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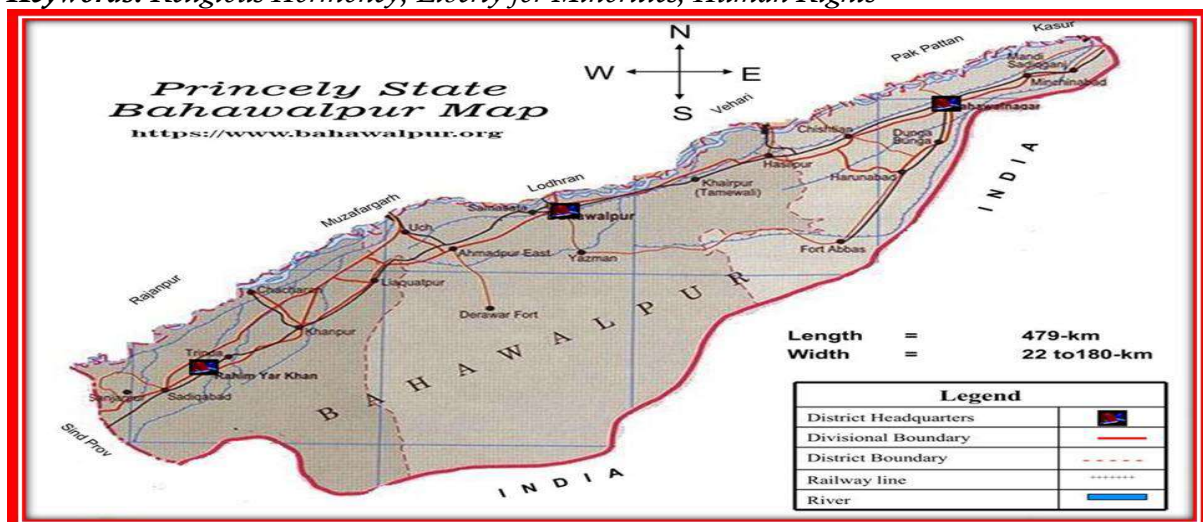
Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Kala Dhari: A Master Piece of Hindu Temple in BWP State: An Interfaith Hormoney in Ex-Princely State Bahawalpur****Dr. Saeed Ahmad**Assistant Professor, Department of Pakistan Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur  
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


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[Yaseen.shah@iba-suk.edu.pk](mailto:Yaseen.shah@iba-suk.edu.pk)**Abstract**

The Kala Dhari Temple, located in the historic region of the former Bahawalpur Princely State in present-day Pakistan, represents an important yet understudied component of the region's religious and cultural heritage. Associated with the worship of the Hindu deity Krishna under the epithet "Kala Dhari," the temple reflects the religious practices and architectural traditions of Hindu communities that once flourished in Bahawalpur prior to the mid-twentieth century. This study examines the historical background, architectural characteristics, and socio-religious significance of the Kala Dhari Temple within the broader cultural landscape of the Bahawalpur State. Drawing on historical records, oral traditions, and regional heritage documentation, the research highlights the temple's role as a local pilgrimage site and community center. The paper also situates the temple within the multi-religious history of Bahawalpur, where Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim communities coexisted and contributed to a shared cultural environment. By documenting the site and analyzing its historical context, this study contributes to the preservation discourse surrounding neglected heritage sites in Pakistan and emphasizes the importance of safeguarding the architectural and cultural legacy of the former princely states of South Asia.

**Keywords:** Religious Hormoney, Liberty for Minorities, Human Rights



Religious Groups in Bahawalpur State (British Punjab Province 1941)														
Religious group	1881		1891		1901		1911		1921		1931		1941	
	Pop.	%	Pop.	%	Pop.	%	Pop.	%	Pop.	%	Pop.	%	Pop.	%
Islam 	480,274	83.75%	546,680	84.1%	598,139	82.97%	654,247	83.81%	647,207	82.85%	799,176	81.17%	1,098,814	81.93%
Hinduism 	91,272	15.92%	90,013	13.85%	114,670	15.91%	109,548	14.03%	114,621	14.67%	149,454	15.18%	174,408	13%
Sikhism 	1,678	0.29%	13,321	2.05%	7,985	1.11%	16,630	2.13%	19,071	2.44%	34,896	3.54%	46,945	3.5%
Jainism 	254	0.04%	17	0%	0	0%	15	0%	1	0%	12	0%	351	0.03%
Christianity 	13	0%	11	0%	83	0.01%	199	0.03%	283	0.04%	1,054	0.11%	3,048	0.23%
Zoroastrianism 	3	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	0%	8	0%	20	0%	0	0%
Buddhism 	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Judaism 	—N/a	—N/a	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Others	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	17,643	1.32%
Total population	573,494	100%	650,042	100%	720,877	100%	780,641	100%	781,191	100%	984,612	100%	1,341,209	100%

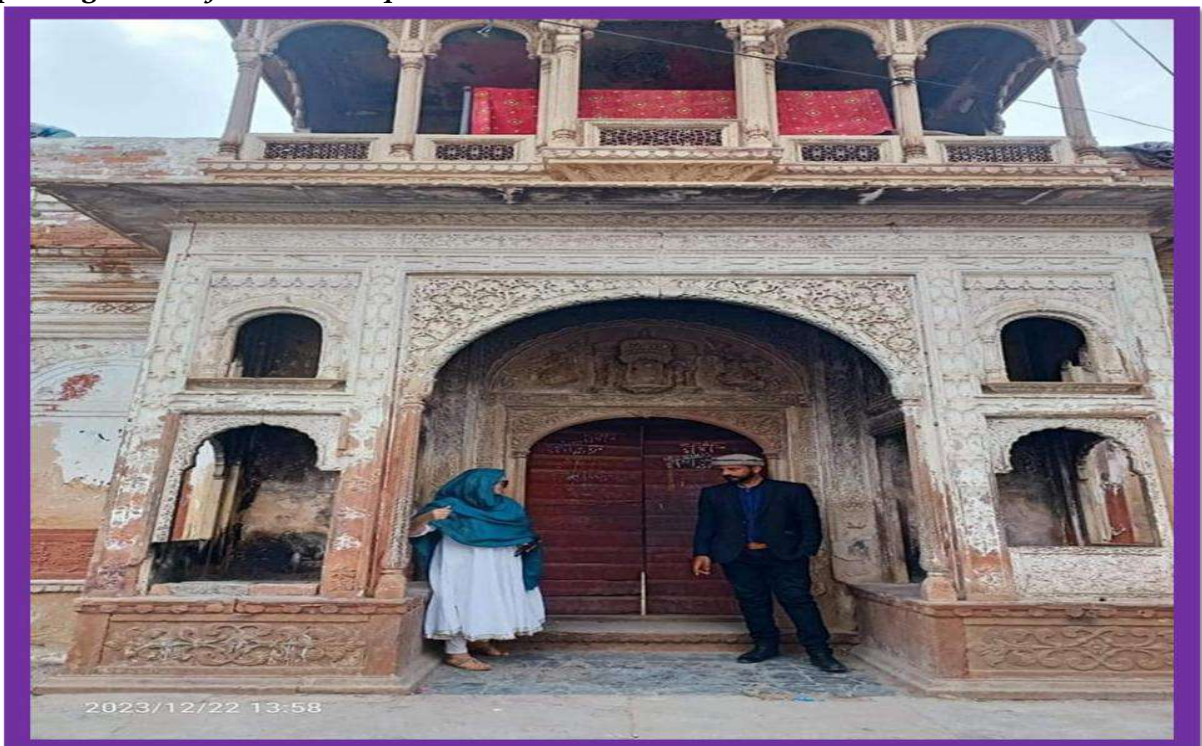
Source: 1 [Senses of India](#) 1941: Govt. Records of India, Volume 16, Government Printing Press of India, 1942.



*Fig.1 The main gate has amazing White Marble & second story of the Temple is Balcony, Which gave a imperial looks to the Temple. According to Hindu Myths, various Gods & Goddess image Carved inside the Temple.*



*Fig.2. The main gate has intricate carvings of Gods and Goddesses worshipped by, what locals call, Vishnu's tribe. The gate is kept at the Bahawalpur Museum. In fact, several paintings and artifacts at the temple have been taken to Lahore Museum.*



*Fig.3. The Foreigner Tourist profound to visit the Temple.*



*Fig.4. This image showcases the exquisite woodwork found in traditional Hindu temple architecture. Skilled artisans create intricate carvings of floral patterns, divine figures, and decorative motifs that reflect spiritual beliefs and cultural heritage. The beautifully carved entrance demonstrates exceptional craftsmanship, patience, and attention to detail. Such woodwork not only enhances the temple's aesthetic beauty but also serves as a lasting symbol of devotion, artistry, and architectural excellence.*



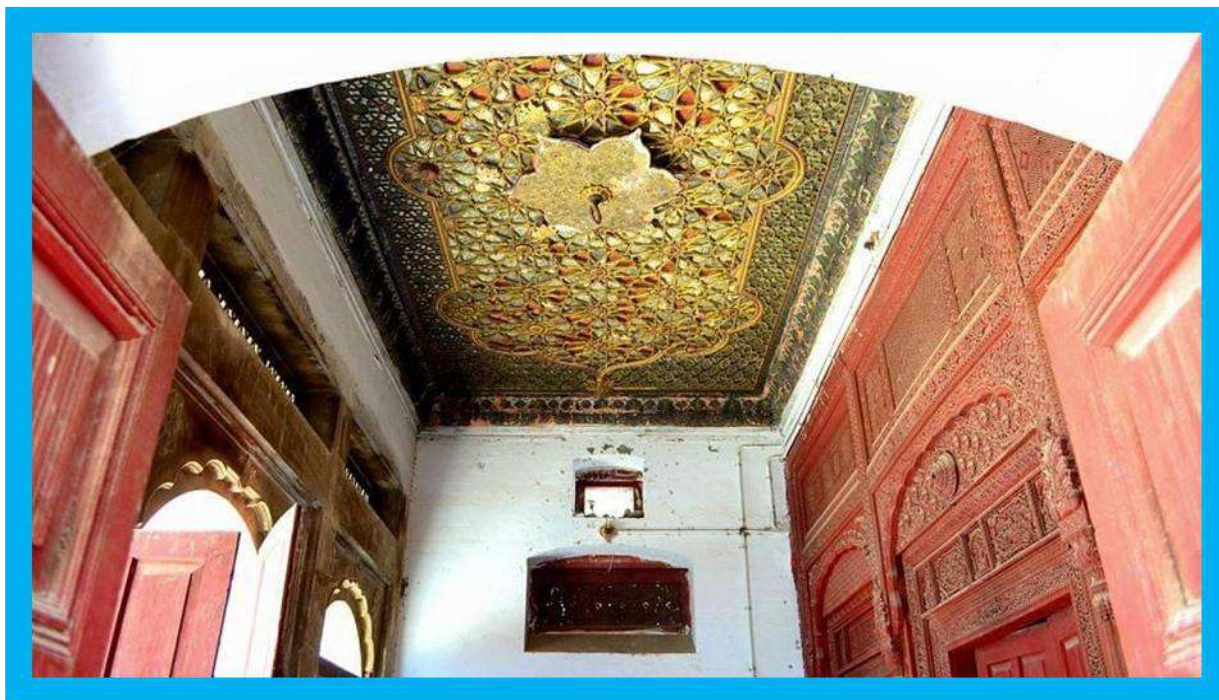
*Fig.5. Wood Carving Art : Wood carving is a traditional craft that transforms wood into beautiful works of art through skillful cutting and shaping. Intricate carvings often portray cultural, religious, and historical themes, preserving heritage and storytelling through design. The detailed patterns and figures seen in this artwork reflect the creativity, patience, and mastery of the artisan. Such carvings enhance the beauty of architecture and remain a valued expression of cultural identity.*



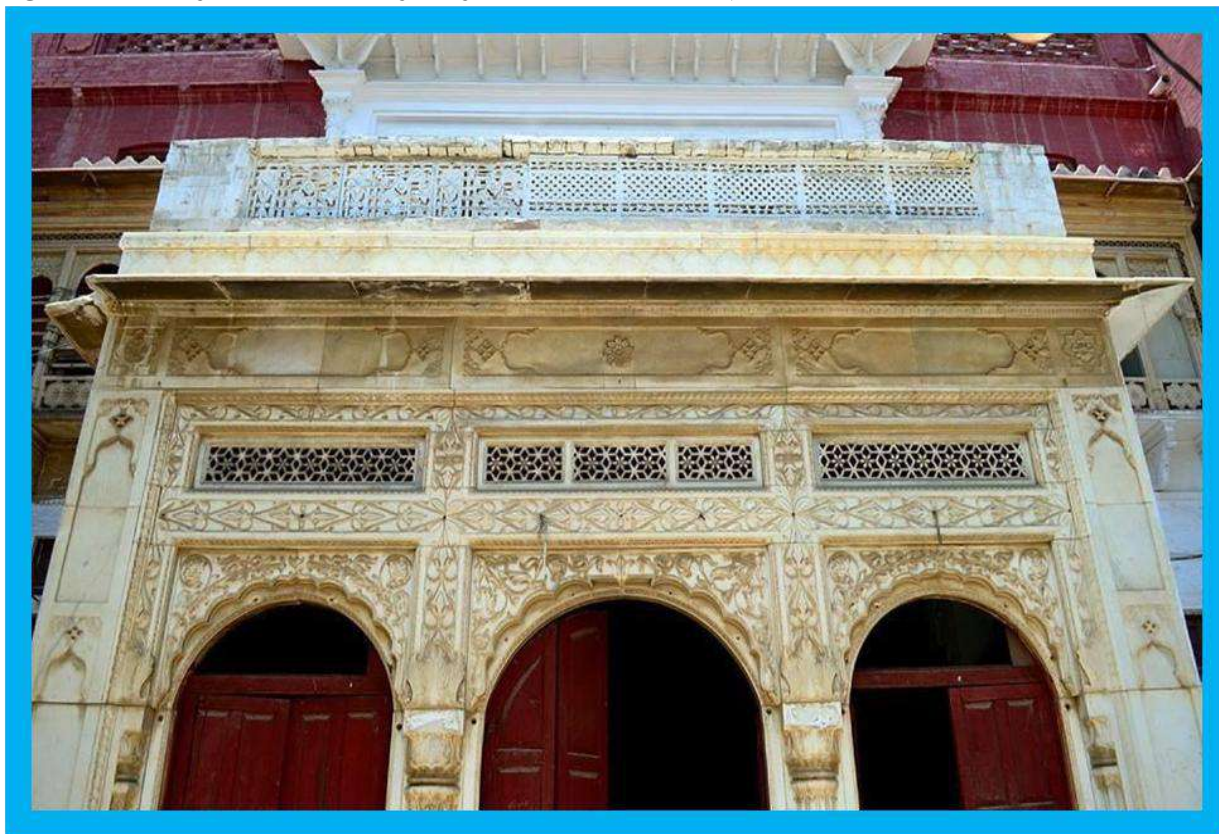
*Fig.6. Left Side View of the Kala Dhari Temple.*



*Fig.7. The Most sacred place of the Temple, visitors love flair the lamp with oil for Goodness of their Gods. Over the centuries this cabin of Lamp had been totally black out due the black dust of the burning lamp. The Roof of the Cabin much decorated with Wood work & side by side walls.*



*Fig.8. The beautiful master piece of Roof decorated with Wood, Mirror & Metal*



*Fig.9. Front Side of the Temple Carved with White Marble.*

The former princely State of Bahawalpur occupies a distinguished place in the cultural and historical landscape in United India. Situated along the fertile banks of the Sutlej River and stretching into the Cholistan Desert, Bahawalpur served for centuries as a meeting point of civilizations, religions and artistic traditions. Among its many architectural and cultural treasures, the Kala Dhari Hindu Temple stands out as a remarkable but lesser-

known monument. This temple is not only a place of worship but also a symbol of religious harmony, artistic excellence, and the deep-rooted Hindu heritage that once flourished in the region. The Kala Dhari Temple represents a masterful blend of spiritual symbolism, architectural precision, and aesthetic refinement. Though time, neglect and political changes have altered its surroundings, the temple continues to speak silently of an era when Hindu religious life, art, and craftsmanship thrived in Bahawalpur State. This essay explores the historical background, architectural features, religious significance, artistic elements, cultural role and present condition of the Kala Dhari Temple, highlighting why it deserves recognition as a masterpiece of Hindu temple architecture.

### **Historical Background of Hindu Heritage in Bahawalpur State**

The Kala Dhari Temple built about 250-300-year ago and a masterpiece of architecture and spirituality stands in the heart of Bahawalpur Ex-Princely State. In history books, its original name mentioned Shiri Nani Dev Kaala Dhari Jee Maharaaj Mandir. The temple reflected its architectural brilliance and devotion. The temple's structure is adorned with intricate carvings of Hindu Gods and Goddesses, beautifully crafted in both stone and wood. Before the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, Bahawalpur State was home to a diverse population that included Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and other communities. Hindu merchants, scholars, priests and artisans played a significant role in the economic and cultural life of the state. Towns and cities across the region contained temples, dharamshala, schools and marketplaces maintained by Hindu communities.<sup>3</sup> The Nawabs of Bahawalpur were generally known for their policy of religious tolerance. Hindu worship places were allowed to function freely and many temples were constructed or renovated under royal patronage or with the support of wealthy Hindu traders. The Kala Dhari Temple emerged in this context as a prominent religious and cultural center. Although exact construction dates are difficult to establish due to the scarcity of written records, local traditions suggest that the temple was built several centuries ago, possibly during the late medieval or early modern period. Its continued use over generations reflects the stability and prosperity of Hindu religious life in the region before major political changes reshaped South Asia. The Kala Dhari Temple is located within the historical territory of the former Bahawalpur State. Its placement was not accidental; like many Hindu temples, it was constructed in a location considered spiritually auspicious. The surrounding landscape, whether urban or semi-rural at the time of its construction, would have been integrated into the religious experience of devotees. The temple's environment likely included residential quarters for priests, pilgrims' resting areas and small markets selling religious items such as flowers, lamps and incense. The temple thus functioned not only as a sacred space but also as a focal point of community life. Over time, changes in population patterns and urban development have altered the temple's immediate surroundings. Nevertheless, the structure still retains a sense of sacred presence that reflects its original purpose and spiritual significance.<sup>4</sup>

### **Architectural Style and Design**

The Kala Dhari Temple is a fine example of traditional Hindu temple architecture, adapted to local materials and regional aesthetics. While it may not match the scale of grand temple complexes found in other parts of South Asia, its architectural coherence and artistic detailing place it firmly among notable Hindu monuments. The temple follows the basic principles of Hindu sacred architecture, emphasizing symmetry, axial alignment, and symbolic geometry. The main shrine forms the heart of the temple, housing the principal deity. This sacred chamber is typically dark and enclosed, symbolizing the cosmic womb from which creation emerges. In front of the sanctum lies the mandapa, or assembly hall, where devotees gather for prayers, rituals, and religious discourse. The progression from the outer space to the inner sanctum represents the spiritual journey from

the material world to divine consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Shikhara and Vertical Emphasis: One of the most striking features of the Kala Dhari Temple is its Shikhara (tower), which rises above the sanctum. The Shikhara serves both a symbolic and visual function, representing Mount Meru the cosmic axis in Hindu cosmology. Its vertical lines draw the eye upward, reminding devotees of the connection between earth and heaven. The Shikhara's form reflects regional variations of Hindu temple design, possibly influenced by North Indian architectural traditions while incorporating local craftsmanship. Though weathering has softened some details, the tower remains an impressive feature of the structure.<sup>6</sup>

### Artistic & Decorative Elements

The artistic decoration of the Kala Dhari Temple reveals the skill and devotion of the artisans who built it. Hindu temple art is never merely ornamental; every motif, figure, and pattern carries symbolic meaning.<sup>7</sup>

- **Intricate Carvings:** The temple's grand entrance and interior are adorned with breathtaking carvings of Hindu deities, displaying the craftsmanship of an era gone by.
- **Artistic Elements:** The pillars and walls showcase delicate floral motifs and mythological symbols, reflecting the region's rich cultural heritage. Since the exodus of the Hindu community, the temple has suffered immense neglect. Over the decades, weather conditions, lack of maintenance, and unauthorized usage have further deteriorated the structure.
- **Structural Decay:** Parts of the temple have collapsed due to years of neglect. In 2015, a room's floor caved in, revealing an underground tunnel, though its historical significance remains uncertain.

### Sculptural Work

Stone and brick carvings adorn various parts of the temple, including pillars, door frames and exterior walls. These carvings often depict floral patterns, geometric designs, and mythological imagery. Such motifs symbolize fertility, cosmic order and the eternal rhythm of life. In some areas, remnants of figurative sculpture can still be seen, possibly representing deities, guardians, or celestial beings. Even where damage or erosion has occurred, the remaining fragments testify to the original richness of the temple's visual language.



*Fig.10. Woodwork is the art of shaping, carving, and assembling wood to create decorative and functional items. It combines creativity, skill, and precision to produce furniture, doors, windows, and architectural designs. Traditional wood carving, as seen in the image, reflects cultural heritage and artistic excellence. Woodwork enhances the beauty of buildings and remains an important craft valued for its durability and aesthetic appeal.*

### **Color and Surface Treatment**

The name “Kala Dhari” itself suggests an association with the color black (kala), which may relate either to the deity worshipped or to the temple’s original appearance. It is possible that dark stone, blackened surfaces or symbolic use of color played a role in the temple’s identity. Traces of plaster or pigment on the walls hint that the temple may once have been brightly painted. In Hindu tradition, color enhances spiritual experience and expresses divine energy, making the temple a vibrant space of worship.<sup>8</sup>

### **Religious Significance**

The Kala Dhari Temple holds deep religious importance within Hindu tradition. While the specific deity associated with the temple may vary according to local belief, the name suggests a connection with a powerful divine form, possibly linked to Shiva, Shakti, or a regional manifestation of the divine. The temple would have been a center for daily worship, seasonal festivals, and important life-cycle rituals such as naming ceremonies, marriages, and prayers for prosperity. Priests conducted rituals according to established traditions, preserving sacred knowledge passed down through generations. Festivals would have transformed the temple into a lively space filled with music, chanting, lamps, and offerings. Such occasions reinforced social bonds and strengthened the spiritual identity of the community.<sup>9</sup>

### **Cultural and Social Role**

Beyond its religious function, the Kala Dhari Temple played an important cultural and social role in the life of Bahawalpur’s Hindu population. Temples traditionally serve as centers of learning, charity, and community organization. Religious instruction, storytelling from sacred texts, and moral education were often conducted within temple precincts. The temple also likely supported charitable activities, such as feeding the poor or providing shelter to travelers, reflecting the Hindu ideal of Seva (selfless service). By hosting gatherings and celebrations, the temple helped maintain cultural continuity and collective memory, especially during times of political or economic change.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Temple; Post Partition & Current Condition**

The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 brought dramatic demographic changes to Bahawalpur State. Most of the Hindu population migrated to India, leaving behind temples and other cultural landmarks. The Kala Dhari Temple, like many similar structures, lost its regular congregation and custodians. In the absence of continuous worship, the temple faced neglect and environmental damage. However, its survival into the present day is itself a testament to its solid construction and enduring significance. In some cases, local communities have continued to respect the site as a historical and cultural monument. Following the Partition of 1947, many Hindu families migrated from Bahawalpur, leaving behind this sacred structure. Today, the temple remains a home to several immigrant families, while a portion of it is utilized as a school by the Bahawalpur Municipal Corporation.<sup>11</sup> Today, the Kala Dhari Temple stands as a silent witness to the region’s pluralistic past. While parts of the structure remain intact, other sections show signs of deterioration due to weather, lack of maintenance and human interference. Preservation challenges include structural instability, loss of decorative elements, and limited awareness of the temple’s historical value. Without proper conservation efforts, there is a risk that this architectural masterpiece could suffer irreversible damage. Preserving the Kala Dhari Temple is not merely about saving a building; it is about

protecting cultural memory and shared heritage. <sup>12</sup> Such monuments remind us that the history of South Asia is deeply interconnected and that artistic achievement transcends religious and political boundaries. Conservation initiatives, documentation, and educational programs can help ensure that future generations understand and appreciate the temple's significance. Responsible heritage preservation can also promote interfaith understanding and cultural tourism. The Bahawalpur Municipal Corporation now operates a primary school within the temple, while other portions are rented out to tenants by the Evacuee Trust Property Board.

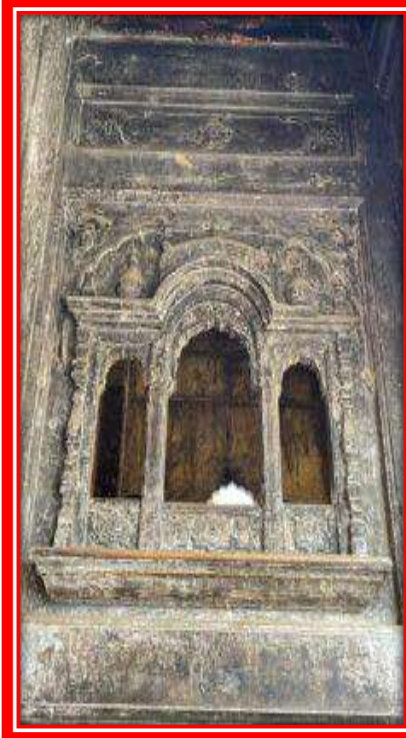


Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.



Fig.13.

The former princely state of Bahawalpur is often remembered for its remarkable tradition of interfaith harmony, where Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and other communities lived together with mutual respect and cooperation. Since 1727-1947; the Nawabs of Bahawalpur sets the example for Interfaith Hormoney, especially under enlightened leaders like Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan V, religious tolerance was encouraged through inclusive governance, equal opportunities in administration, and protection of minority rights. Churches, Temples, Gurdwaras Shrines and Mosques stood side by side, reflecting a shared cultural heritage and peaceful coexistence. Festivals of different faiths were respected and communities often participated in each other's social and cultural events. This spirit of unity and understanding made Bahawalpur a notable example of interfaith harmony in the region's history.

### Conclusion

The Kala Dhari Temple of the former Bahawalpur State stands as a masterful example of Hindu temple architecture and spiritual expression. Through its thoughtful design, symbolic artistry and cultural role, the temple embodies the creativity and devotion of a community that once flourished in the region. Though time has altered its appearance and circumstances, the temples essence remains powerful. It continues to tell a story of faith, craftsmanship and coexistence. Recognizing the Kala Dhari Temple as a masterpiece is not only an acknowledgment of its architectural beauty but also a tribute to the rich and diverse heritage of Bahawalpur State. In preserving and studying such monuments, we honor the past while enriching our understanding of the cultural foundations upon which

modern society stands. Kala Dhari Temple is more than just a place of worship; it is a symbol of culture, history and architectural brilliance. If immediate restoration efforts are not undertaken, we risk losing a priceless heritage site forever. Today, Kala Dhari Temple is widely regarded as an important heritage monument that deserves conservation and restoration. Historians, heritage experts, and members of local communities have repeatedly emphasized the need to protect this architectural treasure. Restoring the temple would not only preserve a valuable piece of history but also celebrate the artistic traditions that flourished in Bahawalpur for centuries. The question remains: Will we allow history to fade, or will we take steps to protect this legacy for future generations?

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<sup>1</sup>[Senses of India](#) 1941: Govt. Records of India, Volume 16, Government Printing Press of India, 1942.

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