was marked by growing tensions. As the British consolidated their control over Sindh,

they increasingly viewed the autonomous organization of the Hur community as a challenge to their authority. The Hurs' rejection of external authority, their possession of weapons, and their tendency to settle disputes through their own mechanisms rather than through colonial courts all contributed to the state's perception of them as a threat.

2.4 The Criminal Tribes Act and the Construction of the Hur as "Criminal"

A critical moment in the colonial state's engagement with the Hur community came in the 1890s, when Commissioner Mohammad Yaqub recommended applying the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871 to the Hurs. This legislation, originally designed to target communities perceived as "criminal" by nature, provided the colonial state with extensive powers of surveillance, control, and punishment. In 1900, the CTA was formally applied to all Hurs, a designation that would remain in effect until 1952.

The application of the Criminal Tribes Act to the Hur community represented a significant escalation in colonial governance. Under the CTA, Hurs were required to register with local authorities, notify their movements, and submit to regular surveillance. The act also provided for the establishment of "criminal tribe settlements" where community members could be confined and subjected to "reform" through labor and discipline.

Scholars have noted that the colonial state's deployment of the "criminal tribe" category in the case of the Hurs represented a strategic effort to reframe religious and political resistance as pathological criminality. By categorizing the Hurs as a "criminal tribe," the colonial state sought to delegitimize their resistance and justify extraordinary measures of control. As J. Barton Scott has argued, the legal category of "criminal tribes," originally devised to describe anti-colonial Hinduism, was redeployed in the Hur campaign to consolidate the category of the Muslim terrorist.

The colonial construction of the Hur as "criminal" and "fanatical" was further developed in subsequent decades through official reports, newspaper accounts, and scholarly writings. H.T. Lambrick's *The Terrorist* (1972), which drew extensively on colonial archives, exemplified this tradition, framing the Hur movement as an irrational outbreak of violence driven by the fanatical devotion of followers to their "lecherous" Pir. Such representations would have lasting effects, shaping both colonial policy and later historical memory.

3. Ideological Foundations of the Hur School of Thought

3.1 Spiritual Devotion and the Concept of Hur (Freedom)

At the core of the Hur School of Thought lies a distinctive conception of freedom that integrates spiritual and political dimensions. The term *hur* itself carries multiple meanings in Islamic tradition, ranging from "free" in the sense of not being enslaved, to "pure" or "noble." In the Hur tradition, these meanings were synthesized into a comprehensive understanding of freedom as liberation from all forms of subjugation – whether to worldly powers, base desires, or false authorities.

The Hur understanding of freedom was fundamentally rooted in the concept of *tawhid* (the unity of God). If God alone is worthy of worship and absolute obedience, then submission to any human authority that contradicts divine law constitutes a form of *shirk* (associating partners with God). The Hur thus understood their rejection of colonial authority as a religious obligation, a necessary consequence of their commitment to God's sovereignty. As Pir Sibghatullah Shah II would later articulate,

THE HUR MOVEMENT IN SINDH: ORIGINS, IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

true freedom meant recognizing no master but God and his chosen representatives.

This spiritual conception of freedom was embodied in the institution of peerimureedi. The relationship between Pir and mureed was understood not as a form of bondage but as the highest expression of freedom: the mureed, by freely choosing submission to the Pir, attained liberation from all other forms of subjugation. The Pir's authority, in this understanding, was not arbitrary but derived from his spiritual station and his role as the representative of divine authority. The Hur community thus understood its relationship to the Pir as the foundation of its freedom, enabling it to resist external powers that sought to impose their authority.

3.2 Loyalty and the Hur Identity

The Hur identity was constructed around the principle of absolute loyalty to the Pir and to the community of believers. This loyalty, expressed through the bond of bay'ah (pledge of allegiance), was understood as both a spiritual commitment and a social obligation. The mureed who had given his bay'ah to the Pir was bound to obey his commands, support his cause, and prioritize the interests of the community over individual concerns.

This conception of loyalty extended beyond the spiritual realm to encompass political and social dimensions. The Hur were expected to defend the community against external threats, to resolve disputes through the Pir's authority rather than through colonial courts, and to maintain solidarity with fellow Hur in all circumstances. This emphasis on collective identity and mutual support created a cohesive social formation capable of sustained resistance.

The Hur identity was also marked by a strong sense of distinctiveness from surrounding communities. The Hurs' distinctive dress, their own dispute-resolution mechanisms, and their unique relationship to their Pir set them apart from other Sindhi communities. This distinctiveness, reinforced by the colonial state's categorization of Hurs as a "criminal tribe," contributed to the formation of a strong collective identity that would prove resilient in the face of state repression.

3.3 Resistance Against Oppression: Religious and Ethical Foundations

The Hur School of Thought articulated a robust ethic of resistance against oppression rooted in Islamic principles. Drawing on Quranic injunctions to "stand out firmly for justice" (Q. 4:135) and to resist those who "spread corruption in the land" (Q. 5:33), Hur teachings emphasized the obligation to oppose tyranny and injustice. The colonial occupation of Sindh was understood as a form of zulm (oppression) that violated divine law and thus demanded resistance.

This ethic of resistance was further grounded in the Sufi tradition of jihad al-akbar (the greater struggle) against the ego and jihad al-asghar (the lesser struggle) against external enemies. The Hur understood their resistance to British rule as a form of jihad – a struggle in the path of God – that was both a religious obligation and a means of spiritual purification. The slogan coined by Pir Sibghatullah Shah II, "Watan ya Kafan, Azadi ya Mout" (Land or a coffin, freedom or death), captured this fusion of spiritual and political commitment.

The movement's religious framing of resistance was not merely rhetorical but

had practical implications. It provided a framework for understanding sacrifice and martyrdom, with those who fell in the struggle against colonial forces being honored as shuhada (martyrs). The willingness of Hur fighters to face death rather than submit to colonial authority reflected this religious understanding of their struggle.

3.4 Anti-Colonial Struggle and Islamic Modernism

While rooted in traditional Sufi spirituality, the Hur School of Thought also engaged with contemporary currents of Islamic modernism and anti-colonial thought. Pir Sibghatullah Shah II's close relationship with Subhas Chandra Bose and his support for the Indian National Congress and later the Forward Bloc reflected an engagement with secular nationalist currents that went beyond purely religious frameworks.

The Pir's emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity, expressed through his newspaper *Pir Jo Goth Gazette* and his public statements, demonstrated a commitment to composite nationalism that challenged both colonial divide-and-rule policies and emerging communalist politics. In his writings, the Pir called for Hindus and Muslims to recognize their common interests and work together for freedom, declaring that "Allah is the same as Parmatma, though with different names" and envisioning a future where "temples and mosques together" would stand as symbols of unity.

This embrace of secular nationalism alongside religious identity reflected a distinctive approach to anti-colonial struggle. The Pir's establishment of a panchayat (council) consisting of both Hindu and Muslim members to resolve local disputes, his appointment of a Hindu editor for his newspaper, and his order to his followers to protect Hindus during communal rioting all demonstrated a commitment to pluralistic nationalism that transcended narrow communal boundaries.

3.5 The Hur Interpretation of Islamic Teachings

The Hur School of Thought developed distinctive interpretations of Islamic teachings that supported its anti-colonial stance. Central to this interpretation was the concept of shura (consultation), which the Pir's establishment of representative councils was understood to embody. The movement also emphasized the Islamic principle of adl (justice), arguing that colonial rule violated this principle through its exploitation of Sindhi resources and its imposition of foreign governance.

The Hur understanding of khilafat (vicegerency) was particularly significant. Drawing on the Quranic concept of humans as God's vicegerents on earth, Hur teachings emphasized the responsibility of Muslims to establish justice and resist oppression. The Pir, as the spiritual leader of the community, was understood to embody this responsibility in a particular way, serving as the representative of divine authority who guided the community in fulfilling its obligations.

The movement's interpretation of jihad also deserves attention. While colonial accounts often portrayed the Hurs as engaging in indiscriminate violence, the movement's own understanding of jihad was more nuanced, emphasizing defensive struggle against oppression and distinguishing between legitimate resistance and unjust aggression. The Hurs' targeting of colonial officials, police, and military forces, as opposed to civilians, reflected this understanding.

4. The Leadership of Pir Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi II

4.1 Early Life and Succession

Pir Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi II was born in 1910 into the Pir Pagaro lineage,

THE HUR MOVEMENT IN SINDH: ORIGINS, IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

the son of Syed Shah Mardan Shah I (the Fifth Pir Pagaro). His early life was shaped by the traditions of the Hur community and the challenges of growing up under colonial rule. The death of his father in 1921, when Sibghatullah Shah was just eleven years old, led to his succession as the Sixth Pir Pagaro, a position that brought with it both spiritual authority and political responsibility.

The young Pir's succession occurred at a time of significant political ferment in Sindh and across India. The Non-Cooperation Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 had mobilized nationalist sentiment across the subcontinent, and the Khilafat Movement had brought Indian Muslims into the anti-colonial struggle in unprecedented numbers. These movements would influence the young Pir's political development and shape his understanding of resistance.

4.2 Political Engagement: Congress, Forward Bloc, and Subhas Chandra Bose

Pir Sibghatullah Shah II's political engagement began in earnest in the late 1920s and 1930s, as he increasingly aligned himself with the Indian National Congress and its anti-colonial program. His close friendship with Subhas Chandra Bose, the radical nationalist leader who would later form the Forward Bloc, was particularly significant. According to historical accounts, the original plan presented by Bose to the Axis Powers included arming the Pir of Pagaro and the Faqir of Ipi to liberate India.

The Pir's relationship with Bose reflected a shared commitment to radical anti-colonialism and a willingness to seek support from diverse sources in the struggle against British rule. When Bose was president of the Indian National Congress, the Pir began inviting Congress leadership to Sindh and organizing Hindu-Muslim unity meetings. After Bose's departure from the Congress and the formation of the All India Forward Bloc, the Pir backed this organization, further distancing himself from both the Congress leadership and the emerging Muslim League.

4.3 The Pir's Role in Hindu-Muslim Unity and Composite Nationalism

One of the most distinctive aspects of Pir Sibghatullah Shah II's leadership was his commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity. In an era when communal politics was gaining ground, with the Muslim League increasingly advocating for separate Muslim interests and Hindu communal organizations mobilizing around majoritarian demands, the Pir stood firmly for composite nationalism.

His newspaper, Pir Jo Goth Gazette, served as a platform for articulating this vision. In its pages, the Pir called for Hindus and Muslims to recognize their common identity as Indians and to work together for freedom. He denounced both the Hindu Sabha and the Muslim League as divisive communal movements, arguing that they served British interests by dividing the nationalist movement. "Only when Hindus and Muslims combined," he declared, would "peace be achieved and satanic deeds stopped".

The Pir's commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity was tested during the Manzilgah Controversy of 1939-40, when communal tensions in Sukkur erupted into violence. In response to the killing of Hindus by mobs, the Pir ordered his armed followers, known as ghazis, to protect Hindu lives and property. While the violence had already taken a heavy toll, the Pir's intervention demonstrated his willingness to put his principles into practice, even at the cost of alienating those who might have

supported him.

4.4 The Pir's Social Reform Initiatives

Beyond his political and spiritual leadership, Pir Sibghatullah Shah II undertook significant social reform initiatives that reflected his vision for a just society. In Pir Jo Goth, his headquarters, he established a panchayat (council) consisting of both Hindu and Muslim members to resolve local disputes. This institution was intended to provide an alternative to the colonial court system, enabling community members to seek justice without resorting to British authorities.

The Pir also established a power station in Pir Jo Goth, bringing electricity to the village and surrounding areas – a significant achievement in a region where such infrastructure was largely absent. This initiative reflected the Pir's commitment to development and his desire to improve the lives of his followers. The British authorities viewed such initiatives with suspicion, seeing them as evidence of the Pir's ambition to establish an independent base of power.

The publication of Pir Jo Goth Gazette represented another significant initiative. With a Hindu editor, the newspaper disseminated ideas of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood and reported on political developments. It also served as a means of communication between the Pir and his followers, helping to organize the movement and maintain morale.

4.5 British Persecution and Imprisonment

The British authorities' growing concern with the Pir's activities led to increasing persecution. In 1930, the Pir was implicated in eight false cases, including a murder case, and was tried in Sukkur court. His defense was conducted by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the future founder of Pakistan, who succeeded in proving the Pir's innocence. Despite this, the British proceeded to implicate him in two additional false cases – one involving the alleged imprisonment of a man in a wooden box, and another concerning unlicensed outdated firearms from the Meerani dynasty era – and sentenced him to eight years imprisonment.

The Pir was deported to Ratnagiri Jail in Bombay Presidency and later transferred to East Bengal Jail. The British authorities' strategy was to isolate him from his followers and to break his spirit through imprisonment far from Sindh. This strategy, however, backfired: the Pir's imprisonment only increased his prestige and won him sympathy among the Sindhi population. When he was released in 1936 and returned to Sindh, he was warmly welcomed by his followers and by political leaders.

4.6 The Final Confrontation: Arrest, Trial, and Execution

The period following the Pir's release saw the Hur Movement intensify its resistance. The Pir reorganized his followers and continued his political activities, maintaining his support for the Congress and his commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity. The British authorities, concerned by his growing influence and the Hurs' escalating attacks on colonial targets, resolved to eliminate the threat once and for all.

In 1941, the Pir was again arrested, this time under circumstances that reflected the colonial state's determination to suppress him. After a series of confrontations with Governor Sir Hugh Dow, during which the Pir was ordered to leave Sanghar and relocate to Karachi, the Pir defied orders and returned to his family. He was arrested on October 14, 1941, while on his way to his lands, and was detained

THE HUR MOVEMENT IN SINDH: ORIGINS, IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

until January 14, 1943.

The final trial, conducted by a military court, lasted only 26 days. The Pir was charged with conspiring to wage war against the King-Emperor, and despite the lack of credible evidence, he was found guilty and sentenced to death. On March 20, 1943, Pir Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi II was hanged in Hyderabad Central Jail. His burial place was kept secret by the British authorities, and remains unknown to this day.

5. The Hur Movement as Organized Resistance

5.1 Organizational Structure and Leadership

The Hur Movement's effectiveness as a resistance force derived in large part from its organizational structure, which integrated spiritual and military hierarchies. At the apex stood the Pir, whose authority was both spiritual and political. The Pir was supported by a network of khalifas (deputies) who served as intermediaries between the Pir and the rank-and-file Hur fighters. These khalifas were responsible for communicating the Pir's instructions, mobilizing followers for operations, and maintaining discipline within their areas.

Below the khalifas were the ghazis (fighters), who formed the core of the Hur military force. These fighters, many of whom had been trained in the use of weapons and guerrilla tactics, were organized into units that could be mobilized quickly for operations. The Hur movement also included women, who played important roles in providing support, intelligence, and sometimes participating in combat.

The movement's organizational structure was reinforced by the social organization of the Hur community. The bonds of mureedi created strong ties of loyalty and obligation that could be mobilized for collective action. The community's practice of settling disputes internally, rather than through colonial courts, helped maintain solidarity and prevented the state from co-opting individual Hurs.

5.2 Guerrilla Warfare and Military Tactics

The Hur Movement's military tactics were shaped by the geography of Sindh and the movement's resources. The Hurs operated primarily from the marshy wilds of northern Sindh, using the difficult terrain to their advantage. Their knowledge of the local landscape enabled them to evade colonial forces, launch surprise attacks, and disappear into the countryside before their pursuers could respond.

The Hurs employed guerrilla tactics that anticipated modern insurgencies. They attacked police stations, military convoys, and colonial officials, seeking to disrupt colonial administration and demonstrate the state's inability to maintain control. They also targeted infrastructure such as railways, which were crucial to colonial economic exploitation. These tactics, while not decisive in military terms, imposed significant costs on the colonial state and demonstrated the limits of British power in Sindh.

The Hurs' use of guerrilla warfare was not without its limitations. Their weapons, consisting largely of outdated firearms, blunderbusses, hatchets, and spears, were no match for the modern armaments of the British Indian Army. The colonial state's ability to deploy coordinated land and air forces, including parachutists, camelry, and motorized infantry, eventually enabled it to overwhelm Hur resistance.

5.3 The Manzilgah Controversy and Communal Violence

The Manzilgah Controversy of 1939-40 represented a critical moment in the Hur Movement's history and in Sindhi politics more broadly. The dispute centered on a building in Sukkur that had once been a mosque but had been used for various purposes over time. Hindu groups claimed the building as a mandir, while Muslim groups demanded its restoration as a mosque. The controversy quickly escalated into communal violence, with mobs attacking Hindu communities in Sukkur and surrounding areas.

The Pir of Pagaro's response to the violence demonstrated his commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity and his willingness to take action to protect minority communities. He ordered his armed followers to protect Hindus and their property, and he denounced the communal violence as contrary to Islamic teachings. While his intervention came too late to prevent the loss of approximately 57 Hindu lives, it reflected the movement's principled stance against communal politics.

The Manzilgah episode also highlighted the Pir's growing opposition to the Muslim League, which he saw as exploiting communal tensions for political gain. In contrast to the League's advocacy of separate Muslim interests, the Pir continued to insist that Hindus and Muslims were equal citizens of Sindh with equal rights and responsibilities.

5.4 Women in the Hur Movement

The role of women in the Hur Movement, while less documented than that of men, was significant. Women participated in the movement in various capacities, from providing logistical support and intelligence to participating directly in combat. The Hur tradition includes accounts of women fighters who fought alongside men in the struggle against colonial forces.

The movement's inclusion of women reflected broader patterns in anti-colonial struggles, where women often played crucial roles in sustaining resistance movements. In the Hur case, women's participation was facilitated by the community's organization and the bonds of loyalty that extended across gender lines. Women who lost husbands or sons in the struggle were supported by the community, and their contributions were recognized and valued.

British repression also targeted women, who were subjected to imprisonment in concentration camps along with men. The establishment of loorhaa (concentration camps) across Sindh resulted in the incarceration of thousands of Hurs, including women and children, who suffered harsh conditions and deprivation.

6. Socio-Political and Cultural Impact on Sindhi Society

6.1 The Hur Movement and Sindhi Regional Identity

The Hur Movement played a significant role in shaping Sindhi regional identity, contributing to a sense of distinctiveness and pride that would have lasting effects. The movement's emphasis on freedom, resistance, and sacrifice resonated with broader Sindhi cultural values, and its leaders became symbols of Sindhi pride and identity. The title "Soreh Badshah" (Brave King) bestowed on Pir Sibghatullah Shah II reflected the movement's place in Sindhi popular memory.

The movement's contribution to Sindhi identity was complex, however, as it also intersected with broader currents of Indian nationalism and, later, Pakistani nationalism. While the Hurs' resistance was directed against British rule, it did not

THE HUR MOVEMENT IN SINDH: ORIGINS, IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

necessarily translate into support for the Pakistan movement. Indeed, as some scholars have noted, Sindhi nationalists have contested attempts to subsume the Hur Movement within the narrative of the Pakistan Movement, arguing that the movement was rooted in Sindhi patriotism rather than Muslim separatism.

The marginalization of the Hur Movement in Pakistani historiography reflects the contested nature of regional identity in a state that has often privileged a unitary national narrative. As scholars at a 2021 seminar on the Hur movement noted, the dominant state and civil society discourses in Pakistan have largely ignored or denied the history and heritage of the Hur movement, raising questions about decolonization and knowledge production in postcolonial contexts.

6.2 Resistance Narratives and Historical Memory

*The Hur Movement has been the subject of competing narratives that reflect different political and ideological commitments. Colonial narratives, exemplified by H.T. Lambrick's *The Terrorist*, framed the movement as irrational violence driven by fanatical devotion. These narratives served to delegitimize the movement and justify the state's repressive measures.*

In postcolonial Pakistan, the movement has been subject to a different kind of marginalization. Despite the Hurs' anti-colonial credentials, the movement has not been integrated into official narratives of the struggle for Pakistan. As scholars and activists have noted, the freedom struggle led by Soreh Badshah in Sindh was a local movement rooted in cultural cognition and symbolism, yet it rarely finds a place in Pakistan's history books, which tend to focus on Arab and Mughal rulers as dominant figures.

Recent years have seen efforts to recover and reclaim the memory of the Hur Movement. The Soreh Badshah Study Circle, established by researchers and activists, has worked to gather literature on the movement and promote scholarly research. Memorial seminars, such as the one held on the 78th death anniversary of Pir Sibghatullah Shah, have sought to raise awareness of the movement and its significance. These efforts reflect a broader desire to decolonize historical knowledge and to recognize the contributions of indigenous movements to the struggle against colonialism.

6.3 Influence on Political Consciousness in Sindh

The Hur Movement's influence on political consciousness in Sindh has been significant and enduring. The movement demonstrated the possibility of sustained resistance against colonial authority, providing a model of anti-colonial struggle that would inspire later generations. The movement's emphasis on freedom, justice, and resistance against oppression resonated with Sindhi cultural values and contributed to a political culture that valued independence and autonomy.

The movement also contributed to the development of political consciousness among rural Sindhis, who had previously been excluded from mainstream nationalist politics. The Hurs' mobilization of peasant communities, their organization of collective action, and their willingness to challenge the authority of both colonial officials and local landlords represented a significant expansion of political participation.

In the postcolonial period, the legacy of the Hur Movement has been invoked

by various political actors. The Hur community itself has remained politically active, with subsequent Pir Pagaros playing significant roles in Pakistani politics. Shah Mardan Shah II (the Seventh Pir Pagaro) was a prominent political figure, and the current Pir Pagaro, Syed Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi III, continues to be involved in politics through the Pakistan Muslim League-Functional and the Grand Democratic Alliance.

6.4 Cultural Legacy: Literature, Poetry, and Folk Memory

The Hur Movement has left a rich cultural legacy in Sindhi literature, poetry, and folk memory. The movement's history has been preserved in Sindhi-language books and articles that document the guerrilla war tactics, organization, and bravery of the Hurs, as well as the atrocities perpetrated by the colonial state. These works have played an important role in maintaining the memory of the movement and transmitting it to new generations.

Poetry has been particularly significant in preserving the memory of the Hur Movement. The slogan coined by Pir Sibghatullah Shah II, "Watan ya Kafan, Azadi ya Mout," has become a celebrated expression of nationalist sentiment, appearing in Sindhi poetry and popular culture. The Pir's own writings, published in *Pir Jo Goth Gazette*, have also been preserved and continue to be read.

Folk memory has preserved accounts of the movement's heroes and martyrs, with stories of Hur fighters and their sacrifices passed down through generations. The secrecy surrounding the burial place of Pir Sibghatullah Shah has added to his mystique, with his grave becoming a symbol of the unfinished struggle for justice and recognition.

7. British Suppression and the Movement's Legacy

7.1 Military Operations and the Use of Modern Warfare

The British response to the Hur Movement escalated significantly in the 1940s, culminating in large-scale military operations that employed modern warfare techniques. In June 1942, the British launched coordinated operations against Hur strongholds, combining land and air forces in what *Time* magazine described as "the biggest experiment yet in the use of modern armament in India".

The operation involved parachutists dropped on the edge of the Sind desert, camelry moving from the north, Punjab constabulary in assault boats from the east, and motorized infantry completing the encirclement. The British forces targeted the Hurs' jungle stronghold in Makhi Dhand, known as the "honey swamp," using their superior firepower and mobility to overwhelm Hur resistance.

The Royal Air Force bombed Pir Jo Goth, the headquarters of the Pir, destroying buildings and causing casualties. The use of air power represented a significant escalation in colonial warfare, reflecting the state's determination to crush the Hur movement by any means necessary. The colonial forces also established concentration camps (*loorhaa*) across Sindh, where Hurs and their families were incarcerated under harsh conditions.

7.2 The Hur Criminal Act and Martial Law

The British colonial state's response to the Hur uprising also included legislative and administrative measures designed to provide a legal framework for suppression. The Hur Criminal Act was passed in the Sindh Assembly in 1942,

THE HUR MOVEMENT IN SINDH: ORIGINS, IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

providing for the detention of Hurs without trial and the confiscation of their property. This legislation was followed by the imposition of martial law in Sindh, the first time such measures had been applied in the province.

Martial law remained in effect in Sindh from June 1942 to May 1943, during which period military courts replaced civilian courts and the normal legal processes were suspended. Thousands of Hurs were arrested, tried by military courts, and sentenced to imprisonment or death. The Pir himself was tried by a military court in a proceeding that lasted only 26 days and resulted in his execution.

The imposition of martial law and the passage of the Hur Criminal Act represented a significant expansion of colonial state power in Sindh. These measures set precedents for the use of emergency powers and military justice that would have lasting implications for governance in the region.

7.3 The Execution of Pir Sibghatullah Shah and Its Aftermath

The execution of Pir Sibghatullah Shah on March 20, 1943, marked a turning point in the Hur Movement. The British authorities, aware of the Pir's symbolic significance, took extraordinary measures to ensure that his execution would not become a rallying point for further resistance. His burial place was kept secret, and the authorities sought to downplay the significance of his death.

The execution, however, had the opposite effect. Rather than demoralizing the Hurs, the Pir's martyrdom intensified their resistance. Violence against colonial authorities escalated, and the movement continued its guerrilla campaign. The Hurs' commitment to their cause, far from being broken by the loss of their leader, was reinforced by his sacrifice.

The British authorities responded with continued repression, conducting further military operations and maintaining martial law until May 1943. Thousands of Hurs were killed, imprisoned, or confined in concentration camps. The properties of the Pir and his followers were confiscated, and his minor sons were sent into exile in England.

7.4 The Hur Movement After Partition: 1947-1951

The Partition of India in 1947 and the creation of Pakistan did not bring an end to the Hur Movement or to the state's repression of the Hurs. Sindh became part of the new state of Pakistan, but the Hurs continued to face persecution. The British authorities, who had retained custody of the Pir's sons, kept them in England, where they were held until negotiations between the Pakistani government and British authorities led to their release.

The Hurs themselves remained in concentration camps until 1952, when they were finally released. The designation of Hurs as a "criminal tribe" under the Criminal Tribes Act remained in effect until 1952, when the newly independent Pakistani government abolished the legislation. The continued detention of Hurs for several years after Partition reflected the persistence of colonial mentalities in postcolonial Pakistan.

The return of the Pir's sons, Syed Shah Mardan Shah II and Syed Nadir Ali Shah, in December 1951 marked the beginning of a new phase in the Hur community's history. The elder son, Shah Mardan Shah II, became the Seventh Pir Pagaro on

February 1, 1952, and would go on to play a significant role in Pakistani politics.

7.5 Historical Memory and the Question of Decolonization

The marginalization of the Hur Movement in Pakistani historical memory raises important questions about decolonization and knowledge production in postcolonial contexts. As scholars and activists have noted, the dominant state and civil society discourses in Pakistan have largely ignored or denied the history and heritage of the Hur movement, reflecting a broader pattern of disowning indigenous movements and knowledge.

This marginalization can be understood in the context of Pakistan's nation-building project, which has often privileged a unitary national narrative that emphasizes the Muslim League's role in the struggle for Pakistan. Indigenous movements like the Hurs, with their roots in regional identity and their commitment to composite nationalism, do not fit easily into this narrative. Their exclusion from official history reflects the state's efforts to shape historical memory in accordance with particular political agendas.

Recent efforts to recover and reclaim the memory of the Hur Movement represent a form of decolonial practice. By researching and writing about the movement, scholars and activists seek to challenge the dominant narratives that have marginalized it and to assert the importance of indigenous struggles in the history of anti-colonial resistance. These efforts, while still limited, point toward a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of history that recognizes the contributions of all those who fought against colonialism.

8. Contemporary Relevance of the Hur School of Thought

8.1 The Hur Movement in Contemporary Pakistani Politics

The Hur Movement's legacy continues to be relevant in contemporary Pakistani politics, particularly in Sindh. The Hur community remains politically active, with the current Pir Pagaro, Syed Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi III, serving as the leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Functional (PML-F) and a key figure in the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), a coalition formed to challenge the Pakistan Peoples Party's dominance in Sindh.

The political role of the Pir Pagaro reflects the enduring significance of spiritual authority in Pakistani politics. As one commentator has noted, "while dynastic politics is often criticized by democrats, nobody questions the dynastic political and spiritual hold of the pirs in Pakistan" because of the religious overtones of peeri-mureedi. The Pir Pagaro's political influence, while not as great as in previous decades, remains significant, particularly in his traditional strongholds of Pir Jo Goth in Khairpur district and Sanghar.

The political trajectory of the Pir Pagaro lineage since Partition has been complex. Shah Mardan Shah II, who was brought to Pakistan from England in 1951, aligned himself with the state and played a prominent role in Pakistani politics. During the movement against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977, he was a key leader of the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) and famously declared himself a "GHQ man." This alignment with the military establishment represented a significant departure from his father's anti-colonial stance.

THE HUR MOVEMENT IN SINDH: ORIGINS, IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

8.2 Faith, Resistance, and Regional Identity in Modern Pakistan

The Hur School of Thought's articulation of faith, resistance, and regional identity continues to resonate in modern Pakistan, particularly in Sindh. The movement's understanding of Islam as a source of liberation rather than subordination, its emphasis on justice and resistance against oppression, and its commitment to pluralistic nationalism all speak to contemporary concerns.

In a context where religious extremism and sectarian violence have posed significant challenges, the Hur tradition's emphasis on composite nationalism and interfaith harmony offers an alternative vision of Islamic identity. The Pir's call for Hindus and Muslims to recognize their common humanity and work together for justice remains relevant in a society where religious minorities face increasing marginalization.

The movement's regional dimension also speaks to contemporary debates about provincial autonomy and national identity. In a state that has often struggled to balance central authority with regional aspirations, the Hur Movement's assertion of Sindhi identity and its resistance to external domination resonates with those who advocate for greater provincial autonomy and recognition of regional cultures.

8.3 Lessons for Anti-Colonial and Decolonial Thought

The Hur Movement offers important lessons for contemporary anti-colonial and decolonial thought. The movement's integration of spiritual and political resistance challenges the secularist assumptions that have often dominated anti-colonial theory, suggesting that religious traditions can serve as resources for liberation rather than obstacles to it.

The movement's emphasis on indigenous knowledge and local organization also speaks to contemporary concerns about decolonization. The Hurs' reliance on their own traditions of dispute resolution, their use of local terrain for guerrilla warfare, and their cultivation of community solidarity in the face of state repression all point toward forms of resistance that do not simply mimic colonial models.

The movement's history also offers cautionary lessons about the persistence of colonial mentalities after formal independence. The continued detention of Hurs after Partition, the marginalization of the movement in Pakistani historiography, and the alignment of later Pir Pagaras with the military establishment all reflect the complex ways in which colonial structures and mentalities can persist in postcolonial contexts.

8.4 Reclaiming History: Contemporary Memorialization Efforts

Recent years have seen growing efforts to memorialize the Hur Movement and reclaim its history. The Soreh Badshah Study Circle, established by researchers and activists, has worked to gather literature on the movement and promote scholarly research. Memorial seminars, such as the one held in Karachi in 2021, have brought together scholars, journalists, and community members to discuss the movement's significance.

Calls for greater recognition of the movement have come from various quarters. Scholars have called for the establishment of a Soreh Badshah University, and activists have advocated for the inclusion of the Hur Movement in school curricula. These efforts

reflect a desire to correct what many see as a historical injustice and to ensure that future generations learn about the movement and its leaders.

The question of Pir Sibghatullah Shah's burial place remains a significant issue. Despite requests from Sindhi people to the government, the location of his grave remains unknown. The secrecy surrounding his burial has become a symbol of the unfinished struggle for justice and recognition, and efforts to locate his remains continue.

Conclusion

This study has examined the origins, ideological foundations, and historical significance of the Hur Movement in Sindh, a sustained anti-colonial resistance that spanned approximately a century from the 1840s to the 1950s. The movement emerged from the spiritual community established by Syed Muhammad Rashid Shah in the early nineteenth century and evolved under successive Pirs of Pagaro into an organized resistance force that posed a formidable challenge to British colonial authority in Sindh.

The ideological foundations of the Hur School of Thought integrated spiritual and political dimensions, articulating a conception of freedom rooted in Islamic teachings and Sufi spirituality. The movement's understanding of hur as freedom from subjugation, its emphasis on loyalty to the Pir and the community, its articulation of resistance against oppression as a religious obligation, and its distinctive interpretation of Islamic teachings all contributed to a coherent ideology that sustained the movement over generations.

The leadership of Pir Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi II marked the high point of the Hur Movement. The Pir's commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity, his support for the Indian National Congress and the Forward Bloc, his social reform initiatives, and his willingness to confront colonial authority all contributed to the movement's growth and effectiveness. His execution in 1943, rather than crushing the movement, intensified resistance and secured his place as a martyr in Sindhi memory.

The movement's socio-political and cultural impact on Sindhi society was significant. The Hurs' resistance contributed to the formation of Sindhi regional identity, shaped narratives of resistance and sacrifice, and influenced political consciousness in Sindh. The movement's cultural legacy, preserved in literature, poetry, and folk memory, continues to resonate in Sindhi society.

British suppression of the Hur Movement involved military operations, legislative measures, and the imposition of martial law that represented a significant expansion of colonial state power in Sindh. The movement's marginalization in Pakistani historiography reflects the complex legacies of colonialism and the contested nature of national identity in postcolonial Pakistan.

The contemporary relevance of the Hur School of Thought lies in its articulation of faith as a resource for resistance, its commitment to pluralistic nationalism, and its assertion of regional identity. In a context where these issues remain contested, the Hur Movement's legacy offers resources for thinking about liberation, justice, and decolonization.

Future research on the Hur Movement might explore several directions. Archival research in colonial and postcolonial records could shed further light on the movement's organization, tactics, and internal dynamics. Oral history interviews with

THE HUR MOVEMENT IN SINDH: ORIGINS, IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Hur families could preserve memories and experiences that are not documented in written sources. Comparative studies of the Hur Movement and other anti-colonial movements in South Asia could illuminate common patterns and distinctive features. And finally, continued efforts to recover and reclaim the movement's history can contribute to the decolonization of knowledge and the recognition of indigenous struggles against colonialism.

The Hur Movement, as this study has shown, represents a distinctive and significant chapter in the history of anti-colonial resistance. Its leaders and followers, who gave their lives in the struggle for freedom, deserve recognition and remembrance. As we continue to grapple with the legacies of colonialism and the challenges of building just and equitable societies, the Hur Movement's example of resistance, sacrifice, and commitment to justice remains relevant and inspiring.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

References

1. Ansari, Sarah. *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sindh, 1843–1947*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
2. Baloch, Nabi Bux. "Remarks at the 63rd Anniversary of Martyrdom of Soorah Badshah." Reported in Dawn, March 20, 2006.
3. Dawn. "History: A Salute to Soreh Badshah." May 3, 2015.
4. Dawn. "'Why Have Dominant State and Civil Society Discourses Ignored Soreh Badshah?'" March 21, 2021.
5. Herald. "His Holiness: Pir Pagara." July 2018.
6. Jalal, Ayesha. *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850*. London: Routledge, 2000.
7. Khaskheli, Abbas. "A Pir versus an Empire." *The Friday Times*, November 27, 2020.
8. Khan, Wisal Muhammad. "Hur Operations in Sindh." July 2015. Accessed via Academia.edu.
9. Jaffar, Saad. "da'wah in the early era of Islam: a review of the prophet's da'wah strategies." *ihya-ul-ulum* 21, no. 2 (2021).
10. Khuhro, Hamida. *The Making of Modern Sindh: British Policy and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1978.
11. Lambrick, H. T. *The Terrorist*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1972.
12. Maitlo, Naveed Abbas. "Pir Sahab Pagara – An Unforgettable Personality from Sindh." *Daily Times*, February 16, 2020.
13. Jaffar, Dr Saad, Dr Muhammad Waseem Mukhtar, Dr Shazia Sajid, Dr Nasir Ali Khan, Dr Faiza Butt, and Waqar Ahmed. "The Islamic And Western Concepts Of Human Rights: Strategic Implications, Differences And Implementations." *Migration Letters* 21 (2024): 1658-70.
14. Metcalf, Barbara D. *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
15. Robinson, Francis. *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*. New Delhi:

- Oxford University Press, 2000.
16. Salim, Saquib. "Muslims against the Partition of India." *Awaz The Voice*, 2022.
 17. Salim, Saquib, and Aasha Khosa. "Pir of Pagaro of Sindh Sacrificed for India's Freedom." *Awaz The Voice*, 2022.
 18. Jaffar, saad, and nasir ali khan. "english-the rights and duties of minorities in islamic welfare state and its implementation in the contemporary world." *the scholar islamic academic research journal* 7, no. 2 (2021): 36-57.
 19. Scott, J. Barton. "Taming the Terrorist: British Responses to the Hur Uprisings in Sindh, 1930-46." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, 2009.
 20. Syed, G. M. Various works cited in Dawn. "History: A Salute to Soreh Badshah." May 3, 2015.
 21. Talbot, Ian. *Pakistan: A Modern History*. London: Hurst & Company, 1998.
 22. Time Magazine. "India: Practice." 1942.