

## An Overview of Manghopir; a potential Tourist Attraction

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Located in the hilly tracts of Kirthar range, at about 16 Kilo Meters to the west of Karachi, Pakistan, the suburban, Manghopir, is known on account of its natural hot water springs. It is also a sanctuary of crocodiles, and a site of remains of a few 16-17 th century, carved Yellowstone graves. Most importantly however, Manghopir is known on account of the shrine of 'Manghopir, a convert mystic.



All the above said four that the devotees of this shrine, parameters are shrouded in the both Muslims and Hindus mist of myths. The only fact is believe in what satisfies their

sensibilities. As a popular belief, a Hindu bandit, Mangho or Manga, intended to loot the well known Muslim saint, Baba Fareeduddin Ganj-i-shakar, while he was temporarily staying at these hills on his way to Mecca for pilgrimage. Inspired by his character and teachings, Manga, quit his profession and converted as his disciple. Afterwards he earned a status of a pious holy man of such a stature that fetches him devotees from far and wide till today.

The shrine is built on a raised platform and is of central importance to the inhabitants of the area, particularly, Sheedis. They are also known as Makranis and believed to have African origin as indicated by their Negro traits, like typical African color, curly hair and thick lips. A festival known as "Sheedi Mela" is conducted every year in the Islamic month of Rabi-ul-Awwal and people from all over Sind come here to celebrate. The shrine is routinely visited by many Muslim and Hindu





devotees who lay wreaths on the grave and Sheedis offer lamb, mutton or poultry meat to the Crocodiles of the shrine to fulfill their pledges.

Just near the footsteps of the shrine are two clusters of, Chaukhundi (Four-Cornered or rectangular), graves each comprising of three graves. One is still fairly intact while the other cluster is nearly destroyed. These isolated graves are made in Yellowstone and

carved so dexterously and artistically that no one can leave the spot without being impressed from the intricate carvings reflecting the grandeur of the past Sind civilization.

Within a periphery of about one kilometer, are a few natural hot water springs. Kirthar range lies in the seismic belt and contains limestone which may probably explain the existence of these springs. Temperature of water in these springs varies from about

40 to 50 celcius and contains carbon dioxide in addition to traces of sulphur. It is on this account that these springs are used for balneotherapy particularly their hot water is believed to cure skin diseases and asthma. Now a days these springs have been transformed into sort of water tanks serving as pools for bathing and the water is provided through purpose made servo tanks fitted with pipes and taps. Provided

with non-absorbent tiles though, the flooring and general environment of these pools are unhygienic. This is on account of apparent lack of Interest and awareness on the part of stake holders.

Not far from the shrine is the place where the well known Muslim saint, Baba Fareeduddin Ganj-i-Shakar stayed and meditated for some time. Similarly there are places visited by the close friend





mystics; Usman Marandi (Lal Shahbaz Qalandar), Makhdoom Jahaniyan and Hadrat Surkh Bukhari. These places are now marked with small mosques or memorial halls.

About a kilometer from the shrine is a pool of warm water accommodating over one hundred crocodiles currently, while in 1960 they were reduced to less than ten. The pool has a low boundary wall and the visitors can view the crocodiles from behind it.

Scientifically known as "Crocodylus palustris" the crocodile belongs to the family of Dinosaurs. Characterized by its broad snout, it is commonly known as "Mugger" or "Marsh Crocodile" and is capable of living in cold or warm water or marshy banks of rivers. Optimum body temperature of this cold blooded reptile is 32-33 celcius and to regulate it, these amphibians spend time on earth or in water on the basis of as and when

required. In the case of Manghopir crocodiles, they like to spend good enough time on earth to avoid the raised temperatures of the hot water pool. Having observed over one hundred crocodiles for about an hour from within the boundry walls and from a distance not more than six meters , I felt like having seen a still life painting of crocks. So mesmerizing is the scene that for a few moments

one almost forgets that the view in front is not a foreground of a still life painting but a real life phenomenon. The symbolically ferocious creature has been converted to very docile one by dint of continued offerings of meat from their devotees. They are therefore never hungry and over a time have perhaps lost their animal instinct of ferocity. No untoward incident related to these crocodiles has ever been recorded.





The most prominent natural plants on the hills of Manghopir are Mesquites (*Prosopis Juliflora*). This small thorny shrub is also known as "jungle Jaleb" or Screw bean Weed.

*Accacia Senegal* (Babool), *Ziziphus* (Beri) and *Calotropis* (Aaak or Muder) and Cacti are the other commonly found plants. *Chenopodium Album* (Bathu) and a variety of herbs are found in these hills which blossom particularly in the festival season.

What might have attracted people of as great stature as Baba Fareed, Lal Shehbaz Qalandar and Surkh Bukhari to meditate on the hills of Manghopir? Friendship among themselves to achieve their common and ultimate objective, favour of the Al-Mighty Allah, is the answer from my point of view.

Warmth of the natural springs is explained by the geology of the area. Presence of Crocodiles anywhere in the land of Sindhu

River is understandable. Remains of the few, isolated, carved Yellowstone, chaukhundi Type graves are however inexplicable.

If these were the graves of some chiefs as considered by a few, why there are no signs and remains of the people around them?

I hypothesize that those buried in these graves were some mystic friends who meditated here and they might have been honoured by their rulers who held them in high regard.

The near destruction of Chaukhundi graves of Manghopir need to be preserved as our historic and cultural heritage. Manghopir has a great potential as a tourist attraction provided that the environment is conducive enough to attract sufficient number of visitors from other areas.

Preservation of Chaukhudi graves, improved access to all affiliated sites, and provision of hygienic environment of the hot water springs can help explore this potential.

