

## The Emergence and Evolutionary Background of Makran and the Zikri Sect in the 15th Century

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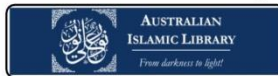
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### Abstract & Indexing



**Abstract**

*This study examines the historical evolution of the Zikri sect in Makran during the 15th century, tracing its roots to Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri's Mahdavi movement. It explores how Mahdavi teachings, brought by preachers such as Mulla Usman bin Qasim Makrani, Sheikh Jalal Herati, and Qazi Nasiruddin, merged with local Baloch Sufi traditions, giving rise to a distinct spiritual identity centered on "Zikr" the collective remembrance of God.*

*By the 17th century, the movement evolved into an organized religious community with established rituals, leadership (Khalifahs), and sacred centers like KohiMurad near Turbat. During the British colonial period, the Zikris were recognized as a distinct religious community known for their discipline and peaceful coexistence.*

*The research concludes that the Zikri faith represents a synthesis of Mahdavi reformism, Baloch mysticism, and tribal egalitarianism, forming a unique socioreligious tradition that continues to influence Makran's cultural identity. The study draws on works by Rizvi (1983), Tate (1910), Hughes (1885), Inayatullah Baloch (1987), and the Encyclopaedia of Islam (2002).*

**Keywords:** *Zikri Sect, Makran, Mahdavi Movement, Baloch Sufism, KohiMurad, Religious Evolution*

**Introduction**

The fifteenth century CE marks the emergence of a new religious movement in the religious and intellectual landscape of Makran the Zikri faith. This sect later became a prominent religious identity in the coastal and mountainous regions of Balochistan, particularly in Turbat, Gwadar, and Pasni.

**1. Historical Background**

By the late fifteenth century, the Indian subcontinent was witnessing intense religious and intellectual activity. Sufi movements had become widespread, and many religious leaders appeared claiming to be reformers or renewers of faith.

During this time, Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri (1443–1505 CE) proclaimed himself as the Promised Mahdi in India. His followers later became known as the Mahdaviya.<sup>1</sup>

When his teachings reached Sindh and Makran, they took on a unique form among the local Baloch tribes, eventually developing into what became known as the Zikri religion.<sup>2</sup>

**2. The Arrival of the Zikri Faith in Makran**

After Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri's death, his disciples and successors spread his teachings in the regions of Sindh and Makran.

One of his prominent followers, Mullah Usman bin Qasim, introduced these teachings among the local Baloch population of Makran.<sup>3</sup>

However, the people of Makran interpreted these teachings through their tribal and Sufi traditions, leading to the emergence of the Zikri religion as a distinct identity.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Formation of Beliefs and Practices**

The core doctrines of the Zikri faith were influenced by Islam, but differed in certain aspects.

Their most sacred site is KoheMurad (Turbat, Makran), which, according to their belief, is where Syed Muhammad Mahdi once resided.<sup>5</sup>

Instead of performing the Hajj, they conduct a collective ritual of remembrance (“Zikr”), considered a symbolic substitute for the pilgrimage to Mecca.

For this reason, they came to be called “Zikri” (those who perform Zikr).<sup>6</sup>

### **4. Stages of Development**

Early Missionary Phase (1490–1550 CE):

During this period, Mahdavi preachers spread their message in Makran, Lasbela, and Khuzdar, laying the foundations of the Zikri faith in Makran.

#### **Introduction**

In the late fifteenth century, when political and religious unrest was rising across

the Indian subcontinent, several spiritual and Sufi movements emerged claiming

to aim for the “reform of the ummah” and the “renewal of faith.”

Among these movements was the Mahdavi movement, founded by Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri (1443–1505 CE).

His claim to be the Mahdi influenced not only India but also Sindh and Makran, from where the Zikri religion later originated.

#### **1. Spread of Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri’s Teachings**

In 1490 CE, Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri traveled across Gujarat, Sindh, and Khorasan, claiming that he was the “Imam Mahdi, the Promised One,” whose appearance in the end times was meant to revive and reform the Muslim community.

After his death in 1505 CE, his successors and disciples continued to propagate his teachings.

Some of these disciples traveled to Sindh and Balochistan (Makran, Lasbela, Khuzdar), where, due to the strong Sufi and tribal traditions, their message was not immediately rejected.<sup>7</sup>

#### **2. Arrival of Mahdavi Missionaries in Makran**

According to historical traditions, after Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri’s death, some of his prominent successors such as Mullah Usman bin Qasim Makrani, Sheikh Jalal Herati, and Qazi Nasiruddin traveled to Makran.

They began their preaching in the regions of Kech, Turbat, and Buleda, where Sufism was already deeply rooted.

The Baloch tribes of the area especially the Gichki, Hot, and Rind clans were devoted to spiritual teachings, which helped the Mahdavi message find acceptance.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Mahdavi Missionaries: Their Role and Influence (1490–1550 CE)**

##### **1. Mullah Usman bin Qasim Makrani**

Introduction and Background

Mullah Usman bin Qasim is said to have belonged to the Buleda or Turbat region of Makran. According to some accounts, he was already a distinguished scholar of religion and had studied in Ahmedabad, India, where he became a disciple of Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri.

After Syed Muhammad's death in 1505 CE, he remained among his followers and later returned to Makran to spread Mahdavi teachings.

#### Missionary Activities

Mullah Usman played a key role in spreading Mahdavi beliefs among the Gichki, Rind, and Hot tribes of Makran.

He emphasized "Zikr" (remembrance of God) as the central act of worship, urging his followers to focus on inner spiritual remembrance rather than the Outer form of ritual prayer.<sup>9</sup>

His teachings promoted spiritual purity, simplicity, and faith in the appearance of the Promised Mahdi.

Mullah Usman is considered the first formal organizer of the Zikri faith in Makran.

His followers established KoheMurad near Turbat as a spiritual gathering place, which later became the central symbol of the Zikri religion.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Sheikh Jalal Herati

### Introduction and Scholarly Background

Sheikh Jalal belonged to Herat (Afghanistan), which at that time was a center of Islamic learning and Sufi movements.

He accepted Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri's claim of being the Promised Mahdi and became one of his successors (khulafa).

After Syed Muhammad's death, when the Mahdavi community came under persecution, Sheikh Jalal migrated westward toward Sistan and Makran.

### Role in Makran

Sheikh Jalal Herati is regarded as a nonBaloch missionary who brought the Mahdavi message to Makran.

He settled in the regions of Panjgur and Kech, where he established his influence among the local tribes through gatherings of asceticism (zuhd), Sufism, and collective remembrance (zikr).<sup>11</sup>

His disciples later systematized the formal doctrines of what became the Zikri religion.

### Intellectual Contributions

Sheikh Jalal distinguished between silent (khafi) and vocal (jali) remembrance of God (zikr), a concept that later formed the basis of the Zikri practice of collective zikr.

His teachings were preserved in a work known as the "Kitab alZikr" (Book of Remembrance), early copies of which are found in various parts of Makran.<sup>12</sup>

## 3. Qazi Nasir alDin

### Background

Qazi Nasir alDin is believed to have originated from Sivistan (modern Sehwan) or Multan.

He was wellversed in both Sharia (Islamic law) and Tasawwuf (Sufism).

During the lifetime of Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri, he served as a jurist and legal scholar of the Mahdavi movementhence the title "Qazi" (judge).

### Mission in Makran

When the Mahdavi community faced persecution in Gujarat, Qazi Nasir alDin

migrated with his disciples toward Balochistan.<sup>13</sup>

He preached in the regions of Lasbela and Khuzdar, where his efforts helped integrate Mahdavi ideas into the local Baloch culture.

### **Teachings and Influence**

Qazi Nasir alDin emphasized the integration of Sharia and Marifah (inner knowledge) that is, the union of outer ritual practices with inner spiritual remembrance (zikr).

Through his influence, the Zikri faith developed a more structured spiritual discipline centered on the recognition of the Mahdi and the practice of zikr.<sup>14</sup>

#### **Collective Impact**

These three figures can be seen as the foundational pillars of the early Zikri religion in Makran:

Mullah Usman – Organizational foundation

Sheikh Jalal Herati – Intellectual and Sufi orientation

Qazi Nasir alDin – Juridical and educational structure<sup>15</sup>

As a result of their efforts, by 1550 CE, an organized community of “Ahle Zikr” (People of Remembrance) had formed in many parts of Makran. This community later evolved into the Zikri religion.

“The emergence of the Zikri sect in Makran was closely linked with the Mahdavi movement that spread from India to the western coastal regions during the late fifteenth century.”<sup>16</sup>

“The Mahdavi preachers, after facing persecution in Gujarat, migrated towards Makran and Baluchistan, where their ideas found resonance among local tribes.”<sup>17</sup>

“The Zikris of Makran form a distinct sect derived from the Mahdavi doctrines, retaining their own rituals centered around the KohiMurad near Turbat.”<sup>18</sup>

“The Zikris, chiefly found in Makran and Las Bela, are followers of Syed Muhammad of Jaunpur, whom they regard as the Mahdi. Their chief act of devotion is Zikr, hence their name.”<sup>19</sup>

### **3. Missionary Activities in Makran, Lasbela, and Khuzdar**

Between 1490 and 1550 CE, the Mahdavi message spread from Makran to Lasbela, Khuzdar, and Panjgur.

Missionaries arriving via the Makran coast emphasized collective zikr as the core ritual, which later became the defining symbol of the Zikri faith.

Early followers replaced formal prayer and pilgrimage (Hajj) with zikr as the means of spiritual closeness to God.

For this reason, local Baloch began to refer to them as “Zikris” those who perform remembrance.<sup>20</sup>

### **4. Local Reaction and Acceptance**

Although some Sufi scholars and religious leaders in Makran initially viewed this new movement with caution, labeling it as Mahdavi, the majority of Baloch tribes embraced it as a spiritual and reformative message.

The early followers began to identify themselves as “Ahle Zikr” (People of Remembrance) or “Ashabe Mahdi” (Companions of the Mahdi).

Due to Makran’s geographical isolation, the movement remained beyond the reach of central Islamic authorities, allowing its doctrines to develop without interference.<sup>21</sup>

### **Religious and Intellectual Evolution**

In its early stages, the Zikri faith was entirely a branch of the Mahdavi movement, but the environment of Makran gave it a distinct local color.

The Zikri faith replaced the pilgrimage to Makkah with gatherings at KoheMurad (Turbat), which became its central spiritual site.

This transformation gave the Zikri religion a separate identity, and by the end of the fifteenth century, it had spread across several parts of Makran.<sup>22</sup>

During the initial missionary phase (1490–1550 CE), the Zikri faith established its intellectual foundation within Makran’s tribal society.

This movement grew through a combination of Mahdavi concepts, Baloch Sufi culture, and Makran’s geographical isolation.

It was in this period that the spiritual identity of the Zikri faith emerged an identity that later evolved into a sociopolitical institution.

**Formative Phase (1550–1650 CE)**

During this phase, the beliefs of the Zikri faith took root among the local tribes of Makran, particularly the Gichki and Rind.

#### **1. Historical and Geographical Context**

In this era, Makran was politically influenced by the Gichki, Rind, and Lashari tribes.

After the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate, the region was divided into semiautonomous tribal states.

Due to its location near the Arabian Sea and proximity to Iran and India, Makran became a center for Arab, Persian, and Indian intellectual influences a blend that greatly facilitated the rise of the Zikri faith.<sup>23</sup>

#### **2. Religious and Intellectual Foundations**

The Zikri creed was primarily influenced by the Mahdavi Movement, founded by Sayyid Muhammad of Jaunpur (1443–1505 CE).

After his death, his successors spread across various regions.

Following 1550, some of his followers such as Mulla Usman bin Qasim Makrani,

Sheikh Jalal Herati, and Qazi Nasir alDin began preaching in Makran.

Their teachings influenced local Baloch tribes, particularly the Gichki, Rind, and Hot.

The concept of “Zikr” (remembrance of God) held central importance through specific recitations and meditation aimed at spiritual purification.

This idea resonated deeply with Baloch Sufi traditions, as Baloch society already possessed a strong mystical inclination.<sup>24</sup>

#### **3. Social and Tribal Impact**

The spread of Zikri beliefs among Makran’s tribes occurred mainly through spiritual reverence and Sufi lodge networks (khanqahs).

Since Makran was a tribal society, the conversion of a tribal chief or elder often led the entire tribe to follow suit.

During this time, Tump, Kech, and Gwadar began to emerge as major Zikri centers.

Worship houses (Jamaat Khanas) were established, and local leaders provided political and social protection for these institutions.<sup>25</sup>

#### **4. Religious Organization and Rituals**

Between 1550 and 1650, the Zikri faith developed a structured religious system, including:

The establishment of the annual Zikr gathering at KoheMurad (though formal pilgrimage became regularized later).

Adoption of silent (ZikreKhafi) and audible (ZikreJahri) remembrance practices.

Formation of specific prayers, rituals, dress codes, and community organization.

Preservation of sayings and teachings of early Zikri saints in local oral traditions.

These developments signify that the Zikri faith had evolved from a purely missionary movement into a wellorganized spiritual and social community.

### **5. Intellectual and Political Challenges**

During this phase, Zikri followers faced criticism from Sunni scholars and jurists.

However, due to Makran's geographic remoteness and the autonomy of Baloch tribes, the Zikri faith continued to flourish relatively freely.

The semiindependent status of Makran under both the Safavid Empire (Iran) and the Mughal Empire (India) shielded the Zikri movement from direct state persecution.<sup>26</sup>

The period 1550–1650 CE marked the formative phase of the Zikri religion in Makran.

During this century, the movement developed from a mystical expression of spirituality into a structured religious community.

Zikri beliefs introduced new concepts of spirituality, Zikr (remembrance), and communal discipline within Baloch culture elements that later became integral to the religious and cultural identity of Makran.

#### **Missionary Activities and Prominent Preachers (1550–1650 CE)**

This “Formative Phase” refers to the period when Zikri doctrines became organized across Makran, Lasbela, Panjgur, and Khuzdar.

Missionary work became more systematic, religious literature was compiled, and the Zikri community established permanent centers for worship and instruction.

#### **1. Beginning of Missionary and Organizational Work in Makran**

After 1550, Makran came under the influence of Baloch tribal chiefs, particularly the Gichki, Rind, and Lashari clans.

This political stability allowed Zikri preachers to promote their faith openly.

They adapted the key Mahdavi doctrines such as belief in the Mahdi, silent remembrance (ZikreKhafi), and purification of the soul to fit the local Baloch mindset.<sup>27</sup>

#### **2. Prominent Preachers and Their Contributions**

##### **(a) Mulla Usman bin Qasim Makrani**

One of the earliest and most influential Zikri preachers in Makran.

He established the foundations of Zikri teachings in Turbat and Tump, introducing the “special remembrance (ZikreKhas)” and “Prayer of Remembrance (NamazeZikr)”.

His efforts led to the formation of the first organized Zikri community in Makran.<sup>28</sup>

##### **(b) Sheikh Jalal Herati**

A native of Khorasan, regarded as one of Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri's spiritual successors.

He traveled through Makran, Lasbela, and coastal areas, spreading the Mahdi's message.

His followers later came to be known specifically as Zikris.

His preaching emphasized spirituality and piety, which deeply influenced the mystical temperament of the Baloch.<sup>29</sup>

(c) Qazi Nasir alDin Makrani

He strengthened the legal and jurisprudential foundations of the Zikri community.

He codified Zikri religious law and organized their worship practices, including the "Zikr Creed" and "Mahdi Prayer."

Under his leadership, the community developed internal unity and structure.

### 3. Establishment of Zikri Centers in Makran

During this period, the Zikri community built specific places for worship and remembrance, which later expanded into KoheMurad (near Turbat) and new Jamaat centers.

These served not only as religious sites but also as educational and spiritual training institutions, where the Qur'an, Zikr, and Mahdavi literature were taught.

### 4. Influence among Baloch Tribes

Zikri preachers presented their doctrines in a way that harmonized with Baloch cultural traditions.

Some chiefs of the Gichki, Rind, and Lashari tribes granted them political protection and social support.

The movement spread rapidly through the deserts and coastal areas of Makran. Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri was recognized as the Promised Mahdi, and the annual ritual of ZikreMurad was initiated in his memory.

### 5. Religious and Intellectual Development

Between 1550 and 1650, several intellectual developments took place:

Silent Zikr and Prayer of Remembrance became the core acts of worship.

Four key pillars of Zikri faith emerged: Mahdi, Khalifa, Jamaat, and Zikr.

Zikri preachers composed devotional and educational texts in Persian and Balochi.<sup>30</sup>

Between 1550 and 1650 CE, the Zikri religion achieved a welldefined religious and social identity in Makran.

The efforts of preachers such as Mulla Usman Makrani, Sheikh Jalal Herati, and Qazi Nasir alDin not only laid the foundation of the movement but also brought about spiritual awakening in Baloch society.

This era became the cornerstone for the later expansion and consolidation of the Zikri faith.

Period of Consolidation (1650–1800 CE)

The period from 1650 to 1800 CE in Makran is known as the "Period of Consolidation" for the Zikri faith. By this time, the Zikri movement had evolved beyond its early missionary and formative phases, transforming into a wellorganized, stable, and socially cohesive religious system.

During this era, the Zikri community strengthened its beliefs, rituals, and social structure, expanded its religious centers, and established deep influence among the Baloch tribes.

### **1. Historical Background**

After the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate and the subsequent rise of the Baloch chieftain system, a political vacuum emerged in Makran.

This vacuum provided an opportunity for religious groups particularly the Zikris to gain social autonomy. Baloch chiefs, especially those of the Gichki and Mirani clans, became patrons and protectors of the Zikri preachers. During this time, Makran effectively became the spiritual and administrative center of the Zikri movement.<sup>31</sup>

### **2. Organizational and Social Consolidation**

In this phase, the Zikri community established institutional foundations for its organization.

Zikri leadership was no longer limited to spiritual preachers but took the form of an organized chain of succession (SilsilaeKhilafat).

The office of the “Khalifa” or “Pir” was instituted serving as the religious leader, decisionmaker, and community administrator.

The Zikri community developed a systematic congregational structure, under which each region had its designated Imam, teacher (Mu’allim), and Khalifa.<sup>32</sup>

Key religiousorganizational terms:

ZikreKhas: Special collective worship.

Khalifa Jamaat: Religious and administrative leader.

MarkazeMurad: Central site of assembly (near Turbat, at KoheMurad).

### **3. KoheMurad and Religious Centralization**

During this era, KoheMurad became the most sacred site of the Zikri faith.

According to Zikri belief, this is the mountain where Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri, regarded as the Promised Mahdi, once resided.

Every year during the days of DhulHijjah, the ritual of ZikreMurad or HajjeMurad was held here a substitute pilgrimage for the Zikris in place of the Meccan Hajj.

This annual gathering strengthened religious unity and centralization within the Zikri community.<sup>33</sup>

### **4. Evolution of Religious Beliefs and Worship**

After 1650, the Zikri faith began to document its doctrines in written form.

During this time, Zikri jurisprudence (Zikri Fiqh) and Zikri devotional texts (Kutub alZikr) were compiled.

Mahdi Alma’ud: Belief in Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri as the Final Mahdi.

Zikr: Central act of worship replacing formal prayer (Salat) with collective remembrance.

Murad: The spiritual center and site of congregation.<sup>34</sup>

Khalifa and Jamaat: Principles of leadership and communal following.

Major Rituals and Practices:

Daily silent remembrance (ZikreKhafi).

Collective audible remembrance (ZikreJahri).

Annual congregation at KoheMurad.

Substitute acts for fasting and almsgiving, aligned with Mahdavi principles.

### **5. Educational and Intellectual Activities**

During this period, the Zikri community established institutions for religious education.

Jamaat Gahs (community halls) were founded in Turbat, Tump, and Panjgur.

These centers provided Qur'anic recitation, training in Zikr, and spiritual discourse (Bayan).

Religious texts were translated and copied in Persian and Balochi for public understanding.<sup>35</sup>

Major Zikri Texts: Kitab alMahdi, Zikr Namah, Risalah Murad.

Many of these manuscripts were later preserved in secrecy due to external opposition and persecution faced by the Zikri community.

### **6. Political and Social Challenges**

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Zikri community faced religious opposition and political pressure.

Scholars from Khorasan and Sindh labeled Zikri beliefs as “heterodox.”

Nevertheless, Baloch chieftains granted them political refuge and safeguarded their religious centers.

Over time, the Zikri community evolved into a closed social group, conducting its rituals privately to avoid external interference.<sup>36</sup>

### **7. Cultural and Linguistic Influence**

During this period, the Zikri faith had a profound impact on Balochi language and culture:

Balochi poetry began to feature themes of spiritual remembrance (Zikr), the coming of the Mahdi, and purification of the soul (Tazkiyah alNafs).

Zikri literature developed in Persian and Balochi.

The Zikri religious system reflected a fusion of Iranian Sufi mysticism and Baloch tribal traditions.

### **8. Geographical Expansion**

Between 1650 and 1800 CE, the Zikri faith expanded beyond Makran to other regions:

Lasbela, Khuzdar, Kalāt, and parts of Karachi's coastal belt.

Into Iranian Balochistan, including Chah Bahar and Sarbaz, where Zikri communities were established.

Through maritime trade, some Zikri merchants traveled to Muscat, Oman, and Yemen, where they founded small religious circles.

Between 1650 and 1800 CE, the Zikri faith in Makran achieved full intellectual, spiritual, and social maturity.

It was no longer a mere missionary movement but a comprehensive religious and cultural system.

Its followers regarded KoheMurad as their spiritual center, Zikr as their form of worship, and the Khalifa Jamaat as their source of leadership.

This period thus marked the milestone of Zikri religious consolidation, spiritual depth, and communal unity.

#### **Religious and Intellectual Evolution**

In its early stages, the Zikri faith was entirely a branch of the Mahdavi movement, but the environment of Makran gave it a distinct local color.

The Zikri faith replaced the pilgrimage to Makkah with gatherings at KoheMurad (Turbat), which became its central spiritual site.

This transformation gave the Zikri religion a separate identity, and by the end of the fifteenth century, it had spread across several parts of Makran.<sup>37</sup>

During the initial missionary phase (1490–1550 CE), the Zikri faith established its intellectual foundation within Makran's tribal society.

This movement grew through a combination of Mahdavi concepts, Baloch Sufi culture, and Makran's geographical isolation. It was in this period that the spiritual identity of the Zikri faith emerged an identity that later evolved into a sociopolitical institution.

Formative Phase (1550–1650 CE)

During this phase, the beliefs of the Zikri faith took root among the local tribes of Makran, particularly the Gichki and Rind.

### **1. Historical and Geographical Context**

In this era, Makran was politically influenced by the Gichki, Rind, and Lashari tribes.

After the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate, the region was divided into semiautonomous tribal states.

Due to its location near the Arabian Sea and proximity to Iran and India, Makran became a center for Arab, Persian, and Indian intellectual influences a blend that greatly facilitated the rise of the Zikri faith.<sup>38</sup>

### **2. Religious and Intellectual Foundations**

The Zikri creed was primarily influenced by the Mahdavi Movement, founded by Sayyid Muhammad of Jaunpur (1443–1505 CE).

After his death, his successors spread across various regions.

Following 1550, some of his followers such as Mulla Usman bin Qasim Makrani, Sheikh Jalal Herati, and Qazi Nasir alDin began preaching in Makran.

Their teachings influenced local Baloch tribes, particularly the Gichki, Rind, and Hot.

The concept of “Zikr” (remembrance of God) held central importance through specific recitations and meditation aimed at spiritual purification.

This idea resonated deeply with Baloch Sufi traditions, as Baloch society already possessed a strong mystical inclination.<sup>39</sup>

### **3. Social and Tribal Impact**

The spread of Zikri beliefs among Makran's tribes occurred mainly through spiritual reverence and Sufi lodge networks (khanqahs).

Since Makran was a tribal society, the conversion of a tribal chief or elder often led the entire tribe to follow suit.

During this time, Tump, Kech, and Gwadar began to emerge as major Zikri centers.

Worship houses (Jamaat Khanas) were established, and local leaders provided political and social protection for these institutions.

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Between 1550 and 1650, the Zikri faith developed a structured religious system, including:

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Formation of specific prayers, rituals, dress codes, and community organization.

Preservation of sayings and teachings of early Zikri saints in local oral traditions.

These developments signify that the Zikri faith had evolved from a purely missionary movement into a wellorganised spiritual and social community.<sup>40</sup>

### **5. Intellectual and Political Challenges**

During this phase, Zikri followers faced criticism from Sunni scholars and jurists.

However, due to Makran's geographic remoteness and the autonomy of Baloch tribes, the Zikri faith continued to flourish relatively freely.

The semiindependent status of Makran under both the Safavid Empire (Iran) and the Mughal Empire (India) shielded the Zikri movement from direct state persecution.

The period 1550–1650 CE marked the formative phase of the Zikri religion in Makran.

During this century, the movement developed from a mystical expression of spirituality into a structured religious community.

Zikri beliefs introduced new concepts of spirituality, Zikr (remembrance), and communal discipline within Baloch culture

Elements that later became integral to the religious and cultural identity of Makran.<sup>41</sup>

#### **Missionary Activities and Prominent Preachers (1550–1650 CE)**

This “Formative Phase” refers to the period when Zikri doctrines became organized across Makran, Lasbela, Panjgur, and Khuzdar.

Missionary work became more systematic, religious literature was compiled, and the Zikri community established permanent centers for worship and instruction.

### **1. Beginning of Missionary and Organizational Work in Makran**

After 1550, Makran came under the influence of Baloch tribal chiefs, particularly the Gichki, Rind, and Lashari clans.

This political stability allowed Zikri preachers to promote their faith openly.

They adapted the key Mahdavi doctrines such as belief in the Mahdi, silent remembrance (ZikreKhafi), and purification of the soul to fit the local Baloch mindset.<sup>42</sup>

### **2. Prominent Preachers and Their Contributions**

#### **(a) Mulla Usman bin Qasim Makrani**

One of the earliest and most influential Zikri preachers in Makran.

He established the foundations of Zikri teachings in Turbat and Tump, introducing the “special remembrance (ZikreKhas)” and “Prayer of Remembrance (NamazeZikr)”.

His efforts led to the formation of the first organized Zikri community in Makran.<sup>43</sup>

#### **(b) Sheikh Jalal Herati**

A native of Khorasan, regarded as one of Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri's spiritual successors.

He traveled through Makran, Lasbela, and coastal areas, spreading the Mahdi's message.

His followers later came to be known specifically as Zikris.

His preaching emphasized spirituality and piety, which deeply influenced the mystical temperament of the Baloch.<sup>44</sup>

#### **(c) Qazi Nasir alDin Makrani**

He strengthened the legal and jurisprudential foundations of the Zikri community.

He codified Zikri religious law and organized their worship practices, including the “Zikr Creed” and “Mahdi Prayer.”

Under his leadership, the community developed internal unity and structure.

### **3. Establishment of Zikri Centers in Makran**

During this period, the Zikri community built specific places for worship and remembrance, which later expanded into KoheMurad (near Turbat) and new Jamaat centers.

These served not only as religious sites but also as educational and spiritual training institutions, where the Qur’an, Zikr, and Mahdavi literature were taught.

### **4. Influence among Baloch Tribes**

Zikri preachers presented their doctrines in a way that harmonized with Baloch cultural traditions.

Some chiefs of the Gichki, Rind, and Lashari tribes granted them political protection and social support.

The movement spread rapidly through the deserts and coastal areas of Makran. Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri was recognized as the Promised Mahdi, and the annual ritual of ZikreMurad was initiated in his memory.

### **5. Religious and Intellectual Development**

Between 1550 and 1650, several intellectual developments took place:

Silent Zikr and Prayer of Remembrance became the core acts of worship.

Four key pillars of Zikri faith emerged: Mahdi, Khalifa, Jamaat, and Zikr.

Zikri preachers composed devotional and educational texts in Persian and Balochi.<sup>45</sup>

Between 1550 and 1650 CE, the Zikri religion achieved a well-defined religious and social identity in Makran.

The efforts of preachers such as Mulla Usman Makrani, Sheikh Jalal Herati, and Qazi Nasir alDin not only laid the foundation of the movement but also brought about spiritual awakening in Baloch society.

**This Social and Political Organization: Evolution of the Zikri Sect in the 19th Century and Its Recognition under British Rule**

The 19th century marked a new era in the history of Makran and Balochistan.

This was the period when the British colonial system profoundly impacted the region’s political, social, and religious structures.

The Zikri sect, previously limited to a local spiritual movement in the hilly and coastal areas of Makran and Lasbela, now emerged as a distinct religious and ethnic identity.

Colonial authorities recognized the sect as an important component of Balochistan’s tribal, ethnic, and religious diversity.

### **1. Historical Background: Colonial Context of Makran**

By the mid-19th century, Makran was a semiautonomous region under the Khan of Kalat.

After 1876, the British government established the “Baluchistan Agency” and brought Makran under direct political supervision.

The Imperial Gazetteer of India (1891) notes:

“Makran, though barren and sparsely populated, is of strategic and ethnographic importance the home of the Zikri sect, a distinct religious community among the Baloch.”<sup>46</sup>

Under British rule, for the first time, the administrative and social existence of the Zikri faith was recorded officially.

## **2. Structure and Organization of the Zikri Faith**

### **(a) Religious Organization**

By the 19th century, the Zikri faith had become a fully organized religious institution, featuring:

Spiritual Leadership (Khalifa or Imam)

Each district had a Khalifa or elder who led religious affairs.

Jamaat Gahs

Centers for collective worship, Zikr, and consultation.

Annual Congregation

The Hajj of Zikr was observed at KoheMurad (near Turbat), the largest religious gathering for Zikris.

ZikreKhas

A special form of collective worship, performed at prescribed daily times.

British officer G. P. Tate (1910) wrote:

“The Zikris possess a wellknit religious hierarchy headed by local elders who command both spiritual and social authority.”<sup>47</sup>

### **(b) Social Organization**

The Zikri community formed a closed but cohesive social system within Makran.

Zikri Tribes: Gichki, Bulaydi, Hot, Nodzai, and Kalanchoi.

Social Relations: Generally peaceful coexistence prevailed with Sunni Baloch tribes, though occasional disputes arose based on religious identity.

According to Hughes (1885):

“Among the Baloch of Makran, the Zikris live in compact communities, following their own rituals, marriage customs, and festivals, though they maintain peaceful ties with their Sunni neighbours.”<sup>48</sup>

## **3. Political Relations and British Policy**

The British government utilized the influence of the Zikri community to maintain political stability.

Many Gichki Sardars in Makran adhered to Zikri beliefs.

British political agent Sir Robert Sandeman portrayed Zikri Sardars as “peaceful and loyal” leaders who could influence other tribes.

According to Inayatullah Baloch (1987):

“The British found the Zikri Sardars of Makran to be more cooperative in maintaining peace, as their religious system promoted obedience, discipline, and mutual loyalty.”<sup>49</sup>

British reports described the Zikri community as “a loyal and organized sect”, considered administratively nonviolent.

## **4. Religious and Intellectual Activities**

During the 19th century, Zikri preachers systematized religious education in written and institutional forms.

Notable figures included:

Mulla Ghulam Qadir Tumpi (1820–1875)

Authored Risalah Zikr WA Marifat, considered a foundational text of Zikri doctrine.<sup>50</sup>

Sayyid Abdul Ghaffar Bulaydi (1850–1890)

Organized collective ZikreMurad and established MajaliseZikr in various regions of Makran.

Maulvi Abdul Hakim Noshki (1865–1900)

Compiled Zikri jurisprudence in Persian and Balochi and spread Zikri literature to Kalat and Karachi.

(Tate, 1910 The Frontiers of Baluchistan)

### **5. Formation of Zikri Identity**

For the first time under British rule, the Zikri faith was recognized as a distinct religious minority.

The Imperial Gazetteer of India (1891, Vol. X) listed Zikris as a separate religious group in Balochistan.

Zikri religious gatherings, social customs, and unique forms of worship distinguished them from Sunni Baloch communities.

During this period, the term “Zikri Baloch” emerged as a marker of ethnoreligious identity.<sup>51</sup>

### **6. Social Reforms and Educational Activities**

The Zikri community emphasized education and social organization under British rule:

Early schools (Maktab Khane) were established in Turbat, Tump, and Pasni.

Religious education included Balochi and Persian language instruction.

Zikri Sardars promoted social equality through collective land ownership and the Bai’at system.<sup>52</sup>

### **7. Cultural and Literary Influence**

In the 19th century, the Zikri faith had a significant impact on Balochi language and literature:

Zikri poetry emphasized spiritual Sufism, Zikr, and Mahdavi beliefs.

Collections such as Zikrnama, Nur alFaqr, and KulliyateTumpi were compiled during this period.

These works combined Persian, Arabic, and Balochi vocabulary, creating a distinct Zikri literary tradition.<sup>53</sup>

### **8. Analysis and Conclusion**

The 19th century was a period of institutional consolidation and social recognition for the Zikri faith:

Religiously: Organized worship, Khalifa system, and KoheMurad congregation.

Socially: Autonomous community, distinct customs and rituals.

Politically: Cooperative relations with the British.

By this time, the Zikri faith had become a stable spiritual and cultural unit within Makran’s social structure.

It was no longer merely a spiritual movement, but a strong social and political community.

Under British colonial administration, the Zikri community maintained religious freedom, social organization, and cultural identity.

This era solidified the Zikri faith as a permanent component of Baloch society, representing a unique ethnoreligious identity that remains significant in Makran’s social and religious diversity today.

## 9. Influence in Makran

The Zikri faith influenced Makran's social fabric deeply.

It maintained a relatively peaceful Sufi-oriented character.

Zikri followers continue to reside in Turbat, Panjgur, and Gwadar, with their social identity intertwined with Baloch culture.<sup>54</sup>

The Zikri Faith and the Social Structure of Makran

Makran today's coastal region of southern Balochistan has historically been a crossroads of civilizations, religions, and cultures.

After the advent of Islam, various spiritual movements emerged, among which the Zikri faith became a prominent and enduring movement.

The Zikri movement was not only unique religiously and intellectually, but it also deeply influenced Makran's social order, cultural traditions, and class structure.

### 1. Historical Background

The Zikri faith originated in mid-15th century in the Makran and Lasbela regions. By the 16th and 17th centuries, it had evolved into a structured spiritual and social movement.

The faith is based on Divine Remembrance (Zikr) and the belief in the Mahdi of the End Times, while its followers adhered to the fundamental principles of Islam Tawhid (Oneness of God), worship, and ethics.

Historians like Al-Baladhuri, Ya'qubi, and Istakhri have consistently described Makran as a center where Islamic and Persian influences merged. The Zikri faith can be seen as a continuation of this cultural-religious synthesis.

### 2. Core Beliefs and Social Principles of the Zikri Faith

The teachings of the Zikri faith had a profound impact on Makran's social system, emphasizing spiritual equality, collective order, and human equality.

#### (a) Spiritual Equality

According to Zikri doctrine, access to God is not limited by lineage, caste, or social class.

This idea was revolutionary in the tribal Baloch social system, helping reduce social inequalities.

#### (b) System of Zikr

The central practice of the Zikri faith is Zikr a collective form of worship in which all participants have equal status.

It became a means of social cohesion in Makran.

#### (c) Principle of Equality and Brotherhood

The Zikri faith treated both the faqir (spiritual seeker) and sardars (tribal leaders) as equals.

This egalitarian thinking fostered a democratic spirit in Baloch society, emphasizing consultation, Jirga, and collective decisionmaking.

### 3. Zikri Faith and Makran's Social Structure

#### (a) Family Structure

Zikri families were generally extended family units, with religious and social training provided under the supervision of elders.

Women were allowed to participate in religious teachings and Zikr gatherings, enhancing their social role in Makran.

#### (b) Marriage and Kinship

Marriages typically occurred within the community, fostering a strong communal identity.

Ceremonies included Quranic recitations and Zikr, blending religious and cultural traditions unique to Makran.

**(c) Education and Social Development**

Zikri missionaries established maktab khanas (schools) across Makran, offering religious and moral education.

By the 19th century, literacy rates within the Zikri community were higher than in other Baloch communities.<sup>55</sup>

**4. Economic and Class Effects**

The Zikri faith also positively influenced Makran's economic system:

The concept of collective land ownership was promoted.

Labor, charity, and service were considered religious obligations.

The Zikri community was active in trade and maritime business, especially in Gwadar, Pasni, and Turbat.<sup>56</sup>

British scholar G.P. Tate (1910) notes:

“The Zikri Baloch, through their strong work ethic and social solidarity, became the most stable community in Makran.”

**5. Sufi Influence and Spiritual Harmony**

The Zikri faith played a key role in promoting Sufi Islam in Makran.

Concepts such as Zikr, Fana (annihilation of the self), and Marifat (spiritual knowledge) influenced local Sufi orders, particularly Qadiriya and Naqshbandiya.

Zikri elders presented Islamic spirituality in accessible language, making religion an integral part of everyday life.<sup>57</sup>

**6. Religious Tolerance and Social Harmony**

Zikri and Sunni Baloch communities coexisted peacefully in Makran for centuries.

The Zikri community avoided armed conflict and extremism, teaching acceptance, patience, and gratitude as moral principles.<sup>58</sup>

“The Zikris of Makran are known for their tolerance, simplicity, and peaceful coexistence with other Muslim communities of Baluchistan.”

**7. Cultural Impact**

The Zikri faith influenced Makran's culture in several ways:

Promotion of spiritual poetry in Balochi. Creation of Zikr literature and devotional hymns. Cultural unity through religious festivals and KoheMurad gatherings. Incorporation of spiritual symbols in clothing, music, and folk dance.<sup>59</sup>

**8. Political and Social Effects (British Period)**

During British rule, the Zikri community was considered a wellorganized and loyal group.

Their social discipline contributed to political stability in Makran.

Zikri sardars were appointed political advisors or local agents, further strengthening their social status.<sup>60</sup>

**9. Analysis and Conclusions**

The Zikri faith influenced Makran's social structure on three levels:

Religious: Promotion of spiritual equality, Zikr, and tolerance

Social: Improvement in family structure, education, and women's status

Economic: Emphasis on collective land ownership, honesty, and labor ethics

**Result:**

**As a result, Makran developed a moderate, ethical, and cohesive social system,** contributing to internal unity in Baloch society.<sup>61</sup>

This research provides a historical and analytical study of the emergence and evolution of the Zikri sect in Makran from the 15th century onward.

The Zikri faith emerged from the Mahdavi movement initiated by Syed Muhammad Junpuri.<sup>62</sup>

Zikr became the central act of worship, leading to the formation of a distinct religious community called Zikris.<sup>63</sup>

During the Period of Consolidation (1650–1800), Zikri institutions, jurisprudence, and rituals especially ZikreKhas and KoheMurad pilgrimage were solidified, along with the establishment of the Khalifa system.

In the 19th century, under British colonial rule, the Zikri community was officially recognized as a distinct religious and ethnic minority, with their educational institutions and spiritual gatherings reflecting social maturity.

The Zikri faith represents a continuation of Makran's Sufi traditions, spiritual egalitarianism, and social organization, leaving a lasting impact not only religiously but also culturally, ethically, and socially.

This study is based on historical sources such as S.A.A. Rizvi, G.P. Tate, Inayatullah Baloch, T.P. Hughes, and the Encyclopaedia of Islam, making it a significant research document on the religious history of Balochistan.



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