



**SPATIALIZING POPULAR
SUFİ SHRINES IN
PUNJAB**

DREAMS, MEMORIES, TERRITORIALITY

Yogesh Snehi



ROUTLEDGE



SPATIALIZING POPULAR SUFI SHRINES IN PUNJAB

This book explores the organic lives of popular Sufi shrines in contemporary Northwest India. It traverses the worldview of shrine spaces, rituals and their complex narratives, and provides an insight into their urban and rural landscapes in the post-Partition (Indian) Punjab.

What happened to these shrines when attempts were made to dissuade Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus from their veneration of popular saints in the early twentieth century? What was the fate of popular shrines that persisted even when the Muslim population was virtually wiped off as a result of migration during Partition? How did these shrines manifest in the context of the threat posed by militants in the 1980s? How did such popular practices reconfigure themselves when some important centres of Sufism were left behind in the West Punjab (now Pakistan)? This book examines several of these questions and utilizes a combination of analytical tools, new theoretical tropes and an ethnographic approach to understand and situate popular Sufi shrines so that they are both historicized and spatialized. As such, it lays out some crucial contours of the method and practice of understanding popular sacred spaces (within India and elsewhere), bridging the everyday and the metanarratives of power structures and state formation.

This book will be useful to scholars, researchers and those engaged in interdisciplinary work in history, social anthropology, historical sociology, cultural studies, historical geography, religion and art history, as well as those interested in Sufism and its shrines in South Asia.

Yogesh Snehi teaches history at the School of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University Delhi, India. Previously, he was a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla (2013–2015). His major teaching and research interests focus on Punjab and the debates on popular religion and its practice. Through a Tasveer Ghar fellowship, he has created a digital repository of images for the 'heidICON' image and multimedia database of Heidelberg University which is in circulation at Sufi shrines in contemporary Punjab. He has co-edited the book *Modernity and Changing Social Fabric of Punjab and Haryana* (2018) and also edited the Winter 2017 issue of *Summerhill: IIAS Review*, Shimla.

'This richly illustrated and densely argued book offers a historically informed social anthropology of popular Sufi shrines and practices in contemporary Punjab, the history of some of which goes back to medieval period. It is a fine contribution to Punjab studies, especially on history and current practices relating to popular forms of Sufism, addressing larger concerns in religious traditions, questions of identity and political contestations using religious symbols. In doing so, the author has moved out of the usual comfort zones of armchair academics to ascertain and report on the actual situation on the ground in political contexts fraught with communal tensions.'

– Raziuddin Aquil, University of Delhi, India

'Focusing on the as yet little studied and even lesser understood phenomenon of Sufi shrine worship in contemporary Indian Punjab, Yogesh Snehi makes a significant contribution to understanding the everyday religiosities of Punjabi peoples. In a state dominated by Sikhism, where Muslims are a miniscule minority, Snehi endeavours to understand the piety of the ordinary and the everyday through observing and interacting with the guardians and the followers of a surprising proliferation of Sufi shrines and their ever-renewing traditions in Punjab. Rejecting the dominant scholarly tendency to study the apparently mainstream, established religions through the lens of origins, conflict, secularism and syncretism, Snehi makes a case for comprehending the quotidian religiosities through deploying methods of historical anthropology. In taking cognizance of the worship of "Muslim" pirs and *shaikhs* by the non-Muslim populace of Punjab, in many cases the more recent burnishing of their *pirkhanas* and tombs, Snehi analyzes the place of dreams, cultural memory, orality, dissent and meaning-making in the exhilarating folk religions of Punjab today. Snehi's book is a must-read for those baffled by Punjab's popular religiosities, as by those mesmerized by the region's dominant Sikh idiom.'

– Anshu Malhotra, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

SPATIALIZING POPULAR SUFİ SHRINES IN PUNJAB

Dreams, Memories, Territoriality

Yogesh Snehi



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PREFACE

My journey into popular Sufi shrines was an accident. During my first teaching assignment in the year 2005 at Abohar, a frontier town in south-west (Indian) Punjab, I was requested by my post-graduate students to take them to a local shrine of Panj Pirs, situated on one of the two large sand dunes on the outskirts of the main city. Despite the fact that I grew up in the town and had on several occasions visited these dunes during monsoons with school friends, I strangely never ventured into the shrine of Panj Pir. This was even though all the three friends who went on these dunes – a Punjabi, a Bengali and a Bagri – had a long history of association with Sufi shrines. Growing up in a predominantly upper-caste ‘Hindu’ neighbourhood that was situated on the edge of Sukhera *basti*, a locality of Rajput ‘Muslims’ who were also patrons of the Panj Pir shrine until 1947, the possibilities of ‘othering’ were widespread. Sukheras are remembered in Abohar as prominent ‘Muslim’ *zamindars* who, like their closest ‘Hindu’ *biraderi* of Bishnois from the nearby village of Sito Gunno, were caricaturized as harassers of townswomen. Visitation of the Sufi shrine associated with Sukheras was thus discouraged or at best avoided. An almost century-old patronage of Sukheras to Panj Pir shrine ended with the partition of Punjab in 1947. But this visit opened an opportunity to enter the ‘prohibited’ spaces and explore the lives of Sufi shrines in Punjab post-partition. This entry point into the lives of popular Sufi shrines post-partition became a major subject of my exploration for the next decade.

Sukheras left for Pakistan post-partition, but the shrine of Panj Pirs still has graves of Sukheras elders who were buried at the entrance of the shrine. Though Panj Pirs continue to figure in memory of Sukheras in Pakistan, they are no longer part of their veneration or ritual practice. I shared some of my notes on this visit with Professor Surinder Singh, my teacher at Panjab University, Chandigarh. He prompted me

to explore the shrine and what emerged was a full-fledged article contributed in his edited book on the *longue durée* of Sufism in Punjab. This was the beginning of a decade-long journey into an exploration of Sufi shrines and their practices. Since I was a student of history, my questions emerged out of my training in this discipline. I wanted to explore these questions at the beginning of my journey: What happened to these shrines when attempts were made to dissuade Sikhs and Hindus from the veneration of popular saints by reformist movements of the late nineteenth and twentieth century? What was the fate of popular shrines that were left behind when the Muslim population was virtually wiped out as a result of partition migration?

Shrines in Punjab have predominantly been understood through the lens of ‘great traditions’. Until Harjot Oberoi’s seminal work on *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, no one bothered to ask whether the predominant religious categories can conveniently be applied to sacred shrines. Besides, the shrines with which I began my engagement were predominantly minor shrines, with no major record of documented histories. Thus, an important contour of my engagement was to explore ‘peripheries’, such histories of shrine practices that were on the margins of historical discourses.

My second teaching assignment took me to Amritsar, a city I visited for the first time in the year 2006, when I joined Dayanand Anglo Vedic College, located inside the walled city. Coming from a ‘periphery’ of (Indian) Punjab and having grown up during the terrible decades of Khalistani movement from the 1980s to 1990s, my understanding of Amritsar as a ‘center’ of ‘Sikh’ religiosity was significantly transformed in the next five years. The location of the college in the walled city exposed me to some new Sufi shrines and ritual practices that were evolving in the early decades of the twenty-first century. I started to explore this religious complex that was emerging just after the militancy waned in Punjab. The memories of violence both by the state and militants was, however, still very raw in the popular memory.

This research was thus both a personal and professional journey to understand and document the histories of Sufi shrines post-partition and their relevance in contemporary demographically transformed landscapes. Pre-partition Punjab had shrines affiliated to Chishtis, Suhrawardis, Qadiris, Nashqbandis, Qalandaris and several sub-branches of primary *silsilas*. I was aware that the larger centres of Punjabi Sufi shrines, predominantly Chishti and Qadiri, were left behind in the West Punjab (now Pakistan) post-partition, most of which have also become targets of religious fundamentalists in the recent decades. But why did such shrines in Indian Punjab continue to thrive despite

the reformist rhetoric against saint veneration that was prevalent for the entire period of the twentieth century? It is intriguing how Sufi shrines became a common ground for reformist critique in the early twentieth century from a diverse spectrum of religious debates: Tat Khalsa, Wahabi, Deobandi, Ahmadiya, Arya Samaji, etc. Their lives post-partition is mediated through the agency of annual *urs*, langar (community kitchen), *ziyarat* (visit/pilgrimage) and *barkat* (wish fulfilment) and mediated through dreams and memories.

It was difficult to choose a stable nomenclature for Sufi shrines under the scope of my study. I chose the word ‘popular’ to denote their location in the ‘ordinary’, ‘mundane’ and ‘everyday’ quotidian spheres of religious practice. Historians’ reluctance to engage with these shrines in the absence of textual narratives compelled me to explore methods in the fields of historical anthropology and historical geography. The narratology of Sufi shrines, therefore, emerged as a crucial entry-point to decode the associated semiotics of ritual practice and critique prevalent concepts to understand religious practice and social change. Thus, the frivolous distinction between rural and urban, elite and subaltern, etc. do not explain the overlaps in these categories. Popular culture, as David Morgan (2007: 21) says, is ‘inseparable from its looming other, elite culture’.

In the year 2010, I got a small fellowship grant from Tasveer Ghar to document the circulation of images at ‘Muslim’ shrines. This grant enabled me to travel to a larger spectrum of shrines and enlarge my ethnography and repository of images, which became crucial medium to understand circulation of images of popular Sufi saints and their shrines in India and Pakistan. A fellowship from the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla in 2013 and a timely leave from Ambedkar University Delhi (an institution I joined in 2011) provided me the much-needed respite to write this book. The book evolved through an active engagement with anthropological debates on sacred shrines in the Middle East and India. Growing up during the terrible decades of the 1980s and 1990s also raised some fundamental questions about conflicts for sacred shrines in India.

These field opportunities exposed me to a fascinating range of source material emerging from widely divergent media – oral interviews of pilgrims, devotees and caretakers; ethnographic survey of rituals and *urs* ceremonies/melas and shrine spaces; and local newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, handbooks and visual material (calendars, posters, paintings, photographs, etc.), and CDs, DVDs, etc. in circulation at bazaars and makeshift markets at popular Sufi shrines. Besides archival and other official – colonial and post-partition – ethnographic

PREFACE

narratives on shrines, I also relied on the Right to Information Act 2005 for sourcing information on such aspects as historicity, ownership and legal status of shrines. Decoding this rich resource required interdisciplinary tools of analysis to which Indian historians are usually unaccustomed. My understanding of textual sources is not bound by familiar terms, tropes and theoretical constructs that see and treat religion in vertical silos. I therefore treat texts and spaces in terms of their mutual imbrications, with texts constituting spaces as much as spaces reinterpreting texts. This also explains why shrine/saint veneration often co-exists with affiliations and religious beliefs.

Therefore, when looking at the ‘textual practices’, in terms of the institution of sacred spatiality, I use a wide canvas of sources – popular tracts and booklets and propaganda material like posters, banners and advertisements, calendars, paintings, and CDs and DVDs, etc. This material helped me in creating the popular worldview of veneration of saint shrines – a local universe in Punjab. But this local universe is as much informed by transnational circulation of visual material by the social media. It was a challenge to situate this visual material that is generally discarded among art historians as kitsch but has immensely helped me to understand shrine spaces and their representations. I was also often struck by complicated shrine narratives – often original stories and their interlude with significant political milieus – wars, conflict, partition – which could be interpreted only through a specific spatial lens. A dream or a memory is therefore a potent moment of rekindling shrine practices post-partition.

I treat religion as a fluid category, refashioning itself in the ever-changing contours of time and space. I therefore problematize the absolutist meaning associated with the term ‘Hindu’, ‘Muslim’ and ‘Sikh’. A study of varied kinds of shrines, therefore, prompted me to broaden the spectrum of sacred shrines in Punjab. I resisted the temptation of an intensive work on select shrine(s) and, on the contrary, chose to work on a variety of Sufi shrines. This engagement was theoretically very challenging since many of these shrines had a peculiarly spatial character. This question still lingers in my mind, and the case studies in this work attempt to unfold this problem. It will be pertinent to understand the discourse of these ‘peripheral’ shrines and their underlying contradictions. Periphery remains one of the foundational aspects of my research, defined as well as problematized at the same time.

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My decade-long engagement with popular Sufi shrines has been a learning experience. This journey wouldn't have begun if the students of MA history at Dayanand Anglo Vedic College, Abohar hadn't insisted on a visit to the shrine of Panj Pirs in 2005. When I shared my experience at the shrine with Professor Surinder Singh, he encouraged me to pursue it further. And thus began a journey that forayed into other such shrines and continued for more than a decade. Professor Singh has both been a mentor and an intellectual companion. I owe this work to him and to my engagement with works of Prof. Subhash Parihar, Dr. Anshu Malhotra, Prof. Ishwar Dayal Gaur, Prof. Rajkumar Hans and Dr. Radhika Chopra. Interactions with Prof. Mahesh Sharma and Dr. Supriya on aspects of sacred space and archaeology have always been rewarding. During the process of writing this manuscript, I shared the initial drafts as well as published articles with Prof. Harjot Oberoi, Prof. Kundan Lal Tuteja, Prof. Harbans Mukhia, Dr. Anne Murphy, Dr. Anand V. Taneja and Dr. Borayin M. Larios. Their encouragement and critical insights have been both intriguing and inspiring. I am thankful to Prof. Robert M. Hayden for sharing some of his recent works (I was introduced to his writings by Prof. Denys P. Leighton). His critical engagement with the introduction helped me refine my arguments in the manuscript. Prof. Peter Ronald de Souza and Prof. Chetan Singh, former directors at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla (IIAS), and Prof. Mahesh Rangarajan, former Director, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi (NMML) very kindly made available platforms of intellectual engagements at Shimla and Delhi. The entire staff of IIAS, particularly the office of the secretary, library staff, academic resource office, publication office and estate office, ensured a hassle-free stay at Shimla, which is one of the most important reasons for the completion of this manuscript.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This work seeks to retain non-English words as they are spoken. Most non-English words in the book are common to Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu. I have chosen a simple form of transliteration rather than using diacritical marks. Such non-English words that have been added to Collins and/or Oxford English dictionaries have not been italicized. Spellings of words in direct quotations have also been left untouched.

INTRODUCTION

Situating popular veneration

Medieval Punjab constitutes an important period for any critical analysis of debate on religion. However, the overwhelming perspective on religion in Punjab emerges out of the Tat-Khalsa trope on the region's historiography that seeks to limit the region's history between two seminal dates – from the birth of Guru Nanak in 1469 to the fall of the Ranjit Singh's kingdom in 1839.¹ Explorations in the 'medieval' are thus significant for my critique of existing historiography that projects backward the modern territorial and ethnic boundaries of reorganized in 1966, on what constituted pre-partition Punjab, hence producing narrow 'presentist', ethnicity-oriented identitarian discourses. These two dates are also significant points of contacts between two political milieus, first the rising predominance of Mughal authority and second the strengthening of the British presence in Punjab. These two dates also fit well into the British imperialist imagination of the region's history.²

The production of Sikh nationalist history (juxtaposed with the history of the region) mobilized for the political present in the past several decades 'shows no indication of losing a privileged discursive position in representations of and by the community'.³ Thus, instead of producing analytical and historically informed discourses, a linear narrative on Sikh-Mughal conflict is foregrounded. Thus, Singh Sabha and Gurdwara reform unproblematically reproduce colonial historiography, one which the scholars invariably sought to critique. Harjot Oberoi remarks that the historiography of the Sikh experience in the nineteenth century – rituals and quotidian practices that constituted the Sikh tradition – is based on two principles, one of absence and the other of negation.⁴ Like the European, they began a journey in search of 'authentic' texts so that the 'correct' articles of faith could be established. Much like the European scholars or late nineteenth century

Sikh reformers, contemporary scholarship either tends to ignore vast terrains of Sikh life in the nineteenth century or views it as a superfluous addition that has to be ignored.⁵ Thus, official Sikh historiography completely undermines the role that Nathpanth and Sufism play in shaping Sikh beliefs and practices and instead ‘establishes that Sikhs were delivered from the bondage of these un-Sikh beliefs by the intervention of the late nineteenth century Singh Sabha movement’.⁶

The Sikh literati who emerged under the shadows of the Raj were, therefore, powerfully influenced by the European discourse on religion and in due course began to exhibit a similar intolerance toward many aspects of the Sikh tradition.⁷ The following discussion will seek to engage with some crucial intellectual debates between the Naths, Sufis and Bhaktas (Nanak in particular) to argue that, despite the polemics of philosophical abstraction, there exists a vibrant narrative thread between these three traditions that defines the contours of popular veneration in contemporary times. I also seek to argue that the evolution of Sufi and Sikh traditions in Punjab cannot be fully appreciated without understanding their dialectics with Naths and vice versa. Further, it is only through the trope of everyday that we can appreciate the interplay of interactive traditions of medieval India in the lived trajectories of contemporary popular veneration.

Approaches to religion in Indian history

Academic discourses on religion in modern India have predominantly searched for ‘essence’ of religious traditions by analysing their ‘source’ and ‘original components’. When this ‘source’ gets recognized, religion is ahistorically established in its ‘pure and unchanging essence’. This largely ‘modern’ conception of religion then seeks to explain the ‘foreign imports’ and ‘influences’ as derivate from ‘original’. In the broader context of comparative study of religion, Carl Ernst believes that this approach also perpetuates a ‘concept of religions as ideologies competing for world domination, and any evidence of dependence on foreign influences is a sure sign of weakness in this game. This model is fine if one is engaging in missionary activity, but for an analytical appreciation of the nature of religion, it is seriously flawed’.⁸

In the intellectual history since the Enlightenment, the term ‘influence’ thus assumed a major category of analysis. A historian of ideas was supposed to simplify ‘complicated philosophical systems into their basic components, much like a chemist reducing compounds to elements’.⁹ These ideas were further complicated by Orientalist

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scholarship produced after a colonial encounter with ancient civilizations of China and India and under the garb of frames like ‘mystic east’, which produced a highly problematic historiography of Indic civilization.¹⁰ European Christianity was initially exempted from such an investigation, and there was an attempt to view non-Christian cultures in terms of their ‘difference’ from the former. ‘This was particularly prominent in the intellectual climate of nineteenth-century colonialism. Theories of evolution and race were freely applied in the comparative study of religion, originally understood as a disingenuous comparison intended to reveal which religion was superior’.¹¹

The influence of Oriental scholarship continues to occupy an important place in the study of religious history, particularly in its relation to Hindus and Muslims in pre-independence South Asia. Eaton quotes from Gerald James Larson’s *India’s Agony Over Religion* to show how Indian history continues to be problematically serialized as a ‘sequence of distinct cultural “layers”, rather like the sedimentary strata successively deposited on the ocean floor. The earliest and deepest layers, building up from the “Indus Valley” to the “Indic (Hindu-Buddhist-Jain)”, are seen as indigenous and authentically South Asian, whereas the more recent layers – the “Indo-Islamic” and “Indo-Anglian” – as alien and fundamentally unassimilable. Indeed, from the late tenth century, we are told, “intrusions” by Muslims “became serious threats to the independence of the subcontinent”’.¹²

In a recent introduction to a paper, Larson once again reinstates his thesis on the religious divide in South Asia:

Whatever else one might want to say about Hindu and Muslim traditions in South Asia since partition in 1947 (and the later emergence of Bangladesh in 1971), in many ways the most important observation is that partition represents a fundamental paradigm shift in religious sensibility among many Hindus and Muslims in South Asia since independence. . . . Partition was not simply an ambivalent political event. It was also a profound and ambivalent religious event in which masses of Hindus and Muslims recognized, many for the first time, that Hindu religious sensibilities could not coexist with Muslim sensibilities in a modern, democratic polity.¹³

Eaton responds to Larson by raising some fundamental methodological questions. He says that while historians are accustomed to

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‘empirically’ gather evidence and build an argument ‘from the ground up’, Larson seems to have followed ‘downwards’ reasoning from the ‘normative model’. He adds:

For him (Larson) . . . South Asian religions can be understood as if they were recipes in a cookbook authored by some unidentified master chef. Thus the recipe for Islam, as presented in the piece, consists of one God, a master text, a master historical narrative, a master community, a credo (“orthodoxy”), and the sacred space of Mecca. The Hindu religion, by contrast, consists of many or no deities, many texts, many narratives, an absence of a credo, and a plurality of normatively hierarchical mini-communities. Without even getting to the question of whether Larson has his recipes right, the problem for the historian or the anthropologist – both of them trained to keep their noses to the ground and not in a cookbook – is that people do not always follow normative recipes, often preferring to concoct their own religious traditions. Or, they might disagree over which recipe is “right”. Indeed, they might not even be aware of the existence of a recipe, or in any event of a single one that applies exclusively to themselves, a condition that fairly describes the greater part of South Asia’s population before the eighteenth century.¹⁴

Eaton thus critiques Larson for reinstating Huntington’s problematic theory of clash of the civilizations and projecting it backward to the tenth century, ‘construing an alien Islam as intruding on an indigenous Hinduism. Such a move, however, prevents him from considering how religious traditions emerge, disappear, or evolve over time, how they adapt to different cultural environments, freely assimilating some bits and pieces of those environments, but not others’.¹⁵

One major question that the historians continue to address is the ‘othering’ of communities and ethnicities that is being continuously produced and reproduced in the urban and rural landscapes of Indian society. For instance, historians have forayed into the deconstruction of the Hindu identity in ancient India produced by colonial scholarship and sought to disentangle the problematic questions of religious and communal identity.¹⁶ While engaging with the term Hinduism, Romila Thapar underlines it as a modern concept ‘resulting from a series of choices made from a range of belief, ritual and practice that were collated into creating a label for this religion’.¹⁷ She adds that the

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reformulation of Hinduism in the colonial times drew more heavily from the daily routine of life and its social sources than from the philosophical.¹⁸ In a further comparison with Semitic religions, Thapar says:

Religions such as Islam or Christianity do diversify into sects but this diversification retains a particular reference point- the historical founder and the teachings embodied generally in a single sacred text or a group of texts regarded as a Canon. The area of discourse among the sects in these religions is tied to the dogma, tenets and theology as enunciated in the beginning. Buddhism and Jainism are up to a point similar except that their non-theism has led to some debate on whether they qualify as 'religion'. However, all these see themselves as part of the historical process of the unfolding of the single religion even though they may have branched off from the mainstream.¹⁹

This problematic 'othering' of Semitic religions, while deconstructing the term Hinduism, invariably orientalizes textual assumptions regarding Islam in South Asia and undervalues religious practices.²⁰ Eaton consistently emphasizes that the reductive and theoretical perspectives only reproduce the limited arguments produced by Euro-American theorists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who habitually saw the world as divided into self-contained and mutually exclusive 'civilisations'.²¹ Such ahistorical approaches overemphasize civilization's 'place of origin'. 'In the case of Islam, then, scholars accordingly focus on seventh century Arabia to discover Islam's "essential nature". Stereotypes associating Islam conceptually with war and geographically with the Arab world persist with remarkable tenacity, as does the quest for civilizational essences and origins'.²²

This scenario has long persisted within the historical debates on religion in Punjab, which has not just been the earliest centre in the northern hemisphere of medieval India to receive Islam and its repository of Sufi shrines and practices, but also provided a fertile ground for the emergence of Sikh *panth*. Both these traditions had strong critical engagement with existing Nath practices yet continuously redefined notions of sacred and rituals of piety. It is this discursive dialectic of religious practices in Punjab that makes the region a fascinating subject of investigation. We shall discuss this thread of argument later in this chapter. However, historical scholarship on the region has

predominantly retained oriental discourses on religion, identity and practices. In the context of Sikh religion, Pashaura Singh says:

The current academic discourse is, however, still theoretically limited as the majority of scholarly works follow with little deviation what we may call the meta-narrative of the Khalsa (that Sikh identity most recognizable as Sikh, one complete with the five corporate symbols known as the Five Ks) and note other ways of being a Sikh whether explicitly or not, as deviations from the 'normative' Khalsa trajectory. The privileging of a normative Sikh tradition from which others diverge is in itself a Sikhism refracted through a western Orientalist lens (as is the term Sikh-ism) and speaks nothing of the Sikh tradition's rich, plural, and inclusive past.²³

In over-emphasising the doctrinal precepts of Sikh tradition and critiquing Harjot Oberoi's emphasis on *sanatanis* to argue for fluidity of Sikh identity, J.S. Grewal accuses the former of precluding the 'possibility of [Sikhism's] any meaningful linkages with the past'. These polemics on the definition of tradition are largely dialects of methodological questions and epistemological interpretations.²⁴ Historians continue to habitually produce neat and linear narrative of Punjab's history and invariably undervalue the complex and overlapping cultural narratives of the past produced within the social history of one community. Thus, while discussing periods of transition, historiography remains entangled with unproblematic narration of the implication of invasions and martyrdom in the history of medieval Punjab.

Nath, Sufi and Bhakti milieu

From the eleventh century, Nathpanth started occupying a predominant presence in the Punjab region, and the Nath practices began to spread throughout northern India, from their centre at Peshawar to all parts of Central Asia and Iran, influencing both Qalandars and Sufis. Known as *siddhas*, yogis or *jogis*, all Naths were hostile to the brahmanical notion of caste distinctions and ritual purity.²⁵ Followers of a monotheistic belief centred on the veneration of formless Shiva, Nath initiated members of all castes, including those outside the Hindu caste system, such as Chandals and sweepers, into their non-hierarchical order.²⁶ Coincidentally, the arrival of Sufis in India took place not long after the Nath or Kanphata yogis became organized in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Naths were free to drop in for meals at Sufi

hospices, which in turn were open to any and all visitors. Moreover, in a country where cremation was the preferred funeral method, both groups practiced burial; Sufi tombs, to the untutored eye, must have fit the model of the lingam shrines or samadhis set up over yogis, who were customarily buried in the lotus position. The similarity between yogis and Sufis extended to the point that the heads of Nath yogi establishments became known by the Persian term *pir*, the common designation for a Sufi master.²⁷

Gorakhnath is said to have founded the ascetic Nath Sampradaya and to have been the first teacher of Hatha Yoga. Several Sanskrit texts on Hatha Yoga are attributed to Gorakhnath, as well as an extensive corpus of vernacular verses in the tradition of *nirguna bhakti*.²⁸ Naths live by a *dhuni* or sacred fire. The central object of worship in several monasteries, and for the itinerant *jamat*, was the *patr*, a pot containing items emblematic of the Naths: the *singnad janeu*; earrings; a *rudraksha mala*; and a chillum, the clay pipe used for smoking cannabis.²⁹ The *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati* and some important works of Gorakhnath's followers formed the basis of the doctrines of the Naths and offered a common ground for the exchange of ideas on Hatha Yoga with such Sufis as Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri and Baba Farid. Discussions on the conception of the Ultimate Reality enhanced the mutual respect of the Naths and the Sufis.³⁰

There is a long and complex history of 'Muslim' interest in yoga, going back 1,000 years to the famous scholar al-Biruni (d. 1048), who not only wrote a major Arabic treatise on Indian sciences and culture but also translated a version of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* into Arabic.³¹ Sufis were particularly engaged with the Nath yogi text *Amritkunda (The Pool of Nectar)*, one of the most significant treatises on Hatha Yoga dealing with a complicated psycho-physical set of techniques of yogic practices. These practices include divination by control of breath through the left and right nostrils, summoning female spirits that can be identified as yoginis, and performing meditations on the chakra centres accompanied by recitation of Sanskrit mantras.³² Laying emphasis on the human body as the microcosm of the macrocosm, the *Amritkunda* deals at some length with the importance of this belief. The work goes on to prescribe exercises by which one could achieve the Nath yogi goal of transubstantiation of the body into a state of samadhi.³³

Amritkunda had a wide circulation among Sufi circles and was translated in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish and later in Urdu. It is believed that it was translated by Qazi Ruknuddin Samarqandi at Lakhnauti in the thirteenth century, who was initiated into Hatha

Yoga principles by a siddha called Bhojar Brahman. The work was later translated into Persian. A further Arabic version was again prepared by a Brahman from Kamrup, apparently in collaboration with a Muslim scholar. This version was re-translated into Persian by Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus Shattari in the sixteenth century.³⁴ It was later adapted as a short Persian text entitled *Risala-i Wujudiyya* (*The Treatise on the Human Body*) on yoga and meditation attributed to the founder of the Chishti Sufi order, Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1236).³⁵ The figure of Muinuddin is important as a symbol for the encounter between ‘Muslims’ and ‘Hindus’, characterized by deep appreciation of India’s spiritual and aesthetic heritage.³⁶

Amritkunda kept inspiring an entire generation of Chishti Sufi mystics and found a significant expression among a prominent Chishti Sabri mystic, Abdul Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537), who was probably more familiar with the yoga of the Naths than anyone else in that order. He also composed a treatise called *Rushdnama*, or *The Book of Guidance*, with considerable yogic content. Rizvi quotes Shaikh Abdul Quddus to identify intriguing similarities between Nath and Sufi ideas and practices. Nath *ulti sadhna* was equivalent to Sufi *salat-i-makus* and *namaz-i-makus*. Similarly, Alakh-Nath, *pranayama* and *dwaitad-waita-vilakshana-vada* had parallels with Sufi Alakh Niranjan, *pas-i anfas* and *wahdat al-wujud*. Further, while a formless representation of *Onkar* was the basis of *pranayama* in the Nath tradition, *Onkar* in Sufism was achievable through *zikh*.³⁷ Thus, contrary to Orientalist expectations, Sufi engagement with yoga was not to be found at the historical beginnings of the Sufi tradition, and it was most highly developed, unsurprisingly, in India.³⁸

The relationship between Sufism and yoga gets further complicated by the participation of Muslims in the Nath yogi tradition. Out of the thirteen principal Nath sub-orders described by Briggs, one, the Rawal or Nagnath order, located in the Punjab, consisted of Muslims.³⁹ Many of these interactions evolved from a dialectical manoeuvring of borrowing and confrontation, dialogue and triumph, conversation and conversion, appreciation and critique. But the most significant component of this process was the way in which Nath practices were assimilated and subsumed in Sufi practices, leading to a unique residue in the realm of contemporary popular practices. We will discuss this point later, but before that let us have a brief discussion on similar debates between Nath siddhas and Guru Nanak.

Among the eleven major Nath *jogis* of the subcontinent, six lived or settled in Punjab. The popularity of Gorakhnath and Balnath/Balakhnath/Jalandharnath (associated with Tilla Jogian near Peshawar

was recognized as the headquarters of the Naths until partition), Chaurangi Nath (son of King Devpal of Bengal, Puran Bhagat's principal shrine in at Sialkot), Carpat Nath (who lived in Chamba),⁴⁰ Rattan Nath⁴¹ (thirteenth century, a disciple of Gorakhnath and famous both as a Nath and a Sufi, he lived at Nepal and Bathinda) and Mastnath (eighteenth century saint who lived at Asthal Bohar near Rohtak) point to a significant presence of Nath influence in the region. There were many other *deras* that were spread across the province in medieval times and patronized by the Mughal state.⁴²

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century discourses around Sikh history were involved in rhetoric to prove the novelty and sovereignty in the intellectual ascendancy of Guru Nanak from the Sant tradition.⁴³ This came predominantly in response to the subsuming arguments of Arya Samaj and the Sanatan Sabha and led to fierce debates on whether 'Sikhs are Hindus'.⁴⁴ The most immediate and rigorous impact of this process was what Harjot Oberoi calls 'the construction of religious boundaries', whereby identities were sought to be sanitized, religious practices redefined and an entire corpus of Sikh literature was reinterpreted and purged of perceived non-Sikh influences.⁴⁵ This debate not only gave prominence to text over tradition but also inspired a long-term investigation of Sikh tenets and their ideals.⁴⁶ A significant repercussion of this shift was the growth of limited theological discourses and the demise of comparative studies on religious traditions in Punjab.⁴⁷

A recent scholarship of Kamala Elizabeth Nayar and Jaswinder Singh Sandhu on *Siddh Gost*, a discourse between the Nath *jogis* and Guru Nanak, is a pleasant yet rare departure from this milieu.⁴⁸ *Siddh Gost* forms a significant component of Sikh dialectics with a contemporary religious milieu and outlines Guru Nanak's understanding of 'Ture' yoga. Composed by Guru Nanak, it is one of the many hymns (Var Ramkali *salok* 2–7 of *pauri* 12)⁴⁹ contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. While there remains ambiguity regarding the time and place of its composition, the encounter still is important. This encounter is further detailed in Bhai Gurdas's *Varan*, as are the various hagiographies about Guru Nanak's spiritual journey (*udasis*) to the "north country", where many followers of the Gorakhnath tradition lived.⁵⁰ *Puratan Janamsakhi* describes Guru's fifth journey, during which Guru Nanak is said to have met several Gorakhnathis (Figure 1.1).⁵¹

Schomer suggests that the Sants were closer to the heterodox religious traditions of India – the Buddhists, the Jains and the esoteric Shaivite tradition of the Nath yogis – than to the orthodox mainstream of Vaishnava devotional religion. However, the general scholarly

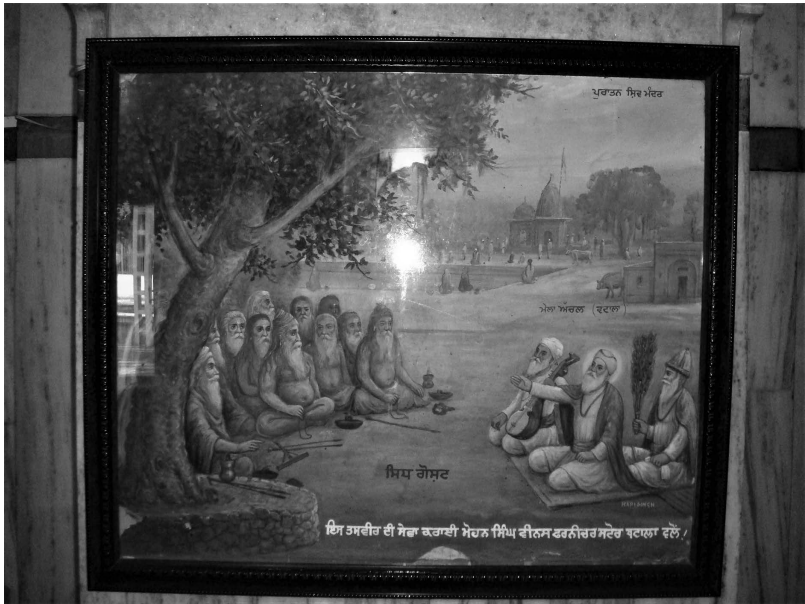


Figure I.1 A painting on *Siddh Gost* by Hari Singh at Gurdwara Achal Sahib
 Source: Courtesy of Gurdwara Achal Sahib

consensus is that the Saints represent a synthesis of Vaishnava Bhakti and elements from the tradition of the Naths. The Saints also have many points of commonality with the Sufis, who were present in India from the twelfth century and contributed to the religious environment in which the Sant tradition evolved.⁵² While the argument on the influence of the Sant tradition on the Sikh tradition has, for the most part, been accepted, several Sikh scholars contend that Guru Nanak was not, in actuality, influenced by the Nath tradition, basing their argument on the fact that Sikhism is founded on the path of the householder that values social involvement, such as selfless service (*seva*).⁵³

Nayar and Sandhu, however, exemplify that Guru Nanak nevertheless does appropriate the Nath terminology of Hatha Yoga, but he modifies it for the sake of teaching his own spiritual message. In presenting the spiritual path of self-renunciation while living in the world, Guru Nanak actually transforms the traditional system of yoga. Thus, while Guru Nanak does use terms associated with the Nath tradition, he changes them to fit the larger context of his perspective on ‘world’

and 'liberation'. This incorporation of the concepts from the Nath tradition suggests a certain degree of influence regardless of the modification of the terms by Guru Nanak in the larger context of Sikhism.⁵⁴ A mid-seventeenth century account, *Dabistan*, speaks of Nanak's praise for Muslims, and also the avatars, gods and goddesses of the Hindus, but he regarded them all as created beings, not the Creator. He denied the (possibility of) Descent (of God into human soul) or Union (between God and man).⁵⁵ Nanak's philosophy emerged out of the redefinition of the wider complex of religious traditions of his times where borrowing and critique went hand in hand.⁵⁶

Thus, while Nanak significantly departs from Nath yogis on questions of renunciation, external symbols and Hatha Yoga, he appropriates and/or redefines the concepts like *shabad*, ultimate reality, *sansar* and *maya* to propose the path of *gurmukh* or self-renunciation while 'living-in-this-world' and reconciling the two polarities of the ascetic and the householder ideals.⁵⁷ Equally significant are hagiographic narratives around Guru Nanak's travels and miracles at Kaba, discourse with deceased Sufi mystics and controversy over his death, which can be located in the prevailing repository of meanings, idioms and templates also associated with Nath and other Sants, the frameworks of which defined aspects of divinity, miracle and devotion in medieval India.⁵⁸ It is thus important to note that despite political differences and violence that marked the latter phase of Mughal history, the mystical verses in the Guru Granth Sahib attributed to Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar, the thirteenth-century Chishti Sufi saint of Punjab were not removed.⁵⁹

Aditya Behl critiques the tendency among cultural historians of the period to list events, kings, battles, and literary and religious texts in chronological order, neatly divided into separate compartments such as Hindu and Muslim and subdivided in each case into art, architecture, languages and history. This compartmentalized history has made it difficult to account for, or even to discern, larger cultural processes or smaller episodes of interaction and assimilation of the everyday culture of Indian sub-continent.⁶⁰ Thus, the literary and popular traditions show a remarkable resilience even in the wake of later hostility between Sikhs and Mughals. Aquil highlights that 'implicit in the detailed treatment of Nanak in eighteenth century Urdu intellectual milieu of Nazir Akbarabadi's poetical works, as also in the hugely popular collection of essays, *Qisas-i-Hind*, and the politically charged compositions of Allama Iqbal, is shared cultural and religious heritage, which was getting ruptured for political and dogmatic reasons'.⁶¹

British colonialism and the 'identity' conundrum

British colonialism induced a complex variant of social formation in Punjab; agrarian changes, revenue policies, and administrative and juridical reorganization that led to the commercialization of agriculture; the narrow codification of customary laws; registration of private property in the name of the male head of the family; seething agrarian distress; and the invention of martiality to give impetus to the young Punjabi recruitment to the British Indian Army had serious implications for the social milieu of Punjab.⁶² Historians and anthropologists have further analysed the role that the census played in redefining the contours of religion and identity in India.⁶³ What historians have perhaps not attempted is delineating the parallel process of colonialism and identity formation. The following discussion will place together the existing scholarship on colonialism and reform movements and argue that there is a strong correlation between these processes, each complementing the other at several historical junctures. With colonialism I mean the structures of governance both administrative and economic, as well as perspectives that influenced both the European and native writings.

The origins of the 'language' of reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a direct repercussion of the invention of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in the colonial discourse, which juxtaposed the binary division on native and British sensibilities, respectively. In both the social and administrative spheres, this resulted in vigorous debates on questions of identity, the modernity of which depended invariably on mimicking the missionary sensibilities of the relationship between the Church, state and society. Most religious institutions, which until the early nineteenth century were highly localized, struggled to reorganize themselves. Reform inspired both centralizing tendencies as well as distancing through redefinition of sacred texts, ritual performance and reclamation of shrine spaces.

The practice of census left diverse strata of Indian society to the mercy of enumerators and colonial ethnographers who sought to map the notion of caste, race, tribe and religious identities in India, replicating the demographic tools invented in the West.⁶⁴ These categories were unproblematically implemented and gradually presumed standard axioms of the colonial enterprise. In the context of Africa, Mamdani laments that little has been done by nationalist and Marxist historians to historicize race and ethnicity as political identities undergirded and reproduced by the political legacy of colonialism.⁶⁵ This project was an important part of the colonial discourse of homogenization and

systematization where identities were sought to be refined and fixed within the frames often ascribed with religious identity. For the first time in Indian history, problematic categories of majority and minority communities were determined. The introduction of competition for employment and political alignments created artificial ethno-religious solidarities. Reformers co-opted colonial ethnographic discourse and fiercely propagated fixed notion of religious identities. In the early twentieth century, these issues led to the emergence of some heated polemical debates among Singh Sabhaites and Arya Samajis on the notion of Sikh/Hindu identity.⁶⁶

Established in 1873, the Singh Sabha sought to reaffirm Sikh identity in the face of two threats: the perceived reversion to alleged ‘Hindu’ practices and the aggressive proselytizing efforts of Arya Samaj⁶⁷ and Christian missionaries. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Tat (‘Pure Essence’) Khalsa, the dominant wing of the Singh Sabha, had attempted to eradicate the last traces of religious diversity within Sikh *panth* and establish clear norms of belief and practices. In effect, they made the Khalsa tradition the standard of orthodoxy for all Sikhs during the colonial period. It was an ‘essentialist reconstruction’ of a uniform identity suitable for modern times.⁶⁸ Further, ‘the new cultural elite among the Sikhs aspired to reach the apex of a “more homogenous”, less “oral and popular” oriented, textually focused “syndicated” tradition that roughly corresponded to the typologies of religion furthered by the colonists’.⁶⁹

Harjot Oberoi critiques the reformist agenda and emphasizes that religious boundaries in nineteenth-century Punjab were highly flexible and the categories ‘Sikh’, ‘Muslim’, and ‘Hindu’ semiotically did not have the same implications they do today.⁷⁰ He emphasizes the significance of popular centres of devotion, like the shrines dedicated to Sakhi Sarwar,⁷¹ Gugga Pir, and goddesses among others, as shared sites for the people of pre-partition Punjab. The movement for reform and ‘textual revivalism’ of dominant religious traditions critiqued these shared popular edifices. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century arguments in favour of saint veneration gradually started losing ground and came under serious attack of the reformist movement. The reformist discourse served to redefine the boundaries of religious communities and was directly related to the discourse of ‘Sikh’, ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ nationalisms. Saint veneration also came under serious strain due to the Wahabi rhetoric of reform. Peter van der Veer wonders whether saint veneration survived the strong rhetoric of revivalism.⁷²

This rhetoric also strengthened the emerging fault lines of communal identities that were now sought to be played out in the selective

narrativization of history. The framework for such an enterprise had already been provided by the European historians (particularly Orientalists) who, despite the early nineteenth century attempts of Rattan Singh Bhangu and Ram Sukh Rao for a defence of Sikh sovereignty, overwhelmingly depended on Mughal sources and Persian texts and produced a narrative of conflict between Sikhs and Muslims.⁷³ Taking the debate back to sultanate India, Eaton argues that contemporary Rajput, Brahman and other Indian elites saw things differently. From the eighth to the fourteenth centuries,

contemporary Sanskrit sources referred to invaders or immigrants from the Iranian plateau not by their religion, but by their linguistic identity – most typically, as Turks (“*Turuska*”). This suggests that whatever medieval Indo-Persian chroniclers might have thought, contemporary Indian elites did not regard the religious traditions of the newcomers as sufficiently alien to South Asia, or even as sufficiently remarkable, to warrant identifying those people as Muslims.⁷⁴

Hence, ‘if non-Muslim Indians contemporary with the advent of Indo-Turkish rule did not think in terms of an “Islamic conquest”, a “Muslim era”, or even of “Muslims”, how, then, did these categories become so compelling for historians in the colonial and post-colonial eras⁷⁵ and how do these perspectives become a predominant concern of intellectuals and reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, later producing a ‘selective amnesia of victimhood’?⁷⁶ European scholars, especially Orientalists, privileged the use of Indo-Persian chronicles over other kinds of pre-modern historical data, which naturally inclined them to view Islam in much the same terms as did the authors of those chronicles – as a ‘foreign’ intrusion in South Asia.⁷⁷ Reforms also tried to purge religious practices of folk elements that were absorbed through varied levels of proximity with lived milieus and lead to the redrawing of boundaries around religion. It is significant to chart these shifts in religious practice as they struggled through the rhetoric of reform. Veena Das underlines that ‘while it is easier to identify and track dramatic events (conquests, martyrdom, partition), it is harder to follow the slow tectonic shifts through which ongoing negotiations between different religious groups take place within local communities and which might, in time, lead to cataclysmic changes’.⁷⁸

Intriguingly, the colonial military discourse and canal colonization also produced similar trajectories of identity. Yong’s examination of military expansion in the Punjab and its deep connect with the reform

movement present an interesting example of how structures produced by the colonial state get subsumed into elite discourses. The invention of the Sikh ‘martiality’ legitimized the identity of predominantly ‘Jats’ as a martial race and facilitated their recruitment in the British Indian army. This became particularly significant in the aftermath of the revolt of 1857 when several revolting regiments from other parts India were disbanded. British army manuals produced during this period of time emphasized and promoted the maintenance of Khalsa Sikh identity.⁷⁹ During the peak of the Gurdwara reform movement (1920s), the government was alarmed by the ability of the Sikhs to organize themselves on military lines through ex-soldiers (demobilized and discharged after WWI) who had acquired these skills in the Indian army.⁸⁰ But, despite tensions with the Akali Dal in the 1920s, Sikh sensitivities were assuaged, and their material and religious demands were carefully managed by the British. However, from the 1930s the Sikhs were no longer content with the special minority status whose interests were maintained by the imperial state, and they began asserting a form of territorial nationalism based on an ethno-religious identity.⁸¹ Thus, the foundations of aggressive politics based on identity were already been in place before the politics of partition unfolded in the 1940s.

Canal colonization was another significant tool that facilitated planned agrarian expansion and prompted peasantization and sedentarization of predominantly Jat peasantry from the central districts of colonial Punjab to the newly developed canal colonies.⁸² It is not a coincidence that central districts of Punjab were also a major recruiting ground for the British Indian Army and also the focal point of reform movements. This entire backdrop provided an effective base for mobilization of the Jat peasantry in the movement for Gurdwara Reform and in a process that redefined their hitherto fluid relationship with Sikhism. The enactment of the Sikh Gurdwara Act in 1925 furthered the process of centralized management of gurdwaras; by 1950, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee established itself as the central authority on all questions of religious discipline.⁸³ In that very year, it published a manual entitled *Sikh Rabit Maryada*, which came to be regarded as the authoritative guide to orthodox Sikh doctrine and behaviour.⁸⁴

Shrines and popular veneration

Punjab had a significant presence of Nath practices and repository of shrines associated with Nath *jogis*. Two of the earliest major Nath centres, which date back at least to the sixteenth century or earlier,

were Jogi Tilla in Punjab and Gorkhatri near Peshawar (both in Pakistan). Until Partition, Tilla Jogian (which has also been known as both Balnath Tilla and Gorakh Tilla) was generally recognized as the headquarters of the Naths in the region. In addition to these, two other previously popular Nath pilgrimage places are also now in Pakistan: Sialkot (the home of Puran Bhagat) and Hing Laj. The latter is situated in a remote part of the Makran coast in Baluchistan and was the most important of the Naths' pilgrimage. It was the duty of every yogi to visit it once.⁸⁵ So predominant was the metaphor of *jogi* in the Indus region that the yogi became a popular figure in poetry written in Punjabi and Sindhi. The writings of the great Sindhi Sufi poet and Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (d. 1752) furnish a very positive evaluation of yogis. He himself had worn the ochre robe and wandered like a Hindu sanyasin, visiting the major yogi places of pilgrimage in the Indus region while travelling with yogis for three years. One of his cycles of poetry, the *Sur Ramkali*, is dedicated to the praise of the ideal yogis. Punjabi Sufi poet Bulleh Shah (d. 1758) similarly used folk motifs that portray the archetypal yogi as the mystical beloved.⁸⁶ Similarly, Ranjha, the hero of the Waris Shah's eighteenth-century Punjabi love poem, gets initiated by Balnath/Balak Nath in the Kanphata *jogi* order at his Tilla in the Salt Range (now in Pakistan).

Besides the shrines/*deras* of the *jogis*, in the centuries before the British arrived, networks of shrines loosely linked with Sufi orders spread through much of the province as the descendants and successors (*khalifas*) of many of the major saints established their own *khanqahs*⁸⁷ (hospices), which in turn developed into new Sufi shrines. In addition to these imposing Sufi shrines, there was an emergence of 'lesser shrines' dedicated to one or many major or minor Sufi centres of medieval Punjab.⁸⁸ The networks became particularly dense in parts of the Indus Valley; in south-western Punjab, the shrines of the descendants of Syed Jalaluddin Bukhari of Uch dotted the countryside when the British arrived. Though loosely linked, each of these shrines maintained its distinctive identity and apparently played a crucial role in the 'Islamization' of new territory.⁸⁹ However, the term Islamization only partially explains the transformation of the native population and fails to capture the significant process of acculturation that does not necessarily involve conversion. We shall discuss this problematic in detail later in Chapter 1.

Hence, even if the medieval state perceived these shrines as local outposts of Islam, to the population at large, they represented sources of power to all in need of superhuman intervention. They were open to people from all religious persuasions. Liebeskind terms this all-inclusive

approach as the local face of Islam.⁹⁰ There was yet another practice of constructing ‘memorial shrines’, which gradually developed into distinctive centres of cultural practices, often denoting local as well as long-term geographical influences. These memorial shrines existed in the realm of the popular and inspired many folk writers of medieval and modern Punjab, evolving into a distinct form of ‘saint veneration’. Literary representation in Punjabi popular narratives, such as *Hir-Ranjha*, suggests that people participated in saint veneration without recourse to or invoking pre-existing religious identities. The practices involved reinterpretation of piety and constituted beliefs that stood alongside the formal categories of religious identity, without necessarily being in conflict with them. The repeated depiction of this form of devotional practice in the most ubiquitous Punjabi cultural form suggests the importance of this social formation in Punjabi popular imagination and in Punjab’s religious and cultural history.⁹¹

Significantly, these popular shrines emerged as centres of inter-communal dialogue and evolved into a distinct form of cultural practices. One particularly distinct character of this social formation was that while western Punjab (now in Pakistan) became a major centre of emergence and dissemination of Sufism in the medieval period, it was eastern Punjab (India) that was the recipient of the vast influence of sacred shrines in the Sind, Multan, Bahawalpur and Montgomery districts of colonial India. The frontier districts of east (pre-partition) Punjab had a direct influence of the major shrines of Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya at Multan, Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar (popularly known as Baba Farid or Ganjshakar) at Pakpattan, Shaikh Ali Hujwiri (popularly known as Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh) and Hazrat Mian Mir at Lahore. Besides, the shrines associated with Ajmer Sharif and the Chishti *silsila* in Delhi (Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya and Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki), Kaliyar (Sabir Pak) and Panipat (Bu Ali Qalandar Panipatti) continued to influence the popular beliefs of colonial Punjab. But the form in which Sufism came and was disseminated in these regions was different from the major centres. East (Indian) Punjab was not known for major Chishti and Qadiri centres of Sufi mystics. Rather, minor/memorial shrines dedicated to either major Sufis or the more popular saints emerged as a source of veneration. Among the most important popular saints were Sultan (Sakhi) Sarwar/Baba Lakhdatta, Goga/Gugga/Zahra Pir, Haider Shaikh, Gaus Pak and Khwaja Khizr. Often, the local Hindu deities or, later, even Sikh gurus came to be associated with these ‘lesser shrines’ and led to the emergence of prevalent popular ethos.

One significant example of this evolution can be found in the continuous rendition of the *qissa* of *Hir-Ranjha* from Damodar (‘Hindu’) in

the early seventeenth century to Hafiz Shah Jahan Maqbul and Waris Shah ('Muslims') in the eighteenth century and Kishan Singh Arif ('Sikh') in the late nineteenth century.⁹² While each retelling critiqued the creed of orthodoxy, their major sources of piety, spiritual strength and dreams were almost always *jogis* and *pirs*. Despite being a story of 'Muslim' lovers and the communalization of the contemporary public spheres, the *qissa* of Hir-Ranjha finds a remarkable resonance in Punjabi identity. These popular narratives exemplify the role that shrines and popular mysticism played in the lived lives of Punjabis. *Hir Waris* continues to be the guiding Sufi text of social critique and constitutes an important social text on the veneration of Sufi saints.⁹³

Twentieth century Punjab was, however, mired by contestations and conflict over the control of sacred shrines of various hues.⁹⁴ Propelled by the movement for reform and revivalism, identity was the most important marker of such contestations. Reformers engaged in intense debates to define the 'dont's' of their perceived religious affiliation. However, a majority of debates that have looked into the question of gurdwara reform or debate over shrines have overwhelmingly dealt with debates on major shrines. While it is true that gurdwaras were central to this entire debate, what is left out from such analysis is how reform redefined the notions of piety and sacredness, invariably claiming the periphery of its physical landscape. These events help us in reinstating academic debates on the 'centre' (for instance, the sanctum of Golden Temple standing in the midst of the sacred tank, as also core 'Sikh' ritual practices) and the 'periphery' (outer edges of the sacred tank, as well as popular veneration) and the role played by this struggle in redefining the ethical and philosophical foundations of the core (also defined as relating to 'text') and securing the periphery, thereby restricting its access for everyday beliefs and lived practices. These contestations had a profound impact on the dominant perception of popular veneration of *pirs* and *jogis*.

As a result of the Gurdwara reform movement (1920s) hundreds of ('Sikh') gurdwaras were transferred from their traditional claimants (Udasi Sikhs)⁹⁵ to the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). This struggle was perpetuated during 1921–1922 and even after the enactment of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act in 1925, legal and political battles over control of sacred shrines continued for the entire period of the twentieth century. Serious efforts were made, for instance, to purge the vicinity of the Golden Temple of perceived 'Hindu' practices, which had also led to a controversy in the year 1905. In the first week of May 1905, the Manager of the Golden Temple Arur Singh removed idols from the precincts of the Golden Temple

and debarred the entry of accompanying Brahmins.⁹⁶ This incident led to a long debate among the reformers, who discussed and detailed both the legitimacy of the Manager's actions as well as the pujaris' right to perform idol worship.

The Tribune maintained that the Golden Temple was held in veneration by both Sikhs and Hindus. However, the *Khblasa Samachar* observed that it was not against idol worship but the Golden Temple was for the worship of one God and idols could not be allowed there. Ruchi Ram Sahni,⁹⁷ a leading Brahmo Samajist, similarly justified the removal of idols from the Golden Temple.⁹⁸ Harjot Oberoi extends this debate further by bringing in a discussion on Sanatani Sikhs who believed that, just as avatars are born out of Brahma and on finishing their earthly mission are once again united with Brahma, Guru Nanak was one such avatar born to save people from the perils of ignorance and to reveal once again the *sanatan* faith that had been lost in an age of darkness. Thus, in everyday life, the *sanatan* religious paradigm resulted in paradoxical mixtures and produced a kaleidoscopic Sikh society that is hard to understand by the logic of European enlightenment. The *sanatan* Sikhs clearly did not support such a unilinear vision of progress. They had received different lessons from their readings of history.⁹⁹ Modern narratives around religion are therefore completely bereft of social reality and manufacture 'neat' categories of religious traditions that read like impermeable high walls of institutions complete in their own sense and bereft of influences from other traditions. Significantly, if this metaphor of 'high walls' is applied to religious structures, it produces similar interpretations.

An analysis of the images from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century amply illustrate the ways in which the heatedly debated periphery was secured and redefined following the wave of reform (Figures I.2–I.8). These rare set of paintings/prints not only capture the monumental legacy of Golden Temple but also illustrate the changing periphery of the sanctum sanctorum, the ghats along the sacred *sarovar* and the everyday domains of ritual and veneration. The first set of paintings/prints from the mid to late nineteenth century include paintings by William Carpenter (1854, Figure I.2; 1864, Figure I.4), Edwin Lord Weeks (1890, Figure I.5) and two unknown paintings/bazaar prints (1860, Figure I.3a & b, 1890, Figure I.6). The second set is of a painting by Charles W. Bartlett (1916, Figure I.7). In front of the imposing edifice of the Golden temple, the periphery in Figure I.2 is represented (left to right) by an Akali, men performing ritual bathing, women in groups, a bull, a Granthi performing path and some men around him in attention, and two men (probably) crushing

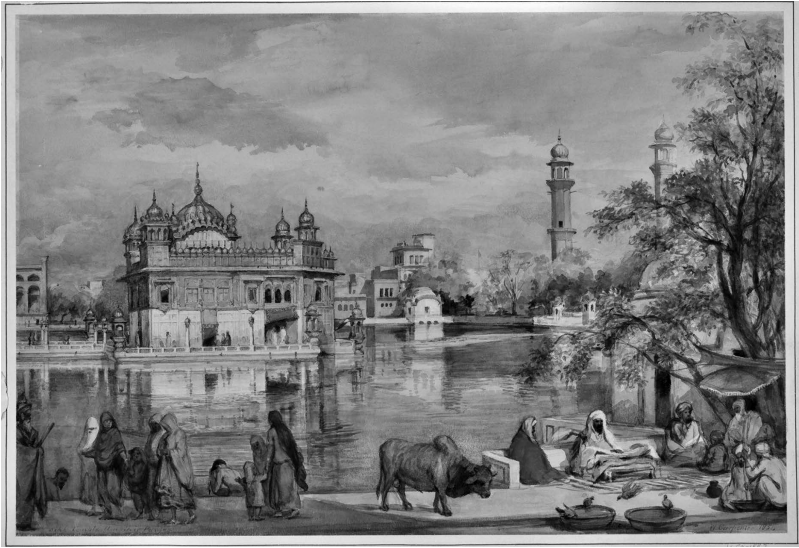


Figure I.2 A painting by William Carpenter, 1854

Source: Courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum

cannabis. Many of these themes remain constant in most reproductions of these paintings.

The panoramic Figure I.3 (a and b) portrays a stretched periphery; four men can be seen seated in yogic/meditating posture, and at least one of them on the extreme right is an *udasi*/yogi. Figure I.4 drawn in front of the Akal Takth similarly portrays an Akali, a *sadh* (ascetic), a Sikh family, a group of musicians and resting pilgrims. Figure I.5 is a painting of Edwin Lord Weeks that depicts pilgrims resting under the shade of trees, a florist and a group of men reading the granth. Figure I.6 is a hand-coloured print from a British Museum album, which is otherwise mostly made up of regimental photographs, dinner menus, etc., depicting various hues of devotees along the *sarovar-udasi*/yogi instructing a woman, woman with her son, a priest performing puja and attended by a man and woman, and yet another set of devotees attending two *sadhs*/yogis. The last painting (Figure I.7) from the early twentieth century blurs the pilgrims as compared to the structural edifice. As compared to the first set of images, the periphery in these paintings has curiously transformed and is almost rendered insignificant. Today, the Golden Temple (Figure I.8) almost looks like a fortress

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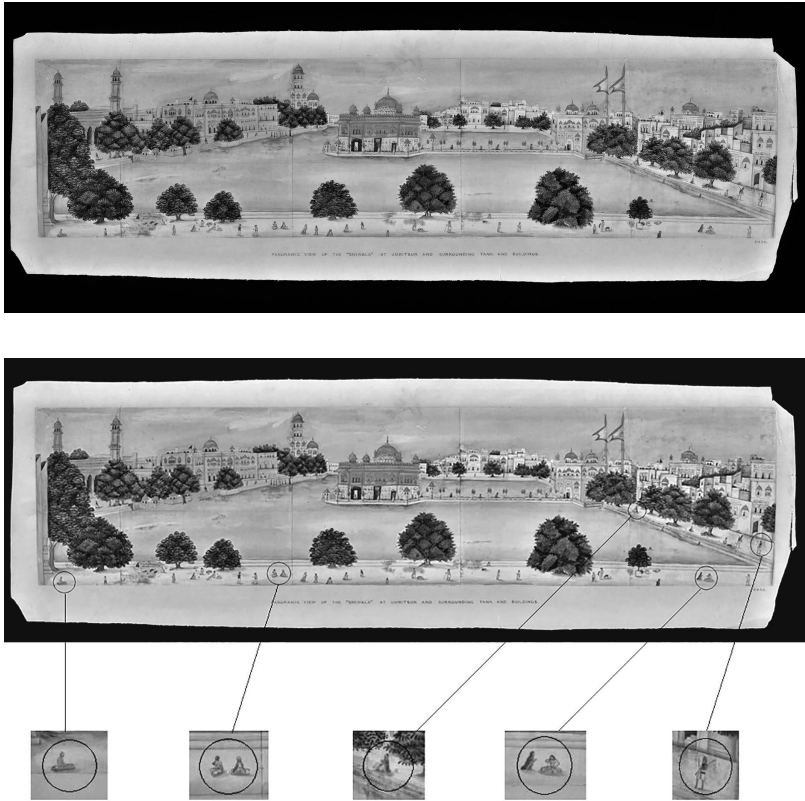


Figure 1.3a and 1.3b An unknown bazaar print, 1860

Source: Courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum

secured from all four sides with multi-storeyed serais and guarded by Sikh attendants at all the entrances, instructing devotees to follow the code of conduct for entry into the premises. The expulsion of Udasi Sikh caretakers from the Golden Temple not only consolidated the Tat Khalsa rhetoric of reform, through which the periphery was secured, guarded and fortified, but also led to invention of competitive zones of ritual and piety, purging it of 'polluting' influences of perceived 'Hindu' practices. The Durgiana Temple is one such example of a shrine that appeared as soon as the Golden Temple was transferred to the SGPC.



Figure 1.4 A painting by William Carpenter, 1864

Source: Courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum



Figure 1.5 A painting of the Golden Temple (Amritsar) by Edwin Lord Weeks, 1890

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Weeks_Edwin_The_Golden_Temple_Amritsar_1890.jpg

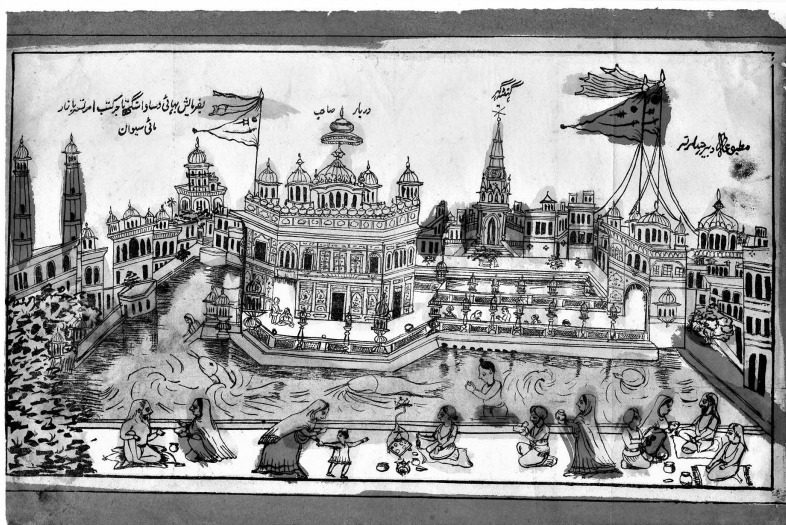


Figure I.6 Hand coloured print from an album, 1890s

Source: Courtesy of British Museum

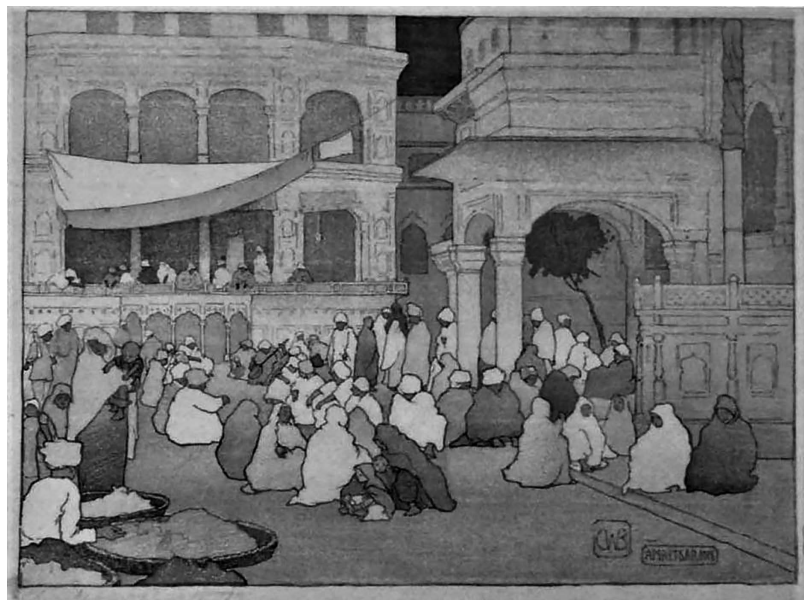


Figure I.7 A painting by Charles W. Bartlett, 1920

Source: Courtesy of Honolulu Academy of Arts



Figure I.8 A contemporary image of the *parikarma* of the Golden Temple

Source: Photograph by author

The Gurdwara Reform exemplifies how shrine spaces were claimed and redefined through the rhetoric of reform. It also indicates toward the larger process in which reform attempted to purge individuals of diversity and heterogeneity. This rhetoric was not limited to the perceived threat of all subsuming Hinduism; reformers also wrote and published popular tracts against ‘Sikh’ veneration of ‘Muslim’ saints. Anshu Malhotra has analysed how reformers like Giani Ditt Singh wrote popular tracts (*Sadhu Dayanand Nal Mera Sambad*, *Guga Gopora Te Sultan Puara*, etc.) dissuading Sikhs from venerating shrines of popular pirs and mystics.¹⁰⁰ Not only reformers of the Singh Sabha but also Arya Samaj and Anjumans dissuaded Hindus and Muslims respectively from venerating dargahs as these were rhetorically condemned as promoting forms of ‘Muslim’ worship and ‘Hindu’ worship, respectively. It is pertinent to note that all the reformers were united in their condemnation of saint veneration. Curiously, these were centres of popular veneration and attended by Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. These popular shrines were now perceived as threats to the imagined (reformed) ideas of religiosity and identity.

Most scholarship on reform movements present a linear narrative of transformation that reform brought to the respective communities. This perspective is not at much variance from popular tracts on these movements and hence fail to capture the residue as well as existing contours of popular veneration in contemporary Punjab. Post-independence scholarship has presented these shrines as centres of pluralism and syncretism (discussed in detail in Chapter 1). It will nevertheless be curious to know what happened to these shrines when attempts were made to dissuade Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims from their veneration of popular saints by Singh Sabha, Gurdwara reform, Anjumans and Arya Samaj movement. For reformers, the issue in this debate was not whether saint veneration promotes harmony and tolerance but whether it is a correct and orthodox practice. A long-standing argument against the veneration of saints is that the imputation of divine powers to the saint and the tomb threatens the monotheistic nature of Islam, an 'innovation' contrary to Sunna, the example of the Prophet. In the Indian context, saint worship is often condemned as an imitation of Hindu polytheism. The argument is put forward most forcefully by the sixteenth-century Naqsbandi Sufi leader Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and gains force with the teachings of the eighteenth-century Shah Wali-Allah of Delhi. In the nineteenth century, the Arab reformist movement of the Wahhabis influences a number of the Indian movements that oppose saint veneration.¹⁰¹

Situating popular veneration of Sufi shrines

Until recently, the entire range of scholarship on shrines in India, from Marc Gaborieau, Henri Chambert-Loir and Claude Guillot's essays on cult of shrines in Islamic history to more recent works by P.M. Currie, Richard M. Eaton and Christian W. Troll, has understood them from the dominant perspective of Muslim piety and devotion.¹⁰² Anna Bigelow's work (which is perhaps the only significant exception) on the shrines of Shaikh Haider at Malerkotla and on Baba Farid's shrine at Faridkot brings research on the theme closer to an understanding of the contemporary process of non-Muslim veneration.¹⁰³ Her work, however, continues to be limited to major shrines and to the centrality of a Sufi shrine as a site of pluralism.

A typical Sufi shrine in Punjab comprises of a dargah (a cenotaph built around or above the grave of a mystic) and in some cases an adjacent mosque and a langar khana. While many shrines (depending on the spiritual affiliation) have some restriction on the entry of women inside the sanctum, no such restriction exists in Punjab

except for the shrine of the orthodox Nasqbandi Sufi Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. While every Thursday remain an important day to offer *dua* the shrine, longer celebrations are held during *urs* (death anniversary), the duration of which varies from one day to almost a week.¹⁰⁴ *Urs* is usually accompanied by *sama* and qawwali and continuous langar. In Punjab, *urs* is also accompanied by a fete, an occasion for enjoyment and celebration. In rural shrines, such occasions also attract folk musicians and performers who sing popular narratives from the life of a patron saint. Wrestling tournaments are organized at several shrines. While dargah constitutes the core of the shrine practices, the periphery is marked by a diversity of intermediaries and ritual performance like ‘possession’.¹⁰⁵ Thus, despite Tassy’s nineteenth-century orientalist critique of Muslim practices in India, his list of ‘Muslim’ festivals includes celebrations at the shrines of Goga (Gugga) Pir, Sultan (Sakhi) Sarwar (also remembered as Lalanwala Pir), Kabir and Baba Lal.¹⁰⁶

In a limited sense, shrines are looked upon either as agencies of pluralism and syncretism or as sites of competitive conflict and confrontation over control.¹⁰⁷ Most of these works in a way justify the dominant theories of Islamization and complement modernizing theories on exclusive religious identities.¹⁰⁸ One would wonder what happens in such scenarios when conversion is not the dominant articulation of social processes. Contrarily, it will be interesting to explore how pirs connect to the ordinary lives of non-Muslims. Veena Das argues that the heterogeneity of everyday life invites us to think of networks of encounter and exchange instead of bounded civilizational histories of Hinduism, Islam or Christianity. The structures of feeling in a neighbourhood define these networks of exchange and encounter as much as by the pressure of authoritative discourses. However, she also underlines that these relations are vulnerable to events at different scales; hence, relatively peaceful social life can be disrupted, and relations between neighbours can morph into violence.¹⁰⁹

It is also important to trace saint veneration in the genealogy of Muslim debate in India, where one of the main issues have always been ‘syncretism’, or ‘Hindu influence’ and ‘Hindu participation’. The charge that saint worship resembles Hindu polytheism is, however, strongly rejected by defenders of the practice, for instance, Barelwis. They base their defence not on the notion that the practice promotes harmony between Hindus and Muslims but on the claim that it is an orthodox practice, in continuity with the Islamic past.¹¹⁰ The defenders deny that saint veneration is syncretic. This does not directly imply that saint veneration as a practice does not create the possibility of tolerance and harmony among Muslims and Hindus, or that it is,

perhaps, an unintended consequence. The only thing that is clear from the Muslim debate is that syncretism is rejected as a deviation from the Truth.¹¹¹ However, there is ample evidence to prove that saint veneration was and is prevalent as a vibrant religious practice in the lands from where these practices travelled to, as much as these took shape in India.¹¹²

This leads us to a much longer debate, for instance, on the permissibility of music in Islam. Raziuddin Aquil's analysis of the contested legacy of music in Chishti Sufism illustrates how the debate on the validity of *sama* in the court of Ghiyasuddin Tughluq led to a half-a-day long arguments and counter-arguments and was resolved only after Maulana Ilmuddin (grandson of Suhrawardi Sufi Bahauddin Zakariya) testified in the *darbar* of the sultan that not only was music listened to in Damascus and Rum but was also accompanied with instruments like *daf* and *shababa* (*shehnai*).¹¹³ Jurgen Wasim Frembgem reports how in contemporary Pakistan religious crusades since 2002, the Taliban has burned down cinemas and shops in which cassettes and Bollywood films were sold; forbidden music and dance at weddings; and attacked musicians or even killed them, forcing many vocalists from North-West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunwala) to migrate to Punjab. Even Lahore has not been spared from this reign of terror, with bombs targeting concerts and other cultural events.¹¹⁴ It will be curious to explore how music survives in popular Sufi shrines in Indian Punjab.

In the twenty-first century, Indian Punjab has experienced a resurgence of the practice of saint veneration through the complex processes of dreams, memory, circulation of images and acculturation.¹¹⁵ The region has also begun to particularly consolidate the influence of the Chishti Sabri tradition and its expression in the urban and rural landscapes. It is worth examining the urban landscapes that have been marked by the emergence of several cultural forums centred on Sufi thought and music. Hobsbawm poses an important question here regarding the usefulness of the study of the 'invention of traditions' for historians. First, he suggests that traditions are important symptoms and therefore indicators of 'problems' that might not otherwise be recognized and 'developments' that are otherwise difficult to identify and to date. They are evidence. Second, they throw a considerable light on the human relation to the past and therefore on the historian's own subject and craft. All invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion.¹¹⁶ It thus seems significant to understand why the trope of popular shrines has found a renewed visible expression in the contemporary religious

landscape of Punjab and whether these can be understood through abstractions of the metanarratives of Islamization.

Rahamat Tarikare beautifully illustrates this point through a case study of Muharram celebrations that take place in Mudgal in the Rai-chur district of Karnataka:

The climax of these celebrations is the coming to ‘face-to-face’ of Hasan and Hussain. Hassan and Hussain are represented by two silver torches. These are decorated with colourful cloth and flowers and made into ‘gods’. To see this rendezvous, which lasts for just a second, about a lakh of people of this region stand faithfully at the gates of the Mudgal fort and wait. In terms of caste and creed, these ‘people’ consist of Bedaru (hunters), *Dalits*, *kurubas* (shepherds), Lingayats and some Muslims. On being questioned about this ‘encounter’ people narrate an interesting story: ‘Hassan and Hussain, wandering from Arabia arrived in Mudgal. The younger brother Hussain entered the town admiring its beauty. The elder brother Hassan went outside the town admiring the beauty of the fort. By that time, it was evening and the fort gates were closed. So, the younger brother had to stay inside and the elder brother outside the town. Thus the two brothers were separated and brought together for an encounter once every year’.¹¹⁷

Here, historical formulation is easily broken down by the world of faith and the ‘epic war of the seventh century, which took place in the fields of Karbala village (on the banks of the river Euphrates in Iraq) gets transferred into the hands of the communities of various religions in India and underwent astonishing transformation, Hassan-Hussain had come to Mudgal as the sons of that soil’.¹¹⁸ Kavita Punjabi similarly critiques the contemporary academic contexts in which cultures are homogenized, ‘resulting in a rootless, ahistoric universalism, and the concurrent spiralling of fierce identity politics- fundamentalist, communal and ethnic’. It thus becomes imperative to understand the lived histories of cultures, as well as the societies they comprised.¹¹⁹

In the context of Punjab, it is therefore important to first recover the medieval context of the Nath-Sufi-Bhakti encounter, explain its location in the contour of reform and then understand popular veneration in contemporary social contexts. In a fascinating study of Haji Rattan or Baba Rattan, Véronique Bouillier and Dominique-Sila Khan recover the multiple narratives around the identity of Baba Rattan

whose shrine at Bathinda links him to both the Nath as well as Sufi tradition, having been a disciple of Gorakhnath as well as a companion of Prophet Muhammad.¹²⁰ However, in the contemporary context, the mystic's relationship to three centres (in Nepal, Bathinda and Delhi) are deeply rooted in their local settings but, nevertheless, not separated from its medieval contexts. The inclusive nature of this tradition, its historical developments, and the fact that it has multiple connections and ramifications should warn us against any simplistic classification. Can we thus understand the rise of Sikhism in isolation from its Nath and Sufi contexts? This is an important problematic that has not been a concern for theologically centred enlightenment narratives on the history of the region. However, this finds a significant expression in popular Sufi shrines in contemporary Punjab. As Ibbetson wrote in 1881:

On the borderlands where the great faiths meet (. . .) the various observances and beliefs which distinguished the followers of the several faiths in their purity are so strangely blended and intermingled, that it is often impossible to say that one prevails rather than other, or to decide in which category the people shall be classed.¹²¹

This raises one fundamental question regarding the evolution of religious traditions, i.e. whether there exists an understanding of religion that remains static and complete to qualify classification as 'great faith/traditions'. Can this category escape the long-term view of religions as evolving traditions that have constantly refashioned them, at times by revisiting older debates in the moment of the contemporary? Is it then possible to sustain terms like syncretism that have derogatory origins in Protestant Reformation, though still used by the votaries of plurality and secularism? Any treatment of religion as homogeneous or autonomous vastly oversimplifies complex questions of historical change.

Syncretism, by proposing that religions can be mixed, also assumes that religions exist in a pure unadulterated state. Where shall we find a historically untouched religion? Is there any religious tradition untouched by other religious cultures? Has any religion sprung into existence fully formed, without reference to any previously existing religion? If pure and irreducible religions cannot be found, a logical problem follows; syncretism becomes a meaningless term if everything is syncretistic.¹²²

Carl Ernst alternatively proposes a ‘polythetic analysis of religion’,¹²³ one that avoids essentialism, striking a practical balance between similarity and difference, and makes comparison a problematic enterprise by abandoning a number of a priori prejudices about religion that are no longer justifiable.¹²⁴ Eaton similarly proposes ‘double movement’ between the local cultures of South Asia and the theological norms of Islam that makes the study of Indian Islamic traditions so fascinating.¹²⁵

Several anthropological debates on understanding, what has been termed as ‘everyday religion’ between the dialectic of ‘ordinary lives’ and ‘grand schemes’, have sought to account for the complex duality of religion as an everyday practice and a normative doctrine.¹²⁶ The concept of a ‘grand scheme’ is again historically problematic since it takes a narrow ‘immediate’ view of complex historical debates. While it is not desirable to detach popular veneration from ‘grand schemes’ or ‘great traditions’, what is being proposed here is to see religious debates as ‘processual’ that are ‘in the making’ and where normative and discursive practices are dialectically embedded in the moment of contemporary. Everyday religion thus permeates both private and public lives, among both privileged and non-privileged people, between state and non-state milieus. It may have to do with mundane routines, but crisis and special events may also punctuate those routines.¹²⁷ Thus, the significance of the ‘social context’ becomes very crucial to understand the form and direction everyday religion takes,¹²⁸ making today’s cultural and religious contact far more complex than either the historiography of ‘conquest’ produced through textual abstraction or ‘revelatory’ and ‘missionary’ perspectives. Recognizing both the agency of ‘ordinary’ individuals and collectivities in negotiating everyday lives becomes crucial to analyse popular forms of piety and devotion.¹²⁹

What happens to Punjab studies?

This discussion raises some significant historiographical questions about Punjab studies. Conventional scholarship on religion, both colonial as well as scholarship produced post-reorganization of Punjab in 1966, has largely focused on the reinterpretation of core ‘Sikh’ texts. Mention here should be made of the contributions of W.H. Mcleod and J.S. Grewal that has inspired scholars during the second half of the twentieth century.¹³⁰ This scholarship also coincided with the aggressive phase of the Green Revolution as well as the turbulent phase of Sikh militancy in Punjab, thus both critiquing some fundamental

traditional assumptions and at times feeding the very discourse in the milieu of which it was being produced. This phase also saw an exponential spurt in the emergence of a Punjabi diaspora and the establishment of predominantly endowed chairs for ‘Sikh’ studies in several universities in the West. The vast scholarship produced through these chairs has produced a textual scholarship that fails to capture the lived realities of the ‘imagined’ homeland and rather sanitize the production of narratives on religion and identities in pre-colonial Punjab. This narrative dominates the entire spectrum of scholarship produced in the twentieth century and reflects a continued legacy of colonialism in Punjab.

Twenty-first century historiography on Punjab reflects a major paradigm shift in the field, having transitioned from idealized, linear and descriptive narrative frames, toward more complex and methodologically nuanced narrativizations of historical processes and the unconventional use of both canonical as well as non-canonical texts, material culture, and oral narratives, thus materializing the past and raising challenging questions about the issue of representation.¹³¹ Grewal’s critique of Oberoi view of the Singh Sabha ‘as a new episteme arising out of praxis’ suggesting that it precludes the ‘possibility of any meaningful linkages with the past’¹³² is geared toward an exclusive narrative of the past that is deeply oriented toward a narrow interpretation of religious texts. Even within the corpus of Sikh texts, there is a wide range of diversity – from Guru Granth Sahib, Dasam Granth to Janamsakhis – that draws a picture of multiplicity of influences (Sufi, Nath and bhaktas) and should be read in their specific contexts. Along with the teaching of the Granth, stories from Janamsakhis (drawing upon both the Puranic as well as *tazkira* tradition) made several miraculous stories of Guru Nanak popular, including his debate with Nath *jogis*. Despite being rhetorical and polemical, these stories portrayed an embedded worldview of social reality.

Obsession with neat boundaries has not been a preoccupation of just the reformers but academics too, who seek to define, categorize and delineate the complex social processes. Ishwar Dayal Gaur argues against these classifications and seeks to appreciate the ‘spontaneous’¹³³ expression of piety and sacredness that, as elsewhere I argue, is an expression of ‘organic evolution’ of shared practices.¹³⁴ It is in the form of veneration of popular saints, ritual practices and the entire paraphernalia of semiotics that embedded meanings of popular veneration are expressed. Also, reducing popular Sufi shrines as exemplars of syncretism, pluralism, harmony, brotherhood and shared centres of veneration in modern India denies them a critical agency within

the academic debate.¹³⁵ The shrine's centrality in popular veneration emerges from its embeddedness with the social and political landscape of the region. Reducing them to centres of conversion and/or as 'circumscribed domain of healing and magic'¹³⁶ rips them off their deep engagement with the everyday and the political. Entrenchment of these debates between the dialectics of communalism and secularism posit competitive arguments to justify the binary opposites of political discourse.

Thus, while situating popular veneration today, it is not just the dialectical legacy of the medieval interactive traditions and contours of contestations that remain significant but also their 'residue' and expression in contemporary social formation. The most fascinating 'residue' from pre-colonial practice of saint veneration emerges from the rituals and symbols at the popular Sufi shrines in contemporary Punjab. A semiotic understanding of these symbols forces us to problematize the limited frames within which the post-partition scholarship perceives religion. For the practitioner of religious traditions, being a householder or an ascetic comprises a larger repertoire of choices available to him/her along with diverse spectrum of sacred allegiances to *pir*, *jogis*, *babas* or *sadhs* and their respective shrines. Thus, any exploration into the history of ideas and social change should also explore the ways in which religion is 'received', 'interpreted' and 'practiced' in the lives of 'ordinary'. It is in the diverse spectrum of the 'everyday' that the 'lived' meanings and expression of religious practices can be captured.

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Notes

- 1 Similarly, in the aftermath of the demolition of Babri Masjid, Eaton argues how contemporary politics came to define the nature of periodization and dramatically brought the late twentieth century Indians face to face with their pre-colonial past. He quotes Shahid Amin who later said, 'We all live today in a 1026–1528–1992 present, and not in the 1757–1885–1947 of the past. In other words, the critical reference points for thinking about South Asian history were no longer the British colonial period, but a much longer period of time commencing with Mahmud of Ghazna and continuing to, and beyond, the destruction of the Babri Masjid'. Richard M.

- Eaton, "Indo-Muslim Traditions, 1200–1750: Towards a Framework of Study," *South Asia Research* 22, 1 (2002): 1.
- 2 One of the earliest of colonial writings by Cunningham (1853) constructs the history of Sikhs from the time of Guru Nanak (which he calls the 'origin of Sikh nation') until the battle of the Sutlej with Ranjit Singh. Joseph Davey Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs: From the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej* (London: John Murray, 1853).
 - 3 Anne Murphy, "History in the Sikh Past," *History and Theory* 46, 3 (2007): 346.
 - 4 Harjot Oberoi, "Popular Saints, Goddesses, and Village Sacred Sites: Rereading Sikh Experience in the Nineteenth Century," *History of Religions* 31, 4 (1992): 363.
 - 5 *Ibid.*, 365.
 - 6 *Ibid.*, 364.
 - 7 *Ibid.*, 365.
 - 8 Carl W. Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15, 1 (2005): 15–16.
 - 9 *Ibid.*, 16–17.
 - 10 The farfetched was sought to be explained through self-assured 'Romantic pronouncements about the essential identity of all Oriental (i.e., non-European) religions in their Indian core. The rough edges of particularity, smoothed out by reducing formulations to a doctrinal core, could be safely disregarded as accidental. The real meaning of religious phenomena was to be found in the exercise of theoretical imagination through comparison and detection of sources'. *Ibid.*, 18.
 - 11 'If, however, other religions could be shown to be hybrids composed of various 'Oriental' influences, that was a testimony to their dependent and inferior nature. Despite the later progress of historical research into the relation of Christianity to the cultural and religious world into which it was born, the colonial legacy of ambivalence toward 'Oriental religions' still lingers. In addition, it is also important to recognize the extent to which Romantic concepts of the 'mystic East' were a screen for debates about religion in the European Christian context. Problematic issues coded under the names of mysticism and pantheism could be projected in this way onto a foreign Oriental substratum'. Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga," 18–19.
 - 12 Eaton, "Indo-Muslim Traditions," 2 cited from Gerald J. Larson, *India's Agony over Religion* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 53.
 - 13 Larson goes on to suggest that there has been a significant change in religious sensibilities of communities in post-partition South Asia and identifies some salient of these new features; (1) the recognition that Hinduism and Islam have now emerged as distinct cultural traditions functioning in modern democratic polities that require practitioners in both nations to take account of all sorts of minority religious traditions in their respective environments; (2) the recognition that the largest majority religious traditions (Hindu in India, Muslim in Pakistan) have had from the beginning up to the present moment great difficulty in accommodating their religious minorities even after the major surgeries of partition; and, most important, (3) the recognition for the need of new civil ideologies, both political and religious, that will permit the new nation-states to coexist peacefully

- in the South Asian region. Gerald J. Larson, "Partition: The 'Pulsing Heart that Grieved'," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, 1 (2014): 7.
- 14 Richard M. Eaton, "Rethinking Religious Divides," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, 2 (2014): 306.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, 307. For Huntington's theory of clash-of-civilizations see Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, 3 (1993): 22–49.
 - 16 See for instance Cynthia Talbot, "Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, 4 (1995): 692–722; Gyanendra Pandey, "Can a Muslim Be an Indian?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, 4 (1999): 608–629; Romila Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity," *Modern Asian Studies* 23, 2 (1989): 209–231.
 - 17 Thapar adds that 'unlike the Semitic religions (with which the comparison is often made, although the comparison could also be with Buddhism and Jainism closer home), which began with a structure at a point in time and evolved both in relation to and within that structure at a point of time and evolved both in relation to and within that structure, and as reactions to historical situations, Hinduism (and I use the word here in its contemporary meanings) because of its fluidity, has taken shape more closely in relation to the latter. This took the form of variations articulated in a range of sects that gave identity belief and practices. This is partly why some prefer to use the phrase 'the Hindu religions' (in the plural) rather than 'Hinduism'. Romila Thapar, *The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities through History* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2014), 138.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, 139.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 139–140.
 - 20 Thapar, however, clarifies that the yardstick of the Semitic religions that has been the conscious and subconscious challenge in the modern recreation of Hinduism would be inappropriate to an understanding of what existed before. *Ibid.*, 141.
 - 21 Eaton, "Indo-Muslim Traditions," 5.
 - 22 *Ibid.* As Romila Thapar, Eaton also underlines that, in spite of the variety of the South Asian Muslim communities from which they sprang, they shared common elements. 'First, they were all discursive traditions, in the sense that they were rooted in written or oral genres that had sufficient historical depth to lend them the weight of authority. And second, they were Islamic traditions inasmuch as they all related themselves in some way to the Qur'an or the Traditions of the Prophet'. *Ibid.*, 6. But at the same time he says that by roughly around 1750, 'Islam had become as Indian as any other religious tradition of the subcontinent. Yet at the same time one sees their connectedness with a worldwide religious community, such that the Indo-Muslim culture that emerged in this period ended up as authentically Islamic as anything to be found in the Middle East'. *Ibid.*, 19.
 - 23 Pashaura Singh, "Re-imagining Sikhi ('Sikhness') in the Twenty-First Century: Toward a Paradigm Shift in Sikh Studies," in *Re-imagining South Asian Religions* ed. Pashaura Singh and Michael Hawley, 27 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

- 24 For a detailed reading on these questions see Tony Ballantyne, “Looking Back, Looking Forward: The Historiography of Sikhism,” *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 4, 1 (2002): 5–29; Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Pashaura Singh. “Revisiting the ‘Evolution of Sikh Community’,” *Journal of Punjab Studies* 17, 1&2 (2010): 45–74; Anne Murphy, *Materiality of the Sikh Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 25 Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India (Vol. 1)* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003), 332–333.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 332.
- 27 Ernst, “Situating Sufism and Yoga,” 24.
- 28 James Mallinson, “Nāth Sampradāya,” in *Brill’s Encyclopaedia of Hinduism* (vol. 3), ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar and Vasudha Narayanan, 413 (London: Brill, 2011).
- 29 *Ibid.*, 410.
- 30 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, 333.
- 31 Carl W. Ernst, “Muslim Interpreters of Yoga,” in *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, ed. Debra Diamond, 59 (Washington DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2013).
- 32 Ernst, “Situating Sufism and Yoga,” 21.
- 33 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, 336.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 335.
- 35 Carl W. Ernst, “Treatise on the Human Body Attributed to Mu’ in al-Din Chishti,” in *Sufi Meditation and Contemplation: Timeless Wisdom from Mughal India*, ed. Scott Kugle, 168 (New York: Omega Publications, 2012).
- 36 Scott Kugle, *Sufi and Saints’ Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2009), 174.
- 37 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, 336–342.
- 38 Ernst, “Situating Sufism and Yoga,” 21.
- 39 George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009) 66, 71, quoted in Ernst, “Situating Sufism and Yoga,” 38. A similar contemporary parallel exist in the context of contemporary Nasqbandi tradition. The *silsila* was known for critique of Mughal state’s closeness to ‘Hindus’. But there now exists Hindu branches of the order, Thomas Dahnhardt, *Continuity and Change in Indian Sufism* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2007).
- 40 For a detailed reading on the *jogis* of Chaparnath see Mahesh Sharma, “Contested Claims: Land, Ritual and the Jogis of Charpatnath (New Documents from Chamba),” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 43, 4 (2006): 487–510.
- 41 Bouillier and Khan (2009) have produced a complex narrative on the multiple identity of Rattan Nath/Haji Rattan. Véronique Bouillier and Dominique-Sila Khan, “Hājji Ratan or Bābā Ratan’s Multiple Identities,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 37, 6 (2009): 559–595.
- 42 B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal have worked on one such shrine at Jakhbar (district Pathankot) and explored *madad-i-maash* received by this

- dera. B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal, eds., *The Mughals and the Jogis of Jakhbar: Some Madad-i-ma'sh and Other Documents* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1967).
- 43 In a similar context of influence of Islam on Nanak's teaching, Aquil critiques Grewal's (J.S. Grewal, *Sikh Ideology, Polity and Social Order* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), 1–6) denial and remark that the Guru's ideas had 'a sure degree of originality' as they were a product of 'illumination' upon him. A more dispassionate scholarship of McLeod (W.H. McLeod, *Who Is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh Identity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), he argues, recognized the importance of the religious heritage from which Nanak benefitted but highlights the transformation of that inheritance by the Guru, leading to the formation of a new Sikh religion. Raziuddin Aquil, "The Celebrations of Guru Nanak's Career in Classical Urdu Literature," in *Poetics and Politics of Sufism and Bhakti in South Asia: Love, Loss and Liberation*, ed. Kavita Panjabi, 126–127 (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011).
- 44 For an interesting debate on these issues, particularly Kahn Singh Nabha's (a prominent Singh Sabhaite) response to these debates, see Kenneth W. Jones, "Ham Hindu Nahin: Arya-Sikh Relations, 1877–1905," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 32, 3 (1973): 457–475; J.S. Grewal, "Nabha's Ham Hindu Nahin: A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity," in *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, ed. Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, 231–254 (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999).
- 45 Obeiroi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*.
- 46 Some of these debates, for instance, the authorship of Dasam Granth, have now been critically studied by scholars like Robert Rinehart. Robin Rinehart, *Debating the Dasam Granth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 47 Arvind-Pal S. Mandair notes that 'for Sikh reformists this quest to extricate themselves from the negative stereotype of contemporary Hinduism was inextricably connected . . . with Ernest Trumpp's thesis that Sikhs, according to the testimony of their own scriptures, were Hindus, and that they shared ideologically, theologically, and ontologically a Hindu time and space. Trumpp's work served to accentuate the crisis for reformist Sikhs leading them to articulate their search for identity with questions like: were Sikhs Hindus? If not, what in fact were they? How could they provide evidence which would demonstrate what they claimed? On what basis could they redraw cultural boundaries that had become blurred?'. Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, "Emergence of Modern 'Sikh Theology'," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 68, 2 (2005): 263. Reformers like Bhai Vir Singh's central technique, which is 'unmistakably modernist' and hinges upon Macauliffe's thesis on *The Sikh Religion*, comprised a 'dual strategy of 'conceptual cleansing'. It worked on the one hand by breaking with prior traditions of interpretation that also shared cultural and intellectual experiences (Nirmala and Udasi traditions of interpretation influenced by Vedantic and Puranic sources) and on the other hand by implementing the peculiarly modern gesture of breaking with the past followed by the act of forgetting that one has made such a break. Specifically in Bhai Vir Singh's commentary, the meaning of the first syllable of the Mul Mantar, *ik onkar*, is defined by disavowing any conceptual association with the Hindu *om*'. *Ibid.*, 270.

- 48 Kamala Elizabeth Nayar and Jaswinder Singh Sandhu, *Socially Involved Renunciate: Guru Nanak's Discourse to the Nath Yogis* (New York: SUNY Press, 2007).
- 49 The hymn is also cited in *Miharban Janamsakhi*, 117 and can be viewed as a means of legitimizing the hagiographical account of Guru Nanak's encounter with the Nath yogis.
- 50 In contrast to Guru Nanak's hymns that refer to the Nath yogis (though without providing any historical information about his encounters with them), Bhai Gurdas's *Varan* and the hagiographies do provide descriptions of Guru Nanak's meetings with the Nath yogis. Bhai Gurdas's commentary on the Guru Granth Sahib describes Guru Nanak as having definitely met the Nath yogis or Nath *siddhs* (Varan I., 28–31). Guru Nanak is portrayed as having climbed up to Mount Sumera (regarded as the centre of the world according to mythological texts). Nayar and Sandhu, *Socially Involved Renunciate*, 50. However, the predominant belief also spelt by W.H. Mcleod contends that the *Siddh Gost* might have taken place at Achal Batala. *Ibid.*, 55.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 48.
- 52 Karine Schomer, "Introduction: The Sant Tradition in Perspective," in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition in India*, ed. Karine Schomer and W.H. Mcleod, 8 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987).
- 53 Nayar and Sandhu, *Socially Involved Renunciate*, 105.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 106.
- 55 They say he held the Muslims' rosary in his hand and put (the Hindus') sacred thread on his neck. He recited the formula of faith and offered prayers in the Muslim manner and recited the *mantras* and *gayatri* and offered puja according to the Hindu religion. Irfan Habib, trans. "Sikhism and the Sikhs, 1645–46: From 'Mobad', *Dabistan-i Mazahib*," in *Sikh History from Persian Sources: Translations of Major Texts*, ed. J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib, 62 (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001).
- 56 Critiquing Mcleod's 'ruthless dissection' of *janamsakhi* to recover 'historical' Guru Nanak, Simon Digby's underlines that, rather than rubbishising the Sikh hagiographic tradition, it is significant to locate it within the predominant *tazkira* tradition. Simon Digby, "Review of Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 7, 2 (1970): 301–313.
- 57 Nayar and Sandhu, *Socially Involved Renunciate*, 113–114.
- 58 Simon Digby narrates several such parallels in the hagiographic accounts of Nath yogis. Simon Digby, *Wonder Tales of South Asia (translated from Hindi, Urdu, Nepali and Persian)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 219–220. Similarly, Dominique-Sila Khan provides us with several narratives where Hindu and Muslim identities are on the 'threshold'. Dominique-Sila Khan, *Crossing the Threshold: Understanding Religious Identities in South Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 30–50.
- 59 The Sikh scripture has over a hundred verses ascribed to Shaikh Farid, only slightly less than those credited to Kabir, for instance. In the Sikh/Punjabi traditions, Farid is venerated for his devotional poetry, included in the Guru Granth Sahib. Aquil, "The Celebrations of Guru Nanak's Career," 127–128.
- 60 Aditya Behl, *Lover's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379–1545* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

- 61 Aquil, "The Celebrations of Guru Nanak's Career," 138.
- 62 For a detailed reading on structure and implication of colonialism in Punjab see Imran Ali, *The Punjab Under Imperialism, 1885–1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987); Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988); Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab 1849–1947* (New Delhi: Sage, 2009). Punjab was also a special place for the British, and within the region the Sikhs were seen as special. Nowhere else in colonial India was an entire community – numbering some 1,700,000 in 1881 – so extensively co-opted by the ruling authorities. Central to this policy of co-option was the controlling connection with the Golden Temple, which, given the tenets and practices of the Sikh faith, had an importance for Sikhs, greater than any single religious institution had among India's other religions. Ian J. Kerr, "British Relationships with the Golden Temple, 1849–90," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 21, 2 (1984): 151.
- 63 For a fascinating reading on the role of census in shaping social structures in India see N. Gerald Barrier, *The Census in British India: New Perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981); Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).
- 64 The question on race, caste, tribe and religion was invoked and debated from the very first Census of 1872 in British India. Anthropologists were appointed as census commissioners of India, and the population was subjected to be classified into racial categories based on nationality, mixing of nationality and even religious identities. The Census tried to identify race within a religion and religion within a race. Race or ethnicity and religion were not two separate issues in British India like in the US or British census. In Census 1872, the Indian population was divided in five broad categories – Non-Asiatic, Mixed Races, Exclusives of Natives of India, Asiatic and Mohammedans. Nationality and religion along with intermixing of races between Asiatic and Indians with that of Europeans defined as Eurasians were the fundamental basis of racial classification in India. This broad classification was later abandoned, and the purpose of race was mainly to separate the white or European people. After 1872 until the last British Census in 1941, race was exclusively used for the Christian population (further classified as European and Allied Races, Anglo-Indian and the Natives). The other religious groups were divided into caste and tribes. R. B. Bhagat, "Role of Census in Racial and Ethnic Construction: US, British and Indian Censuses," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, 8 (2003): 687–688.
- 65 Mahmood Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, 4 (2001): 652. Races were considered a civilizing influence, even if in different degrees, while ethnicities were considered to be in dire need of reform. Besides, while races were governed through civil laws, ethnicities were governed through customary laws. While civil law spoke of language of rights, customary laws spoke the language of tradition, of authenticity. *Ibid.*, 654. In India this process culminated in the invention of 'caste'. Padmanabh Samarendra, "Census in Colonial India

- and the Birth of Caste,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, 33 (2011): 51–58.
- 66 For a detailed discussion on reform movements in Punjab see Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Bob van der Linden, *Moral Languages from Colonial Punjab: The Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyahs* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008).
- 67 Pashaura Singh unproblematically uses the phrase ‘Hindu Arya Samaj’, without highlighting the association of Sikhs with the movement until the controversy of the *shuddhi* crusade of *samajis*. Singh, “Re-imagining Sikhi,” 18. Historians should be extremely cautious in usage of their relative terms in defining a milieu where identities were still fluid.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 366–367.
- 71 Sakhi Sarwar, also known as Lakhdara or the Giver of Lakhs, Lalanwala Pir, bestower of the Rubies, or Rohianwala, who lives in the Hills, was widely spread among the Sikhs.
- 72 Peter van der Veer, “Syncretism, Multiculturalism and the Discourse of Tolerance,” in *Syncretism/Anti-syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, ed. Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart, 193–194 (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 73 Purnima Dhavan, “Reading the Texture of History and Memory in Early-Nineteenth-Century Punjab,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, 3 (2009): 519–520; Eaton, “Indo-Muslim Traditions,” 5.
- 74 Eaton, “Indo-Muslim Traditions,” 3–4.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 76 Yogesh Snehi, “The Entrapment of Selective Amnesia,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, 32 (2014): 21–23.
- 77 Eaton, “Indo-Muslim Traditions,” 5.
- 78 Veena Das, “Cohabiting an Interreligious Milieu: Reflections on Religious Diversity,” in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Janice Boddy and Michael Lambek, 80 (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).
- 79 Tan Tai Yong, “Assuaging the Sikhs: Government Responses to the Akali Movement, 1920–1925,” *Modern Asian Studies* 29, 3 (1995): 659–660.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 678.
- 81 Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab 1849–1947* (New Delhi: Sage, 2009), 144.
- 82 Imran Ali, “Canal Colonization and Socio-economic Change,” in *Five Punjabi Centuries. Polity, Economy, Society and Culture, 1500–1990*, ed. Indu Banga, 341–357 (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997).
- 83 This was in contrast to how Hindu temples were managed, as well as how *waqf* were administered. In the former case, temples were seen to be inherently local in their character and in this way expressed the highly decentralized and diverse nature of ‘Hinduism’ as understood by the colonial state; at the same time, this loose definition was upheld as an overarching concept. In the latter case, a homogenized and elite understanding of Islam was followed in the designation of rightful Islamic practice, marginalizing

- local customs. Cited in Anne Murphy, "Defining the Religious and the Political," *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* 9, 1 (2013): 58.
- 84 Singh, "Re-imagining Sikhi ('Sikhness') in the Twenty-First Century".
- 85 Mallinson, "Nāth Sampradāya," 421–422.
- 86 Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga," 33. It has been suggested that Bulleh Shah was familiar with the Persian translation of *The Pool of Nectar* through his master Shah 'Inayat Qadiri (d. 1735), author of the *Dastur al-'amal* or *The Handbook of Practice*, a work that discusses yogic teachings. Ibid.
- 87 The construction of Sufi *khanqahs*, and later Sufi tombs, produced symbolic cultural outposts of the power of Islam and of the Muslim in a world where local, tribal identities continued to be of vital importance. Imposing Sufi tombs, constructed by Muslim sultans, underscored the importance of Islamic shrines as sites of access to transcendent spiritual authority. David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 41–42.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 Ibid., 43–45.
- 90 Claudia Liebeskind, *Piety on its Knees: Three Sufi Traditions in South Asia in Modern Times* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2. It is significant to elaborate the term 'local Islam' here. In this work, this term is used as representing the articulation of belief systems at the popular level. Alternatively, the term syncretism could have been utilized but it assumes that dominant identities are the core determinant of popular identities and thus discounts the academic understanding of the latter.
- 91 Farina Mir, "Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism," *Comparative Study of Society and History* 48, 3 (2006): 755.
- 92 For a fascinating account on social space in *Hir Waris* see Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy: Exploring Medieval Punjab Through Hir Waris* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2009). For *qissa* tradition in medieval and modern Punjab, see Mir, "Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives," 727–758. For an overview of folk writers of Punjab see Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, eds., *Sufism in Punjab: Mystics, Literature and Shrines* (New Delhi: Aakar, 2009); Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Popular Literature and Pre-Modern Societies of South Asia* (New Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008).
- 93 Ajay Bharadwaj's film *Kitte Mil Ve Mahi*, which focuses on the predominantly Dalit veneration of Sufi shrines in contemporary Punjab, significantly weaves the narrative around the *qissa* of *Hir Waris*. Ajay Bhardwaj, Dir., *Kitte Mil Ve Mahi* (Where the Twain Shall Meet), DVD (New Delhi, 2005).
- 94 It is interesting to note that this legacy prevails in the latter part of the twentieth as well as twenty-first centuries. SGPC has now emerged as an all-subsuming body, and the recent demand for HSGPC, a similar committee for Haryana, represents inversion against almost absolute hegemony of ruling party Shiromani Akali Dal over the management of Sikh shrines through SGPC. Yogesh Snehi, "Vicissitudes of Gurdwara Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, 34 (2014), www.epw.in/reports-states/vicissitudes-gurdwara-politics.html (accessed on 12 October 2014).

- 95 Paramjit Singh Judge says that Udasi *sampraday's* close proximity with Sikhism can be established by the fact that its founder, Sri Chand, was the elder son of Guru Nanak (375). Paramjit Singh Judge, "Taksals, Akharas, and Nihang Deras," *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, 372–381 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- 96 Amrit Kaur Basra, "The Punjab Press and the Golden Temple Controversy (1905): An Issue of Sikh Identity," *Social Scientist* 24, 4/6 (1996): 44–45.
- 97 During the very moment of the reform, Sahni wrote a detailed foreword for a tract on the Gurdwara Reform Movement. Teja Singh, *The Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening* (Jullundur: Desh Sewak, 1922), i–vi.
- 98 Basra, "The Punjab Press," 45–48.
- 99 Oberoi, "Popular Saints, Goddesses, and Village Sacred Sites".
- 100 Anshu Malhotra, "Living and Defining Caste: The Life and Writing of Giani Ditt Singh/Sant Ditta Ram," *Journal of Punjab Studies* 20, 1&2 (2014): 159–191.
- 101 Gaborieau examines the reformist condemnation of not just the worship of dead and living saints but also the entire plethora of everyday practices associated with shrines and ritual performance during *urs*. Marc Gaborieau, "A Nineteenth-Century Indian 'Wahhabi' Tract against the Cult of Muslim Saints: Al-Balagh al-Mubin," in *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance*, ed. Christian W. Troll, 198–239 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- 102 Marc Gaborieau, "The Cult of Saints among the Muslims of Nepal and North India," in *Saints and their Cults*, ed. Stephen Wilson, 291–308 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Henri Chambert-Loir and Claude Guillot, eds., *Le culte des saints dans le monde musulman* (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, 1995); P.M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu'in al-Din Chishti of Ajmer* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989); Richard M. Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Christian W. Troll, ed., *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003). Gaborieau's introduction to Troll provides an interesting reading on the range of scholarship on Sufi shrines in India. Christian W. Troll, ed., *Muslim Shrines in India*, v–xxi.
- 103 Anna Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred: Practising Pluralism in Muslim India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) and "Everybody's Baba: Making Space for the Other," in *Sharing the Sacra: The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations around Holy Places*, ed. Glenn Bowman, 25–43 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).
- 104 Gracin de Tassy, a French orientalist who visited India in the nineteenth century, unapprovingly remarks that most religious ceremonies of Indian Muslims are local innovations established as a result of unconscious Hindu influences, which conform little to the spirit of the Quran and are sometimes even contrary to its spirit. He further laments the Muslims' pilgrimages to the tombs of saints, some of whom are apparently non-Muslim, and their performance of 'semi-pagan ceremonies'. Indian Muslims have also created new ceremonies performed by both Shias and

- Sunnis. Some of them are consecrated to the memory of pirs, who are to Muslims what *deotas* are to the Hindus. They visit the tombs of these pirs on Thursdays and sometimes on Fridays. Gracin de Tassy, *Muslim Festivals in India and other Essays*, trans. and ed. M. Waseem (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 32–33.
- 105 Anna Bigelow's study of the dargah of Haider Shaikh at Malerkotla draws a complex picture of this ritual performance, which is ultimately subsumed within the identity of the shrine. Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred*.
- 106 de Tassy, *Muslim Festivals in India and other Essays*, 88–112.
- 107 While a majority of works on Sufi shrines in India locate them as centres of pluralism, Robert M. Hayden sees them as sites of competition. For a detailed discussion on the theme, refer Chapter 1. Robert M. Hayden, "Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans," *Current Anthropology* 43, 2 (2002): 205–231.
- 108 Raziuddin Aquil argues that Islamization and conversion to Islam involved complex negotiations, which further contradicts the older view that only large sections of low-caste Hindus were attracted to the egalitarian and notions of brotherhood in Islam, as embodied by Sufi institutions such as *khanqahs*, *jamat khana*s and dargahs. Normative Islam does have certain ideals emphasizing egalitarianism in society, but as Islam spread to various regions, it got embedded in local social structures; hierarchies – based on birth, wealth and power – became an integral part of Muslim communities, as is the case with caste among Muslims in India. Raziuddin Aquil, *In the Name of Allah: Understanding Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Penguin, Viking, 2009), 180. Chapter 1 details some complex debates around Islamization and Sanskritization.
- 109 Das, "Cohabiting an Interreligious Milieu".
- 110 Warren Fusfeld, "The Boundaries of Islam and Infidelity," in *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*, ed. Katherine Ewing, 205–219 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), cited in van der Veer, "Syncretism, Multiculturalism and the Discourse of Tolerance," 193.
- 111 Ibid.
- 112 Stephen Wilson, ed., *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Regional Sociology, Folklore and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Pedram Khosronejad, ed., *Saints and their Pilgrims in Iran and Neighboring Countries* (Herefordshire, UK: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2012).
- 113 Raziuddin Aquil, "Music in Chishti Sufism," in *Devotion and Dissent in Indian History*, ed. Vijaya Ramaswamy, 287 (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2014).
- 114 Jürgen Wasim Fremberg, *Nocturnal Music in the Land of the Sufis: Unheard Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42.
- 115 Chapter 3 discusses the complex contours of dreams, memories and dissent. Chapter 4 furthers this discussion by focusing on the circulation of images.
- 116 Eric Hobsbawm, "Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 117 Rahamat Tarikare, "Is there Anything Called 'Muslim Folklore'?" in *The Inner Mirror: Kannada Writings on Society and Culture*, ed. A.R. Vasavi, 102 (New Delhi: The Book Review Literary Trust, 2009).

- 118 Ibid., 103.
- 119 Kavita Panjabi, "Introduction," in *Poetics and Politics of Sufism and Bhakti in South Asia: Love, Loss and Liberation*, ed. Kavita Panjabi, 7 (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011).
- 120 Bouillier and Khan, "Hājji Ratan or Bābā Ratan's Multiple Identities," 559–595.
- 121 Denzil Charles Jelf Ibbetson, *Report on the Census of the Punjab, 1881, Vol. I* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1883), 101.
- 122 Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga," 17.
- 123 The polythetic approach to religion is extremely helpful. No longer is it necessary to attack or defend arguments of influence or authenticity since it is now possible to acknowledge freely that numerous examples of hybrid and multiplex symbols, practices, and doctrines can be at work in any particular religious milieu. Ibid., 20–21.
- 124 Ibid., 19–20. Ernst gives an interesting example of Naqshbandi *silsila*, which in recent times has transformed itself from its historical baggage as one of the most orthodox of Sufi orders in South Asia. Naqshbandi Sufi leaders in northern India have taken significant steps to spread their teachings among Hindu disciples, including a number of Hindu masters who explain the Naqshbandi cosmology with terms from classical Hatha Yoga. These Naqshbandi branches (centred particularly on Kanpur) constitute what is in effect a new Sufi-based school of yoga, known as Ananda-yoga. Particularly important practices of these groups include silent recitation of the name Allah to awaken the chakras. The overall doctrine of the identity of the microcosm and the macrocosm, common to both Islamate and Indic traditions, permits a wide-ranging series of analogies between Sufi notions of subtle centres with yogic chakras. This recent development, which inverts the Orientalist view of the relation between Sufism and yoga, is a striking indication of the way in which the history of religion can defy the expectations of essentialism. Ibid., 26–27.
- 125 Eaton, "Indo-Muslim Traditions".
- 126 Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec, "Introduction," in *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion*, ed. Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec, 1 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).
- 127 Nancy Ammerman, "Introduction: Observing Modern Religious Lives," in *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, ed. Nancy Ammerman, 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 128 Ibid., 6.
- 129 Ibid., 14–15.
- 130 J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History* (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1969); W.H. Mcleod, *The Evolution of Sikh Community* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976).
- 131 Mention should be made of the works of Singh and Gaur, eds., *Sufism in Punjab*; Singh and Gaur, *Popular Literature and Pre-Modern*; Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy*; Murphy, *Materiality of the Sikh Past*; Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks*; Hardip Singh Syan, *Sikh Militancy in the Seventeenth Century: Religious Violence in Mughal and Early Modern India* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014); Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdis: Gender, Sect, and Society in Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017).

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- 132 J.S. Grewal, *Historical Perspective on Sikh Identity* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1997). 73, quoted in Singh, “Re-imagining Sikhi (‘Sikhness’) in the Twenty-First Century”.
- 133 Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy*.
- 134 Yogesh Snehi, “Dissenting the Dominant: Caste Mobility and Ritual Practice at the Popular Sufi Shrines in Contemporary Punjab,” in *Devotion and Dissent in Indian History*, ed. Vijaya Ramaswamy, 291–320 (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2014).
- 135 Chapter 1 details several contours of these debates.
- 136 Veer, “Syncretism, Multiculturalism and the Discourse of Tolerance,” 195.

1

HISTORIOGRAPHY, FIELDWORK AND DEBATES ON SACRED SHRINES

For a significant period in post-colonial India, religion remained outside the domain of historians' investigation, a field that has been dominated by understandings of the state and political economy. Thus, even while 'religion' defined the complex political contours of the modern Indian state in multiple ways, it remained outside the purview of this secularity. In one of his early writings on culture and consciousness in modern India, Panikkar argues that:

[C]ontemporary India religion as an ideology has embraced almost every sphere of existence, thereby masking the socio-economic and political reality. Therefore, if people are to be made to face the reality, the illusion that masks that reality is to be removed. Developing a critique of religion therefore becomes an immediate political task.¹

These perspectives continue to define even contemporary meta-frames of the historians' craft, as well as their understanding of religion, where the state and its mechanisms and the political economy maintain a central place. While seen as a way to de-emphasize religion, often with a 'moral' commitment to secularism in India, this marginalization of everyday religious developments only strengthened Orientalist assumptions about some fundamental themes in Indian historiography, particularly in relation to Islam and the 'medieval' in Indian history and, in the context of Punjab, issues of invasion, conversion and martyrdom. In a similar vein A. Azfar Moin argues how 'Akbar's "religion" is commonly imagined as a precocious attempt at social engineering to harmonize the sacred traditions of his realm . . . within [the] nationalist frames of thought [that is] based on anachronistic conceptions of "religion" and "state"'.² Carl Ernst had likewise argued that in the historiographies of Islam and India, 'polarized opinions can be found

regarding all the prominent figures of Indo-Muslim history, especially Akbar, Aḥmad Sirhindī, Dārā Shikūh, and Awrangzīb, whose religious views are variously categorized and judged (from a modern perspective) as secular, orthodox, fanatic, or apostate'.³

Thus, as Neeladri Bhattacharya argues, the recurring trope of 'secular' historiography in India has for long been pre-ordained by the constitutive assumptions of 'communal' histories, despite the fact that they chose to invert the latter.⁴ Carl Ernst also underlines how the limited

image of the Sufi missionary has been encouraged by the modern Pakistani state, to support the ideological interpretation of Islam as the basis for government. A competing political image is fostered in India, where Sufis are depicted as tolerant universalists and secularists only tangentially related to Islam. In all these cases the interpretative stance is governed by the aim of the literary genre employed.⁵

This continued entanglement of state and religion continue to define and inform both political and academic discourses. Neeladri also laments the lack of scholarly attention to popular tracts that very often shape people's conception of the past.⁶ Thus, it is important to ground the 'intellectual history [of sacrality] firmly in social reality' and pay 'close attention to the relationship between social structure and the persistence of particular type of cosmologies'.⁷ Intriguingly, South Asian historiography outside of India has remained far more open to understanding the history of South Asian religions, both within the field of Religious Studies and outside of it.⁸

Despite Bernard Cohn's early plea for convergences between history and anthropology, and the ascendant subaltern studies' de-canonization of the colonial and nationalist historiography, the historian's craft in India predominantly continues to be, very contradictorily, defined by the centrality of the archive, where fieldwork has a peripheral life.⁹ The predominance and centrality of the 'archive' in the historians' craft does not encourage forays into some very significant aspects, for instance, of caste/Dalit consciousness, which were in a way also contrary to the nationalist as well as Marxist frames of writing Indian history.¹⁰ While highlighting the problems of writing Dalit histories through the present paradigm of historical method, Dipesh Chakrabarty poses a paradox between the role of evidence and contextualizing myths in academic procedures.¹¹ He also underlines the possibility of multiple narratives of the same event and also the growing uneasiness

among many historians over the dangers of relativism in history writing.¹² However, despite the current debates on identity, one major concern of academic engagement among historians continues to be an interpretation of the Hindu-Muslim question – a reflection of the backdrop of continued riots in contemporary India.¹³

The debates on convergences between history and anthropology have been furthered by scholars like Nicholas Dirks and Brian K. Axel, and more recently by Anand Pandian, who have enriched the now established field of ‘historical anthropology’, but it is notable that this effort has been led predominantly by anthropologists rather than historians.¹⁴ Similar trends can be discerned in the fields of historical geography and historical sociology, among others, where historians’ engagement with lived religion remains relatively peripheral.¹⁵ These interdisciplinary advances thus seem one-sided: sociologists, geographers and anthropologists have learned to think historically, but far less disciplinary innovation has been seen among those who espouse a historical approach.

It is, therefore, crucial to enlarge the spectrum of the historiography of India (and particularly Punjab) through a significant engagement with historical anthropology. Oberoi raises a significant problem here and says, ‘It is all very well for historians to think, speak and write about Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, but very rarely pause to consider if such clear-cut categories actually found expression in the consciousness, actions and cultural performances of the human actors they describe’.¹⁶ Historical anthropology or anthropological history thus opens a foray of methods where ‘text’ and ‘field’ enrich each other, revealing the realms of everyday life that are too often excluded from an archive that acts, by its very nature, to ‘sediment an archaeology of the state – indeed an archaeology of history’.¹⁷ Critiquing the static notion of the archive, Peter van der Veer laments that in research on religious orders (and, we can argue, shrines), one does not find exhaustive documents, except documents related to landed property; the building of temples; and patronage that are common to temples, mosques, *khanqahs*, gurdwaras and those useful to frame proprietary claims in the present. A plethora of crucial processes related to ‘the history of itinerant monks and faqirs’¹⁸; shrines spaces and their embeddedness within the social space; details on pilgrims, etc. remain outside of this documentation. Kelly Pemberton illustrates how the vision of ‘beastly ascetic’ associated with fakirs and other ‘rogue elements’ stood in contrast to that of *sajjada nishin*, or saint’s successor of Sufi shrines, who were favoured allies of the colonial administration.¹⁹ ‘Even the other textual evidence, devotional literature, songs

in praise of God, theological arguments – does not give much clue to those who are footloose'.²⁰ Thus, 'historians may make their own history, but they cannot always make it as they choose'.²¹ As Taneja argues, the 'antagonism of bureaucratic archives toward everyday life' complicates this conjunction because of 'the very organization and epistemology of the postcolonial archive', which makes it 'well-nigh impossible to turn to the state to verify histories of presence, practice, and belonging'.²²

These issues impinge on historical engagement with popular shrine culture in two ways. First, the absence of 'religion' in dominant historical discourses does not provide sufficient grounding for an historical accounting of such shrines in broader terms; second, the absence of 'popular shrines' in the archive itself reinforces this silence.²³ Dipesh Chakrabarty's discussion of Ranajit Guha's seminal work on peasant insurgency identifies a similar problematic on the absence of religion in another context.²⁴ Guha analyses the testimonies of peasants during the trail against the Santal rebellion of 1855 where rebel peasants' statement shows the subaltern himself as refusing agency or subjecthood; 'I rebelled', he says, 'because Thakur [god] made an appearance and told me to rebel'.²⁵ Chakrabarty problematizes Guha's ambivalence on this statement and argues that 'historians will grant the supernatural a place in somebody's belief system or ritual practices, but to ascribe to it any real agency in historical events will go against the rules of evidence that gives historical discourse procedures for settling disputes about the past', that 'allows the divine or the supernatural a direct hand in the affairs of the world'.²⁶ He adds:

Guha's position with respect to the Santal's own understanding of the event becomes a combination of the anthropologist's politeness – "I respect your beliefs but they are not mine" – and a Marxist (or modern) tendency to see "religion" in modern public life as a form of alienated or displaced consciousness. . . . In Guha's essay, the resistance that the "historical evidence" offers to the historian's reading of the past – a Santal god, Thakur, stands between the democratic-Marxist historian and the Santals in the matter of deciding who is the subject of history – produces minor or subaltern pasts in the very process of weaving modern historical narratives. Subaltern pasts are like stubborn knots that stand out and break up the otherwise evenly woven surface of the fabric. When we do minority histories within the democratic project of including all groups and peoples within mainstream history, we both hear and anthropologise the Santal at the same time.

We cannot write history from within what we regard as their beliefs. We thus produce “good,” not subversive, histories, which conform to the protocols of the discipline.²⁷

Such ‘neat’ histories, bereft of the messiness of the subaltern narratives, do not capture the complexities of social processes and are therefore manifestly ahistorical. Take, for instance, the histories of religious communities that were produced by the religious reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that imagined religious communities as ordained by religious texts where social space had no place. In fact, a variety of religious practices that were seen as contrary to textual imagination of notions of sacred were now frowned upon by the ‘modern’ leaders of reform. We shall explore this aspect in greater detail through the following case studies.

Chakrabarty’s discussion challenges us to enable a ‘historical anthropology from the margins’²⁸ that goes beyond the limits of ‘power and knowledge in the British colonial archive’ and the archive of the modern state.²⁹ It is thus important that while anthropologists and historians rethink theory, method and perspective, archival materials should be read through anthropological filters and the fieldwork harnessed to the historical imagination to explore the ‘archive’ and the ‘field’ in tandem.³⁰ In this way, by ‘rendering the strange [undocumented] as familiar and accessing the familiar [the ones which had a prime place in the annals of colonial archive] as strange, the narratives of historical anthropology better unsettle widespread notions of strangeness and familiarity regarding the past and the present’.³¹ This, as I will show below, is particularly important if we seek to understand the vibrancy and persistence of Sufi shrines in post-partition Indian Punjab. Absences, appropriation, adaption, abstraction or exclusion are therefore significant processes through which shrine spaces respond to complex social milieus – in contrast to imaginary binaries of secularity or conflict. The intersection of historical and anthropological methods therefore can significantly enhance our ability to historicize and enliven our understanding of these locations, outside of colonial and nationalist frames.

Shrines in and beyond the colonial archive

Colonial interest in religious shrines followed two main concerns. One related to the major shrines’ symbolic association with the state authority in pre-colonial India, bestowed with enormous wealth and prestige and the regular recipient of revenue-free grants.³² This, too, was fraught with the selective, instead of multifaceted, role of sacred

shrines. The other related to colonial concern with governance and management, which had serious implications for the imperial project to bolster colonial authority and thus the colonial state.³³ The invention of colonial mechanisms of governmentality had already put in place identitarian competition over sacred shrines, which drew upon the polemical definition of religious communities formed within colonial governance more broadly.³⁴ The colonial framework provided a radically different legal and administrative framework within which claims and counter-claims over ‘management’ and ‘ownership’ of shrines could be contested in judicial courts until a ‘procedural’ settlement was obtained. British administration provided a complex legislative framework for the management of religious sites that ‘took new shape with the circumstances produced by East India Company and British Crown administration. . . [such that the] interference by the state grew in intensity through the second half of the nineteenth century- at the very time that efforts were ostensibly made to lessen the colonial state’s role in the management of such sites’.³⁵ Often, these claims and conflicts occupied the emerging public sphere, thereby redefining the terms of public engagement.³⁶

Two significant examples of these conflicts are violent incidents over the occupation of Nankana Sahib in the 1920s and Shahidganj Mosque in the 1930s – in an otherwise peaceful Gurdwara Reform Movement – that find a prominent place in the annals of the colonial archive. Both these cases led to violence; both were also etched into the communal politics of the early twentieth century. As David Gilmartin says, ‘support for the concept of Pakistan in fact initially developed in the Punjab among many of those same groups that had supported the Shahidganj mosque agitation, including the leading editors of the Muslim press in the cities and, somewhat later, the Sufi pirs of the countryside’.³⁷ The Nankana Sahib similarly remained involved in a longer engagement with litigation as well as conflict with the colonial government. Shrines were seen as representative of evolving notions of territorialization, reflecting the evolution of identity, community and sovereignty that impacted all shrines, not just those that were at the centre of conflict. Along these lines, Murphy argues that:

colonial property formations had in some senses . . . subverted early forms of ownership associated with gurudwaras; at the same time, notions of community that had not previously existed were introduced into the rule of property. The term of the debate – as fundamentally historical, and communitarian – were framed within British understanding of property and

right . . . such that even claims made to retrieve earlier forms of property relations and corollary relationships between community and property were framed within the terms and concepts of the Raj.³⁸

Our understanding of such shrines, within diverse communities, is thus fundamentally constituted of colonial formulations of identity, community, property, conflict and competition.

Gandhi gave a useful critique of the problem of giving overwhelming attention to conflict situations alone in *Hind Swaraj*. He writes:

Little quarrels of millions of families in their daily lives disappear before the exercise of this [soul/truth] force. Hundreds of nations live in peace. History does not and cannot take note of this fact. History is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love or of the soul. Two brothers quarrel; one of them repents and re-awakens the love that was lying dormant in him; the two again begin to live in peace; nobody takes note of this. But if the two brothers, through the intervention of solicitors or some other reason take up arms or go to law which is another form of the exhibition of brute force, their doings would be immediately noticed in the press, they would be the talk of their neighbours and would probably go down to history.³⁹

A deeply entrenched “family resemblance” between colonial historiography on the one hand and the secular nationalist projects on the other⁴⁰ has defined engagement with popular shrines spaces, perceived either as centres of pluralism and tolerance, shared/popular culture, syncretism and/or folk/vernacular practices.⁴¹ Harjot Oberoi’s work on Punjab also similarly emphasizes the significance of popular centres of devotion like the shrines dedicated to Sakhi Sarwar, Gugga Pir and goddesses as shared sites for the people of pre-partition Punjab.⁴² On the other hand, such spaces have also been portrayed as flash-points of communal and political ‘events’. Sacred shrines have in this way, somewhat tragically, acted as cultural and political sites for the nation’s tryst with a secular destiny and therefore have not been critically studied for their location in the lived contours of the diverse communities of India, as indicators of social space formation and concomitant social change. Popular shrines represent enduring locations of subaltern lived agency expressed through everyday beliefs and practices, constituting a living archive of everyday meanings. These are not

fossilized but instead, especially during *urs*, become a living spectre of past and present, a kind of playful interplay of tradition and contemporality. Partha Chatterjee has rightly argued that negative abstraction of the ‘autonomous domain’ of subaltern beliefs and practices misses the ‘immanent process of criticism and learning, of selective appropriation, of making sense and using on one’s own terms the elements of a more powerful cultural order’. Subaltern consciousness is ‘not merely a structure, characterised solely by negativity; it is also interaction between the dominant and the subordinate’.⁴³

Problematizing ‘antagonistic tolerance’

There have been several contemporary debates on disputes over shrines. In post-partition India, Ayodhya continues to be one major example of extreme polarization over claims to the ‘birth place’ of Ram.⁴⁴ Disputes over shrines have majorly been studied in the Mediterranean (particularly Balkan) context and West Asia and have so far attracted one of the largest studies on sacred shrines in Bosnia, Jerusalem, Serbia, Turkey, etc. Most of these sites have been conflict zones between Europe and the Middle East since the ‘medieval ages’. Partly a residue of the World Wars of the twentieth century, the emergence of the Israeli state led to further perpetuation of these conflicts. Many of these conflicts have been enacted in the ‘war on sacred grounds’ (Hassner 2010).⁴⁵ Scholars like Robert M. Hayden (2002, 2014), Ron E. Hassner (2010), Glenn Bowman (2012) and Dionigi Albera (2008) have also applied these debates to South Asian contexts.⁴⁶ Hassner situates this debate by suggesting the ‘indivisibility’ of sacred places. He argues that:

Conflicts over sacred places are particularly difficult to resolve because sacred sites pose an indivisibility problem: they cannot be shared. Political scientists have tended to dismiss indivisibility as an unlikely cause for conflict, arguing that most contested goods are entirely divisible. Sacred places are one exception to that rule. They are indivisible because the religious prerequisites for safeguarding these sites from desecration require believers to have complete and exclusive control over them. Thus, competing groups may resort to violence in order to gain control of such a site.⁴⁷

Hassner’s indivisibility argument hinges on the exceptionality of sacred places, as sites that require safeguarding and exclusive control. Territorialization of notions of sacred is one precondition of indivisibility and

narrows the perspective on sacred spaces as sites of conflicts. In fact, most shrines in South Asia in general and India in particular are spaces of everyday devotion. Barring some major Sufi shrines and temples in Pakistan that have been targets of radical Islamists and similar radical (often political) targeting of dargahs, mosques, temples and churches in India, cases of perceived ‘competitive’ conflict over sacred spaces in South Asia are rare and episodic. Hayden has similarly been using the problematic trope of ‘antagonistic tolerance’ (AT) and ‘religioscape’ to emphasize religious difference and argue that ‘long-term patterns of relationship between members of groups which identify themselves and each other as Self and Other communities, [are] differentiated primarily on the basis of religion, residing in close proximity or even intermingled but rarely intermarrying’.⁴⁸ He more recently expands the sample of difference and adds that:

The religious distinction is often accompanied, and thus reinforced, by other differences such as in naming, kinship terminology, marital endogamy, places and methods of burial, diet, dress, education, and perhaps preferred methods of gaining a livelihood. We note that while there may often be practices and even groups that appear to represent syncretic combinations of primary Self and Other groups, the distinctions between the latter remain robust, while the apparently syncretic are often “crypto-” or “heterodox,” labels that indicate their distinction from the supposedly “true” or orthodox communities.⁴⁹

Hayden’s problematic model of ‘competitive sharing’ to understand religious traditions focuses predominantly on difference. One would wonder if nodes of differences or divergences exclusively operate along larger complex of religio-social debates or whether there are several ‘other’ parallel nodes of convergences which spatialize shrines in their local contexts, their lived environment. Hayden further argues that major religious sites are markers of processes of dominance, ‘indicating which group is dominant at particular times’.⁵⁰ His argument on shared religious sites integrates exclusivity of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ with varying scales of interaction:

The best way to understand shared religious sites is by looking at them as *nodes in structures of social interactions* between populations that distinguish themselves and each other as different, on religious grounds, through time. As a node, a single site is not isolable from the social networks, of *varying scale*,

that interact at it. Scale here may range from local communities to regional networks to those on a state or imperial scale, and even between state/empires.⁵¹

(emphasis mine)

Human social interface is far more complex than dominant religious debates and to fit interactions at shared sacred sites on a 'varying scale' berefts individuals and social groups of their agency over sacredscapes. AT model, therefore, does not help us to capture the quotidian experience at shared sacred sites in post-partition Indian Punjab. Hayden's understanding of shrines as 'nodes in structures' of social interactions is very persuasive; when combined with the AT model of the 'varying scale', it leads to some bizarre conclusions. AT argument fails to contextualize a milieu where the reconstruction of a mosque (for instance *Guru-ki-maseet*) is performed by non-Muslims,⁵² reinstating the benevolence of a Sikh Guru in medieval Punjab or a Moorish mosque built by a Sikh ruler (Maharaja Jagatjit Singh) of Kapurthala⁵³ for Muslim subjects of the state in the early twentieth century. Medieval Punjab also gives several other examples like Vaishnava seat at Pindori, Nath *dera* of Batala, etc., which received *madad-i-mash* grants from the Mughal state irrespective of religious affiliation of the state or the grantees.⁵⁴

Thus, the antagonistic milieus of political contestations that sometimes lead to destruction of religious sites should not be merely interpreted as acts of intolerance. These often are attempts to replace signs of political authority or sovereignty that are vested in these sites.⁵⁵ Glenn Bowman adds that most scholarship around shrines treat religious sites as 'repositories of core identities, and just as those identities must remain inviolate so too the sites must be protected from the presence of corrupting others by all means possible'.⁵⁶ Notions of sovereignty, therefore, do not always parallel ideas of popular sacredness. Besides, community and ordinary sites are mostly not the targets of such vandalism. When Banda Bahadar raided Sirhind in 1710, he destroyed the imperial mosques and the fort of Sirhind where the sons of Guru Gobind were killed but spared the town of Malerkotla founded by Haider Shaikh, a Suhrawardi Sufi mystic of great significance in Punjab. Misleading conclusions regarding the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, particularly in pre-colonial Indian contexts or limiting choice of sacred sites from conflict zones, undermine the possibilities of their existence as a sites of memory. These sites may seem an anomaly in the politico-demographic milieu of the contemporary but, nevertheless, provide a necessary corrective to the dominant

ideological framework. Thus, Chishti Sufi orders in India continue to proliferate even after the partition of Indian subcontinent. Further, the Chishti Sabri sub-order is among the most vibrant of these branches in ‘Sikh dominated’ Indian Punjab. Shrines associated with Chishtis have, however, often been repeatedly bombed and attacked in ‘Muslim dominated’ Pakistan. Dionigi Albera further critiques the AT model:

For Hayden what is “real” is *competition*. Syncretism, in his view, is always a more or less disguised form of competition. The tolerance is under *no circumstances genuine*. All the cases he analyzes support an identical scheme, in which syncretism corresponds to a pragmatic form of adaptation in situations in which the simple *repression* of the religious practices of other groups is impossible. From this point of view, even the crossing of the borders between the groups is only *tactical* ground recognition of another’s domain, a temporary form of compromise *tolerated* by a weak minority, or accepted by a majority momentarily *blocked* in its will to dominate. The direction is clear: in the end a group is bound to *triumph* over the others and to impose its *monopoly* of the sacred site.⁵⁷
(emphasis mine)

Albera further proposes that ‘we should go beyond binary oppositions, as tolerance vs intolerance, repression vs embrace of the Other. We should work to define an analytical vocabulary capable of grasping the plurality of attitudes linked to “the manifestation in one site of practices or beliefs identified with more than one religion”’.⁵⁸

Metanarratives limit the linkages of shrines to everyday caste, kinship and spatial realities. Even if linked with networks of pilgrimage, architecture, etc., shrines still have local embeddedness. Thus, Jat, Dalit, Khatri and Aggrawal identities are as important as urban or rural dynamics, as are diasporic/transnational spheres. It is thus a ‘range [of vocabulary] that can go from a simple proximity to imitation, borrowing and blending. The adoption of some items of another religion generally does not imply an intention of conversion, even if in some case the conversion can be the result of crossing over, but this depends mainly on the political context and on the strategy of religious specialists’.⁵⁹

Not all social milieus are antagonistic. Besides, antagonism is always not vertically manifested along religious lines and spaces. It can also be, as Hayden himself accepts, diverse and complex and, in the Indian contexts, along the axis of caste, class and gender. Therefore,

antagonism can manifest against Sufi heterodoxy in Pakistan but also manifest in a Malerkotla's 'Muslim' Nawab's defence of 'Sikh' Guru Gobind Singh's sons. We need to invent models of fieldwork that aren't limited to meta-frames of historiography but frames that capture complex social reality. Hayden's emphasis on the struggle for control of the shrines is statist and overtly influenced by the notion of formal sovereignty, whereby the control over ritual spaces is considered a definitive aspect of communal assertion. However, even in the classical frame of state formation, absolute sovereignty never meant, at least in South Asia, a complete suppression of non-state religions. In a majority of cases, the state continued to provide revenue-free grants to religious institutions irrespective of religious affiliations. Also, parallel to the statist notion of territoriality, there existed the notion of spiritual territoriality/*wilayat* that transcended both medieval and modern states.

Situating shrines: Sanskritization, Islamization and beyond

Popular Sufi shrines in the Indian Punjab, which continue to flourish in a predominantly non-Muslim landscape, embody the living memory of a pre-partition past, where non-Muslim veneration of pir shrines is justified through the narration of national secularized belonging. At the same time, they stand out as anomalies in a largely non-Muslim landscape. Popular Sufi shrines, by their persistence, enunciate the possibility of looking beyond the historiography of 'conflict' to search for complex meanings in which rituals and territoriality are defined. With diverse populations participating in eclectic religious rituals and social realms, popular Sufi shrines represent in some ways one of the most dynamic forms of religious activity in Punjab today. But how do we understand the changing social formations enacted at Sufi shrines in post-partition Punjab, with the emergence of Dalit leadership and the retreat of traditional Islamic authority structures? Punjab has a peculiar distinction of hosting strong anti-caste movements – such as Buddhism, Nathpanth and Sikhism – but at the same time is host to the dominance of Jats in most spheres of social and political life in the region. Thus, governance of gurdwaras in Punjab, for instance, is dominated by Jat Sikhs, thereby marginalizing the possibilities of Dalit social mobility, which has led to the emergence of strong identity movements among lower castes of Punjab. The nature of social mobility among Punjabis of the region, however, is in deep contrast to prevalent theories on social mobility.

In the 1950s, renowned anthropologist M.N. Srinivas theorized social mobility among various castes of India through a term he called ‘Sanskritization’, according to which ‘lower castes . . . tried to take over the customs and way of life of the higher castes’.⁶⁰ Such social changes involved ‘not only the adoption of new customs and habits, but also exposure to new ideas and values which have found frequent expression in the vast body of Sanskrit literature’.⁶¹ Other scholars have preferred the term ‘Brahmanization’ to explain this process.⁶² Romila Thapar has described this in more dynamic terms as a ‘process of acculturation between brahmanic “high culture” and “low culture” of local cults’, suggesting a ‘reverse’ of Sanskritization as in the case of the cult of Viththala at Pandharpur or that of Jagannatha at Puri.⁶³ While there are problems with Srinivas’ formulation, such as its emphasis on linear movement and discounting of lateral and/or horizontal movement or mobility of castes (which Thapar in part attempted to address), the idea has been applied broadly to other religious traditions as well and has parallels outside of Brahmanical contexts. For example, Dominique-Sila Khan argues that Sikh *panth* had been ‘gradually Sanskritised after the death of Guru Arjan and. . . [therefore] easily identified with one of the numerous bhakti movements’.⁶⁴ We also see a preoccupation of dominant contemporary scholarship on the Sikh tradition to delineate a normative Sikh identity that reproduces classificatory schemes of colonial historiography and ignores diversity in Sikh tradition.⁶⁵ This ideal has implications beyond the academy and has been operationalized both socially and politically.⁶⁶

Islamization is another trope that has been used to describe the functioning of Sufi shrines. Richard M. Eaton tries to problematize our understanding of the spread of Islam by arguing that contrary to the Orientalist theory of conversion through sword and the role of military force in the diffusion of Islam, Islamization was defined as a complete transition, even if slow, from one religion to another.⁶⁷ However, Eaton’s persuasive argument on the ‘modes of conversion’ and ‘regions’ where this process was most pervasive does not problematize the ‘definitive’ connotation associated with the term Islamization. In his early essay on popular perceptions of the shrine of Baba Farid, Eaton investigates the question of Bai’at where he interestingly uses the term ‘initiation’ through which a devotee was formally accepted as a disciple (murid) of the shrine, a ceremony possibly borrowed from Hindu-Buddhist initiatory practices.⁶⁸ Bai’at destabilizes the prevalent notions of conversion and Islamization by vernacularizing the process and practice but does not say anything about the association of non-Muslim devotees to the shrine who might have not converted

but nevertheless remained 'initiated' disciples of Baba Farid. On the *dastar-bandi* ceremony, Eaton discounts the presence of significant Hindu men who participated 'out of respect for a local institution of great repute, and perhaps also out of a sense of civic responsibility'⁶⁹ but not out of association or devotion to the shrine. This distancing of the non-Muslim presence from debates around Islamization (in Eaton's case, Islam's spread among the ordinary peasants of Punjab) does not help us chart the differential ways in which religious processes penetrate ordinary lives. Similar processes are ascribed to term 'Ashrafization'⁷⁰ that, like Sanskritization, prompted the social transformation of communities, such as through:

[I]ntroduction of clan names (*gotr*) such as Mughal, Pathan, Shaykh, Ghorī, etc., among the *manihar* (ritual bangle-maker) and *dhuniya* (cotton-carder) communities; or the tendency of *qasais* to regard themselves as belonging to the prestigious Arab Quraysh tribe and so change their name into "Kureshi". The converted artisans thus denying their origin, started to claim descent from the Ashraf Muslims, and consequently sought to conform themselves to their behaviour.⁷¹

This trope of conversion, yet again, derives from an understanding of conversion as a linear progression, reminiscent of Christian Protestant evangelical formulations.⁷² Like Eaton, who argues for an understanding of conversion as gradual and iterative,⁷³ Dube and Dube also suggest a re-imagining of the conversion 'less as unremitting rupture and more as the fashioning of novel practices, beliefs, identities, visions and boundaries of discrete religiosities'.⁷⁴ Still, while these formulations reject the idea of conversion as a fundamental rupture, they do identify a process of Islamization in association with the function of the shrine as a social force.

This discussion foregrounds the limitations of the ideas of Sanskritization, Islamization, Ashrafization and conversion in explaining the complex process of social change. Neither do they explain the continued existence of the pre-1947 memory of the Sufi saint veneration in a largely non-Muslim population, nor do they address the emergence a new spectrum of popular Sufi shrines in contemporary Indian Punjab where conversion is not a definitive ideal. Ronki Ram further problematizes Sanskritization and argues that 'the patterns of Dalit social mobility in Punjab have emerged independently of the agendas of conversion to neo-Brahmanism and Sanskritization'.⁷⁵ This pattern 'draws heavily on the phenomenon of Guru Ravidass for the

construction of a separate Dalit identity[,] . . . deploying the strategy of bhakti as a vehicle of peaceful social protest'.⁷⁶ Debates and manifestation of Dalit identity continues to be complex and diverse, however, following different strands ranging from Ravidasia to Valmiki. The latter forms an important element in the Aadhas Samaj (Adi Dharm Samaj) movement, which advocates educational reform among Dalits but, at the same time, presents a strong critique of Brahmanic Hinduism. While thinking of an alternative term to explain such complex processes of religious change is outside the scope of this discussion, the consciousness of limitations posed by them is nevertheless crucial. Khan's positioning of evolving religious identities as being 'on the threshold' can be crucial for an understanding of popular shrines, where identities are constantly in the process of becoming. In what follows, I will argue that religious processes have always been on 'the threshold' and religious identities are determined in spatial terms that are always changing.

The following case studies foreground some of the theoretical possibilities embedded in the invocation of 'space' as an analytic in the long history of Punjab. No attempt has been made to establish one correct narrative. I have translated and paraphrased diverse narratives in my own voice, collating both oral and textual tales that had been narrativized within the premises of shrines. My attempt is to analyse narrative strategies, emplotment and meaning embedded in these narratives – reinterpreting causality by attaching meaning to memory and agency to narrative strategies. I remain wary of ascribing definitive values to popular shrines either as abodes of peace or spectres of antagonism, discourses that are informed by identitarian politics. Shrines are archives of everyday, a mirror to understand the complex reciprocity, contestation and dissent of dominant discourses. This complexity cannot be understood by presupposing exclusivity and competition.

While shrines are constituted of caretakers and ordinary pilgrims, rituals and patronage, the purpose of this book is to decode narratives around these sites. Most of these narratives identify an originary moment or milieu within which shrines came into being. That is their starting point. But such narratives assume their real significance not in their representation of origins but in their relationship with continuing, living spaces, a kind of constant negotiation of the shrines' past has with their present – 'locally situated case studies that are unique perhaps in their social, political or cultural fabric'.⁷⁷ Fieldwork here is valuable for its ability to foreground practice as a lived archive of such everyday narratives and to understand the past in relation to the

present. This allows us to construct histories of presence and belonging, a historical anthropology from the margins and a narrative strategy that goes beyond the binary of conflict and secularity. In all the three case studies discussed below there was neither any fundamental change in the patterns of custodianship of the shrine nor any radical break, despite the demographic homogenization of the province post-partition. In this case, then, continuity is a subject of immediate interest along with social processes that enable this continuity.

Case study 1.1 Dargah Haider Shaikh, Malerkotla⁷⁸

Narratives around Haider Shaikh are mostly available through popular hagiographies (Figure 1.1), memories and retellings that inform us about the life of the saint. Haider Shaikh (d. 1508) was a Suhrawardi saint who migrated from Kabul in Afghanistan and settled and established Malerkotla in 1454. This was the time when Bahlul Lodhi (d. 1489) was planning to wage a war against the Sayyid sultans of Delhi. When he asked Haider Shaikh whether he would win the war, the latter answered in the affirmative.⁷⁹ Bahlul Lodhi won the war and presented an expensive horse to Haider Shaikh. The Shaikh sacrificed the horse and distributed the meat in his langar. When Bahlul learnt about it, he sent a messenger, who came looking for the horse, the Shaikh asked him to look out for his horse in his stable where the messenger saw innumerable identical horses from which he could not identify the one the Sultan had gifted. Bahlul asked for forgiveness and became the Shaikh's disciple. He offered his daughter Taj Murassa Begum in marriage to the saint, to which he later agreed. The Shaikh's second wife was the daughter of the Bhatti ruler of Kapurthala.

The Malerkotla estate was gifted to Haider Shaikh as a dowry. Haider Shaikh had one daughter, Bibi Mangi, and three sons, Shaikh Hassan, Shaikh Musa and Shaikh Eisa. One son didn't marry, the second became the *gaddi-nishin*, and the third inherited the state of Malerkotla. His only daughter was married in Tohana but soon her husband died, and she was brought back to Malerkotla. Her grave is located adjacent to the Idgah of Malerkotla. Anwar Ahmed Khan, who is the eldest among the family of descendants, is the current Khalifa of the shrine. He says that when Haider Shaikh died, a stone wall was constructed overnight around his grave allegedly by holy spirits

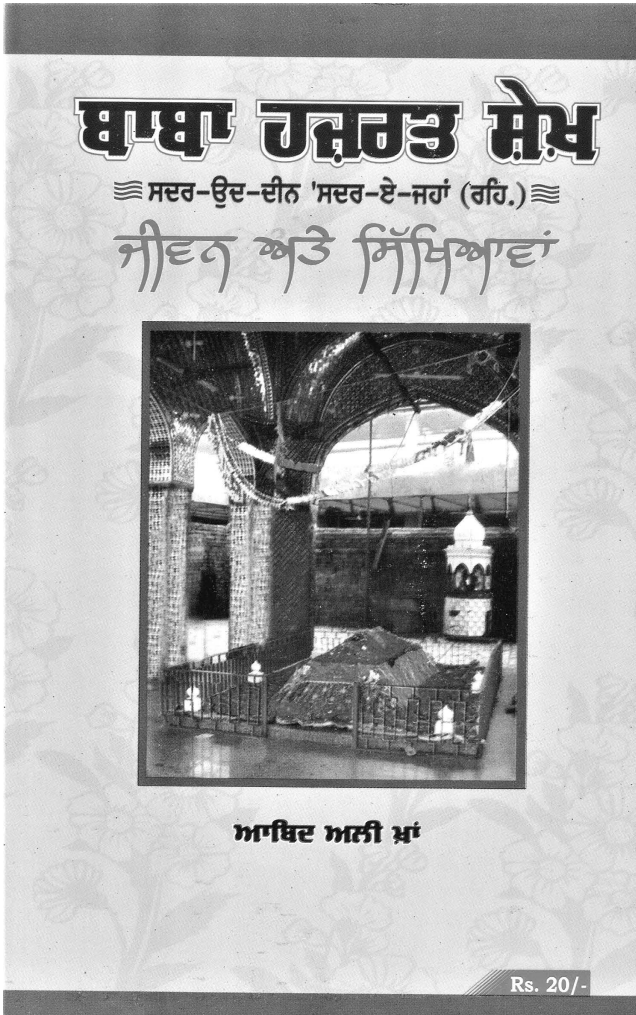


Figure 1.1 A popular Punjabi tract on Haider Shaikh written by Abid Ali Khan

Source: Photo courtesy of Abid Ali Khan

(*jinn*s) without the use of mortar. The boundary wall (Figure 1.2) is the only extant structure that purports to being ‘medieval’ and is comparable to several popular shrines in Punjab that are similarly identified by a boundary wall around the grave(s) and without a tomb.⁸⁰



Figure 1.2 Pilgrims touching the enclosing ‘medieval’ wall of shrine complex

Note: All photographs in this chapter are by the author unless otherwise mentioned.

Shaikh Haider’s status of being a Sufi and the founder ruler of the Malerkotla state bestows a special meaning to his position as a saint today. He is one of the earliest manifestations of a saint-emperor/warrior (*sant sipahi*) in the region, an epithet that is later used for several ‘Sikh’ gurus. After his death in 1508, he was buried in Malerkotla, and his grave promptly became a shrine to his glory (Figure 1.3).⁸¹ The sixth ruler of the state Saiful-Malik Bayzid Khan (d. 1659) erected the first tomb over the grave of the shrine, which was deeply revered by the rulers of the State and ordinary people who still gather at the large fair held every year. In the past, on the occasion of accession to the throne or celebration of Ids, offering of horses, robes and money were made at the tombs on behalf of the state.⁸² The gift of horses is still practised in the form of a symbolic ritual gift of a goat by Hindu, Sikh and Muslim pilgrims during the *urs* at Malerkotla. The shrine of Haider Shaikh is therefore bestowed with *barkat* that flows from sovereignty that is enshrined in the tomb of the saint and sustained every year by the gift of a horse and goats.



Figure 1.3 Muslim and Sikh devotees offering prayers at the dargah of Haider Shaikh

Shahzad Ali, the present *sajjada nishin* of the shrine, claims that Hindus and Sikhs constitute 90 per cent of pilgrims to the shrine.⁸³ The popularity of the shrine among non-Muslims is explained by a narrative around the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (d. 1707), Guru Gobind Singh (d. 1708) and Sher Mohammad Khan (d. 1712). This was a period when the Mughal state sought to suppress the rising Marathas under Shivaji as well as the sovereignty of Bijapur, Golconda, Ahmadnagar and Mewar. Sher Mohammad Khan was from Malerkotla and he fought shoulder to shoulder with the Mughals against the ruler of Bihar and the Rohillas of Badaun and also against the Sikhs who had rallied under the tenth Guru Gobind Singh. After prolonged skirmishes, Mughal forces laid a siege at Anandpur, the stronghold of the Guru. The latter escaped but was chased by the troops of Malerkotla and Sirhind. In the meantime, the Guru's mother and his two younger sons were captured from their refuge in the village of Kheri and were imprisoned at Sirhind. Wazir Khan, the governor of Sirhind, offered to Sher Mohammad Khan to execute the sons of Guru Gobind Singh and

avenge the death of his two brothers, who had died fighting the Sikhs. Sher Mohammad Khan, however, refused to punish the innocent sons of the Guru. Undeterred Wazir Khan issued an order to cement them alive in the 'wall of Sirhind'.

Sher Muhammad Khan protested and wrote a letter (*ba da nara*)⁸⁴ to Aurangzeb (d. 1707) condemning this cruelty. Although the sons of the Guru could not be saved, nor did Aurangzeb survive this incident for long, but the gesture of Sher Muhammad was acknowledged and appreciated by the Guru who declared that 'his roots will ever remain green'.⁸⁵ The Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims always remembered this act of benevolence and that this gesture was made possible by the blessings of Haider Shaikh, the patron Sufi mystic of Malerkotla. Later, Sher Mohammad Khan avoided providing any active assistance to the Mughals against the Sikhs. When Guru Gobind Singh's disciple Banda Bahadur avenged the persecution of the former's sons by devastating Sirhind, he didn't attack Malerkotla. It is this narrative that epitomizes the popular veneration of Haider Shaikh.

Lakhs of Sikhs and Hindus throng to the shrine of Haider Shaikh every year, during *urs* or otherwise. There are memorial shrines dedicated to him spread across the urban and rural landscape, south of Indian Punjab, often constructed along with another popular saint, Baba Lakhdata. These shrines are popularly known as *pirkhanas* and are important centres of veneration among the Aggrawal ('Hindu') community, who construct them as private shrines. Many of these *pirkhanas* have been in existence since pre-partition times. The tomb of Haider Shaikh was originally without a roof. A flat-roofed enclosing structure was first constructed in the 1950s. When the roof of this structure fell in 2008, it was re-laid. Nine months later, a dome was added to the shrine. Thereafter, the entire structure was demolished, and a new mausoleum with a dome was constructed. Shahzad Ali points out the sacred symbols of Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists in the niches of the enclosing wall, indicating the shared sacredness of the shrine. The state of Malerkotla did not continue past the last Nawab of Malerkotla Iftikhar Ali Khan (d. 1982), who died without an heir. The sovereignty of the shrine, however, continues to prosper. On the thirteenth day of *rojas* (fasting), the belongings of Haider Shaikh comprising of his *jutti*, pagri, *chola* and a brown coloured stone he apparently brought from Mecca are displayed to the public. Shahzad Ali points out to the negligible influence of the Deobandis in Malerkotla, who represent a more conservative vision of Islam.⁸⁶ The town has not experienced any major riots during and after partition.⁸⁷ Anna Bigelow, Karenjot B. Randhawa and Pippa Virdee ascribe this to

a significant role that the narrative of Sher Mohammad Khan's *ha da nara* played in the lack of violence in Malerkotla.⁸⁸

Anna Bigelow highlights non-Muslim veneration of the 'Muslim' Sufi Haider Shaikh, which also has a deeper imprint on the everyday notions of sacred space through the saint's possession and performance that she identifies as 'practising pluralism'. However, she does not identify and relate the performance of this veneration outside of Malerkotla through the agency of *pirkhanas*.⁸⁹ It may be argued that the recent renovation and reconstruction work in the of shrine may consolidate formal claims of the saint's descendants and his 'Muslimness', but this does not prevent both ritual as well as symbolic significance of the non-Muslims in the everyday veneration of the buried saint. Similarly, this major centre of veneration does not have any formal affiliation to numerous memorial shrines spread across rural and urban centres of Punjab, and Anwar Ahmed Khan does emphasize the distinctiveness of Malerkotla. But in practice, this major centre is deeply connected with minor memorial shrines that play a central role in the dissemination and extension of Haider Shaikh's *barkat*. The narrative around Haider Shaikh, therefore, does not follow the dominant hagiographic tropology of miracle, conquest or conversion. On the contrary, the narrative humanizes Haider Shaikh and Sher Mohammad Khan by locating them in the everyday. Haider Shaikh's shrine is dotted by graves of his family members and meanders around the complex narrative tropes of migration, sovereignty, conflict, miracle, gift, *barkat*, sacrifice and belonging.

Case study 1.2 Baba Lakhdata Pir Nigaha, Village Langiana⁹⁰

Baba Lakhdata (bestower of lakhs), was an obscure saint of mixed Suhrawardi and Chishti lineage and his shrines are important in the historic Punjab region. There are four major Nigahas dedicated to Baba Lakhdata that are located in Nigaha, at the edge of the Suleman Mountains in the frontier of Dera Ghazi Khan (Figure 1.6), and at Dhaunkal in Gujranwala (both in Pakistan). Una's (*chotta*) Nigaha (in Himachal Pradesh, Figure 1.4) now occupies a prominent place among such shrines in India, followed by one at village Langiana.

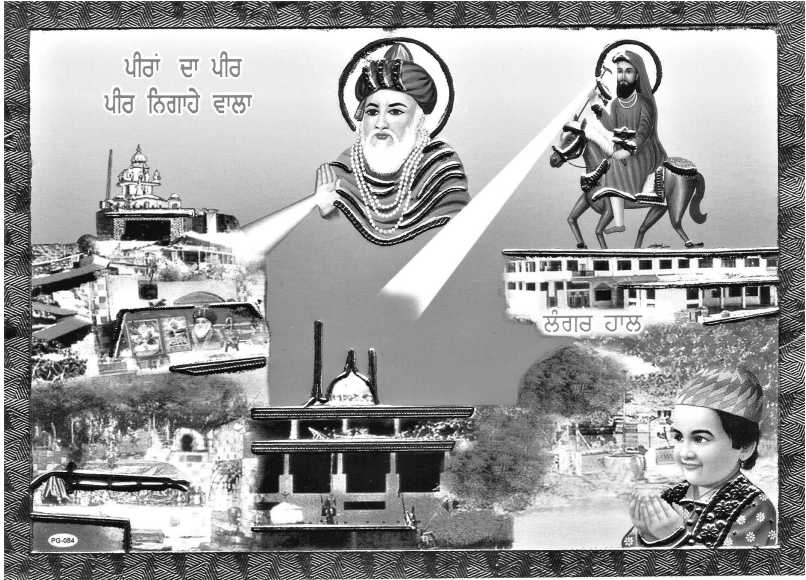


Figure 1.4 A popular poster of the Nigaha shrine at Una receiving blessings from Baba Lakhdata (right) and Gauz Pak (centre)

Dedicated to Baba Lakhdata, these shrines constitute a wide network of sacred centres that are now transnational yet at the same time embedded in the regional and local settings. Lacking any formal hagiographic accounts, Baba Lakhdata's popular lore traverses the landscape of Punjab through folklore, popular saint hagiographies and bardic compositions sung at numerous fairs and festivals held across pre-partition Punjab. Known by several other names like Sakhi Sarwar Sultan (divine king), Pir Nigaha or Rohianwala (who lives in the wild) and Lalanwala Pir (saint of rubies or sons), this saint has an extraordinarily large following.⁹¹ His followers could be affiliated with their formal religious identities as Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus or Christians but nevertheless preferred to be counted as Sarwaris in the colonial census.

'Sikh' literati offered a strong resistance to Sikh veneration of Sakhi Sarwar. In 1896, Giani Dit Singh, an important intellectual of the Singh Sabha movement, censured the popular veneration of Sakhi Sarwar through a Punjabi tract where he argued the futility of saint the veneration for curing illness through miracles.⁹² In post-partition

Pakistan and India, veneration of Sakhi Sarwar has been violently resisted by the bombing of his major shrine in Dera Ghazi Khan that killed more than fifty people during *urs* celebrations⁹³ or the killing of a caretaker at Nigaha, Langiana in Moga. Shrines dedicated to Sakhi Sarwar have always thrived on local networks of patronage and therefore pose challenges to reformers and religious radicals. Harjot Oberoi notes that 'to wean worshippers away from Sakhi Sarwar must have been difficult, for he was believed to possess ample supernatural powers to reward his adherents without demanding much in return. Faith in him imposed hardly any restrictions on food, dress or social behaviour. Free of doctrinal dogma and with no stringent requirements of ritual purity, worship of Sakhi Sarwar enjoyed ample votaries'.⁹⁴

Nigaha shrine at Langiana should be situated in the pre-partition networks of shrines dedicated to Baba Lakhdata. One of the oldest in the Punjab plains of India, this Nigaha shrine is purportedly 250 years old and is said to have been built by Baba Lakhdata himself. Although, this historical ascription is incoherent because Sakhi Sarwar lived in the thirteenth century, but saint narratives have often remained connected across time and space through dreams and visions.⁹⁵ Thus, even while a majority of *nigahas* in Punjab are memorial shrines – many constructed post-partition – they may still be endowed by the *barkat* of Sakhi Sarwar. Nigaha at Langiana has a special place in the hierarchy of these shrines since it is, apparently, directly bestowed by the saint's visit and *barkat*. Contemporary memorialization of the practice of saint veneration is thus a significant example of living 'sites of memory' that transcend *barkat* across space and time.

Hardip Soni explains the circumstances that led to the establishment of this shrine. Their ancestor Pir Buddhu, a Khatri, was blind and could not cultivate his agricultural land. He deeply wished that Baba Lakhdata Pir Nigaha (Sakhi Sarwar Sultan) would restore his vision. Baba Lakhdata was incidentally travelling from Multan toward Sultanpur Lodhi and while passing through this village wanted to find the correct direction. He asked Pir Buddhu for the way. Pir Buddhu expressed his inability to show Lakhdata the way to Sultanpur due to his blindness. Baba Lakhdata threw his green *parna* (cloth tied as turban) on Buddhu; when the latter ran it over his face, he gained his eyesight. In return, Baba Lakhdata asked Buddhu to establish a *darbar* for him. Buddhu pleaded that he possessed land but did not have the money to construct the *darbar*. Baba Lakhdata told Buddhu that the son of a ('Sikh') *sardar* of Mansa was cursed with a mental illness and would only be cured by the latter. Their son was cured by Pir Buddhu; as a

result, the Mansa *sardars* constructed the original *darbar*, which has now been expanded and a large langar hall constructed adjacent to the shrine. The family of Pir Buddhu was blessed with the *gaddi-nishini* of this shrine.

The narrative of Sakhi Sarwar's travel from Multan to Sultanpur Lodhi, and the performance of the miracle of healing, follows the reciprocity template of *barkat*, piety, patronage and sovereignty that has been extant in several other narratives and saint hagiographies elsewhere in India. The extension of his *wilayat* from the west to the east of Punjab also follows the patterns of the slow and gradual sedentarization of Jats,⁹⁶ a process that was already complete by the end of the seventeenth century when the shrine was apparently established. The non-Muslim inheritance of shrines punctures the linear theories of Islamization that pre-supposes conversion and territorialization of sacred shrines. Also, scholars studying Sufi shrines have explored notions of syncretism through visitation and pilgrimage but have often ignored complex forms of inheritance, possibly due to a narrow focus on major shrines that has predominantly been enriched through networks of state patronage. However, structures of patronage mimic popular ideals of sovereignty and therefore, rather than limiting any investigation of sovereignty and patronage to frameworks of state, it is important to explore the guiding spirit of popular notions of sovereignty and patronage.

Two major fairs are held at the Sakhi Sarwar shrine in Langiana every year, as well as small fairs every Thursday. The shrine draws pilgrims of diverse faiths from across the region. Rose gives a brief account of this shrine in district Moga:

It is called Nagaha Pir, and was founded in 1869 S. [Samvat] by a Patiala man. It contains no image but has a *chabutra* or platform. The *pujari* is a Khatri and succession follows natural relationship. . . . Another shrine of Sakhi Sarwar is at Nagah[a], where a fair is held on the light Thursday of Phagan. . . . It was founded some 200 hundred ago by the Sirdar of Mansa. When subjected to several trials they were bidden [sic] in a vision to go to Moga and there build a temple. So they constructed this shrine and all Hindus and Muhammadans in this part are its votaries, offering it grain at each harvest. It also has a *chhabil* where the poor travellers drink water. At the fair visitors are fed free. A Brahman is employed as *pujari*.⁹⁷

The seven generations of *sevadars* of this Nigaha, as mentioned by Rose, belong to the clan of Khatri who have been in continuous possession of this shrine since pre-partition times. Here is an example of a popular Sufi shrine that was never under the ownership of Muslim caretakers (refer Table 1.1 below). The conspicuous presence of a Brahmin priest also mimics patterns of popular ritual hierarchy.

Village Langiana is predominantly comprised of Khatri (Soni), Jats (Brar) and Majhabis. Located in south-western (Indian) Punjab, the region was inherited by several clans of 'Sikh' Jats. Both the Rajas of neighbouring Faridkot and Kotkapura were Sidhu Brars and had gained an important footing in the region by the sixteenth century.⁹⁸ During the heydays of militancy in Punjab, militants gunned down Baba Mangat Rai here in 1987. The militants contended that Nigaha was a Muslim place of worship and wanted to destroy the *darbar*. This violent contestation mimics Giani Dit Singh's late nineteenth-century polemic against the veneration of Sakhi Sarwar. Rode, the village of Jarnail Singh Bhindrawala incidentally also a Brar Sardar, is located nearby. Nevertheless, the scale of annual fairs as well as the shrine complex has grown over the years. When first visited in January 2010 by the author, the shrine complex comprised of a small main *darbar* of Baba Lakhdata and another *darbar* for Baba Buddha Shah. There were a few shops selling souvenirs along the road leading to Nigaha. In February 2015, the main shrine complex was being expanded and redone to accommodate the increasing flow of pilgrims, subduing the late medieval historic structure. A very large langar hall (community kitchen) now adorned the northern side of the shrine, approached through a large gateway adorned by two tall minarets and an arched gateway (Figure 1.5). Small exclusive shrines were now dedicated to Bhairon, Mata Masani and Baba Khan Doda.

Sakhi Sarwar's ubiquitous presence at almost all Sufi shrines and their *urs* endows special significance to the saint. He is a miracle maker, tamer of wild animals, curer of diseases and giver of sons and bestows his *barkat* on everyone, irrespective of caste and religious identity. His folklore weaves narratives of his miracle and blessing to a Jatti/Jat, Brahmin and Khatri. He can disguise himself as a beggar or a trader. Harvinder Singh Bhatti situates his ability to tame lions, his portrayal as innocent (*bhola*), mischievous, true king (Sultan), etc., within the contour of Indic sacred cosmologies. Therefore, among his companions are Mata Masani (goddess Sitala whose veneration is linked to cure of smallpox) and Bhairon (messenger of Sakhi Sarwar who is also



Figure 1.5 Gateway to a large Langar Hall at the Nigaha, village, Hargobindpur

a *rudra*/dreadful form of Shiva), two of the most prevalent *kismet*ic (related to fate) saint cults associated with miracle, power and healing in medieval Punjab.⁹⁹ Sakhi Sarwar is thus one of the several liminal saints of medieval India who remains on the threshold of religious

Table 1.1 *Sevadars* of Nigaha Baba Lakhdata at Langiana

Pir Buddu Shah	Baba Khushi Ram	Baba Mangat Rai (killed in 1987) Baba Harbans Lal (d. 2013) Baba Faqir Chand Soni (d. 2008)	Deepak Soni Ashwini Soni (d. 2011) Hardip Soni Sandeep Soni Krishan Soni Bikramjeet Soni (d. 2014) Kuldeep Soni (d. 2008)
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Source: Prepared by author

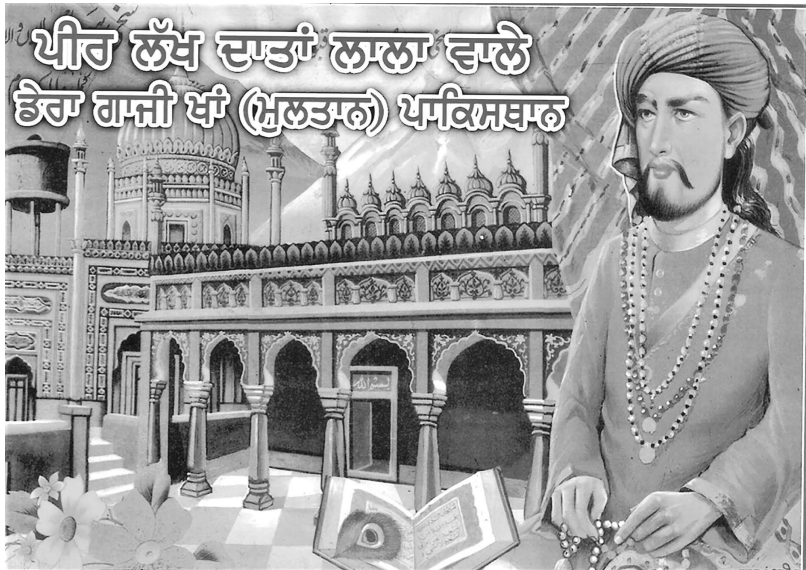


Figure 1.6 A photograph situating Baba Lakhdata at his shrine in Dera Ghazi Khan Pakistan that was twice bombed in 2011

identity and critiques dominant discourses of religious boundaries in Sikh historiography.

Baba Lakhdata's Nigaha shrines traverse diverse topographic contours from the plains of the Indus (Figure 1.6) to the submontane terrain of Gujranwala and Una to the semi-arid plains of Moga. It also counters contemporary notions of territoriality associated with nationalist histories as well as limited identitarian discourses around Sufi shrines that usually associate and legitimize such shrines with 'Muslim' caretakers. Here is an example of a shrine that had an uninterrupted

succession of Khatri caretakers only (Table 1.1), and there has been no change in the ritual performance at the shrine. The shrine's complex mimics symbols of Islamic architectural traditions, but the space continues to be vibrantly 'secular' in its spatial dynamics. The miracle story around Baba Lakhdata and Pir Buddhu does not involve any trope of conversion or Ashrafization. The miracle tropology is instead interwoven with the gift of healing, recovery and boon to heal. The circumstances associated with the establishment of the shrine similarly involve a 'Hindu' Khatri and a 'Sikh' Jat through the agency of a 'Muslim' saint.

Case study 1.3 Mandhali Sharif (district Nawanshahr)¹⁰⁰

Roza Sharif Mandhali was established by Baba Abdullah Shah Qadiri, who was said to have been born in 1785 in the 'land of Arabs'.¹⁰¹ He got one *qullah* (place of meditation) constructed at Mandhali and another at Behram where he remained absorbed in the contemplation of Allah. In 1883 he started the construction of a mausoleum where an eight-day fair began to be organized every year. This task was completed in 1908. In the meantime, a childless couple met Baba Abdullah and asked for his blessings. They were blessed with three sons, and two of them were dedicated to the service of the shrine. During his lifetime, Baba Abdullah designated a woman disciple, Bibi Rehmat, as his successor *gaddi-nishin* and died at Behram in 1910. The disciples at Behram wanted the saint to be buried there, whereas others wanted Mandhali as his final resting place. It is after the Deputy Commissioner of Jalandhar ruled in favour of the latter that Baba Abdullah was buried inside the mausoleum he had constructed at Mandhali.

During the partition of the province in 1947, the entire family, including Bibi Rehmat, migrated to Pakistan. Her youngest son, Rana Ali Ahmed, stayed back with his father, who soon died in 1950. Rana Ali Ahmed was born on 1 July 1900 and became the third successor of the shrine after 1947. He is remembered as Sabir Data Ali Ahmed Shah Qadiri. After his demise, a close disciple, Bhajan Shah Ji Qadiri (d. 2005), became the fourth successor, followed by Ghulam Baqi Sai Billa Shah Ji Qadiri (d. 2009). There is presently a network of four



Figure 1.7 Dargah of Baba Abdullah Shah Qadiri at Mandhali Sharif

shrines associated with Baba Abdullah Shah. The parent shrine, which Abdullah Shah had constructed, is at Mandhali, and Sai Umre Shah Ji Qadiri is its current *gaddi-nishin*.

In addition to this, a memorial shrine for Baba Abdullah Shah and Ali Ahmed Shah stands at the place where the former used to perform *qullab*. It was constructed by the latter in 1984. At the site of another *qullab* at Behram stands another shrine, Roza Bagh Sharif (dedicated to an unidentified Data Abdul Rehman Ji Saiyid). Bibi Taro Ji Sawar, a close female disciple of Ali Ahmed Shah, is the *gaddi-nishin* of the shrine (Figure 1.8). The shrine of a close disciple of Baba Abdullah Shah, Hazrat Baba Ghulam Muhammad Shah Ji Qadiri (1875–1965), is located in the city of Banga. Karam Bibi is the present female *gaddi-nishin* of this shrine. *Urs* is celebrated at all four shrines on different dates.

The major shrine complex of Mandhali Sharif is a two-storey dargah of Baba Abdullah Shah. Set on an octagonal plan on a raised square platform, this shrine is surrounded and replicated on all four corners by burial and/or memorial shrines dedicated to Data Ali



Figure 1.8 Bibi Taro, *gaddi-nishin* of Roza Bagh Sharif (bottom left) with Data Gulami Shah (top left) and Ali Ahmed Shah (right)

Ahmed Shah, Baba Bhure Shah and Sai Umre Shah; Baba Bhajan Shah and Sai Bille Shah; and Baba Machendranath, Sai Kalu Shah, Baba Chidi Shah, Chaudhary Nathu Shah and Baba Nathu Shah. There is a tall *nishan-sahib* adjacent to the small gateway to the shrine that attests to its sovereignty in the landscape of Jalandhar Doab and small niches for lighting oil lamps. One of the most crucial aspects of this shrine is its social settings in the Jalandhar Doab, which is known for its contribution to the Punjabi diaspora on the one hand and its share of scheduled caste population on the other. Chamars among the latter have historically and profitably been engaged in the leather tanning industry.¹⁰² This demographic pattern, along with the caste tensions between Dalits and Jats (who have dominant control over Gurdwaras in Punjab), is visible in the former's large presence and participation in various festivals organized at this shrine.¹⁰³ The shrine is also among the richest Sufi shrines in Punjab.

There aren't any images of Baba Abdullah Shah or Bibi Rehmat on display at the site. On the contrary, Baba Ali Ahmed Shah Qadiri is frequently portrayed in both black and white images as well as in wall paintings. He is usually portrayed as sitting in a contemplative mood

and being attended by several of his followers, which include both men and women Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims (Figure 1.9). The background of the painting represents Mecca and Medina on both sides, and the scene of a fair is on the right corner below. The saint dons green attire and wears ear and nose rings. These set of images articulate a feminine typology of Sufi mysticism where the murid yearns for union with the divine, attesting to a long continuity with Nath and Bhakti traditions. In the more contemporary images, such representation becomes symbolic and are juxtaposed with the display of growing wealth around the *gaddi-nishin* Sai Gulam Baqi Bille Shah. Sai Bille Shah wears several necklaces, earrings, a nose ring and rings in his fingers. He is portrayed holding a cigarette in his left hand and currency notes in the other. There is also a hoard of currency notes in front of him (Figure 1.10). Sai Bille Shah has been particularly popular among Punjabi NRIs and frequently visited his devotees in the West, an aspect that also defines the political economy of the shrine.

The shrine and its *gaddi-nishins* thus transcend the conventional metaphors of gendered identity. Two of the four shrines in this network are headed by women. The annual *urs* celebrations attract a large number of eunuchs who have a special relationship with these shrines. There have also been reports on the shrine's popularity among gays and transgenders.¹⁰⁴ It is thus important to see 'how [even while] the body [of Sufi shrines] is constructed through [popular] social images



Figure 1.9 Baba Ali Ahmed Shah Qadiri sitting in a contemplative mood and being attended by several of his followers



Figure 1.10 Sai Gulam Baqi Bille Shah seated in front of the shrine Mandhali Sharif with a hoard of currency notes in front of him

and in turn reinforces social values',¹⁰⁵ yet it also offers possibilities of critiquing social systems. Another crucial aspect of the shrine is its symbolic relationship with Machendranath, the iconic figure in the Nath tradition who was the Guru of Gorakhnath. The existence of *dhuna* (hearth) also symbolizes continued usage of Nath symbols in contemporary ritual practices. Shrines also complicate the linear articulation of social mobility. The sense of agency and caste mobility, for instance, among the 'untouchable' Chamars of Jalandhar Doab, who attend this site in large numbers, does not necessarily involve the unilineal articulation of the Ad Dharm or Ravidassia identity that has been worked on by Mark Juergensmeyer and Ronki Ram.¹⁰⁶ Instead, it exhibits far more diverse and complex trajectories of affiliation and migration: Nath, Sufi, Dalit among Hindu, Sikh or Muslim.

Popular Sufi shrines in Jalandhar Doab have developed a typical structural semblance. Set on an octagonal plan, these shrines present a coherent picture of such shrines from Jalandhar to Ropar (Figure 1.7). The walls of the shrine at Mandhali are beautifully decorated with

modern enamel paint using bright colours. The shrine attracts a large number of immigration aspirants, especially young boys and girls, and is also among the richest shrines in Punjab. The sanctum of Data Ali Ahmed Shah's shrine is inscribed with coins from across the world. Significantly, Islamic symbols and sacred spaces represented in the paintings of the shrine at Mandhali are in striking contrast to the demographic landscape of Jalandhar doab, which is predominantly non-Muslim; its Chamar connections, however, make sense since this area accounts for (together with Amritsar and Ludhiana) more than half of the scheduled caste population in the state.¹⁰⁷ Ajay Bhardwaj has highlighted this particular trend of Dalit veneration of Sufi shrines in his recent documentary *Kitte Mil Ve Mahi*. But such representation fails to appreciate the significant role that non-Dalits play in the location of Sufi shrines in contemporary Punjab and thus falls into the trap of the binaries of caste and class which (although significant but) are not the only defining element of these centres.

Sufi shrines and their embedded worldviews

Sacred shrines and sacrality have predominantly been understood through the agency of texts and the textual notion of community. Therefore, they are either construed as belonging to the realm of dominant religious identities or, if this does not explain the aspects of belonging, they are reduced to metonyms like syncretism or tolerance. Historians, do not pay much attention to the social spaces of sacrality and structures of power that explain the embeddedness of sacred shrines in the realm of a quotidian lived practice. 'Sacred' is thus separated and distinguished from the 'profane'. Commenting upon the problems of bifurcating religious studies and political history to understand Sufism and 'Muslim' kingship, A. Azfar Moin argues that these 'too formal and textual' models give 'much weight to doctrine and not enough space to practice'.¹⁰⁸ It is thus important to see tradition and materiality, spirituality and notions of power or sacrality and sovereignty as deeply intertwined with and performed within the *longue durée* of social space. These evolved through a dynamic process of patronage and structures of power and were informed by a worldview embodied in these popular sacred practices. It is this notion of sovereignty that is manifest in Baba Lakhdata's miraculous healing of Buddhu Shah and subsequent enshrinement of the saint through the

agency of a Sardar, extending Sufi saints' *wilayat* (spiritual territory) among Khattris, Jats, Aggrawals and Dalits. It is also evident in the extension of ritual practices at sacred shrines— like the establishment of a new langar hall at Langiana or the emergence of a new network of Sufi shrines associated with Mandhali Sharif and Haider Shaikh's shrine at Malerkotla.

It is also important to situate the 'modernist' (read textual) and reformist critiques of these very sacred practices in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India, informed as these were by colonial historiography as well as emerging notions of governmentality.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the pre-colonial notions of sacrality and rituals that ensured the continuous flow of *barkat* (power) embodied in the living saint or grave of the buried saint and/or his successor *khalifas* or *sajjada nishins* also enabled continuation of these practices in post-partition contexts. Sacred genealogies and the accompanied *barkat* that manifested in saints and successors, created and sustained by the narrative flow of an important cosmological worldview of power that flowed from miraculous saints to devotees, sometimes even through *jinn*s, such as the pilgrims touching the 'medieval' wall around the grave of Haider Shaikh that was apparently constructed overnight by *jinn*s.¹¹⁰ It is not surprising that shrines of miraculous saints are popularly identified as *darbars* (or courts) and perform a curial function of mediation in the cosmos, between 'god' and 'man',¹¹¹ a worldview that enabled the crossover of identity and religious boundaries. It is this mediatory role of Sufi shrines that enliven the possibility of the flow of *barkat*, even in situations of conflict and manifest in Sher Muhammad Khan's defence of the sons of Guru Gobind Singh. It is thus possible to see the historical contact without reference to their perceived notions of religious identities or conflict. Pnina Werbner underlines the significance of *barkat* in several ways:

Barkat imbues objects, such as the salt given out by the pīr, or *langar*, with the power of procreation, proliferation, fecundity, expansion, life, fertility, and growth of children, crops, wealth, job prospects, health, and so forth). *Barkat* is magical and contagious. The very touch of a pīr can imbue an object with *barkat*. This means that the pīr himself is charged physically with *barkat*, which explains why he is constantly mobbed by devout followers.¹¹²

Barkat is also both embodied and trans-regional. As Nile Green argued, it is 'kept alive through the stories and rituals that surrounded it. . . .

Transformed into an eternal saint in this way, as miraculous patron or even genealogical ancestor of his client community, through this spatial process of enshrinement the blessed man became a ritualized' and memorialized in the sacred landscape as 'architectural embodiment of collective memory- served to bridge the past and present time of his followers'.¹¹³ This process does not necessarily follow the familiar trope of textualization and formulation of a 'Muslim' community as Green argues but rather permeates into the lived community in complex ways.

This subtle persistence of notions of sacred and power embodied in genealogical saints also explains the continued popularity of *deras* across the Punjab region. Often tagged as heretical and despite some being at the centre of controversy, these *deras* follow the popular tropology of embodied sacrality, mediated though the living saint, *bani* (poetry) of popular Punjabi mystics and miraculous saint hagiographies. Importantly, it is these very 'heretical' conceptions of sacred authority that attracted a 'Muslim' notion of 'sovereignty more than orthodox notions of Islam . . . giving ritual practice and [its] performance an interpretive priority over religious doctrine and law' in medieval India.¹¹⁴ Moin (2017) further elaborates on this notion of sovereignty:

For what may appear as "heresy" from doctrinal point of view was, in many cases, a ritual engagement with popular forms of saintliness and embodied forms of sacrality that were broadly and intuitively accepted by much of the populace as morally valid and spiritually potent. To make way for this perspective, however, we must set aside many conventional assumptions and timeless truths about Islam [Hinduism and Sikhism]. Instead, we must examine from first principles the social processes that transmuted kings into saints and saints into kings.¹¹⁵

These 'heretical' conceptions of ritual practices mediate the possibilities of overlaps between Nath and Sufi mystic practices that are significantly embedded in contemporary ritual practices. Ritual practices embedded in these three shrine narratives legitimize this 'sovereign' spiritual authority of popular Sufi shrines to mediate and spatialize contemporary social processes. It is important to understand the salience of gifting a symbolic 'horse' to Haider Shaikh, the spiritual sovereign of Malerkotla, whose *barkat* and miraculous capabilities transform the fortunes of his disciples in the same way it did for Bahlul

Lodhi. This continuous flow of *barkat* is also mediated through ‘possessed’ chelas, who through their *chaukis* and *pirkhanas* extend saint’s miraculous power and spatialize the blessed community. Therefore, the model of social mobility articulated through terms like Sanskritization and Islamization, or a distinction between ‘high culture’ or ‘low culture’, does not explain the dynamic social processes at popular Sufi shrines. Identities in this process are always on the ‘threshold’.

The transformation of social space in which Sufi shrines are embedded also informs us about their emerging significance due to shifts in the contemporary structures of power. Mandhali Sharif presents one such example of a shrine that has assumed a major place in the sacred landscape of Jalandhar Doab, a region known for its Punjabi Jat and Dalit migration, and also for the presence of a large Dalit population and *deras* of Ravidassia saints that are among the most affluent in Punjab. This changing contour of the structures of power and material affluence is represented in the political assertion of Dalits and also in the display of Dalit pride. A predominant perspective of this process has been articulated by scholars through the rise of Dalit identity movements in Punjab and territorialization of Ravidassia identity.¹¹⁶ But it is equally important to emphasize the parallel presence of popular Sufi shrines that are legitimized through the same process. It is therefore crucial to understand the significance attached to displaying wealth (Figure 1.9) and the possibilities of migration that indicate toward the newer networks of patronage to the sacred spaces that re-fashion some aspects of ritual practice at saints’ shrines. Mandhali Sharif’s global networks of belonging and patronage exemplifies a dialectic between the local and transnational.¹¹⁷ This has a striking semblance with similar displays of wealth inside ‘community’ gurdwaras, in the form of gifts of coins of foreign denominations as well as models of aeroplanes. However, one major point of distinction between ‘popular’ Sufi shrines and ‘modern’ gurdwaras (both Sikh and Ravidassia) of Jalandhar Doab is the significant presence of women in the structures of authority in the case of former. Popular shrines, therefore, do not necessarily represent or mimic existing structure of authority but sometimes radically subvert them.

These three case studies illustrate the spatialization of rituals and the dynamic process of continuity and change at the popular Sufi shrines in contemporary Indian Punjab. It is pertinent to note how *dhuna*, mostly associated with Naths, manifests at popular Sufi shrines in Langiana and Mandhali, suggesting the ongoing and historical congruence between Yoga and Sufi practices,¹¹⁸ a process through which ‘early modern memory . . . lingers to this day in the spaces of the

saints'.¹¹⁹ Despite the violent partition of the region in 1947, we see continuities in beliefs in the spiritual power of the saint (*barkat*) that also manifests in *gaddi-nishins*, rituals and symbols and is sustained through (Aggrawal, Khatri and Sikh) patronage, pilgrimage, annual festivals (*urs*) and weekly fairs that might involve visitation or possession of saints mediated through chelas and *chaukis*. These practices are living histories and memories of Sufi saints of Punjab that continue to reverberate in the popular landscapes of the region. As Bernard Cohn argued, 'the past exists not only in records of the past, but survives in buildings, objects and landscapes of the present day, the observation of which assist the historian in constructing the context'.¹²⁰ Through her discussion on the ephemeral, Carla Bellamy says that by drawing from the language of the court (*darbar*), 'in both the royal and the legal sense' of the term, 'the pilgrim comes to understand herself as part of a global community, allowing her to develop an experience of selfhood that transcends *jati*-or family-based identities'.¹²¹ Her limiting of the practice of saint veneration to something ephemeral, however, does not explain the intimate articulation of the process in Punjab.

Popular Sufi shrines foster alternative articulations of identity that do not just rupture dominant narratives of caste mobility and Tat-Khalsa dominated historiography but also posit crucial questions for a broader understanding of the complex processes of the social formation of Punjabi society.¹²² I have argued for a method for understanding the lived lives of Punjabis as not subsumed within dominant metanarratives of Sanskritization and Islamization or syncretism/tolerance versus conflict. Despite century-long reformist/revivalist rhetoric against popular Sufi shrines in Punjab, shrines continue to thrive. Their embeddedness within the contemporary social formations is crucial to this process, as I have also highlighted elsewhere.¹²³ Such shrines act as a kind of 'bridge of understanding'¹²⁴ to subaltern pasts and presents. Joe Moran situates the everyday practices such shrines represent as a kind of 'living memory', which 'carries within itself both survivals [and continuities] from previous eras and the possibility for further change'.¹²⁵ Significantly, 'everyday' is absent both from the annals of the archives and the 'spectacularizing discourse of modernity'.¹²⁶ He sees it as a residual, overlooked material that is 'repetitive', 'peripheral', 'uncanny' and 'uneventful' and hence invisible.

However, it is this everyday that opens up 'modernity to historical difference'.¹²⁷ Moran makes a case for 'everyday' within Gramsci's (1971) 'spontaneous philosophy' as 'those forms of lay knowledge that, by virtue of being so firmly embedded in specific social contexts,

conceal resilient power relationships',¹²⁸ My case studies exemplify a deep, what Antonio Gramsci terms 'organic',¹²⁹ relationship among Punjabi communities that foster saint veneration, as Mir has shown, despite the rupture created by Partition violence.¹³⁰ What we must remember is that a focus on rupture fails to grasp the continuity and overlaps of pre-partition memory that is mediated in contemporary social processes through rituals, dreams and memories that migrants carry along with them in newer landscapes. A saint's spiritual sovereignty spans across space and time and provides a stable mediatory template, enabling a continuous flow of saint narratives and memorial practices.

Popular Sufi shrines defy the modernist agenda of reform that was initiated in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Punjab. This agenda endowed faith practices with a theology and embedded them in a modernist worldview of sacred cosmologies. Critique of popular shrines was one of the most essential components of these refashioning. It is important to identify how reform attempted to transform the worldview of faith practices by foregrounding sacred texts and discounting living Gurus (associated with *deras* and *pirkhanas*) and such other practices that revolved around shrines erected on the graves of saint figures. It is therefore not a surprise that the most violent and polemical responses to popular faith practices in post-partition Punjab, which have come from dominant discourses, specifically question whether living gurus can be equivalent to *gurbani* embodied in sacred texts like Guru Granth Sahib. These cults of saints, godmen and sites of popular veneration destabilize modern religious discourses. It is not a surprise that the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), the supreme body that governs most pre-dominant historic gurdwaras of Punjab, has remained consistently opposed to popular modes of veneration that centre around ordinary and mundane concerns of everyday life. Roger Ballard terms these popular modes of religion in Punjab as 'kismatic',¹³¹

This worldview of faith practices seeks answers to uncertainties of a frontier region that has been struggling through the aftermath of partition, wars, agrarian distress, urban decay, caste and gender violence and militancy. The most significant of Baba Lakhdata dargahs are frontier shrines, situated on historical or contemporary frontiers. It is curious to note that saint hagiographies along frontiers follow similar tropes of signification – true king, protector, miracle maker, bestower of sons and settler. This is true for both Nigaha at Langiana and Shaikh Haider's shrine at Malerkotla. A perennial need for resolution of these uncertainties explains a considerable traction toward miracle saints

and their *barkat*. These charismatic saints and their shrines' powers to heal also enliven the possibility to begin a historical discourse that challenges caste hierarchies. Unlike elaborate rituals at temples (except those dedicated to Shiva) and gurdwaras – associated with idols or the granth and mediated through ritual specialists – Sufi saint shrines offer some simplistic formulae of visitation and lighting a lamp (*chirag*). Also, unlike practice of veneration of idols and the granth that strictly restrict devotees' access to darshan (distant gaze), the devotees at saint shrines have direct access to a saint's entombed body. This direct access to a saint's *barkat* is a crucial component of the devotees' intimate association with the visitation of sacred shrines. Interestingly, Sikhism also emerged as a critique of dogmatic worldviews, but its modern interpretation is marked by distance and boundaries of rituals and access. The dominance of 'Sikh' Jats in gurdwara management, therefore, restricts the access of Majhabis, Sanatanis, Dalit, Udasis, etc. Popular Sufi shrines make space for the expression of these shifts in structures of domination that originated in the twentieth century.

The recent controversy over high school history textbooks in Punjab has brought back debates on the sovereignty of Sikhi in the landscape of the region's history and the perceived threat that destabilizes the normative Tat Khalsa worldview.¹³² The dominant perspective of Punjab's 'modern' historiography limits the region's long historical experience to the sovereignty of Sikhism and, therefore, discounts any possibility of an alternative narrative – themes of 'true' sovereignty, wars, persecution, martyrdom, invasion and autonomy predominate – leaving little space for worldviews of contact and reconciliation. The narrative of *ha da nara* offers an opportunity to rethink the contemporary linear historiography of conflict between Sikhs and Mughals by situating peace amidst war and artition. It challenges and ruptures the nationalist worldview of a Sikh nation's emergence from the shadow of Mughal persecution by evoking a possibility of narrativizing an embedded history of Punjab enriched by fieldwork, a history of contact and reciprocity where the sovereignty of the Sufi saint and Sikh guru can overlap and coexist. Sufi shrines are imbued with memory of decades, sometime centuries, of visitation, veneration and association – both as a quotidian observer as well as a guide to long stream of pilgrims and disciples. In the contours of post-partition contemporary (Indian) Punjab, popular Sufi shrines stand as the only testimony to intersecting social contours of the spaces pre-partition.

Is it, therefore, possible to see Punjabi social history as overlapping layers of ruptures, change and continuities, rather than neatly defined vertical layers, one over the other? Can shrines be studied not just as

‘timeless and pristine objects’ but as ‘products of the restless operation of both internal dynamics (mostly local power relations) and external forces (such as capitalism and colonialism) over time’?¹³³ It is in the ‘culturally organized practices’ of everyday life that the dialectics of social life can be understood. While shrines renegotiate their everyday realms in the post-partition realities, they also continue to be deeply embedded in rituals, memory and dreams of pre-partition social milieu. Werbner and Basu argue, ‘the power of ritual . . . derive[s] not from belief as a set of abstracted ideas but from ritual as a complex set of transformative, embodied, negotiated ethical and aesthetic practices and the experiences which their enactment generates’.¹³⁴ It is thus only in understanding the workings of the everyday and the relationships that comprise it that we will understand the dynamic of the continued veneration of popular saints in Punjab. This is as much a concern for a historian as it is for an anthropologist, the methodologies of which have been central to this project to rethink the past and its life in the present.

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Notes

- 1 K.N. Panikkar, “Culture and Consciousness in Modern India: A Historical Perspective,” *Social Scientist* 18, 4 (2012): 7.
- 2 A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New Delhi: Primus, 2017), 131. Moin’s larger argument is to augment the centrality of the social and everyday in shaping the conception of the state and kingship in Mughal India and Safavid Iran. He laments the complete absence of the role played by such social processes, for instance, astrology and astronomy, that ‘transmuted kings into saints and saints into kings’. *Ibid.*, 6.
- 3 Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Centre* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.
- 4 Neeladri Bhattacharya, “Predicaments of Secular Histories,” *Public Culture* 20, 1 (2008): 58–59.
- 5 Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 242.
- 6 Bhattacharya, “Predicaments of Secular Histories,” 70.
- 7 Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 10.

- 8 Some significant works, for example, have critiqued popular notions of ‘Muslim’ invasions and conversion (Richard M. Eaton, “Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, 3 (2000): 283–319; “Shrines, Cultivators, and Muslim ‘Conversion’ in Punjab and Bengal, 1300–1700,” *The Medieval History Journal* 12, 2 (2009): 191–220), construction of communalism (C. A. Bayly, “The Pre-History of ‘Communalism’? Religious Conflict in India, 1700–1860,” *Modern Asian Studies* 19, 2 (1985): 177–203), community identification and othering (Cynthia Talbot, “Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, 4 (1995): 692–722), the idea of ‘medieval’ in Indian historiography (Daud Ali, “The Idea of the Medieval in the Writing of South Asian History: Contexts, Methods and Politics,” *Social History* 39, 3 (2014): 382–407.), situating the political in Sufi hagiographic narratives (Ernst, *Eternal Garden*) and situating sacred space between texts and territories (Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012). Identity, however, remains an essential constant in most of these works.
- 9 Bernard S. Cohn, “History and Anthropology: The State of Play,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, 2 (1980): 198–221.
- 10 For a critical reading on exclusion of caste from historical narrative see Dilip M. Menon, *The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India* (Chennai: Navayana, 2006).
- 11 Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Public Life of History: An Argument out of India,” *Public Culture* 20, 1 (2008): 157.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 164–165. Shahid Amin presents an interesting example of complex narrativity of an event. Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922–1992* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- 13 Badri Narayan’s research, for instance, shows how Dalits and their histories have recently been subsumed into the communal narrative in contemporary Uttar Pradesh. Badri Narayan, *Fascinating Hindutva: Saffron Politics and Dalit Mobilisation* (New Delhi: Sage, 2009).
- 14 Nicholas B. Dirks, “Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History,” in *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and its Futures*, ed. Brian Keith Axel, 47–65 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Brian Keith Axel, “Introduction: Historical Anthropology and its Vicissitudes,” in *From the Margins*, ed. Brian Keith Axel, 1–46; Anand Pandian, “The Time of Anthropology: Notes from a Field of Contemporary Experience,” *Cultural Anthropology* 27, 4 (2012): 547–571.
- 15 Most recent works on popular shrines include Bigelow’s work on the shrine of Haider Shaikh (Anna Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred: Practising Pluralism in Muslim India* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2010]) and Bellamy’s work on healing processes at Husain Tekri (Carla Bellamy, *The Powerful Ephemeral: Everyday Healing in an Ambiguously Islamic Place* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011]).
- 16 Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1.
- 17 Dirks, “Annals of the Archive,” 64.

- 18 Peter van der Veer, "Religion in South Asia," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 176.
- 19 Kelly Pemberton, *Women Mystics and Sufi Shrines in India* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 38.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Nicholas B. Dirks, *Autobiography of an Archive: A Scholar's Passage to India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 49.
- 22 Anand Vivek Taneja, "Jinnealogy: Everyday life and Islamic Theology in Post-Partition Delhi," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3, 3 (2013): 145.
- 23 Anshu Malhotra's recent exploration of Gulabdasis and their *dera* (shrine) in modern Punjab highlights an important social dimension of a 'sect' that 'points to a deep-seated cultural habitus, adapted and constantly responding to changed times and disparate circumstances, spatializing 'people's ethereal yet everyday [religious] quest'. Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis: Gender, Sect, and Society in Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017), xxvi.
- 24 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).
- 25 Cited in Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 103.
- 26 Ibid., 104.
- 27 Ibid., 105–106.
- 28 Axel, "Introduction: Historical Anthropology and its Vicissitudes," 33.
- 29 Saloni Mathur, "History and Anthropology in South Asia: Rethinking the Archive," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29 (2000): 95.
- 30 Saurabh Dube, "Historical Anthropology of Modern India," *History Compass* 5, 3 (2007): 763.
- 31 Ibid., 764.
- 32 Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States."
- 33 British perception and treatment of Sufi shrines and pirs, for instance, was closely tied to the 'colonial agenda of asserting economic, social, ideological, and political control over their subjects. . . [by creating] pliable allies from along the ranks of those who were, or were perceived to be, local elites [caretakers] . . . understand, maintain, and replicate the types patronage-based relationships that their predecessors had cultivated with local religious leaders'. Pemberton, *Women Mystics and Sufi Shrines in India*, 39.
- 34 Anne Murphy, *Materiality of the Sikh Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 35 Ibid., 192.
- 36 Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion, Nation, and Empire* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 14–29.
- 37 David Gilmartin, "The Shahid Ganj Mosque Incident: A Prelude to Pakistan," in *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements*, ed. Edmund Burke III and Ira M. Lapidus, 163 (Berkeley: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
- 38 Murphy, *Materiality of the Sikh Past*, 222.
- 39 M.K. Gandhi, *Hindi Swaraj* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938), 55.

- 40 Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 98–99.
- 41 Several scholars have sought to engage with term syncretism as blending, synthesizing or harmonizing of pre-existing religious identities and its meanings for tolerance in the Indian context; Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Peter van der Veer, “Syncretism, Multiculturalism and the Discourse of Tolerance,” in *Syncretism/Anti-syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, ed. Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart, 185–199 (London: Routledge, 1994). Farina Mir, on the contrary, extends Tony Stewart’s criticism of syncretism grounded in his study of early-modern Bengal into the modern period and problematizes its usage ‘as an analytic for the study of South Asian religious practices because its use elides diversity of opinion, thought, and belief within the Hindus, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian tradition’. Farina Mir, “Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism,” *Comparative Study of Society and History* 48, 3 (2006): 732–733; Tony Stewart, “In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory,” *History of Religions* 40, 3 (2001): 260–287. Mir argues that popular devotional practices in Punjabi *qisse* ‘are better understood as reflecting shared notions of piety, and that participating in the forms of devotion that accompanied this piety was not predicated on one’s pre-existing religious identity’, and therefore ‘opens up more conceptual and analytical space than that accorded by the notion of syncretism’. Mir, “Genre and Devotion,” 734. Asim Roy categorises shrines of popular Sufi saints in Bengal as those of ‘fictitious pirs’ who emerged out of old popular and practices associated with a popular locality or a site and sought to be Islamized through the protean process of ‘purification’ (see Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition*, 207–248).
- 42 Harjot Oberoi, “Popular Saints, Goddesses, and Village Sacred Sites: Rereading Sikh Experience in the Nineteenth Century,” *History of Religions* 31, 4 (1992): 363–384.
- 43 Partha Chatterjee, “Caste and Subaltern Consciousness,” in *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha, 206 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 44 Several scholarly works have focused on debates over Ayodhya, Babri Masjid and its demolition; Sarvepalli Gopal, *Anatomy of a Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1991); Dhaneshwar Mandal, *Ayodhya, Archaeology After Demolition: A Critique of the “new” and “fresh” Discoveries* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2003).
- 45 Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2010).
- 46 Robert M. Hayden, “Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans,” *Current Anthropology* 43, 2 (2002): 205–231; “Sufis, Dervishes and Alevi-Bektâşis: Interfaces of Heterodox Islam and Nationalist Politics from the Balkans, Turkey and India,” Paper presented at a workshop on “Sufi Islam and the Politics of Belonging in South Asia,” 1–27 (Heidelberg: University of Heidelberg [6 Nov 2014]); Glenn Bowman, “Introduction: Sharing the Sacra,” in

- Sharing the Sacra: The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations around Holy Places*, ed. Glenn Bowman, 1–24 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Dionigi Albera, “‘Why Are You Mixing what Cannot be Mixed?’ Shared Devotions in the Monotheisms,” *History and Anthropology* 19, 1 (2008): 37–59.
- 47 Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*, 3.
- 48 Hayden, “Antagonistic Tolerance” cited in Robert M. Hayden and Timothy D. Walker, “Intersecting Religioscapes: A Comparative Approach to Trajectories of Change, Scale, and Competitive Sharing of Religious Spaces,” *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 81, 2 (2013): 401.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid., 402.
- 51 Ibid., 407–408.
- 52 Anna Bigelow, “Tying Bonds of Unity at Guru ki Maseet,” *The Tribune*, 24 February 2001, www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20010224/windows/main1.htm (accessed on 14 November 2015).
- 53 The Moorish mosque was constructed along the lines of a similar shrine in Morocco.
- 54 See Grewal and Goswamy for a useful discussion on *madad-i-ma’sh* grants to *jogis* of Jakhbar. B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal, eds., *The Mughals and the Jogis of Jakhbar: Some Madad-i-ma’sh and other Documents* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1967).
- 55 For a fascinating account of complex parallel narratives around Somnath temple’s destructions see Romila Thapar, *Somnatha: The Many Voices of a History* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2004).
- 56 Bowman, “Introduction,” 1.
- 57 Albera, “Why Are You Mixing,” 39.
- 58 Cited from Hayden, “Antagonistic Tolerance,” 219 in Albera, “Why Are You Mixing,” 55.
- 59 Albera, “Why Are You Mixing,” 55.
- 60 M. N. Srinivas, “A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization,” *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, 4 (1956): 482.
- 61 Ibid., 485–486. Srinivas admitted that ‘Sanskritization does not help the untouchables to move up’ and hence destabilises the very narrative he proposes. Ibid., 494.
- 62 Historians have typically used the term Brahmanization to imply the Orientalizing of Hinduism, discourses of social reform in colonial India or situating feminist debates. The term has also been used to describe the ways in which Hinduism made inroads into tribal heartland of India or ideological change in oral traditions. For a representative reading on the process of Brahmanization see David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and “the Mystic East”* (Routledge: London, 1999); Ranjana Sheel, *The Political Economy of Dowry: Institutionalization and Expansion in North India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999); Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); A. Murali, “Cultural History of Pre-colonial Deccan: A Study into Long-term Dynamics of Change,” in *Different Types of History*, ed. Bharati Ray, 245–266 (New Delhi: Pearson

- Longman, 2009); Upinder Singh, "Brāhmaṇa Settlements in Ancient and Early Medieval India," in *A Social History of Early India*, ed. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 157–177 (New Delhi: Pearson Education, 2009).
- 63 Romila Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity," *Modern Asian Studies* 23, 2 (1989): 213.
- 64 Dominique-Sila Khan, *Crossing the Threshold: Understanding Religious Identities in South Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 65.
- 65 Pashaura Singh partially develops the idea of diversity in the Sikh tradition (Pashaura Singh, "Re-imagining Sikhi ('Sikhness') in the Twenty-First Century: Toward a Paradigm Shift in Sikh Studies," in *Re-imagining South Asian Religions*, ed. Pashaura Singh and Michael Hawley, 27–48 [Leiden: Brill, 2013]). Harjot Oberoi's discussion on the construction of religious boundaries is a classic reading on diversity of religious practices among Sikhs of colonial Punjab (Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*). On definitions of Sikh identity, see Kenneth W. Jones, "Ham Hindu Nahin: Arya-Sikh Relations, 1877–1905," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 32, 3 (1973): 457–475; J.S. Grewal, "Nabha's Ham Hindu Nahin: A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity," in *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, ed. Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, 231–254 (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999); Paramjit S. Judge and Manjit Kaur, "The Politics of Sikh Identity: Understanding Religious Exclusion," *Sociological Bulletin* 59, 3 (2010): 345–366; W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh Identity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Louis E. Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the "Game of Love"* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000). For more recent attempts to delineate clear and concrete definitions of Sikh identity see W.H. McLeod, *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition and Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 204; Pashaura Singh, "Sikh Identity in the Light of History: A Dynamic Perspective," in *Sikhism and History*, ed. Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, 103 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), both cited in Judge and Kaur, "The Politics of Sikh Identity," 351.
- 66 SGPC, which has been dominated by Akali Dal, has long been advocating the removal of Sehajdharis from the list of voters in the elections to the body and limiting voting rights exclusively for Amritdharis. The parliament recently brought in an amendment to this effect in the Sikh Gurdwara Act in 1925, and the same was passed in Lok Sabha on 25 April 2016 without any debate. The Sikh Gurdwaras (Amendment) Bill, 2016 amended the 'provisos to section 49 and section 92 of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925 retrospectively with effect from 08th October, 2003 for removing the exemption given to Sehajdharis Sikhs' to 'to enable them to vote in the elections to the members of the Board and the Committee constituted under the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925'. The central had attempted modifications to these sections vide notification dated 08 October 2003, but the same was quashed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court on 20 December 2011. This systemic othering of Sehajdharis among Sikhs reproduces the exclusionary colonial tropes of classification.
- 67 Eaton, "Shrines, Cultivators, and Muslim 'Conversion'".
- 68 Richard M. Eaton, "Court of Man, Court of God: Local Perceptions of the Shrine of Bābā Fārīd, Pakpattan, Punjab," *Contributions to Asian Studies* 17 (1982): 54.

- 69 Ibid., 55.
- 70 See Khan, *Crossing the Threshold*, 56.
- 71 Ibid., 57.
- 72 On the influence of discourses related to the Protestant reformation for ‘moral languages’ in colonial Punjab, see Bob van der Linden, *Moral Languages from Colonial Punjab: The Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyahs* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008); on conversion, see Christopher Harding, *Religious Transformation in South Asia: The Meanings of Conversion in Colonial Punjab* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 73 Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1706* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
- 74 Saurabh Dube and Ishita Banerjee Dube, “Spectres of Conversion: Transformation of Caste and Sect in India,” in *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*, ed. Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke, 250 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 75 Ronki Ram, “Beyond Conversion and Sanskritisation: Articulating an Alternative Dalit Agenda in East Punjab,” *Modern Asian Studies* 46, 3 (2012): 639.
- 76 Ibid., 702.
- 77 Karenjot B. Randhawa, *Civil Society in Malerkotla, Punjab: Fostering Resilience through Religion* (Lexington Books: Lanham, 2012), x.
- 78 Shahzad Khan Bagga (58 years) was interviewed on 14 February 2015 at the shrine of Haider Shaikh, Malerkotla. The earliest academic recording of the narrative was Iftikhar Ali Khan’s *History of the Ruling Family of Shaikh Sadruddin, Sadar-i-Jahan of Malerkotla, 1499 A.D. to 1948 A.D.* (Patiala: Punjabi University Publication Bureau, 2000). Anna Bigelow has also recorded this narrative, but the author attempts to recollect it afresh to see if there are any connects or disconnects in the narratives and whether fresh recording opens up newer possibilities of interpretations (Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred*). Most recently, Karenjot B. Randhawa has looked upon Malerkotla from the perspectives of conflict and peace between Sikhs and Muslims that shape contemporary resilience of civil society in this town (Randhawa, *Civil Society in Malerkotla*) and Pippa Virdee (*From the Ashes of 1947: Reimagining Punjab* [New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2018]) who explores the value of sacredness of Malerkotla in ensuring peace during Partition.
- 79 These narratives follow a similar trajectory of reinstating the *barkat* of buried saints. Simon Digby records similar narratives while documenting the hagiographies of Nath saints of Punjab (Simon Digby, *Wonder Tales of South Asia* [New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006]). Bouillier and Khan also narrate stories of Baba Haji Rattan, who blessed the powerful fort of Bathinda on Muhammad Ghori (Véronique Bouillier and Dominique-Sila Khan, “Hājji Ratan or Bābā Ratan’s Multiple Identities,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 37, 6 (2009): 562.
- 80 Snehi’s study of Panj Pirs at Abohar similarly documents the absence of a dome in the imagination of this medieval shrine covered predominantly by a local tree *jand* (*Salvadora oleoides*). Yogesh Snehi, “Historicity, Orality and Lesser Shrines: Popular Culture and Change at the Dargah Panj Pir at Abohar,” in *Sufism in Punjab: Mystics Literature and Shrines*, ed. Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, 402–429 (New Delhi: Aakar, 2009).

- 81 Khan, *History of the Ruling Family*, 8.
- 82 Ibid., 9.
- 83 Shahzad Khan Bagga (58 years) was interviewed on 14 February 2015 at the shrine of Haider Shaikh, Malerkotla.
- 84 The Call for Justice (*ha da nara*) has been reproduced from Khan's *History of the Ruling Family of Shaikh*, in Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred*, 249–250.
- 85 Khan, *History of the Ruling Family*, 35.
- 86 Karenjot B. Randhawa also points out how, in contrast to its activities elsewhere in India, Jama'at-i Islami in Malerkotla focuses on social obligations as opposed to political aims. Another organization, Tablighi Jamat, a reformist movement in South Asian Islam opposed to saint veneration, *sama*, *qawwali*, etc. has a weak organisational network in Malerkotla. Randhawa, *Civil Society in Malerkotla*, 104–105.
- 87 For further reading on Malerkotla's uniqueness during partition violence see Bigelow, "Saved by the Saint".
- 88 Both Karenjot, as well as Pippa, however, also lay significant emphasis on the active role that the Nawab of Malerkotla State played in maintaining peace in the State.
- 89 Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred*.
- 90 Interviewed Hardip Soni on 9 February 2015 at his residence in village Langiana.
- 91 The following of Sakhi Sarwar must have been sizeable for his adherents were known by varied names in different localities: Sarwaria, Sewak Sultani, Hindu Sultani, Nigahia, Sarwar Sakhi, Sarwar Sagar, Sultani Ramrae, Sarwar Panthi, Guru Sultania, Khawaja Sarwar, Ramdasia Sultania. H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-west Frontier Province*, Vol. 1 (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1919), 566, cited in Harjot Oberoi, "The Worship of Pir Sakhi Sarwar: Illness, Healing and Popular Culture in the Punjab," *Studies in History* 3, 1 (1987): 32.
- 92 Oberoi, "The Worship of Pir Sakhi Sarwar," 29.
- 93 "DG Khan Shrine Bombing: Death Toll Reaches 50," *The Express Tribune*, 4 April 2011, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/142210/militants-attack-shrine-in-dg-khan-3-dead/> (accessed on 01 April 2018).
- 94 Oberoi, "The Worship of Pir Sakhi Sarwar," 34.
- 95 Snehi has explored another shrine dedicated to Baba Lakhdatta at Abohar and explored the significant role that dreams and memorialization play in the continued practice of Sufi saint veneration in Indian Punjab. Yogesh Snehi, "Dreaming Baba, Resituating Memory: Popular Sufi Shrines and the Historiography of Contemporary East Punjab," *Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia* 2, 1 (2014): 3–24.
- 96 For a detailed reading of the process of sedentarisation of Jats see Eaton's "Shrines, Cultivators, and Muslim"; Irfan Habib, "Jatts in Medieval Punjab," in *Precolonial and Colonial Punjab: Society, Economy, Politics and Culture*, ed. Reeta Grewal and Sheena Pall, 63–76 (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005).
- 97 Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, 570–571, also cited in Oberoi, "The Worship of Sakhi Sarwar," 36.
- 98 *Gazetteer of the Ferozepore District, 1915, Part A* (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1916), 21.

- 99 *Kismet* is a term used by Roger Ballard to situate the faith practices in Punjab. Roger Ballard, "Panth, Kismet, Dharm te Qaum: Continuity and Change in Four Dimensions of Punjabi Religion," in *Punjabi Identity in a Global Context*, ed. Pritam Singh and Shinder Singh Thandi, 7–38 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 100 Narrative extracted from a newspaper provided by Sai Umre Shah, the current *gaddi-nishin* of the shrine on 02 February 2015. I am indebted to Prof. Surinder Singh for introducing me to Mandhali Sharif.
- 101 It has been a usual hagiographical practice to claim Saiyyid lineage for most Sufi mystics and follows the established conventions of *Mal'ufuzat* literature and links them to the family of Prophet Muhammad.
- 102 Ram, "Beyond Conversion and Sanskritisation".
- 103 This region was also an epicentre of Dalit violence in the aftermath of murder of a Ravidasia saint Ramanand in Vienna on 24 May 2009. For a detailed reading on the relations between Jats and Chamars of Jalandhar Doab see Paramjit S. Judge, "Dalit Culture and Identity: Valorisation and Reconstruction of Tradition among the Chamars in Punjab," *Economic and Political Weekly* 70, 34 (2015): 53–60.
- 104 "Gay Self-help Groups Jubilant," *Deccan Chronicle*, 29 June 2009, www.deccanchronicle.com/national/gay-self-help-groups-jubilant-237 (accessed on 09 January 2011).
- 105 Scott Kugle, *Sufi and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2009), 13.
- 106 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebels in the Punjab: The Ad Dharm Challenge to Caste* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2011); Ram, "Beyond Conversion and Sanskritisation."
- 107 Punjab also has the highest (8.9 per cent) of the scheduled caste (SC) population in India (Census 2001).
- 108 Moin, "The Millennial Sovereign," 5.
- 109 Sovereignty and selfhood embodied in Sufi shrines ensured the role that Sufi religious leaders played for the British, who sought to maintain the state structure, or the alliances that the nationalist and reformist groups forged with the weakening of the colonial structure. Pemberton, *Women Mystics and Sufi Shrines in India*, 44.
- 110 Anand Vivek Taneja has elaborately worked on the flow of *barkat* through *jimms*. Taneja, "Jinnealogy".
- 111 Eaton, "Court of Man, Court of God".
- 112 Pnina Werbner, "Du'a: Popular Culture and Powerful Blessing at the 'Urs," in *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny*, ed. Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey, 89 (London: Continuum, 2012).
- 113 Green, *Making Space*, 3.
- 114 Moin, "The Millennial Sovereign," 6.
- 115 Ibid.
- 116 Ram, "Beyond Conversion and Sanskritisation".
- 117 Carla Bellamy similarly elaborates on the ways in which 'Indian dargāhs function as simultaneously local and cosmopolitan places' and 'their efficacy as places of healing derives from this dual nature'. Bellamy, *The Powerful Ephemeral*, 216.
- 118 See Carl W. Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15, 1 (2005): 15–43.

- 119 Green, *Making Space*, 32.
- 120 Cohn, "History and Anthropology," 221.
- 121 Bellamy, *The Powerful Ephemeral*, 217.
- 122 Historians have explored some of these dimensions. See, for instance, Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*; Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, eds., *Sufism in Punjab: Mystics, Literature and Shrines* (New Delhi: Aakar, 2009); *Popular Literature and Pre-Modern Societies of South Asia* (New Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008); Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
- 123 Snehi, "Dreaming Baba, Resituating Memory".
- 124 Wilhelm von Humboldt, "On the Task of the Historian," in *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, 112 (New York: Continuum, 1985) cited in Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 109.
- 125 Joe Moran, "History, Memory and the Everyday," *Rethinking History* 8, 1 (2004): 56.
- 126 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 127 *Ibid.*, 56.
- 128 Joe Moran, *Reading the Everyday* (London: Routledge, 2005), 12.
- 129 Antonio Gramsci, "The Study of Philosophy," in *Selections from the Prison Notebook*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, 323–377 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).
- 130 Mir, "Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives."
- 131 Ballard, "Panth, Kismet, Dharm te Qaum."
- 132 Chitleen K. Sethi, "Amarinder Faces his First Big Test by Fire Over 'Erasing' Punjab History from Textbooks," *The Print*, 4 May 2018, <https://theprint.in/governance/how-punjabs-history-has-been-erased-from-textbooks/55329/> (accessed on 18 June 2018).
- 133 Sherry B. Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power and the Acting Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 9.
- 134 Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu, *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality, and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* (London: Routledge, 1998), 8.

2

SHRINES, WILAYAT AND LIVED LANDSCAPES

The landscape of Punjab has continuously been reshaped in varied ways from medieval to contemporary times. Medieval Punjab's physical, political as well as social contours have remained in a constant state of flux and dialogue. Across the frontiers of the large province evolved identities that were sub-regional and local. There could thus be several imaginations of cultural zones within the space that was identified as Punjab. This long transformation assumed peculiarly complex dynamics with the sudden and catastrophic partition of the province in 1947 when the imagined borders increasingly became non-porous and territorial contours of nation-state boundaries became permanent. An important repercussion of this mammoth transformation was terrible loss of lives and forced migration, leading to demographic reconfiguration and social re-imagination of space across the region.¹

This chapter tries to approach this transformation through the practice of veneration of Panj Pirs from medieval to contemporary Punjab. Panj Pirs occupy a special place in the imagination of a province that is also identified with several other of the 'five' elements: *panj darya*, *panjtan pak*, *panj piyare*, etc. What is also interesting is that this tradition and its popular idiom have found resonance in the popular Sufi (Waris Shah's *Hir*)² as well religious literature (*Vars* of Bhai Gurdas)³ of the region. This chapter will explore the popular *wilayat* (space/territoriality) of this tradition through a shrine dedicated to Panj Pirs at Abohar, now a frontier town on the Indo-Pak border, and will try to illustrate the ways in which it reconfigures in the post-partition environment. It has been argued that 'space' plays a crucial role in the imagination of the 'sacred landscape' and, even after territorial demarcation, the popular imagination of the 'sacred territory' transcends the limits posed by nation-state boundaries.

Contextualizing *lived* spaces

Scholarly reading of Sufi shrines in South Asia has predominantly focused on the sacred arena of shrines and their ritual practice. Most of these readings do not take into account the ‘space’ within which shrines emerge. A fundamental obsession with the convenient tropes of structures and symbolism fails to take into account the significant role that ‘space’ plays in the emergence of the cult of shrines.⁴ The problem gets further complicated when focus shifts to an understanding of such popular shrines that have no saint hagiographies or documented history of establishment and evolution. In the case of such shrines, an exploration of ‘space’ becomes all the more crucial. Space also provides a window to such ‘other’ factors that remain unexplored in the conventional historical narrative. These ‘other’ factors include networks of trade, migration, demography, rural settings, existing religious spaces, etc.

In his seminal work *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues that ‘every social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents, signifying and non-signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical.’⁵ In short, every social space has a history, one invariably grounded in nature, in natural conditions that are at once primordial and unique in the sense that they are always and everywhere endowed with specific characteristics (site, climate, etc.).⁶ As is discussed later in this chapter, the veneration of Panj Pirs and the emergence of the shrine dedicated to these saints had a specific local significance yet was influenced by the topography and its relationship with trade networks in medieval and early modern India. In an effort to understand this shrine, one had to move out of the sacred premises and travel through maps, legends and narratives to make sense of this obscure complex. It is thus through a ‘long history of space’ that is ‘neither a “subject” nor an “object” but rather a social reality’ that ‘a set of relations and forms’ emerge to ‘explain the developments, and hence the temporal conditions, of those realities which some geographers call “networks” and which are subordinated to the frameworks of politics’.⁷ Lefebvre further elaborates the significance of spatiality:

When the history of a particular space is treated as such, the relationship of that space to the time which gave rise to it takes on an aspect that differs sharply from the picture generally accepted by historians. Traditional historiography assumes that thought can perform cross-sections upon time, arresting

its flow without too much difficulty; its analyzes thus tend to fragment and segment temporality. In the history of space as such, on the other hand, the historical and diachronic realms and the generative past are forever leaving their inscriptions upon the writing-tablet, so to speak, of space. The uncertain traces left by events are not the only marks on (or in) space: society in its actuality also deposits its script, the result and product of social activities. Time has more than one writing-system. The space engendered by time is always actual and synchronic, and it always presents itself as of a piece; its component parts are bound together by internal links and connections themselves produced by time.⁸

Understanding space and time are therefore critical components that define the past and its relationship with the present. While discussing the social space of language in colonial Punjab, Farina Mir identifies some crucial spatial elements that embody over three hundred years of the narrative of *Hir*⁹ in every different rendition and retelling of the Punjabi *qissa*:

The themes that surface in Hir-Ranjha texts elaborate a historical imagination that contributes in important ways to our understanding of colonial Punjab. They mark *zat* as a critical determinant of self and community, not religious community. They represent women in ways that defied the conservative reformist discourse of the day. They point to a relationship between individual, community, and territory that emphasizes the local, with a discernible lack of association with or affect for the nation or even the region. They point to notions of religious identity that could accommodate multiplicity, such that individuals could participate in shared notions of piety without distancing themselves from being Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Christian.¹⁰

Such a reading of space disrupts the accepted communal narrative and provides an alternative imagination of social space. Thus, the ‘spatialities of religion can help us to understand its histories’¹¹ and the ways in which ‘religions of whatever kind demonstrate their legitimacy and establish their provenance by reference to specific histories and geographies, which are codified in cultic and banal texts, documents, devices, instruments, protocols and systems of discipline’.¹² Further, as De Rogatis argues, ‘[a]mong the most suggestive studies are those that

consider space as a point of cultural and religious contact, exchange, and sometimes conflict. Spaces may be read, therefore, not only as *sacred or profane*,¹³ but also as the *reflections and reproductions of religious and social desires and anxieties*.¹⁴ (emphasis mine)

Kong thus identifies three linked directions for future research: extending the site of analysis beyond ‘officially sacred spaces’; ‘historical and place-specific analysis’ of religion; and the need for ‘analysis at various scales: global, national, regional, local and bodily’.¹⁵ One that explores religion through the ‘construction and performance of everyday dynamic and hybrid place-based identities’ and the ‘conceptual apparatus of cultural geography, an opportunity to develop geographies of religion that are sensitive to historically contingent processes of identity formation. In this revitalized approach, religion is understood as a relational phenomenon with distinctive spatialities that are involved in human life’.¹⁶ Space is also ‘dynamic, in terms of its relationship to power, history and time, its condition of simultaneity and the various ways in which it is experienced and represented’. It is not a ‘passive container or backdrop for human activity’. Thus, ‘opening up contemporary “space” to closer scrutiny and identifying some of its constituent elements is an important stage in the process of turning spatial theory into a workable methodology for contextualising religion and analysing its relationship to other social, cultural, economic and political factors’.¹⁷ Knott further emphasizes that:

Religion, which is inherently social, must also exist and express itself in and through space. Moreover, it plays its part in the production and reproduction of social space. Transnational religious communities, for example, root themselves in national contexts and in a variety of local places. They express themselves through the mobility of their adherents, in the printed word and in cyberspace, and through their spatial acts, whether mundane, ritual, performative, or even terrorist. They also generate new spaces, for example, the diasporic space – at once real and imagined, physical and social.¹⁸

Space is also a ‘dynamic summation’ of the ‘physical, mental and social dimensions that constitute’¹⁹ ‘place-based subjectivities that are critical in the reproduction and reportage of religious identities’.²⁰ Place is also brought into being and practice through the medium of a ritual that constitutes a ‘creative process whereby people make a meaningful world that they can inhabit’.²¹ It is through this aspect of ‘making’ places sacred by ritual that a plethora of sacred shrines emerges.

The power (*barkat*) implicit in memorial spaces/graves get legitimized through such rituals.

Shrines and the partition of Punjab

Saint veneration has been an important aspect of the Punjabi landscape since the medieval times. Farina Mir understands saint veneration as ‘constituting a parallel, alternative spiritual practice that was accessible to all of Punjab’s inhabitants’ in the period before the twentieth century.²² Rather than limiting it to a symbolic adherence to Sufi values, she sees the practice of saint veneration as a shared piety constituting a ‘sphere of religiosity and devotion that cut across the boundaries that distinguished the Punjab’s major religious traditions’.²³ This form of devotion to saints developed over a long period. Green links this process to migration along the trade routes:

[T]he immigration of Sufis and the introduction of the great Sufi lineages into India was stimulated by such factors as the medieval trade links between Multan and Iraq and the promotion in Punjab of a Suhrawardi lineage transplanted from ‘Abbasid Baghdad; the Mongol devastation of the great Sufi cradle of Khurasan; the mass persecution of Iranian sufis under the Safavids; and the ties of the Mughal to their Central Asian homelands and the Naqshbandi Sufis who followed them in India. Geographies of memory were contingent historical productions.²⁴

The settlement of these Sufi saints and extension of their lineage led to the development of a practice of saint veneration that spread across both rural and urban spaces of Punjab. The places associated with these Sufis were identified with several names: *khanqah* (the place where the master lived and taught), *dargah* (the place where the master was buried and remembered through prayers and pilgrimage) and *mazar* (literally ‘a place which is visited’). Eaton has identified this as a gradual process of Islamization that was facilitated through localization of various forms.²⁵ Despite the problems of the term Islamization, Eaton significantly argues for the spread of Sufi shrines in Punjab, Bengal and Deccan that facilitated the practice of saint veneration. Anna Suvorova remarks that when travelling through India and Pakistan, one is struck by the ‘abundance of saints’ tombs, which are powerful places of pilgrimage and objects of popular devotion . . . nothing less than extraordinary sacred necropolises, where someone’s venerated

tomb is located almost at each and every step of the way'.²⁶ She adds that:

By the end of its existence the Delhi Sultanate *mazār* . . . had grown from a modest structure of cubic form with a dome into a prayer and ritual complex (*dargāh*), where side by side with the tomb proper there used to be a small mosque with minaret, living accommodation for the *pīr* ('old man'), or the 'successor of a *pīr*' the *sajjādanishīn* (literally 'one sitting on his prayer rug'), cells for dervishes (*hujra*), halls for gatherings (*majālis*), for hearing music (*samā'*) and for celebration of the saint's birthday (*maulūd*) and day of demise (*'urs*), a guest house for pilgrims and also a public kitchen, where any visitor or beggar could get food free of charge.²⁷

While living saints continued to be significant, the graves of the buried saint developed as predominant centres of devotion and pilgrimage. 'Many of the functions of the living blessed man were transferred to the dead saint [through] . . . various institutional, theological, and commemorative mechanisms associated with their hagiographical texts and shrine spaces'.²⁸ Green argues that while the construction of a mausoleum gave permanence to the saint, his memory was kept alive through the stories and rituals that surrounded it. This 'process of enshrinement' 'ritualized' as well as 'textualized' the 'collective memory' of the saint and gave an 'enduring stability of the landscape'.²⁹ A dargah resembled both a Sufi *khanqah* in various parts of the Islamic world as well as a *dharmasala* in South Asia. It was also known as a *darbar* signifying a ruler's court.³⁰ The dargah is more than a tomb site because even after a saint dies, he remains open to petitioners. The moment of a saint's death is celebrated as *urs*, the anniversary of his marriage to God.³¹ Green related this 'anthropocentric focus of spatial marking and memory' to a 'wider Muslim settlement patterns which saw new territories claimed through either acts of burial or imaginary findings of burial'. He adds that:

These entwined geographies of settlement and internment were formulated with reference to the entombed presence of remembered community members graded from the scriptural prophets (*anbiya*) through the multifarious ranks of the saints (*awliya*), with the latter category open to indefinite numbers of blessed men and thereby of the spaces they created through their burial and enshrinement.³²

According to Eliade, sacred places fulfil three primary functions for believers. First, they act as places in which worshippers can communicate with the divine, whether through prayer, ritual or contact with an image of the gods. Second, sacred places seem to contain a permanent divine presence. Worshippers thus approach sacred places with the expectation of receiving blessings, healing, forgiveness, spiritual merit or salvation. Finally, in their layout and design, sacred places provide meaning to the faithful. They evoke passages from history, social structures or religious precepts and, ultimately, hint through forms, actions and objects. The art, architecture, music and drama that embellish these places represent an ideal of that religion in its purest form.³³

The central ritual act of the saint veneration is *ziyarat* (literally 'visit'), a pilgrimage to saints' tombs. However, the partition of Punjab in 1947 into eastern and western Punjab led to the separation of the pilgrims from their patron saints and shrines. The region saw an unprecedented migration of millions of people across the Radcliffe line-exodus of the non-Muslims from western Punjab and Muslims from eastern Punjab.³⁴ A large number of refugees from Bahawalpur State and from the Montgomery and Lahore districts entered India through the border along the Ferozepur District. Of these, about four-fifths settled in the rural areas and the rest in the urban areas of the district.³⁵ Among all the districts in Punjab, Ferozepur District accommodated the largest number of refugees from Pakistan (Table 2.1). Refugees from the Bahawalpur State entered from Fazilka and Abohar side, whereas those from the Montgomery District, mostly belonging to rural areas, entered from the Fazilka side. Those from the rural areas of the Lahore District entered from the Ferozepur and Jalalabad side. According to the 1951 Census, 349,767 refugees from Pakistan

Table 2.1 Displaced persons from Pakistan (selected districts) who settled in Ferozepur (including Moga and Muktsar tahsils which were transferred to Faridkot district in 1972)

<i>District of Origin in Pakistan</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Lahore	1,22,224	66,207	56,017
Shaikhupura	11,090	5,986	5,104
Montgomery	1,44,022	76,779	67,243
Lyallpur	17,960	9,576	8,381
Bahawalpur	34,030	19,315	14,715

Source: Census of India, 1951, Punjab District Census Hand Book, Volume II, Ferozpur District, D-V, p.clxvi

settled in the Ferozepur District (including the Moga and Muktsar tahsils which were transferred to the Faridkot District in 1972).³⁶

This migration not only affected the demographic, economic and political configurations but also led to a serious break in the social thread of Punjab that had been woven through centuries of social and political exchanges. While colonial Punjab was characterized by multi-faceted identities from different socio-religious groups, partition almost dissolved these identities. However, the memories of a shared cultural past continue to live in the memories of the Punjabi psyche and folklore (see Table 2.2). Waris Shah's *Hir* exemplifies how a popular *qissa* continues to have an indelible imprint on the social psyche of post-Partition Punjab.³⁷

However, the social context of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs veneration of Sufi mystic shrines was badly shaken with the partition of Punjab. Fairs held at shrines of their patron saints in Pakistan were discontinued post migration. A local shrine of Panj Pirs at Abohar was witness to one such social void. Partition led to the migration of the entire population of Sukhera Muslims from this city, including those who were caretakers of this shrine. But this scenario changed within a few decades after partition. Table 2.2 illustrates the fairs and festival held in the 'memory' of pirs in the district of Ferozepur post-partition. Several of these fairs were earlier held in Pakistan Punjab, and the tradition was carried along with the migrants to Indian Punjab post-partition. The dates and duration of the fairs also follow the native lunar calendar.

Panj Pir shrine at Abohar remained desolate for several years; in 1950, it was taken over by Ghela Ram Kamboj,³⁸ who migrated to Abohar from the Montgomery District of western Punjab. Thereafter, his son Bool Chand Kamboj took care of the shrine (Figure 2.1). It continues to be an important centre of pilgrimage for people throughout Punjab, Rajasthan and Haryana.³⁹ It is important to understand why, in the aftermath of partition, when Muslims en masse migrated to Pakistan, this shrine continues to attract people of various hues. In a majority of studies, the survival of such shrines is seen in terms of their continued relevance to their followers' lives.⁴⁰ This relationship and shrine's adaptation to bureaucratization and systematization in the post-partition scenario is crucial to our understanding of the dargah culture in Punjab.

Locating Panj Pirs in a partitioned landscape

The tradition of constructing dargahs of Panj Pirs (five saints) had been widespread across the Indian subcontinent.⁴¹ There is a 'Panj Pir

Table 2.2 Fairs and festivals in the 'memory of pirs' held in Ferozepur district of Punjab (including Muktsar and Moga) in the year 1961

<i>Srno</i>	<i>Town/ Village</i>	<i>Fair/Festival</i>	<i>Date and Duration (lunar calendar italicized)</i>	<i>Significance and Legend</i>	<i>Castel/ Communities</i>
Tahsil Fazilka					
1	Toorwala	Pir-da-Mela	<i>Asarb</i> 5 (June-July) -one day	Death anniversary of Pir Mushah	Bishnois
2	Chak Gherwala	Mela Pir Mohammad Panah	<i>Chet</i> 20 (March- April) -one day	In the memory of Pir Mohammad Panah. The fair was held in Pakistan before partition.	All
3	Chak Chapriwala	Mela Mohan Shah	<i>Jeth</i> 21 (May-June) -one day	In the memory of Faqir Mohan Shah	All, men only
4	Asafwala	Mela Nadar Shah	February -one day	In the memory of Nadar Shah	All
5	Kabulshah Hirthar	Mela Shamas-ud-Din	July -two days	In the memory of Shamas-ud-Din	All
6	Miyani Basti	Mela Pir Bhana	<i>Asarb</i> 1 (June- July) -one day	Dedicated to local saint Pir Bhana	All
7	Ladhuka	Mela Pir Sahib	<i>Sawan</i> 2 (July- August)	In the memory of a Pir	All
8	Lakheke Uttar	Karrahian Wala Mela	-Poh 2 (December- January) -one day <i>Sawan</i> 1 and 2 (July- August) -two days	In the memory of a saint whose tomb exists here	All
9	Jalalabad Town	Mela Sayyad Kabir	Second Thursday of <i>Chet</i> (March-April) -two days	In the memory of Muslim saint Sayyad Kabir, who possessed great spiritual powers. Legend says that in the course of fighting, his head was chopped off and fell in Jalalabad, while his headless body continued fighting until it fell in the village of Kapura	All

10	Fazilka Town	Pir Guraia	<i>Asarb</i> 1 (June-July) -three days	In the memory of Pir Guraia whose tomb exists here	All
Tahsil Abohar					
11	Abohar Town	Mela Panj Peer	<i>Sawan</i> 15 (June-July) -three days	In the memory of Panj Pirs at the tomb constructed over their graves	All
Tahsil Ferozepur					
12	Miranshah Noor	Mela Miranshah Noor	<i>Asoj</i> 5 (September-October) -three days	In the memory of a Muslim saint, Miranshah Noor, whose tomb exists here	All
13	Karian	Mela Pir Balawar	<i>Asarb</i> 15 and <i>Magh</i> 20 (June-July and January-February) -one day	In the memory of Pir Balawar	All; chiefly women
14	Kailash	Mela Charag Shah Wala	<i>Sawan</i> (July-August) -two days	Dedicated to a Muslim saint; the fair is held at his grave	Sikhs and Hindus
Tahsil Zira					
15	Shah Abubakar	Mela Shah Abubakar	<i>Asoj</i> 28 (September-October) -three days	In the memory of a saint Shah Abubakar whose tomb exists here	All
16	Sherpur Taiban	Mela Baba Bole Shah	June 26 -two days	Dedicated to Baba Bole Shah whose grave exists here	All
17	Indergarh	Dharmak Mela	<i>Sudi</i> 11 of every month -three days	Connected with the tomb of a Pir	All
Tahsil Moga					
18	Chogawan	Mela Baba Sayyad Kabir	<i>Chet</i> (March-April) -one day	In the memory of a fakir whose tomb exists here. It is believed that offering salt at the tomb cures warts	All

(Continued)

Table 2.2 (Continued)

<i>Srno</i>	<i>Town/ Village</i>	<i>Fair/Festival</i>	<i>Date and Duration (lunar calendar italicized)</i>	<i>Significance and Legend</i>	<i>Caste/ Communities</i>
19	Kapura	Mela Sayyad Kabir	Second Thursday of <i>Chet</i> (March-April) —two days	In the memory of Muslim saint Sayyad Kabir, who possessed great spiritual powers. Legend says that in the course of fighting, his head was chopped off and fell in Jalalabad, while his headless body continued fighting until it fell in the village of Kapura	All; mostly men
20	Killi Chahlan	Mela Jogi Pir	<i>Chet</i> 14 (March- April) — one day	In the memory of Baba Muman Singh	All
21	Langiana Nawan	Mela Nigahe Ka	First Thursday of <i>Chief Sudi</i> —one day	In honour of Sakhi Sarwar, a Muslim fakir whose tomb exists here	All; mostly women
22	Baghapurana	Marhi Mustifa	<i>Chet</i> 14 (March- April) —three days	In the memory of a Muslim Pir	Malhi Clan
23	Rajiana	Raja Pir	<i>Chet Chaudash</i> (March-April) — three days	Gill Jats have a shrine of a saint called Raja Pir	Sikhs (Gill Jats) & Hindus
Tahsil Muktsar					
24	Jhurar	Mela Baba Mian Nahra	<i>Phagan</i> (February- March) —one day	Associated with Baba Mian Nahra, a Muslim Pir, whose tomb exists here	All

Source: Census of India-1961, 1965, Punjab District Census Handbook (No.12), Ferozepur District, Chandigarh; Superintendent of Census Operations, Punjab, pp. 105-123

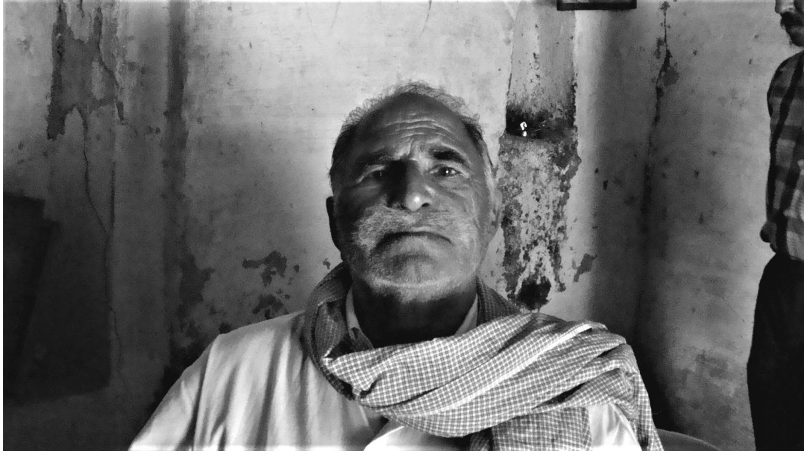


Figure 2.1 The second *sevdar* of the shrine late Bool Chand Kamboj

Note: All photographs in this chapter are by the author unless otherwise mentioned.

Wali Mazar' in Jalandhar, Panj Pir dargah in Gurdaspur and Abohar in Punjab. Panj Pirs are also venerated in Rajouri (Jammu). There are several dargahs of Panj Pirs in Burdwan, Midnapore and Sonargaon in West Bengal. Besides these, there are Panj Pir graveyards in Shikarpur (Karachi) and Lahore in Pakistan. Several places like the village of Panjpir in Swabti (North-West Frontier Province) in Pakistan and Pir Panjal in Kashmir (India) owe their name to this common tradition. Panj Pirs are also venerated across Northwest India through a network of 'memorial shrines', which often get coalesced with 'Hindu' gods and goddesses. Interestingly, at some places Panj Pirs (*Panchon pirs*) represent a terminal synonym for five 'Hindu' 'clan deities'.⁴² Therefore, the names of Panj Pirs may differ from place to place:

In some parts of the country the Hindus are fond of representing themselves as followers of the Panj Pirs or Five Saints. Who these five saints are is a matter which each worshipper decides according to his taste. Sometimes they are the five Pandavas; sometimes they are the five holy personages of Shiaism, viz. Muhammad, Fatima, Ali, Hasan and Husain; sometimes they are a selection of Musalman saints, as Khwaja Qutb ud-Din, Khwaja Muain-ud-Din Chishti, Shaikh Nizam-ud-Din Aulia,

Nasir-ud-Din Abul Khair, and Sultan Naisr-ud-Din Mahmud or as Khwaja Khizr, Said Jalal, Zakaria, Lal Shahbaz and Farid Shakarganj.⁴³

In fact, all places across Punjab have different names associated with these five Pirs. Even at places where all the Pirs are Sufi saints, a large number of non-‘Muslims’ flock to their shrines for veneration. According to Blunt, the five are worshipped by some 53 castes in North India, of which some 44 are wholly or partly ‘Hindus’.⁴⁴ Most of them, however, do not identify all the Panj Pirs. Anna Suvorova identifies the most common composition of the group of five Pirs, Baba Farid, Makhdumi Jahaniyan Jahangasht, Jalaluddin Surkhposh Bukhari, Ghazi Miyan and Khwaja Khidr. However, she also problematically argues that the ‘choice of other collective saints smells of the profanation of the very idea of Muslim saint (*wilayat*)’.⁴⁵ In a similar vein, she argues that in the ‘world of South Asian saints there is a great number of doubles: a saint whose tomb is venerated at one place, might actually have been buried at quite another place’,⁴⁶ recognizing yet belittling the significance of memorial traditions.⁴⁷ These ideas of separation between major Sufi shrines (as authentic) and the ones in the popular domain (as deviant and fake) is no longer tenable.

The Panj Pir dargah at Abohar has special significance in terms of understanding this tradition – first because of the availability of oral traditions that narrativize Panj Pirs. Interestingly, Panj Pirs have been a significant part of folk traditions in colonial Punjab (we will discuss it in the latter part of the chapter). Some colonial ethnographers like H.A. Rose (1919), R.C. Temple (1884) and W. Crooke (1896) have documented this tradition. We also have substantial oral information to relate with documentary evidences and see the underlying contradictions within them.

The earliest substantiated version of the tradition associated with Panj Pirs dargah at Abohar was recorded in the *Final Report on the Revision of Settlement of the Sirsa District, 1879–83*, reproduced in the *Gazetteer of Ferozepur District, 1915*. This version narrates the event of arrival of Panj Pirs:

[T]he villagers have a tradition that many centuries ago it [Abohar] was held by a Rajput Raja Abramchand. They tell that his horses were one day carried off in a raid (*dhar*) made by the Saiyads of Uchan [Uch] towards Multan, and as he [the Raja] had no son, his daughter dressed like a man, went

after the raiders armed with sword and spear and gun and bow and arrow, and after various exploits brought back the spoil of Uchan [Uch] which consisted chiefly of horses. The Saiyads of Uchan [Uch], being holy men, endeavoured to get back their property by threatening to curse the spoilers, and forming a *mela* or cursing committee, they came and sat [on a] *dharna*, as it were, on the sand-ridge east of Abohar. But the Raja held out so long that the women of the Saiyads at Uchan [Uch] got tired of waiting for the return of their lords, and came in a body to look for them. When the Saiyads on the ridge saw their wives approaching they called down curses on all around, and they themselves and their wives and the inhabitants of the town all died on the spot. The *pakka* tomb of the women in the cemetery, and that of the holy men (*pir*) on the sand-ridge exist unto this day.⁴⁸

Another colonial documentation of the tradition, though with slight modification, is found in Rose's Glossary:

Tradition says that nearly 900 years ago Abohar was ruled by Rájá Aya Chand who had an only daughter. On his death bed he expressed deep regret that he had no son to go to the Panj Píran at Uch in Baháwalpur and mount the horses there. His daughter courageously assured him that she would go and fetch the horses from Uch. So accompanied by a small band she went there and carried off the horses of the Panj Pír. They came after her and begged her to return them, but she refused and so they had to wait in patience for their return. The Pír's wives being tired of waiting followed their husbands to Abohar where with their beloved spouses they breathed their last, cursing the lady and the place. . . . The five Pírs were interred at a place in the village and near them the remains of their wives. The shrine contains the tombs of the five Pírs and those of their five wives which are surrounded by a brick wall, but have no roof. The administration of the *khánqáh* is carried on by two Musalmán *faqírs* caste Lád. They keep it clean and light a lamp in the evening.⁴⁹

Though both versions give an almost similar narration, Rose names the Raja of Abohar as Aya Chand whereas Revision Settlement of the Sirsa District names him as Raja Abramchand. The Pírs supposedly

belonged to Uch in Bahawalpur, who arrived at Abohar to take back the horses recovered by the daughter of the Raja. Additionally, SFSR mentions Panj Pirs as Saiyads. On the caretaker of the dargah, Rose's version says that its administration was undertaken by two Muslim *fakirs*. We shall discuss some other aspects of these versions in the latter part of the chapter.

Another version narrated by the *sevadar* Bool Chand Kamboj gives an alternate account of the reasons for which the Raja wished to obtain the horses of Panj Pirs and their interlude with Ranjha and Baba Ramdev:

Raja Chander suffered from leprosy. On the recommendation of an astrologer, he sent his soldiers to Pirepur (Multan) where the Panj Pirs resided. They stole the horses of Panj Pirs and took them to Abha Nagri. Raja bathed in the blood of these five horses and was cured of leprosy. When these Qadiri Panj Pirs learnt about the theft of their horses, they began a journey to Abha Nagri. After crossing Bahawalnagar, they reached near river Chenab [?] where they met Ranjha. Impressed by the deep devotion of Ranjha, Panj Pirs bestow (*baksh*) him with Hir. Panj Pirs then reached Pokaran in Rajasthan and rested at Baba Ramdev's residence.⁵⁰

This version interweaves the narrative of two significant popular cultures of this region: one associated with the shrine complex of Baba Ramdev at Ramdevra (Rajasthan) and another associated with Waris Shah's *Hir*. Dominique-Sila Khan has recently documented the Punjabi oral tradition of Panj Pirs. Regarding the route taken by Panj Pirs to reach Abohar, she narrates the following account, which is also corroborated by the *sevadar* of the dargah:

Characteristically, this tour starts in Multan, the abode of the Pirs. . . . From there the five saints intend to go to Abohar, the ruler of which has stolen their five horses. On their way they stop near Pokaran, where they meet Ramdev. They perform miracles in front of him by throwing on the ground their five tooth-brushes out of which grow five Pipal trees.^[51] . . . from Pokaran they go to Jalandhar, then to Ferozepur, and finally reach Abohar, where they try to get back their horse. However, the king does not behave well and the Pirs curse his city which immediately falls into ruins. Later on, a grave was built at this place to commemorate the five Pirs.⁵²

Table 2.3 Names of Panj Pirs

<i>R.C. Temple (1884)</i> ⁵⁸	<i>Shangri and Puri</i> ⁵⁹	<i>Anonymous dictionary</i> ⁶⁰	<i>H.A. Rose</i>
Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki of Delhi	Gazi Mian (Salar Masud)	Hazrat Baba Farid Shakarganj	Muhammad
Khwaja Muainuddin Chishti of Ajmer	Zinda Gazi ⁶¹	Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya	Fatima
Shekh Nizamuddin Aulia of Delhi	Shaikh Farid	Hazrat Ali-ul- Hiwari (Shaikh Ali Hujwiri)	Ali
Nasiruddin Abul- khair Abdullah Ibn Umar Al-Baizavi	Kwajah Khizr	Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti, Ajmer	Hasan
Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud	Pir Badar	Hazrat Shamas Tabrezi	Hussain

Source: Prepared by author

with eleven names.⁵⁷ Table 2.3 narrates some of these versions prevalent in Punjab.

Rose mentions that the Bhattis of the Gujranwala District narrate their five saints as Shaikh Samail, Shah Daulat, Shaikh Fateh Ali, Pir Fateh Khan and Shah Murad, all patrons of the Bhatti race. In Ludhiana, they are Khwaja Khizr, Durga Devi, Vishnu, Sakhi Sarwar and Guru Gobind Singh; in Shimla, Guga Pir, Balaknath, Thakur, Sakhi Sarwar and Shiv are worshipped as Panj Pirs. '*Panjpurias* are found all over the province from Muzaffargarh to Delhi, and there is a place in the Shahpur District, 10 miles south of Sahilwal (Montgomery), where a large fair is held every year in the honour of the Panj Pir. Some persons, wishing to be more specific, declare themselves to be followers of the Chahar Pir or Four Saint; by this is generally implied the four friends of the Prophet, whose admirers are found both among Musalmans and Hindus'.⁶² The tradition of Panj Pirs at Abohar shows a close relation to the narration of Waris Shah. Interestingly, Malkahans⁶³ (now in Montgomery/Sahiwal district of Pakistan) the village where Waris Shah had supposedly written *Hir*⁶⁴ has geographical proximity with Abohar (see Figure 2.3).⁶⁵ The map also reflects on the route supposedly taken by Panj Pirs, which possibly formed the *wilayat* of this tradition.

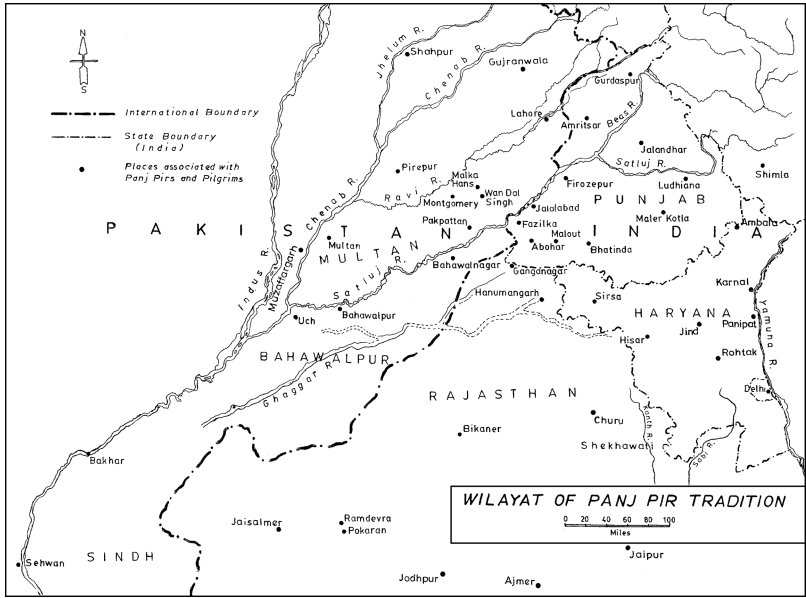


Figure 2.3 Wilayat of Panj Pir tradition

Source: Prepared by the author

Historicity, orality and the imagination of *wilayat*

One significant way local Islam manifests itself is through the symbolic use of space. Werbner and Basu argue the ‘Sufi notion of *wilayat* refers to spiritual dominions controlled by famous saints, but these also have an organised temporal, spatial and social realisation. Shrines thus represent important landmarks in the sacred geography of Islam in South Asia. . . . At the same time, the organisation of a shrine’s space is embedded in place and community’⁶⁶ and the ‘spiritual (*wilayat*) and geographical domain, which includes Muslim and Hindu occupational groups and devotees’.⁶⁷ In the political and religious spheres, ‘*wilāya*[t] denotes “the exercise of authority”, whether temporal or spiritual, or a combination of both; hence by extension, it comes to mean the government or administration of a region or a province under the supreme overlordship of a caliph, sultan or amir, or the spiritual authority and charisma of a particularly spiritually gifted person like a sufi saint or ascetic’,⁶⁸ that ‘enables him to be the subject of miracles or more precisely, *charismata* (*karāmāt*)’.⁶⁹ The shrine of Panj Pir at Abohar, however, follows a spatial trajectory different from the emergence and location of major shrines.

Until now we have tried to comprehend the nature of the Panj Pir tradition, dargah at Abohar, its origin as reflected in the oral accounts, the break and continuity after partition and the emergence of a new scenario in which the dargah attains popularity in the realms of the reconfigured space. In the following discussion, we shall try to correlate these oral accounts with documentary evidence and try to see the contradictions and complexities that emerge out of it. The structure of the dargah as it exists today has no major architectural significance. Rose gives the description of the dargah as it existed in the nineteenth century: 'The shrine contains the tombs of the five Pirs and those of their five wives which are surrounded by a brick wall, but have no roof'.⁷⁰

According to this description, the graves of the five Pirs and their wives are (apparently) contained within the main structure that is surrounded by a brick wall. However, this account is not supported by the structure as it exists today. The main structure merely contains the graves of the five Pirs; the graves of their wives are not part of this structure. The wives' graves are situated at a distance of about 50 metres from the main complex.⁷¹ Possibly, the area under the main structure might have previously been larger. However, the graves of the Pirs and their wives were possibly never enclosed together inside a common wall.

The structure of dargah seems to be a reconstruction of an earlier structure that predates the colonial period. An analysis of the walls and bricks used in the dargah present an interesting complexity.⁷² There were three different types of bricks used in constructing the present structure. On the exterior-most side were the 'modern bricks', and there were two other types of bricks on the inner side, one of which belonged to the medieval period.⁷³ Another important aspect of the finding was the distinct type of bricks found outside the main compound.⁷⁴ Thus, it becomes difficult to reach any conclusive argument to date the structure. The only thing that can be said with regard to the structure is that it was reconstructed from an older structure. This argument is supported by an analysis of the wall around the graves of the Pirs, which correlates to the medieval period, keeping in mind its thickness.⁷⁵ There is also an impression of a mihrab on the western wall, a mosque-like structure adjacent to the dargah, which is prominently visible on the exterior side of boundary wall.

Adjoining one wall around the graves is an old tree locally known as *van* (*Salvadora oleoides*). According to the *sevadar* of the dargah, the tree is more than 500 years old, which would mean that it was planted somewhere around the fifteenth century.⁷⁶ The origin of the dargah in the fifteenth century is supported by another tradition of Baba Ramdev. As discussed earlier, Panj Pirs supposedly stayed overnight

with Baba Ramdev near Pokaran on their way to Abohar. The date associated with the Panj Pir dargah can thus be determined based on its linkages with the tradition of Baba Ramdev, which has been situated in this period. It is said that Mokal Singh (1419–20 to 1433), the ruler of Chittorgarh, the former capital of Mewar, was childless.

Table 2.4 Position of Panj Pir in the records of Patwari of Abohar

<i>Item Number</i>	<i>Area (unit of measurement)</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1922–1923		
2173	01 bigha 17 biswa	Hakim, Hiader and Ali s/o Wahib
2174	29 bigha	<i>shamlat patti bakhshian-makbuza ahl-i-Islam</i> (common land divided into separate strips, assigned to and occupied by people who practise Islam)
2474	24 bigha 13 biswa	-do-
2475	01 bigha	Sarab, Nawab and Kamir s/o Shamu
Total	55 bigha 30 biswa	
1943–1944		
2173	01 bigha 17 biswa	<i>shamlat patti bakhshian-makbuza ahl-i-Islam</i>
2174	29 bigha	-do-
2413	07 biswa	-do-
2474	24 bigha 13 biswa	-do-
2475	01 bigha	-do-
Total	56 bigha 37 biswa	
1965–1966		
499	17 kanal 07 marla	<i>ghair mumkin kabristan panj pir</i> (barren graveyard of Panj Pirs)

Source: Land records of the *Patwari* office at Abohar for the relevant years and Wilson (1855) for the translation of the terms

Since ‘Ramdev Pir’ had the reputation of a miracle maker, he thought of inviting him to his kingdom and asking him for the boon of a son. However, instead of coming himself, the ‘Pir of Runicha’ delegated his uncle, with whom he invested supernatural powers.⁷⁷

Absolute dependence on the traditional accounts associated with Panj Pirs and Baba Ramdev can, however, be problematic. According to Rose’s account, Raja Aya Chand (Abram Chand according to Sirsa Settlement Report) ruled ‘nearly nine hundred years ago’.⁷⁸ Further, the Patwari records present a complex picture as far as the existence of the dargah is concerned (refer Table 2.4 above). Significantly, until 1965–1966, the dargah was not entered as Panj Pirs. In 1922–1923, a major part associated with Panj Pirs today was entered as *shamlat patti bakhshian- makbuza ahl-i-Islam*,⁷⁹ while two others were under private ownership. In 1943–1944, this entire area was entered as *shamlat*. However, the existence of the dargah is corroborated by Rose’s account,⁸⁰ which predates the accounts of Patwari and the account of Nazar Masih.⁸¹

Although the origin of the Panj Pir tradition may be situated in the fifteenth century, the actual existence of the five saints is crucial to our understanding of this tradition. As discussed earlier, the account of Waris Shah provides a clue on the names of Panj Pirs. Table 2.5 details the names associated with Panj Pirs at Abohar.

Kwajah Khizr is identified with river-gods or spirits of wells and streams. On the River Indus, the saint is often identified with the river, and he is sometimes represented as an old man clothed in green. His principal shrine is on an island of the Indus near Bakhar in Sind.⁸² Baba Farid, one of the most revered Chishti saints of colonial Punjab, was the successor of Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, who settled in Pakpattan (Montgomery – now Sahiwal). Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya was a Suhrawardi saint and disciple of Shaikh Shahab-ud-din

Table 2.5 Panj Pirs at Abohar

<i>Names</i>	<i>Birth</i>	<i>Death</i>
Kwajah Khizar	-	-
Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar (Baba Farid)	1172	1265
Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya	1170	1267
Syed Jalal Bukhariya	1199	1291
Lal Shahbaz Qalandar	1177	1274

Source: Prepared by the author

Umar Suhrawardi of Baghdad. Zakariya later settled in Multan. Syed Jalal Bukhariya was a Suhrawardi and a disciple of Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya. He settled in Uch in Bahawalpur.⁸³ Lal Shahbaz Qalandar was born in Marwand, now Afghanistan; he was also a disciple of Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya. He migrated to Sindh and settled in Sehwan.

Table 2.5 apparently contradicts both the account of Rose and the association of Panj Pirs with Baba Ramdev. While Rose's account ascribes nine hundred years to the tradition, i.e. somewhere in tenth century, the association with Baba Ramdev locates Panj Pirs in the fifteenth century. The map on the *wilayat* of the Panj Pir tradition offers a more plausible explanation of the growth and development of this tradition. All the principal shrines of Sufi saints associated with Panj Pirs from Lala Shahbaz Qalandar of Sehwan, Khwaja Khizar of Bakhar, Syed Jalal Bukhariya of Uch, Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya of Multan to Shaikh Farid of Pakpattan are situated either on the banks of River Indus or on its tributaries (Chenab and Sutlej). Significantly, the location of these shrines also coincides with the medieval trade routes linking Sind with Multan and Multan with Delhi.⁸⁴

Abohar was situated on this important Sultanate trade route linking Sind (through Sehwan, Bakhar and Uch) and Multan (through Pakpattan and Abohar) with Delhi.⁸⁵ The tradition of Panj Pirs at Abohar might have, thus, gradually developed with the growth of trade and military activity activities along this route and traders, who played a significant role in this regard after the thirteenth century. The oral narrative on Panj Pirs lay primary emphasis on the 'horses' – Pir's association with horses, raid for horses, etc. The narrative associated with Panj Pirs could have thus emerged out of the influence of Turks and their association and tussle with local rulers. The places associated with Panj Pir tradition at Abohar (i.e. Sehwan, Bakhar, Uch, Multan and Pakpattan) emerged as major centres of pilgrimage and veneration, and impressive shrines were constructed on the graves of Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar (d. 1265), Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya (d. 1267), Syed Jalal Bukhariya (d. 1291) and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (d. 1274) after the thirteenth century. The shrine associated with Kwajah Khizar could have emerged much earlier due to its association with seafaring Persians and Arabs. Significantly, travelling in the fourteenth century, Ibn Batuta reached Abohar through Sehwan, Uch and Multan.⁸⁶ These five shrines were centres of pilgrimage in the pre-partition times also, and the Panj Pir dargah could have been a dedication, as a memorial shrine, for these saints.

Thus, the space within which the Panj Pir tradition at Abohar evolved and the *wilayat* with which it connects has an intriguing spatial trajectory. Green justifiably argues that:

Just as these different types of Muslim sacred space in South Asia drew reference to other geographies through the medium of the person, so the shrines built to the Sufi saints that have formed some of the most important centres of Muslim religious expression in South Asia also invoked absent geographies into their own formulation of sacred space. In spite of the centralizing elements in Muslim religious and cultural life, *local versions of Muslim piety* have always evolved as a consequence of the *wide geographical and ethnic diffusion of Islam*.⁸⁷

(emphasis mine)

The crucial role of space in the evolution of saint veneration of Panj Pir forms a significant departure from the conventional trope on the emergence of popular shrines in South Asia. Therefore, it is important to recognize that ‘blessed men and saints were at once territorial and textual constructions who were created by and in turn created texts and territories’.⁸⁸ Further, Sufis and shrines in South Asia must be seen as the ‘sanctifiers of travel itineraries more routinely made by Indian merchants of all creeds’.⁸⁹ The case of the Panj Pir dargah also illustrates the significance of memorial traditions in the historical narrative of religion in South Asia. The popular shrine’s embeddedness in the local space is assimilated in regional geography from Sindh to Multan and thereafter, tying together distant geographies of trade and travel.

Tradition, continuity and pilgrimage

After the partition of India, the shrine complex remained desolate until 1950 when the dargah was taken over by Gehla Ram Kamboj, father of the second *sevdar* Bool Chand. He was caretaker of the dargah until his death in 1960 at the age of 90. Since then, Bool Chand had been taking care of the dargah. He was officially granted the license of the dargah in 1989–1990 by the Punjab Wakf Board. A *chirag* (an oil lamp with five wicks) keeps burning at the dargah, a tradition that is common at all dargahs in India.⁹⁰ In 1965, Bool Chand started a langar at the dargah, and a langar khana was constructed for this purpose (Figure 2.1). Since then, the langar has become a regular feature of the dargah and is held every week on Thursdays.⁹¹ Besides this, a continuous langar is

organized during the annual *urs* (death anniversary, locally known as *mela*) held during the fifteenth of *Sawan* (July-August) each year for three days.

During these three days, people from far-flung areas of Punjab come on a pilgrimage and pay their obeisance at the dargah. Devotees, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs come from as far as Delhi and West Bengal. Since the shrine is also associated with Baba Ramdev, it attracts people from the Hanumangarh and Sri Ganganagar Districts of Rajasthan. Occasionally, a few Muslims from the Lahore and Pakpattan (Montgomery) regions of Pakistan also flock to the shrines during *urs*. Qawwals from different areas, who are private individuals, also visit the dargah. Offerings at *urs* range from green embroidered sheets (*chadars*), sweets, oil and ghee to hens. Women bring pots containing water (*ghadolian*) and offer them to Pirs. The devotees pray and tie a red thread on the tree for fulfilment of their wishes (*sukhna/mannat*). The langar-khana works overtime during these days, and pilgrims are offered *dal-phulka*, kheer, halwa, jalebi, puri, rice, milk, etc. Besides this annual celebration, Muslims offer Id-ul Fitar namaz at the dargah. The ritual tradition at the dargah evolved out of multiple factors of isolation, continuity and initiation. The langar became an important institutional practice after partition.

On 30 July 2006, the last day of *urs*, a survey was conducted on the nature of ritual practices and pilgrims at the annual *urs* (fair in the memory of Pirs) at Panj Pirs. This survey aimed at gathering socio-anthropological data on pilgrims who visit this shrine during the annual *urs* (Figure 2.4). The Panj Pir dargah at Abohar has the largest following among Kambojs, Bagri Jats, menial castes (Dhanuk, Kumhar, Chamar, Regar, etc.), Rais and Majhabi Sikhs, Sidhu, Sekhon and Mehra Sikhs, Aroras and Mahajans, Khattris, Rajputs, Brahmins, Kabirpanthis and Udasis. Besides, a few Saifi, Ansari and Pathan Muslims also frequent the dargah. Thus, the shrine is predominantly visited by non-‘Muslims’.

For most pilgrims, the dargah of Panj Pirs is a wish-fulfilling shrine and caters to their everyday needs. Pilgrims bring all kinds of offerings like chadar, oil, broom (especially for treatment of boils), essence and *mauli* (sacred thread to tie around *van* tree) for the fulfilment of their wishes (*mannat*). Pilgrims from Ferozepur and places as far as Ludhiana and Amritsar flock to the shrine during *urs*. Villages adjoining Abohar, Fazilka and Malout attract the largest gathering during the annual *urs*. Most Bagris visit the shrine due to its association with Baba Ramdev, who is worshipped as a primary deity in their families. Many pilgrims who visit this dargah also associate



Figure 2.4 People visiting dargah at the annual *urs*

themselves with other popular Pirs. Pilgrims mentioned the presence of dargahs dedicated to Baba Ali Mohammad, Lalanwala Pir, Baba Bullah Shah, Baba Bhumman Shah, Baba Pir Khumber, Baba Lakhdata, Baba Khetarpal, Baba Ahmed Shah, Dipalpur Pir and Baba Nahre Shah as objects of veneration in their villages.

One of the most significant aspects of this pilgrimage is the affinity of pilgrims for pre-partition memories. Many amongst them narrated their association with areas like Arif Mandi in Montgomery (Pakistan)

and with villages that had memorial shrines related to numerous local Pirs. The Census of India 1961 gives a vivid description of such fairs, which recreate the lived past in the form of memories through popular experiences (Table 2.2). Dominique-Sila Khan mentions that ‘the shrines dedicated to Panch Pirs (in Rajasthan) . . . can be regarded as Hindu or Muslim places of worship, but in all cases devotees of both communities gather at the same place without wondering about its “religious identity”’ (Khan 2003, 90).

The shrine at Abohar also attracts folk artists who sing popular ballads, often narrating recreated memories of the legend of Panj Pirs, at times relating it with some other tradition. During the annual *urs* (Figure 2.4) at the Panj Pir dargah in Abohar, folk artists⁹² narrate folk verses on the life of Baba Farid and at times give an alternative identity to Panj Pirs by relating them to Baba Lakhdata.⁹³ The most fascinating aspect of these shrines is the way in which pilgrims emulate Sufi and Islamic symbols by wearing green clothes and skull caps. Dargah in the present context represents a mixture of traditional practices and modern influence (notice a poster on major Islamic shrines in Figure 2.5). The present-day fair looks like a typical fair in rural Punjab and is associated with market and business activity, besides the usual means of recreation (Figure 2.4). One also experiences the presence of possessed pilgrims wearing green clothes and headgears and dragging themselves toward the dargah.

The dargah of Panj Pirs reflects upon the larger ‘culture of pirs’ in this region. The development of the Panj Pir tradition has been a part of the socio-historical process of acculturation and assimilation. According to the Census of India 1961, in the Ferozepur District alone, there were some 24 annual fairs organized in the memory of one or other pir (Table 2.2). Significantly, just three among them shared a common saint. This ‘pirification’ of the social milieu experienced significant growth after the partition of India. Pirification refutes some of the conventional theories of Islamization in India, viz., military force and official patronage.⁹⁴ Significantly, the dargah has been and continues to be a common place for veneration for Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.⁹⁵

The experience of Panj Pirs also raises certain conceptual questions for the practise of historiography and its influence on the understanding of ‘popular Islam’ in South Asia. Asim Roy argues that the focus of Islamicist explanation on the historical development of Islamic society, in terms of the long, slow and gradual process of Islamization that eventually brings about a heterodox-heteroprax to orthodox-orthoprax religious orientation, gives a narrow understanding of popular Islam as it reduces it to ‘festers’ that could be ‘cured’.⁹⁶ While



Figure 2.5 A poster on sale at the dargah of Panj Pirs

proposing a complementarity between the historical and sociological understanding of Islam, he argues that syncretistic traditions in Bengal have rather been a necessary stage of its historical development. The case of Panj Pirs amply illustrates that while earlier traditions like Panch Pandavas of Mahabharata or the Shia version of ‘five sacred bodies’ might have played a significant role in the development of Panj Pir tradition, it is the local socio-cultural context and geographical influence that played an important role in transforming it into to a shared cultural complex.

Socio-anthropological understanding further strengthens the argument that the post-partition scenario of continued popularity of such dargahs is an expression of the pre-partition milieu of saint veneration. These dargahs could have played an important role in Islamization yet existed as ‘cult centres’ and ‘principal deities’ for Sikhs and Hindus alike. Significantly, these shrines earlier existed independent of state-control, in the popular domains of the society. The *wilayat* of such shrines extended beyond the political boundaries of either medieval or modern states and provided an alternative expression of social space.

In the Patwari records from 1922–1923 to 1965–66, the area associated with Panj Pirs was generally entered as ‘common land’. Thus, it remained outside the domains of bureaucratization and systematization, which was typical to the advent of colonialism in India, possibly because it remained functional in the popular domain. It was only after the formation of the Central Wakf Council in 1964 that such ‘lesser shrines’ also came under the control of the Punjab Wakf Board, which started exercising control over their income.⁹⁷

The continuous popularity and increasing income from these centres have exposed them to greater intervention of the state. In 1989–1990, the Punjab Wakf Board had fixed an amount of Rs. 5000 as a license fee for the control of the dargah. It was increased to Rs. 1.70 lakh in the year 2006–2007.⁹⁸ In June 2007, the Punjab Wakf Board came up with the scheme of entrusting the maintenance of Panj Pir at Abohar to the highest bidder. *The Tribune* reported that the board had issued a license in favour of Mohinder Singh for one year, supposedly against the payment of Rs. 2.10 lakh. The latter claimed to have paid a donation of Rs. 50,000 in addition to the license fee. Bool Chand, the existing *sevadār* of the dargah, said that he too was ready to increase the annual licence fee from Rs. 1.70 lakh to Rs. 2.10 lakh at par with Mohinder Singh, who otherwise had no association with the place of worship.⁹⁹ Bool Chand was finally entrusted the management of the dargah for 2007–2008 against a license fee of Rs. 3 lakh.¹⁰⁰ The association of the *sevadār* with the sacred centres in pre-partition times have recently found significant weight in claims to control over such shrines. Recently, the entrance to the shrine was adorned with a semi-circular display mentioning the name of the dargah as ‘Panj Pir Khanqah (dargah)’ and the name of the *sevadār* as ‘Bool Chand Kamboj (Pakpattan wale)’ along with the Islamic symbol of a crescent moon and a star (Figure 2.6). Significantly, despite the swelling ranks of pilgrims and income, the shrine complex has structurally remained intact in its pre-partition form.

In the aftermath of partition, popular dargahs in Punjab have undergone another significant changeover. Many existing dargahs have non-Muslim *sevadars*, and it is pertinent to note their role in the affairs of these dargahs. As has been said earlier, technically *sevadars* are mere custodians authorized by the Wakf Board for the upkeep of the dargah on the payment of a license fee, yet Bool Chand’s position has significant bearing on his relationship with pilgrims who flock to these centres. In colonial Punjab, the position of *gaddi* played an important role in determining the succession for running the day-to-day affairs of a Sufi shrine that usually followed customary practises.¹⁰¹ Adjacent to



Figure 2.6 Panjpir Khangah (dargah), *sevdar* Bool Chand Kamboj (Pakpattan wale)

the graves of the five Pirs at Abohar, there is a *gaddi* where the *sevdar* sits and offers his blessing and *parshad* to the devotees (Figure 2.7). Significantly, this is the same place where his father Gehla Ram Kamboj sat, emulated and performed the duties of a *gaddi-nishin*. Thus, even in the aftermath of partition, we see continuity in the practices and symbols associated with Sufi dargahs, which were co-opted in the post-partition scenario.

The gradual increase in popularity of the dargah had led to the development of certain myths and active association with other centres like Baba Ramdev in Ramdevra (Rajasthan). The dargah, however, might have experienced different phases of popularity. Rose's work on tribes and castes of Punjab and NWFP, which was compiled in 1919, mentions that 'few people attend it, mostly Madari, Naushahi, etc'.¹⁰² But the manner in which the Panj Pir tradition is associated with the tradition of Baba Ramdev suggests that the dargah was quite popular in the late medieval times. Nevertheless, the Panj Pir dargah at Abohar continues to attract pilgrims of different faiths from a number of Indian states. Besides, such lesser shrines have left an indelible mark on the



Figure 2.7 *Gaddi* of *sevadar* kept adjoining the five graves

folk literature of Punjab, influencing writers like Damodar and Waris Shah, and continue to inspire folklore and folk culture. Dargahs also provided a vital link between Muslims and non-Muslims of Punjab. Pilgrims from the urban centres primarily belong to trading castes.

Until 1947, Sukheras were the primary patrons of the Panj Pirs shrine. Sukheras were major Rajput ‘Muslim’ landholding caste who settled at Abohar in 1839 at a place known as Sukhera Basti. The graves of their elders are still located in the shrine complex. However, the shrine could have lost much popularity due to the influence of social reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is during this period that we also see the emergence of a small adjacent mosque. The number of mosques also significantly increased in Sukhera Basti. One of the major mosques where the mother of prominent Sukhera Bagh Ali was buried, was completed just around partition. When several of their descendants were interviewed, they fondly remembered stories of the Panj Pir dargah at Abohar but no longer practice its veneration in the reconstituted spaces of Pakistan.¹⁰³

Dargahs and popular literature have to be understood as a process of acculturation through the adaptation of symbols of dress, food,

speech, etc. and also, as discussed in the previous chapter, a significant articulation of the practice of saint veneration, mediated through the continuous flow of a saint's power (*barkat*) and sovereignty in the contemporary contexts. It is in this context that the role of popular culture needs to be understood. The process of establishment of such centres is an ongoing process, and reference should be made to the establishment of a *gaddi* (chair) associated with Ajmer Sharif by Firoz Khan (28 yrs) at Indira Nagri (Abohar) in 1998. He is a murid of Sabir Pak; founder of Chishti Sabri silsila; and is a *shagird* of Ghulam Jilani, *khadim* and *gaddi-nishin* at Kaliyar Sharif (near Roorkee). He has been administering the wishes of his pir at Abohar.¹⁰⁴ Firoz Sabari Chishti (Firoz Khan) regularly visits Ajmer Sharif and Kaliyar Sharif. He plays the role of a mediator between Shaikh and the people who come from places as far as Amritsar and Chandigarh to meet him. Present research compels us to re-think the effects of the partition on Sufi centres of Punjab. Significantly, these centres have continuously been re-orienting the socio-cultural milieu of Punjab. It is this continuity and change that is significant to the growth and evolution of Sufism and saint veneration in modern Punjab.

Contemporary Punjab constitutes a buffer zone of influence of major Sufi centres located in western Punjab, Delhi and Western Uttar Pradesh toward the east and Ajmer on the southern end. The shrine of Baba Farid constituted a major influence on social formation of the region pre-partition. With the partition of the province, this influence was reconfigured, and a new network of shrines and pilgrimage was constituted with a focus on the major shrines of Chishti dargahs located in Ajmer, Delhi and Kaliyar. This break in relationship detached or reconfigured the formal links of people with their patron saints now in Pakistan. Some people erected memorial shrines dedicated to their patron saints by burying a handful of sand they carried from the major shrines left behind in Pakistan. Links with Suhrawardi lineages was sustained through continued links with the shrine of Shaikh Haider of Malerkotla. Some significant aspects of memory and its important role in saint veneration through the agency of dreams is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Discussing the evolution of shrines in the early modern contexts, Green highlights the significant role spatialization, rituals, texts and buildings (shrines) play to bring the tropes of text and territory into common focus and builds a relationship between mobile persons, static places and the textual narratives. He also centralizes migration as an imaginary as well as a physical act that play a crucial role in the construction of collective historical self-consciousness of saint veneration. In the context of the Panj Pir shrine, this process of spatialization of

the charismatic power of the saints' tombs is enacted through intersection of orality, rituals and the emergence of the shrine dedicated to the memory of trade, mobility and migration. Thus, 'marking of memory onto the landscape was not only performed by the architectural forms of mausolea but also by the topography . . . to create the kind of "narrative landscape" . . . rendered as permanent architecturalized features of the territories'.¹⁰⁵ As Henri Lefebvre argues:

(Social) space is not a thing among other things, not a product among other products: rather it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity- their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object. . . . Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others. Among these actions, some serve production, other consumption (i.e. the enjoyment of the fruits of production). Social space implies a great diversity of knowledge.¹⁰⁶

However, we also need to acknowledge the 'diversity of social spaces and of their historical origins' and be wary of 'reducing all such spaces to the common trait of abstraction'.¹⁰⁷

In a transnational context, the exploration of space gets further complicated. In addition, there have emerged new contours of 'cyber space' that circulate and influence the dialectics of space in a transnational context. Chapter 4 discusses the ways in which popular images and poster constitute the crucial element of investigation to configure how these traditions survived in the new nation-states and how the sacred *wilayat* of the tradition of saint veneration is perceived in contemporary Punjab. The tradition of Panj Pir cannot be located within the domain of either major Sufi orders of Punjab. Thus, the conception of *wilayat* in this tradition constitutes a significant articulation of popular imagination and provides an insight into the organic interplay of popular tradition with everyday lives of people in contemporary Punjab.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

- 1 For an interesting reading into the nature of migration of population and complexities of their resettlements in newly created nation-states see Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
- 2 For an excellent translation of Waris Shah's *Hir* see Waris Shah, *The Love of Hir and Ranjha*, trans. Sant Singh Sekhon (Ludhiana: Old Boys' Association, College of Agriculture, Punjab Agricultural University, 1978).
- 3 Mansukhani has translated the compositions of Bhai Gurdas, who was a contemporary of four Sikh Gurus – Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas, Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind. At one place, Mansukhani translates *panj piyaalay panj pir* as 'The five Gurus' and ignores the significance of the idiom of *panj pir*, which is ascribed to the first five Sikh gurus by Bhai Gurdas while writing his compositions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Gobind Singh Mansukhani, *Hymns from Bhai Gurdas's Compositions* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1989), 30.
- 4 A typical trope of historical analysis will try to argue how a town and its political economy emerge as a result of the establishment of a shrine that becomes the centre of social and everyday activities. The reverse is rarely explored, and hence the role that space and its contours play in the emergence of shrines remains relatively unexplored.
- 5 For Lefebvre, the dialectical aspects in which space is perceived, conceived and lived is constitutive of three aspects: spatial practice (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space) and spaces of representation (lived space). These three aspects provide useful tools for thinking about how people experience the spaces they inhabit, use and represent space. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 110, cited in Kim Knott, "Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion," *Religion Compass*, 2, 6 (2008): 1110.
- 6 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 110.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 116–117.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 110.
- 9 While each rendition examined is unique, together they share a core set of narrative elements. *Hir* is always set in a particular Punjab landscape: the village of Takht Hazara, Jhang, on the banks of the Chenab River and Tilla Jogian in the Salt Range mountains. Its protagonists are always Dhido, who is referred to by his *zat* (Ranjha), and Hir, the daughter of a prominent Sial (*zat*) landowner of Jhang. While in Damodar's seventeenth-century *qissa*, the romance ends with Hir and Ranjha reunited and living happily ever after, from the early eighteenth century it has more often been portrayed as a tragedy in which the two lovers die. Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 25.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Catherine Brace, Adrian R. Bailey and David C. Harvey, "Religion, Place and Space: A Framework for investigating Historical Geographies of Religious Identities and Communities," *Progress in Human Geography* 30, 1 (2006): 31.

- 12 Ibid., 30. In their study of Methodists, Brace et al. argue that ‘it is necessary to move beyond the spaces of the church or chapel and pay attention to the links between community work and religious belief by focusing on the everyday, and often banal, formal and informal practices of Methodists, from involvement in education, charities and autodidactic cultures, to the organization of sports and social events’ (Ibid., 32–33). In a similar vein, we should look for informal practices at popular Sufi shrines to understand their multiple points of contact with social space. For instance, the practice of the *dangal* (wrestling) competition during *urs* is one significant way in which the distinction between sacred and profane become irrelevant. Theoretically, the division between sacred and profane has followed the oriental trajectory of sacred texts. However, this separation is not tenable in popular spaces where religious experience emerges out of everyday interaction.
- 13 Eliade’s (1959) problematic usage of the axiom of *sacred* space as separate from ordinary, *profane* space, one that constitutes the ‘center’ or *axis mundi*, a manifestation of the ‘Real’ (or hierophany) has now been critiqued as a myopic separation of conjoint spaces. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Williard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1959).
- 14 Amy DeRogatis, *Moral Geography: Maps, Missionaries and the American Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 9, cited in Brace et al., “Religion, Place and Space,” 30.
- 15 Lily Kong, “Mapping ‘new’ Geographies of Religion: Politics and Poetics in Modernity,” *Progress in Human Geography* 25, 2 (2001): 211–233 cited in Brace et al., “Religion, Place and Space,” 30.
- 16 Brace et al., “Religion, Place and Space,” 38.
- 17 Knott, “Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion,” 12. Knott further argues that the ‘focus on space need not mean ignoring time, as spatial theory acknowledges the intersection of the two, particularly in the context of globalisation. The dynamic production of space, its diachronic extensiveness and synchronic interconnectedness, and its multiplicity of representations mean that temporal traces, movements and developments are never excluded from a spatial analysis. This is an important consideration for the study of religion with its characteristic focus on history, tradition and change’. Ibid., 14–15.
- 18 Kim Knott, “Spatial Theory and Method for the Study of Religion,” *Temenos* 41, 2 (2005): 159–160.
- 19 Ibid., 160.
- 20 Adrian R. Bailey, Catherine Brace and David C. Harvey, “Three Geographers in an Archive: Positions, Predilections and Passing comment on Transient Lives,” *Transactions* 34 (2008): 266.
- 21 Knott, “Spatial Theory and Method,” 171.
- 22 Farina Mir, “Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism,” *Comparative Study of Society and History* 48, 3 (2006): 755.
- 23 Ibid., 748–749. Mir adds that the ‘depictions of saint veneration (in various renditions of *Hir-Ranjha*) make little reference to Punjab’s major religious traditions. Characters’ participation in this world of devotion and devotional practice seems to bear no direct relation to Islam, Hinduism,

- Sikhism, or any other religion. The way saint veneration is represented in these texts points to an independent set of beliefs that are neither in conflict with Punjab's major religious traditions, nor coterminous with them'. *Ibid.*, 754.
- 24 Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 28.
- 25 For a detailed reading of his fascinating work on Punjab, Bengal and Deccan see Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur 1300–1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1706* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 26 Anna Suvorova, *Muslim Saints of South Asia: The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 28 Green, *Making Space*, 3.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 Suvorova, *Muslim Saints of South Asia*, 17.
- 31 Mumtaz Currim and George Michell, eds., *Dargahs: Abodes of the Saints* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2004), 21.
- 32 Green, *Making Space*, 18.
- 33 Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1967), 367, cited in Hassner 2010, 22.
- 34 Soon after the announcement of the boundary award in mid-August 1947, the trickle of uprooted persons developed into a spate, and they started pouring in and going out in an unending stream. *Punjab District Gazetteers, Ferozpur District* (Chandigarh: Revenue Department, Punjab, 1983), 57.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 66.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 37 Waris Shah was born in the village of Jandyala Sher Khan near Gujranwala and studied at Qasur under Hafiz Ghulam Murtaza. In his youth, he fell in love with a village girl of Pakpattan. Scandalised by a Saiyid stooping to such depths, the villagers drove him out of their village, and Waris Shah was forced to retire to a village in the Sahiwal District. There he found spiritual comfort by versifying the romance of Hir-Ranjha. Although several other reversifications exists – one of them by the sixteenth century poet Damodar (1556–1605) – it is the artistry of Waris Shah which has made his *Hir* immortal. Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1983), 447.
- 38 Kamboj's association with the dargah at Abohar adds significance to the tradition of Panj Pirs. The Kambojs (Kambojs) belonged to one of the Hindu castes of Punjab and were either peasants or daily wage earners. They emerged as a new social formation owing to their association with the Suhrawardis of Multan. Their children were educated in the madrasa founded by Shaikh Zakariya. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, "Sufism Comes to Medieval Punjab: Its Historical Role," Keynote Address at a Seminar on "The Role of Sufis in the Making of Medieval Punjab" (Department of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 13–14 December 2005), 10–23.

- 39 The second *sevadār* Bool Chand (76 yrs, a resident of Anand Nagri, Abohar) says that during the annual *urs* people from as far as West Bengal and Pakistan come to pay obeisance at this dargah (interviewed on 01 March 2006).
- 40 Claudia Liebeskind, *Piety on its Knees: Three Sufi Traditions in South Asia in Modern Times* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.
- 41 Anna Suvorova problematically argues that the ‘unification of saints into a stable group is highly typical of the lower levels of medieval society’. Nevertheless, the cult of Five Pirs (*panj piriya*) took shape in North India in the fifteenth century, consisting of various saints in various regions of the country. The Five Pirs were venerated in Punjab, Bengal and in eastern Uttar Pradesh, where collective tombs were erected for them, of which the most well-known happened to be in Sonargaon (Bengal). Suvorova, *Muslim Saints of South Asia*, 23.
- 42 Crooke mentions that Patwas who are generally Viashnavas of eastern Uttar Pradesh Districts include Mahabir, the Panchon pir and Harditha among their clan deities. William Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1896), 172–173.
- 43 H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-west Frontier Province*, Vol. 1 (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1919), 572–573.
- 44 E.A.H. Blunt, *The Caste System of Northern India* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1931) cited in H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, eds., *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953), 457.
- 45 Suvorova, *Muslim Saints of South Asia*, 23.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Green highlights the widespread form of a ‘secondary shrine’ known as an *astānā*. ‘Found throughout South Asia, such shrines are typically only marked by a stone, tree or small building but their simple physical forms are augmented through narratives describing them as the stopping-place during the travels of a major saint. The great saints Mu‘in al-din Chishti of Ajmer and ‘Abd al-Qadir Jilani of Baghdad possess such *astanas* all over South Asia, including one for the former in Aurangabad and one for the latter in Srinagar’. Nile Green, “Migrant Sufis and Sacred Space in South Asian Islam,” *Contemporary South Asia* 12, 4 (2003): 498.
- 48 J. Wilson, *Final Report on the Revision of Settlement of the Sirsa District in the Punjab, 1879–83* (Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press Company, 1884), 194–195.
- 49 Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, 573.
- 50 This account was recorded by Muhammad Ishrat Khan and is based on an interview with Bool Chand. Muhammad Ishrat Khan, “Panch Pir Sufion ka dhārmik sthal,” *Swagat* (Indian Airlines, New Delhi, December 1993) 72–74.
- 51 This particular episode is common to the Ramdev folklore, with the difference that the Pir of Runicha (place where Baba Ramdev supposedly resided, known as Ramdevra today) eventually proves his superiority by performing a still more difficult ‘trick’: He brings instantaneously in front of them their five bowls, which had remained inside a locked room

- in Mecca. We need to specify that in the older devotional tradition, for instance, in a bhajan by Likhmoji Mali (eighteenth to nineteenth century), these five Pirs are said to have come from Multan: ‘*mahimā sun multān mulk rāyā pir milān tāhi . . .*’ (‘hearing of his glory, from the country of Multan the Pirs came to meet him’). In Ramdev’s hagiography, it is said that one of the Pirs who had acknowledged his superiority and given him the title ‘*hinduō kā pir*’ decided to remain in the kingdom of Pokaran. Dominique-Sila Khan, *Conversions and Shifting Identities: Ramdev Pir and the Ismailis in Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003), 91.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 She says that ‘a look at the map will immediately reveal that the five Pirs’ itinerary is not at all logical: the choice of Pokaran as a halting place when going from Multan to Abohar is not exactly what one would call a shortcut and much more than a simple detour’. Ibid., 92.
- 54 These names have been put up in a photoframe on the wall in the room adjoining the graves of Panj Pirs at Abohar. Besides the photo frames of Mecca, Baba Ramdev and six holy saints and their respective dargahs are also kept in and around the dargah at Abohar. These six holy saints are portrayed sitting together and facing each other. They include Hazrat Ghaus Pak (Abdul Qadir Gilani, Baghdad), Hazrat Bu Ali Sharaf (Bu Ali Qalandar, Panipat), Hazrat Mahbub-i-Ilahi (Nizamuddin Auliya, Delhi), Hazrat Khwaja Gharib Nawaz (Muinuddin Chishti, Ajmer), Hazrat Khwaja Qutbuddin (Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Delhi) and Hazrat Baba Farid Shakarganj (Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar, Pakpattan).
- 55 Waris Shah has mentioned the names of Panj Pirs in *Hir* as ‘Khwaja Khizr, Shakarganj, Zikriya of Multan, Syed Jalal Bukhariya and Lal Shahbaz’. Sant Singh Sekhon, *Heer Waris Shah* (Punjabi) (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1969), 59.
- 56 From right (top to bottom); Saints – Hazrat Ghaus Pak (Abdul Qadir Jilani), Hazrat Bu Ali Sharaf (Bu Ali Qalandar, Hazrat Mahbub-i-Ilahi (Nizamuddin Auliya); Shrines- Rauza Mubarak Ghaus Pak Baghdad Sharif, Dargah Hazrat Bu Ali Sharaf Panipat, Dargah Hazrat Mahbub-i-Ilahi Delhi. From left (top to bottom); Saints – Hazrat Khwaja Gharib Nawaz (Muinuddin Chishti), Hazrat Khwaja Qutbuddin (Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki), Hazrat Baba Farid Shakarganj (Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar); Shrines- Dargah Hazrat Muinuddin Chishti Ajmer Sharif, Dargah Hazrat Khwaja Qutbuddin Delhi, Dargah Hazrat Baba Farid Shakarganj (translation courtesy, Prof. Surinder Singh).
- 57 Cited in Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 457.
- 58 The Panj Pir(s) are any five saints the author may remember or worship. The Nawab (Alauddin Ahmad Khan) of Loharu, nephew of Nawab Shamsuddin Khan, who had sent a manuscript in the Persian character to Mr. Delmerick in 1872, narrates his version of Panj Pirs in ‘The Ballad of Sarwan and Pharijan’. Besides the reference of Waris Shah, Panj Pirs are also mentioned in the folk version of *Hir Ranjha* (‘The Marriage of Hir and Ranjha’ as related by Jats from the Patiala State, recorded by Temple [525]). Interestingly, while Waris Shah mentions Khwaja Khizr among the five Pirs, this folk version lists Panj Pirs similar to ‘The Ballad of Sarwan and Pharijan’ as recorded by Temple. Richard C. Temple, *The Legends of the Punjab*, Vol. II (Patiala: Department of Languages, 1884), 372.

- 59 Panj Pirs are also referred to as *hawas-i-batani*. The text quotes Waris Shah saying ‘*panch pir ne panch hawas tere*’. T.R. Shangri and J.R. Puri, *Sai Bulle Shah* (Urdu) (Jalandhar: Sartaj Printing Press, 1987), 77–78.
- 60 Cited in *Ibid.*, 78.
- 61 Popular consciousness firmly believed that a saint continues to live after his death, hence the frequent prefix of the word *zinda* (‘living’, ‘eternal’) to the name of a saint, for example, Zinda Pir (same as Khwaja Khidr), or Zinda Shah Madar. Suvorova, *Muslim Saints of South Asia*, 24.
- 62 Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, 572.
- 63 Malkahans lies on the road from Pakpattan to Montgomery.
- 64 Onkar Nath (77 yrs, presently a resident of Jain Nagri, Abohar) was a resident of Malkahans (named as such because majority of population was that of Hansis) in Montgomery, Pakistan before the partition of Punjab (interviewed on 26 March 2006). For a discussion on Waris Shah see Sekhon, *Heer Waris Shah*, 9–27.
- 65 Bool Chand adds that before partition, people from his village Wan Dal Singh (neighbouring Malkahans) and community (Kambojs) used to come to the market of Abohar (Abohar *ki mal mandi*) to purchase bullocks and thus had knowledge of the dargah and its relation with Waris Shah’s *Hir*, which was then a popular text. He narrated that he was born with the blessing of Shaikh Farid. Before the partition of Punjab, he had spent three years in Pakpattan, and his school was situated just below the dargah of Shaikh Farid. He used to offer his services at this dargah. His family primarily had a following with Baba Bhumman Shah, an Udasi Saint of medieval Punjab. Baba Bhumman Shah was born on 14 April 1687 at Behlolpur village, in the Montgomery District in Pakistan, in a family Kamboj lineage. Significantly, Bool Chand had never been to the dargah at Abohar before migrating from Pakistan in 1947 but had read about them in *Hir*. He was 17 years old then. Post-partition, his father used to light a lamp every morning and return in the evening. He also narrated certain miracles associated with Shaikh Farid. For instance, he never walked but used to fly 100 *kos* a day. Bool Chand also recited some verses from *Hir* (interviewed at Abohar on 4 April 2006).
- 66 Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu, *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality, and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* (London: Routledge, 1998), 12.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 68 Mawil Y. Izzī Dien, “Wilāya,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Vol. II), ed. P. J. Bearman et al., 209–210 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 208.
- 69 Hermann Landolt, “Walāyah,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* (Vol. 15), ed. Mircea Eliade, 316–323 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 321.
- 70 Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, 573.
- 71 Interestingly, men are not allowed in the courtyard where the wives of five Pirs are buried. There is a popular myth that if a man enters this area, he shall go blind.
- 72 I came across this exposed wall, which was put up for repairs on 25 March 2006.
- 73 The bricks were used in the wall along the surface of a raised platform where the graves of the Panj Pirs are located. One of the inner bricks was

- 4 cm thick and 11 cm long, suggesting a medieval association, while the other one was 5 cm thick and 20 cm long, which is the size of modern brick tiles used in flooring.
- 74 One brick was found on the backside and another on the opposite side of the dargah. These bricks were of unusual dimensions – 4.5–5.0 cm thick and 20 cm broad – and probably belonging to an early medieval/ancient period. All this suggests that the site has been in habitation in some form from at least early medieval times.
- 75 The wall measured 49 inches in thickness (including the much recent plastering). There were three niches in the surrounding wall, which were around 31–32 inches deep (including plaster).
- 76 According to the *sevadār*, the exact date of the trees is written on the wall of a temple in the village of Patrewala in Fazilka. The circumference of the tree measures around 22 feet.
- 77 Khan, *Conversions and Shifting Identities*, 81. Incidentally, Mokal's reign coincides with the dates traditionally ascribed to Ramdev Pir by the *bhajniks* –Samadhi in 1458. Ibid., 81–82.
- 78 Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, 573.
- 79 *The Gazetteer of the Multan District* mentions one proverbial characteristic of Multan City, (i.e. the prevalence of graveyards), and in the district at large the graveyards are a marked feature in the landscape. 'They are generally on ground too high for irrigation or cultivation, often on ruined *bhirs*, and are entered somewhat pathetically in the revenue records as *makbuza ahl-i-Islam*. It is common to bury in the neighbourhood of some saint's grave, and in such cases the wood round the grave is allowed to grow, it being considered profanity to lay hands upon it. Though most of the graveyards are bare unlovely spots, there is a tendency, where possible, to find a shady place for graves'. *Gazetteer of the Multan District*, 81.
- 80 Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, 573.
- 81 Nazar Masih (80 yrs, a resident of Jammu Basti, near Kabristan) was interviewed on 28 March 2006.
- 82 Rose identifies Kwajah Khizr as Sultan Naisr-ud-Din Mahmud (1246–1265). Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, Vol. 1, 573. The long list of religious virtues attributed to Nasiruddin by tradition was first put forth by Isami. The Sultan took nothing from the public revenue but earned his livelihood by making copies of the Quran and selling them secretly. 'He was one of the chosen people of God, always absorbed in thoughts of Allah. . . . Some people say he was a saint, while others put him among the prophets. . . .', cited in Mohammab Habib and Khaliq Ahmed Nizami, eds., *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. 5 (Part I), 'The Delhi Sultanat-AD 1206–1526' (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1996), 257–258.
- 83 Rizvi identifies Waris Shah's Syed Jalal Bukhariya as Jahaniyan Jalal Bukhari, who is also known as Makhdum Jahaniyan Jahangasht (1308–1385). He does not mention why the latter couldn't be Syed Jalaluddin Surkh Bukhari (1199–1291), who was the latter's grandfather. In fact, when Baba Farid, Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar are contemporaries, Waris Shah's Syed Jalal Bukhariya ought to be Syed Jalaluddin Surkh Bukhari (1199–1291). The principal shrines of both the Pirs are located at Uch in Bahawalpur. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, 447.

- 84 Siddiqui adds that since Ajodhan was situated on the merchant caravan route linking Multan, the border city, Delhi and other parts of Delhi Sultanate, the merchants, nobles and soldiers travelling from and to Delhi paid visits to the dargah and invoked the saints' help and blessing for success as well as safety from dacoits, illness and wild animals. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, "The Early Chishti Dargahs," in *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History, and Significance*, ed. Christian W. Troll, 14–15 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 85 Ibn Battuta says that the first town reached after leaving Multan was Abohar, which was the first town in India. Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa, 1326–54*, trans. H.A.R. Gibb (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 190.
- 86 Zulfiqar Ahmad, *Punjab: Selections from Journal of the Punjab Historical Society-2* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1982), 89.
- 87 Green, "Migrant Sufis and Sacred Space," 496.
- 88 Green, *Making Space*, 3–4.
- 89 Green, "Migrant Sufis and Sacred Space," 493–494. Green add that 'taking advantage of wider conventions of commercial and military travel often meant that the many Sufis who settled in regions far from their places of birth were not the sole new residents of their chosen adoptive homes. The kind of material capital that Sufis required in order to establish themselves in a given region by way of buildings, lodges and land grants made good relations with a wider community a prerequisite for success. In practice this often meant that the movement of Sufis into new regions mirrored broader migrations of communities of potential clients'. *Ibid.*, 494.
- 90 Rose mentions that a lamp is lit at the dargah in the evening. Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, 573.
- 91 Bool Chand proudly narrates a three-month long langar during the Indo-Pak war of 1971 and states the army was stationed near the dargah.
- 92 Two such folk renderings on Baba Lakhdata and Baba Farid were recorded at the annual *urs* on 30 July 2006 at Dargah Panj Pirs, Abohar.
- 93 The word *lakhdata* literally means the giver of hundreds of thousands. It signifies this Pir's status as a giver of Sufi wisdom. The life of Pir Lakhdata is shrouded in mystery. In one tradition, he is associated with Shaikh Ali Hujwiri of Lahore. In another tradition, he is said to have been a close associate of Guru Nanak, the first guru of the Sikhs. The cult of Pir Lakhdata is particularly popular among the agriculturist castes of Punjab and Rajasthan, both Hindu as well as Muslim. This tradition is linked with the cult of Guga Pir, said to be a Rajput chieftain who converted to Islam. In some versions of the account of Guga Pir's life, he and Pir Lakhdata are presented as one and the same person. Yoginder Sikand, "The Sufi Shrines of Jammu," *ISIM Newsletter* 1, 5 (2000): 19–20.
- 94 For a useful discussion on theories of Islamization see Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 113–134.
- 95 Siddiqui says that unconverted Hindus also often remained sincerely attached to the dargah, paid visits there and made offerings in cash or kind. Their descendants followed this tradition. It is worth recalling that in medieval times, Hindus and Muslims often vowed offerings to a patron saint or deity if their prayers were answered. Sometimes faced with serious problems such as illness of the only son or the desire for a male child,

- Hindus seem to have vowed that they would accept Islam. For Hindus, and often for new converts to Islam whose conversion was partial, the dargah was a substitute for the idol. Siddiqui, “The Early Chishti Dargahs,” 7.
- 96 Asim Roy, “Thinking Over ‘Popular Islam’ in South Asia: Search for a Paradigm,” in *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics*, ed. Mushirul Hasan and Asim Roy, 29–61 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39.
- 97 Significantly, in year the 2001, the Punjab Wakf Board (a composite board managing thirty-six thousand properties in three states of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh and the union territory of Chandigarh) was entrusted as the richest board in India with ‘a record revenue income of Rs. 15.09 crore during the financial year 2000–01’. Press Information Bureau Release, Government of India, 21 December 2001.
- 98 A letter no. Eo/PWB/FZR/2007/3110 dated 03–09–07 from Estate Officer, Punjab Wakf Board, Ferozepur to Yogesh Snehi, Abohar in response to latter’s query on the lease status of the Panj Pirs dargah at Abohar under the Right to Information Act 2005.
- 99 “Panjpeer Mazaar Complex: Wakf Board in Dock for Changing Lease,” www.tribuneindia.com/2007/20070610/punjab1.htm#4 (accessed on 19 June 2018).
- 100 A letter no. Eo/PWB/FZR/07/3281 dated 27–12–07 from Estate Officer, Punjab Wakf Board, Ferozepur to Yogesh Snehi, Abohar in response to latter’s query on Wakf property in Abohar under the Right to Information Act 2005.
- 101 *Gaddi* occupied a significant place in the debates on succession to Sufi sacred centres in colonial Punjab – whether the shrine was to be understood fundamentally as a local institution, which governed its affairs according to its own customs, or as an Islamic institution, governing its affairs according to Islamic law. Eaton narrates one such case before the Lahore High Court on the question of succession to the shrine of Baba Farid. Often the defendant’s lawyers vigorously argued that because the sharia was not generally interpreted as sanctioning primogeniture, the Gaddi followed custom and not Mohammadan Law. Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, 232–233.
- 102 Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, 573. One possibility of Rose’s observation could be that the surveyor visited the shrine on weekdays other than Thursday and annual *urs*. This day is considered auspicious for visit to shrine. Besides, in the late nineteenth century, the place was indeed situated atop a desolate sand ridge, at a distance from the main city.
- 103 Sukheras were politically aligned to the Unionist Party and were opposed to partition.
- 104 He narrated that once he had a *kaifiyat*, it revealed to him the existence of the grave of Zameel Shah Chishti several feet below the surface in the backyard of Rajindra Theatre at Abohar. He dug the grave in 1997–1998; since then, the site has been a popular place of veneration. His father Mohammad Kamruddin (60 yrs) had earlier established a Madina Masjid at Abohar. His grandfather Mohammad Salabuddin was primarily a native of Dibai (district Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh) and was

a resident of Abohar in pre-partition times and was associated with the dargah of Shaikh Shamsuddin Turk Pani Patti at Panipat (Interviewed on 20 June 2008).

105 Green, *Making Space*, 19.

106 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 73.

107 Ibid., 142. Lefebvre adds that 'like any reality, social space is related methodologically and theoretically to three general concepts: form, structure, function. In other words, any social space may be subjected to formal, structural or functional analysis. Each of these approaches provides a code and a method for deciphering what at first may seem impenetrable'. Ibid., 147.

DREAMS, MEMORIES, DISSENT

Popular shrines open a plethora of generally unexplored domains of Indian historiography. The growth of these traditions cannot be straightjacketed into fixed frames of medieval or modern history. While partition of the province attempted to bring a break in the social milieu of pre-partition Punjab, the creation of physical boundaries did not deter people from carrying ‘memorial’ traditions to new lands to which they migrated. These oral histories and their process of cultural production was mediated through narratives and counter-narratives of ‘dreams’ and ‘memories’ – marginal voices that also constitute a significant process of historical formation. It is important to analyse how groups and/or individuals negotiate their subjectivities with linear historical narratives through sustenance and restitution of social memory of saint veneration, everyday commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices at the shrines of popular Sufi mystics.¹ Thus, dreams and memories present a fascinating trope for probing the ruptures as well as continuities of a received discourse. This chapter probes these questions through case studies of some popular shrines at Abohar and Makhu along the Indo-Pak border and Ghuram Sharif near Patiala and situate their evolution and ritual practices in an understanding of contemporary Punjab.

After a brief lull post-partition, many older shrines managed by Muslims of Punjab were taken over by non-Muslims, though the ones managed by non-Muslims continued. These shrines have been centres of veneration for people of diverse faiths. While some of them are identified largely with Sufi mystics, others are an intriguing mixture of popular deities and saints. In the backdrop of communalization of social spaces in contemporary India, how do we understand the continuation, evolution and development of recent Sufi shrines as forms of social articulations in Punjab? The narratives of the caretakers,

the ritual practices and the profile of pilgrims discussed in the previous chapter suggest that these popular spaces are not just centres of veneration but dissent the dominant religious discourse and also present an alternate expression of caste mobility. Significantly, these 'memories' and 'dream narratives' appropriate and interweave the liberal discourse of the Chishtis with the Nath and Bhakti tradition and emphasize the continued relevance of these articulations in contemporary social formation.

Dreams and social space

'Dreams' and 'dream interpretation' have had a long tradition in most religious traditions.² As a broader category, dreams can encapsulate both 'dream states and the waking reports of these states' and also a variety of other experiences called visions, waking dreams, hypnogogic fantasies, hallucinations,³ trance, possession⁴ and 'other extraordinary states of consciousness that occur while awake or in other conditions different from both sleeping and waking'.⁵ Kilborne identifies two kinds of dreams – the 'message' dream or communication from god, a king or prophet in which the 'dreamer is no more than a medium' (such repeated dreams are considered of prophetic value and could have a political divination),⁶ and the 'apocalyptic' dream, which speaks 'not through symbols of ordinary daily life but through powerful, imaginary, divinely-inspired symbols'.⁷

Bulkeley states the significance of prototypical dreaming that refers to 'vivid, highly memorable patterns of dream content that recur in the sleep experiences' and 'reflect innate predispositions to dream in certain ways' and when 'actualized, make unusually strong impressions on waking awareness', leaving a 'vivid presence on people's memories for the rest of their lives'.⁸ In shamanistic traditions, dreams are used to 'seek out and confront the spiritual causes of illness and misfortunes'.⁹ Dreams hold a special place in the Islamic tradition. The Prophet Muhammad's revelation experiences began in the form of dreams and found expression in the Qur'an.¹⁰ Toufic Fahd's (1966) preliminary surveys listed a staggering number of dream manuals written by medieval Muslims scholars – 158 different dream manuals in Arabic, as well as another 23 Persian and Turkish – all but a few accessible only in manuscript form.¹¹ Amira Mittermaier further underlines the historical significance of dreams: 'without dreams, the call to [Islamic] prayer reportedly would not have come into existence in its present form; Aristotle's works would not have been translated into

Arabic; and Ibn al-Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (Seals of Wisdom) would never have been written'.¹²

John C. Lamoreaux argues that Muslim dream interpretation is quite different from the forms of dream interpretation practiced in modern psychoanalysis:

Muslim oneirocrits [interpreters of dreams] were not concerned with dreams for the light they might shed on the workings of the unconscious. They studied dreams because they believed that by properly interpreting them it was possible to discover things about the world outside the dreamer, things that could not otherwise be known. Dream interpretation offered Muslims a royal road that led not inward but outward, providing insight not into the dreamer's psyche but into the hidden affairs of the world. In short, the aim of dream interpretation was not diagnosis, but divination.¹³

The distinction of Muslim dream interpretation from modern psychoanalysis is crucial since the former locates dreams in the individual but extrapolates it in the affairs of the world. Cultural dream theories are learned and reproduced with each generation. Termed as 'enculturation', they lead to the embeddedness of dreams and their purported meanings in the cultural repertoire of everyday.¹⁴ Methodologically, the bridging of this duality¹⁵ is very crucial and useful for the purpose of my case studies. Dreams are not separated from the material world, the 'realm of matter and of mattering', and as Walter Benjamin proposes, 'dreaming has a share in history'.¹⁶ Since dreams have social and cultural repertoire – cultural values, categories, expectations, social conventions and also visuals – and not merely individual causes and consequences, their ethnographic perspective is invaluable.¹⁷ They are 'symbols and have meanings that can be read or deciphered . . . using systems of symbolic equivalence'.¹⁸

While dream experience has long been a rather difficult object of ethnographic study, recently the attention has shifted to understanding dream narratives.¹⁹ Dream narratives are both complex and crucial. They move to the limited frames of the individual and his/her immediate surroundings and can be extended to understand the ways in which dreams (as with other mediums in literature and poetry) travel and transform themselves and the social spaces or unique circumstances in which they inhabit. Lohmann suggests that it is 'worthwhile to explore what occurs between having a dream experience and constructing a dream narrative', a process of 'meaning-making' and

‘primary interpretation’²⁰ before the individual dream experience gets ‘transformed into a public document by sharing it as a narrative’. The process of converting memories of dream experiences into narratives – the forms and the circumstances under which they are told – is also culturally variable,²¹ culture-bound and ethnocentric.²²

In societies that have significant influence of saint veneration, Katherine Ewing suggests, a ‘Sufi initiation dream may have a powerful impact on the dreamer’s system of self-representations, so that as a result of the dream the dreamer comes to regard himself as the disciple of some Sufi teacher’. She further adds that:

[T]he social salience of a particular self-representation will depend upon subsequent events and may shift over time as external conditions change. If the dreamer does not succeed in resolving conflicts by adopting the new self-representation, the relevance of both the self-representation and the dream may diminish. The dream loses its transformative power. A dream’s potentially transformative power, in other words, comes from its ability to give rise to an appropriate self-representation and is limited by the dreamer’s ability to realize the expectations of the new self-representation in his subsequent life.²³

A Sufi initiatory dream thus forms the ‘node around which a nascent self-representation is formed’.²⁴ Dreams induced by another human being, a Sufi, pir or mystic, are perceived as a social phenomenon.²⁵ Wallace has observed that in situations of extreme cultural disruption and stress, the social significance of dreams appears especially prominent and may have a transformative, therapeutic effect on the personality of the individual dreamer.²⁶ Katherine adds that:

Even in more stable societies, dreams may act as a mechanism of adjustment and gradual cultural change. When an individual dreams a culturally prescribed dream, he alters, however slightly, the culturally transmitted dream form and its associated social institutions, just as individual narrators transform a myth in the telling. This process of alteration may take a particular direction when many individuals find themselves in similar conflictual situations and experience dreams that attempt to resolve the conflict in similar ways; the result may be considerable cumulative change in the cultural system.²⁷

Dreams are thus an arena for the operation of a culture as a ‘system in motion’, the components of which exist in dynamic tension.²⁸ Amira Mittermaier says:

Whether the dreamer’s spirit leaves the body and mingles with the spirits of the dead, or the dreamer is visited by the Prophet or the *awliyā’*, or a dream is taken to a dream interpreter, or the dream triggers actions in the dreamer’s waking life, many dream-stories in this ethnography exceed the autonomous subject in a number of ways. Dream-visions, then, carry ethical and political weight because they draw attention to the very conditions of interrelatedness, the in-between, and alterity.²⁹

Dreams define the rubric of human agency, mark ethnic identity and catalyse cultural change by incorporating history into current cultural realities.³⁰ The following section details three case studies on popular Sufi shrines where dreams and vision experiences form a central narrative function.

Case study 3.1 Pirkhanas in Southern Punjab

The practice of constructing memorial shrines of saints known as *pirkhanas* in Punjab has been recorded by colonial ethnographers like Rose (1919).³¹ Sakhi Sarwar (d. 1174), popularly known as Lalanwala or Lakhdara Pir,³² and Shaikh Haider (d. 1515),³³ popularly known as Haider Shaikh, continue to be one of the most popular saints to be revered at *pirkhanas*. Built on the boundaries of villages, *pirkhanas* are eight to ten feet in each direction and covered with a dome and with low minarets or pinnacles at each of the four corners. In front, there is usually a doorway that opens outward to a plastered brick platform.³⁴ Most *pirkhanas* are concentrated in the adjoining regions of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan and managed by Aggrawal Sabha, an organization of ‘Hindu’ trading castes usually classified as Baniyas.³⁵

The majority of *pirkhanas* emerged in the post-partition period as a continuation of the tradition of venerating pirs pre-partition.³⁶ The *pirkhana* under study came up in the first decade of the twenty-first century at Abohar and hence makes an interesting study of re-enchantment with these practices in recent times.³⁷ Baba Makhan Lal narrates that there was a tradition in his family to visit and pay thanksgiving to



Figure 3.1 Women venerating the memorial grave of Shaikh Haider at Abohar

Note: All photographs in this chapter are by the author unless otherwise mentioned.

Shaikh Haider of Malerkotla (d. 1515) at the birth of a son, occasion of marriage, etc (Figure 3.1).³⁸ Dr. Darshan narrates that once his father had a *paun*³⁹ (dream revelation) of ‘unconscious mistakes committed by his family’, which led them into enormous economic difficulties. He adds that until 1940, his great grandfather (Kahn Mal) was a rich and prosperous businessman. But when his great grandmother stopped worshipping pirs and lighting *chirag* at the nearby shrine, the family started to suffer losses and was reduced to penury for three years beginning in 1958. Later, his father (Tirath Chand, died at the age of 78 years in the year 2000) restarted the practice of venerating pirs. He narrated how he had a *paun* where the Baba of Malerkotla asked him the reason for which his family stopped worshipping pirs post-partition.⁴⁰



Figure 3.2 Sacred objects and images of popular saints at the *pirkhana*

In 2004, Master Shambu Nath arrived at the house of Dr. Darshan Paul during a *chauki* (religious event)⁴¹ organized by Baba Krishan Lal of Rampura Phul and offered a piece of land to establish a *pirkhana* at Abohar. Punjabi Aggrawal Sabha did not find the place suitable for establishing a *pirkhana* since it was located in a Dalit colony.⁴² Two years later, Master Shambhu offered the same land once again; on 17 May 2007, it was finally decided to establish *pirkhana* at the same site. The chairperson of Shri Peerkhana Sabha, Abohar says that in a span of two years after the establishment of the shrine, twenty-five lakh rupees had been spent on the expansion of Pirkhana.⁴³ Baba Makhan Lal instructs visitors according to their religious affiliations, apparently irrespective of caste and religious traditions. Dr. Darshan had been to the goddess (mata) Chintpurni's shrine, in the adjoining state of Himachal Pradesh, before and says that *fakirs* (holy person) don't recognize the barriers of religion. Every Thursday, he holds a *sanjhi gaddi* (literally 'common seat')⁴⁴ at the Pirkhana. Besides him, Baba Harbans Lal Garg from Mandi Dabawali and Baba Suresh Kumar from Hanumangarh also preside over *sanjhi gaddi* from time to time.

Pirkhana has memorials for various pirs, fakirs and goddesses. In the centre of the prayer hall, there is a shrine with a photograph of six popular Sufi saints⁴⁵ of the region (Figure 3.2). There are two memorial graves on either side of this shrine. On the left is a memorial grave for Shaikh Haider of Malerkotla (Figure 3.1) that is covered with blue *chadar*; on the right is an



Figure 3.3 An invitation card soliciting presence at the third annual *diwan* at Abohar

enclosed grave of Baba Lakhdatta (Sakhi Sarwar) covered with green *chadar*. There are also minor shrines dedicated to the Mata (goddess) Masani (Sitala Mata),⁴⁶ Khan Doda Pir (who is believed to be the young brother of Baba Lakhdatta) and Bhairon Chadi (who was supposedly the *wazir* (minister) of Baba Lakhdatta). *Diyas/chirag* are lit every day in the central shrine of Pirkhana, and a *bhandara/langar* (community kitchen) is organized every third Thursday. Weekly *chauki* is associated with bhajans (devotional singing) and *bujhe* (suggestions). Annual *diwan* is regularly held since 2008 (Figure 3.3).

When asked about the resurgence of the culture of pirs in the recent times, Baba Makhan Lal says, ‘If a customer goes to the market to purchase things he/she looks for the cheapest and the most durable (*kifayati*) store. Pirkhanas are also more *kifayati* centres for fulfilment of wishes’. He had also been associated with Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS) since 1984, but lately has not been going to the meetings primarily because of his association with the Pirkhana. Local members of the RSS had objected to his association with pirs and regarded it as inappropriate. Baba Makhan says that now even some members of the RSS come to resolve their financial and personal problems.

Case study 3.2 Baba Bohar and Khanqah Chishtiya

The emergence of Sufi shrines in post-partition Punjab has been an intriguing phenomenon. Until the last decade of the twentieth century, partition historiography communalized the forced migration and presented a picture of break and trauma. Contemporary trends in the historiography of Punjab similarly negate and restrict the history of Punjab to an understanding of dominant Sikhs traditions,⁴⁷ thus ignoring any objective and meaningful analysis of those popular traditions that were crucial to the growth of sacred milieus in the region. The continuity and re-emergence of Sufi shrines in this scenario is crucial to our understanding of contemporary Punjab.

Khanqah Chishtiya at Makhu emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century (Figure 3.4). The narrative associates the origin of this centre with Bohar (aged 38 years in 2015).⁴⁸ Bohar was born in a Dalit Christian family. His father's name is Bahadur, and his mother's name is Bibi Shahido. He is the only son in the family and has two sisters. His elder paternal uncle's name is Barkat, and his aunt's name is Bibi Jijo.⁴⁹ His parents and grandparents (Bibi Bhago and Baba Hasmat) have been venerating the shrine of Haider Shaikh of Malerkotla for generations. His father was a contractor for loading goods trains, but his business suffered losses since 1995. Bahadur had, on the occasion of a family marriage, apparently consumed liquor, which supposedly offended the Baba of Malerkotla. Bohar was pursuing graduation at Khalsa College (Sarhali) when he began falling ill frequently. He was taken at the shrine of the Baba of Malerkotla in the village of Sodhan on several occasions, but his health showed no signs of recovery.

In 1995, Bohar had a 'dream revelation' (*bazari*) of Anant Nath, who was a Nath saint of Makhu and apparently the 213th disciple of Gorakhnath.⁵⁰ According to this, Bohar was actually a reincarnation of Anant Nath, reinstating the belief that since Bohar was born with pierced lobes he is from the *kul* of Naths. He also had a vision of the mortal remains of Anant Nath, which were reportedly dug up in the main town of Makhu and a memorial (locally called *dargah*) was constructed over it. Later, he had revelation of the Baba of Malerkotla and then of Sakhi Sarwar/Lalanwala Pir. In 1996–1997, he had another dream that said that everything that had been happening to him was at the behest of Khawaja Muinuddin Chishti of Ajmer who wants him to perform *seva* for the saint. From 1995 onwards, after every two



Figure 3.4 Khanqah Chishtiya at Makhu is almost a replica of Ajmer Sharif

months he frequented the important Chishti shrines of Nizamuddin Auliya (Delhi), Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (Mehrauli), Hazrat Bu Ali Qalandar (Panipat), Hazrat Saiyid Alauddin Ali Ahmed Makhdum Sabir Pak (Kaliyar, d.1291) and Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti (Ajmer).

The local narrative around Anant Nath relates him to the Khatri caste. At the age of 12, Anant Nath apparently became a disciple of Gorakhnath and started living in Kashi (Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh). His desire to achieve mystical revelation remained unfulfilled during his association with Gorakhnath and his other disciples. His wandering spirit was assisted by Muinuddin Chishti, who helped him in ‘meeting God’. Harjinder Singh Bittu says that Anant Nath has not revealed his complete identity as yet and they were going to Kashi (Varanasi) to find more about him. Later, Bohar, who now came to be known as Babaji, visited the shrine at Ajmer; in 1999, he read the *kalmia* (the Islamic testimony of faith) and ‘converted’ to Islam. He assumed a new name, Sufi Ghulam Farid Chishti, and was also designated the Khalifa of the Qalandari Qadiri Chishti *gaddi* at Makhu by Saiyid Aijaz Ahmed Hashmi, *khadim* of the dargah of

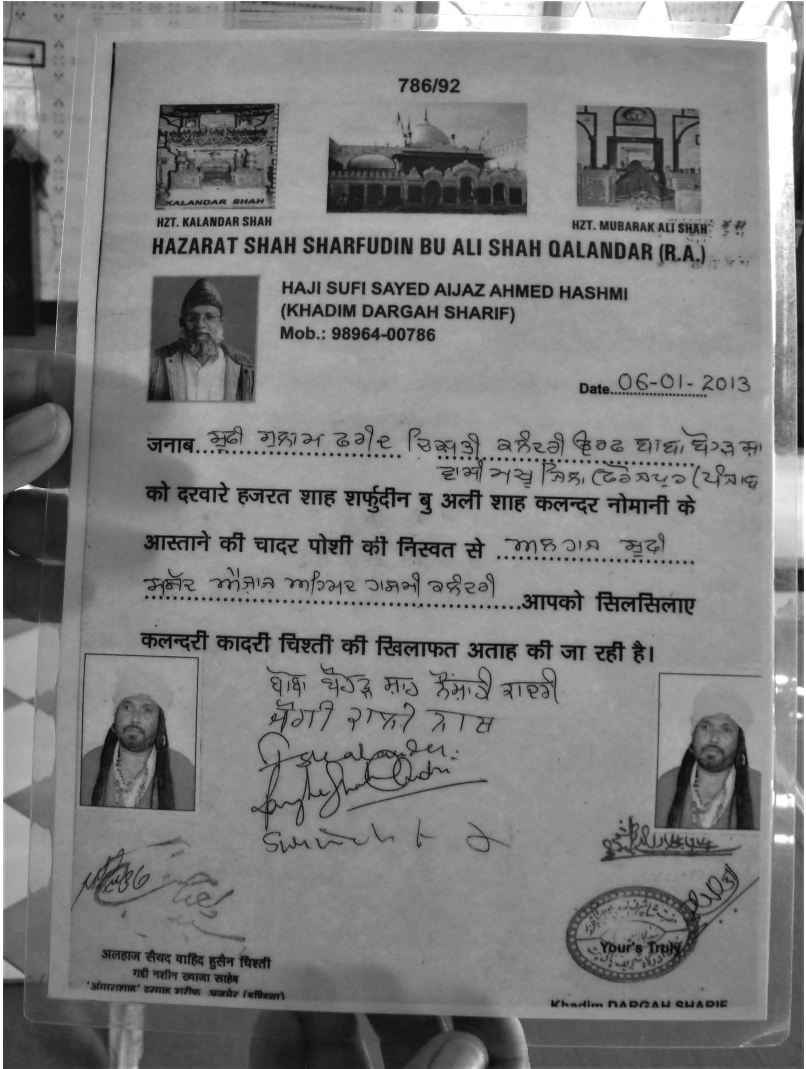


Figure 3.5 A letter confirming *khilafat* on Ghulam Farid Chishti from the *khadim* of Bu Ali Qalandar and *gaddi-nishin* of Ajmer Sharif
 Source: Photo courtesy of Ghulam Farid Chishti

Hazrat Sharfuddin Bu Ali Shah Qalandar and Guru Pir of Baba Bohar who performed his *dastar-bandi* on 6 January 2013 (Figure 3.5). The shrine follows the *maryada* (ritual practice) of Ajmer Sharif and once a year organizes an annual fair in the memory of Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti. Syed Nasiruddin Niyazi, Khadim of the Ajmer Sharif visits this shrine during *urs*.

Gradually, with the assistance of local Mahajans ('Hindu' businessmen), the scale of annual celebrations in honour of Anant Nath has become larger. In the meantime, a murid (disciple) who was blessed by Baba Bohar and subsequently went to America donated a piece of land (1/2 acre) to construct a larger *khanqah* outside the city. The foundation of this *khanqah* was laid on 12 February 2003 and was dedicated to Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti on 13 February 2004.⁵¹ *Chadarposhi* of the memorial grave was performed on 3 August 2006. On the same day, the first *urs* (death anniversary of the patron saint) was celebrated at the new *khanqah*. A stud farm was later established behind the new *khanqah*, and the proceeds from the sale of horses bred there are utilized for the purpose of maintenance, upkeep and development of its premises. In 2009, the annual *urs* was organized from 1 to 3 July (first three days of the second week of Rajab, 1430 AH). *Roshni* is read in the morning and evening each day, and a white *chadar* – apparently from Ajmer Sharif – is offered at the memorial grave of Muinuddin Chishti at Khanqah Chishtiya.

The newly constructed shrine complex, though incomplete, has an imposing arched gateway called *buland darwaza* through which one large dome of the main complex is visible. When it was last surveyed in February 2015, a beautifully decorated memorial grave dedicated to Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti was situated inside the sanctum. The shrine complex is a replica of the shrine of Ajmer Sharif (Figure 3.4). Names of the popular Sufi saints and their hagiographies are inscribed on the interior and exterior walls of the memorial shrine. The names of Allah, Prophet Muhammad, Ali, Bibi Fatima, Hasan, Hussain and significant Chishti saints such as Khwaja Usman Harooni and Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti are also engraved separately on the three walls around the memorial grave. There is a large hall outside the sanctum marked by the *gaddi* (seat) of Ghulam Farid Chishti, the *khalifa* of Makhu. In the last four years, a new arched diwan hall has been added to the premises. Outside the memorial grave, located in a small room, is a hearth (*dhuna* or *ibadat khana* of Baba Ghulam Farid) where a *Shaiwa* symbol of trident and a Shia *panjtan pak* have been erected adjacent to each other (Figure 3.6).



Figure 3.6 Shaiva trident and Shia *panjtan pak* at *dhuna mubarak* (sacred hearth)

This entire narrative around Khanqah Chishtiya engages and weaves early medieval interaction between Naths and Chishtis. From the eleventh century, Nath yogis began to spread throughout northern India and from their centre at Peshawar moved to all parts of Central Asia and Iran, at the same time influencing Qalandars and Sufis. As has been discussed in the Introduction, the Naths initiated members of all castes, including those outside the caste system, such as Chandalas and sweepers, into their non-hierarchical order. The narrator also relates Anant Nath and Bhagat Puran who apparently were contemporaries. He also draws parallels and attests to formers' presence when Ranjha meet Balnath, under whose guidance the famous love martyr of Punjab became a Nath *jogi*.

Case study 3.3 Dream of Saint Bhikham Shah

The post-partition historiography of east (Indian) Punjab has dominantly been influenced by the demographic reconfiguration of the population affected by the mass migration of Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs into India. The sustained demand of a 'Sikh' political party Akali Dal for a Punjabi speaking state led to further re-organization of the province in 1966 and the creation of a predominantly 'Sikh' state of Punjab. The rise of 'Sikh' dominated Punjab and subsequent upheavals of militancy from the early 1980s to 1990s gave impetus to a historiography that privileged the role of the dominant Sikh community in the social formation of the region.⁵² Similarly in Pakistan, this translated into the construction of a history that focused primarily on the region's linkages with the rise of Islam in Arabia and its subsequent emergence as an Islamic country in 1947. In Indian Punjab, the history of the region has been limited to the role of Sikhs. In this vein, the contribution of Sufism was denied, and Muslims were presented in a negative light.⁵³ Thus, conflicts between the Mughal state and Sikh Gurus were presented as religious conflict between the Sikhs and the Muslims. Both of these nationalist historiographies de-emphasized the centuries' long history of the exchange of ideas and conversations between Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus that had led to the development

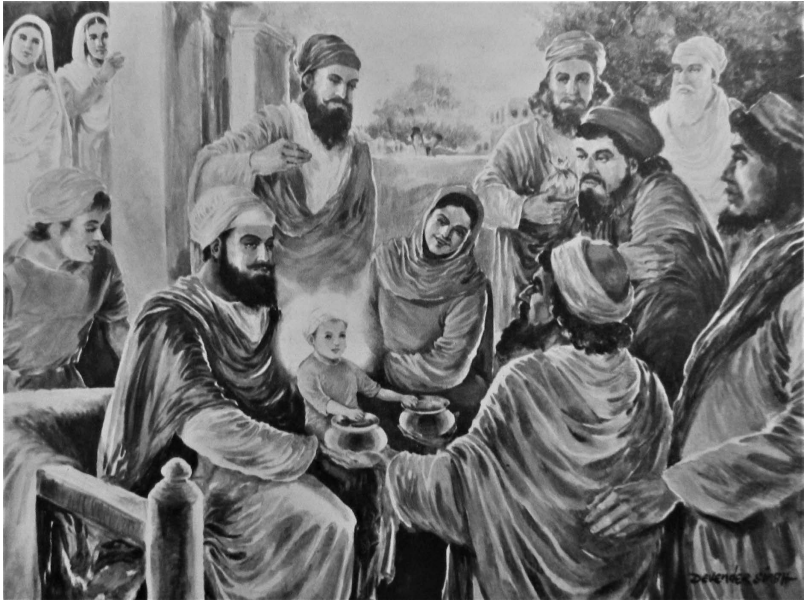


Figure 3.7 Bhikham Shah offering sweets to baby Gobind Rai

Source: Painting by Devender Singh appeared in Punjab and Sind Bank calendar 1979–1980

of the ideal of ‘Punjabiyaat’.⁵⁴ The oral narrative of Pir Bhikham Shah problematizes such historiographies.

The shrine Ghuram Sharif⁵⁵ celebrates a lesser-known legend about Pir Bhikham Shah (d.1709), a Chishti-Sabri saint of Patiala.⁵⁶ The legend states that when the tenth Sikh Guru Gobind Singh was born in the east of India at Patna, the saint offered *sajda* (prayers) facing toward that direction. When questioned about this by his murids, he told them that he had dreamt of a new sun rising with the birth of baby Gobind Rai. Bhikham Shah and his disciples then travelled all the way to Patna (Bihar) to have a glimpse of the infant Gobind Rai, then barely three months old. Desiring to know what his attitude would be toward the two major religious traditions of India, the saint placed two small pots of sweets in front of the child, one representing Hindus and the other Muslims. As the child covered both the pots simultaneously with his tiny hands, Bhikham Shah felt happy concluding that the new seer would treat both Hindus and Muslims alike and show equal respect to them (Figure 3.7).

After meeting Bal Gobind at Patna in 1666, the Pir lamented that due to his old age he will not be in a position to travel to the place and visit him again. He wished to meet Bal Gobind at Ghuram. Later in 1702, Guru Gobind apparently visited the Pir, and the place of their meeting is commemorated by a Gurdwara Milapsar (also known as Baoli Sahib due to the location of a medieval step-well in its premises), which was ‘revealed’ to Sant Baba Gurbachan Singh Kambli Wale in the year 1965 (see Figure 3.8 for a painting commemorating this meeting). The Gurdwara is managed by a local managing committee headed by Sant Baba Avtar Singh. The shrine organizes celebrations every night of the new moon. A huge fair (*gor mela*) is organized on the day of Baisakhi, and a *nagar kirtan* (procession) from the Gurdwara visits and pays tribute at the dargah of Pir Bhikham Shah.

The shrine of Bhikham Shah was witness to attempts of plunder, loot and violence triggered after the partition of the province. It remained desolate for several years until the 1950s, when Baba Mast Wareh Shah along with Baba Mast Diwana Bulleh Shah undertook the task of restoring it. After the demise of the former, the latter has been playing



Figure 3.8 A painting of Guru Gobind Singh meeting Baba Bhikham Shah near a *baoli* where a memorial Gurdwara Milapsar was erected in 1965

a central role in its expansion, along with his wife Bibi Mast Diwani Bholu Shah. Both are present *gaddi-nishins* of the shrine. Baba Mast Diwana Bulleh Shah is a Kumhar⁵⁷ by caste. Under his supervision, the dargah has constructed a large langar hall and spaces for pilgrims' stay.

Baba Bulleh Shah is critical of the current political dispensation and opines the difference between *tehrir* (expressed in words/text) and *rubaniyat* (spiritual/mystical experience). In a varied group of disciples, he says that the former is the cause of all the conflicts in contemporary times while the latter binds humanity.⁵⁸ Baba identifies his Sufi lineage as Bhikh Chishti, which assumed a new line after Bhikham Shah (fifth in the line of succession among Chishti Sabris). Bhikham Shah is apparently the ninth Qadir, a lineage from Abdul Qadir Jilani. He was born in 1625 in the village of Siana (Pehowa) to Saiyid Yusuf, who died when Bhikham was 10 years old. His mother Malka brought him to his maternal home at Sadhora (near Ambala). His maternal uncle (*mama*) Pir Fazal Shah (whose mausoleum is also located at Ghuram, the fourth Khalifa of Baba Farid) sent him to Hazrat Shah Abul Maali at Ambehta (near Saharanpur) for spiritual learning. He became the foremost disciple and Khalifa of the Chishti Sabri saint and was sent to Ghuram for the propagation of the Sabri order.

Bhikham Shah's blessings transformed the life of a poor Brahmin Daula (assumed the name Roshan Daula) who rose to become incharge (*wazir*) of the royal treasury under Shahjahan. Subsequently, the emperor bestowed the land revenue of 26 villages for the shrine. A significant mausoleum was constructed over the grave of Bhikham Shah, and Roshan Daula was also buried in an adjacent complex. In contemporary Punjab, this shrine occupies a central place for the pilgrimage and spiritual needs of Sabri disciples who are from a wide variety of caste and religious affiliations. Shrines and *urs* claiming association to this order can be found in Amritsar and Batala.

Some 18 years ago (around 1996), a *bir* (holy copy) of Guru Granth Sahib was installed in one of the rooms along the enclosing hall. A Granthi and his supporting 'Sikh' staff take care of the premises that have several images from Guru Gobind Singh's life. A 'Hindu' granth Ramayana is located in the adjacent room, which is attended by a pujari.⁵⁹ The room has idols of several Hindu deities (Figure 3.9). This has been a more recent addition and was in place both during my first survey in December 2010 and second survey in January 2015. Both these rooms are not classified by the pilgrims or the staff as a gurdwara or a temple but cater to the religious need of diverse spectrum of

pilgrims who visit the shrine. Recently, the dargah faced objection over the location of Guru Granth Sahib in its premises, apparently by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). The criticism is being handled by assigning a different and independent gate to the room where the Granth is located that can be accessed independently of the Sufi shrine.⁶⁰

Before the partition of the sub-continent, Ghuram comprised of a cluster of villages dominated by prosperous Shaikh Muslims. Other Muslim communities of the village were comprised of Pathans, Penjas, Telis and Dhobis. Non-Muslim Majhabis, Harijans, Balmikis, Ravidasias,

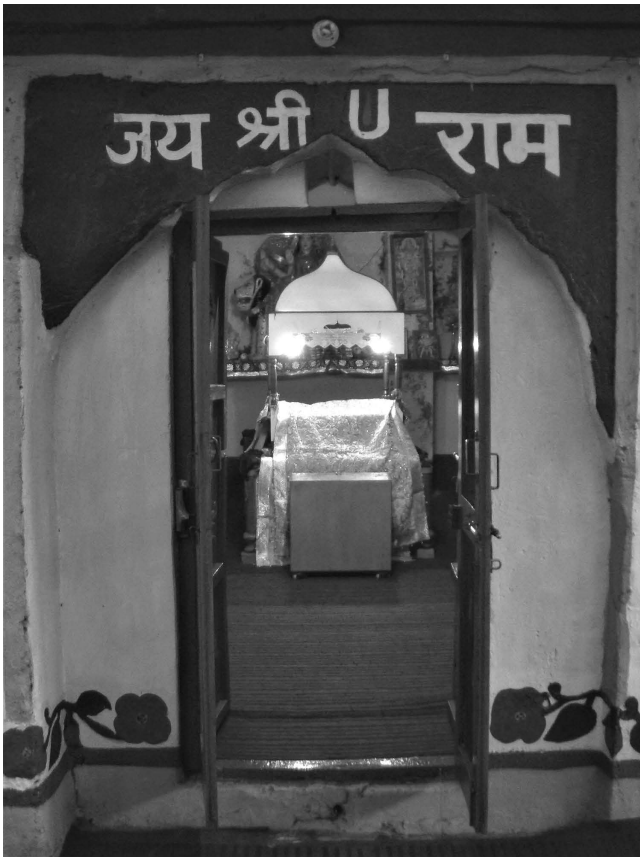


Figure 3.9 A room where Ramayana has been placed

Shorgars and Pandits were also native residents of the village. Jat and Rajput Sikhs migrated from the Gujarat, Sialkot and Lyallpur Districts of west Punjab post-partition and constitute dominant castes in contemporary Ghuram.

The shrine has two major entrances. A huge medieval gateway leads to the first storey of the mausoleum of Bhikham Shah (d. 1709) while the second gateway leads to the actual place of burial. Adjacent to this shrine is a mausoleum of Roshan Daula and probably the members of his family. Currently, langar is distributed to the pilgrims from the old langar hall. A new large hall and a serai on the first floor are being constructed adjacent to the outer wall of the shrine. The shrine has two mosques: one inside the complex and adjacent to the dargah of Bhikham Shah and another along the major gateway to the shrine. A large hall was later added to the structure by the current *gaddi-nishin*, who also added makeshift shrines to house Ramayana and Guru Granth Sahib in the shrine complex.

Annual celebrations during *urs* go on for two weeks and include the recitation of Ramayana and Guru Granth Sahib, offering chadar at nearby shrines, ceremonies of *gyarvi sharif* (for Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani) and *ghusal sharif* (for Pir Bhikham Shah). *Gyarvi sharif* is celebrated every month on the eleventh day of the moon.

Situating dreams

Pre-modern Punjab has been a centre of some very intriguing debates on religion that have significant implications for contemporary Punjabi identity. The three case studies under discussion can be located within the contours of interactive traditions of medieval South Asia – from Nathpanthi, Bhakti and Sufi traditions and the subsequent rise of Sikhism – and the later movement for ‘social reform’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Punjab. Contemporary historiography of the partitioned sub-regions of Punjab, however, takes into account only selective historical antecedents to justify the frames of Pakistani or Indian nation-state formations or the supranationalist state formations of Taliban and Khalistani movements, respectively. These case studies, on the contrary, try to foreground the narratives of such lived histories that continue to flourish despite decades of violence unleashed upon them.⁶¹

It is difficult to locate these case studies in conventional frames of time (before and after). They refer to the ‘condition of timelessness’– past

as such but to the past in the present and into the future.⁶² The studies outlined above pose several epistemological questions for a historian and, in this case, historicizing the content of ‘dream’. With the emergence of oral history as a specialized methodological framework, some new tools of historical research have now been devised to visualize the everyday in the light of archival research.⁶³ Katherine Ewing argues that ‘in societies where dreams are regarded as socially significant, a cultural template, that is, a particular structure of signs with a consensually agreed upon significance, is available for the dreamer to draw upon to shape and organize the manifest content of a dream. The manifest content of the dream is, in other words, based on a culturally available model’.⁶⁴ In these three case studies, this available model enables a non-Muslim to dream of a Sufi mystic and is articulated through the culturally embedded narrative of everyday histories. Dreams also play a significant role in locating, mediating and sustaining the centrality of memory in ‘connected histories’ of the region.⁶⁵

Punjab had a cultural landscape where the pre-Islamic and Islamic tradition of dream interpretation had a precedent in the early centuries of Muslim conquest of the region. The significant presence of all major liberal and radical Sufi orders in the region ensured the assimilation of the theories of dream interpretation even among the non-Muslim population, thereby evolving into a unique practice of saint veneration. With limited possibilities of future revelation in textual Islam, the oneirocritic vehicle of true dreams became a potential pathway to the divine.⁶⁶ ‘In sleep or in deep contemplation, the mystically attuned have access to the noumenal, not just the surreal’.⁶⁷ The centrality and interpretation of dreams also forms one of the most important services expected from Sufi masters: forming a style of spiritualized Islamic psychoanalysis.⁶⁸ ‘Stories surrounding popular saint cults with shared Muslim and Hindu congregations also frequently involve visionary or oneiric episodes, often at the same time invoking legends concerning earlier kings and emperors’.⁶⁹

Nile Green provides a framework through which we can approach the significant role that dreams play in the evolution of Islamic thought and Sufism (Islamic mysticism). It would, however, be even more interesting to analyse the ways in which dreams came to play a similarly crucial role in the sustenance of piety and reinvention of the popular notion of the sacred in a predominantly non-Muslim landscape of contemporary east Punjab, which had also been enriched by centuries of tradition of dream interpretation – Nath, Bhakti, Sufi, etc.⁷⁰ It would also be crucial to analyse the ways in which dreams articulate and

also help in the reconfiguration of the linkages between the shrines of Sufi mystics in west Punjab, which are no longer accessible to the people of contemporary east Punjab. It is essential to underline that after the partition of the province in 1947, the shrine of Sabir Pak (founder of Chishti Sabri order in India) at Kaliyar in Uttar Pradesh plays a pivotal role in the reconfiguration of this relationship, particularly in the Majha and eastern Malwa belt of Punjab.⁷¹ Significantly, in two of the three case studies, it is a non-Muslim who is in a state of a dream; in the third case, it is a non-Muslim who is the subject of a dream. Scholarship on the pre-partition milieu can conveniently reduce this process to 'a stage' before the culmination of the process of Islamization. But such reductionist analogy does not explain the complex process of continuity and the uniqueness of the parallel processes of conversion as well as disparate evolution of the long-term process of Islamic acculturation.

This process of acculturation leads to the development of a different kind of piety that is articulated through the memories of the pre-partition era when the shrines of the Sufi mystics were also venerated by large numbers of non-Muslims. More important is the process in which this is articulated through the function of a dream. Among the three shrines discussed above, two shrines were constructed in the twentieth century, and the third one at Ghuram is a medieval shrine. There is thus a renewed interest toward popular veneration of shrines of significant Sufi mystics or the local pirs. One of the key elements of these narratives is that they appropriate and interweave the medieval liberal discourse of the Nath, Bhakti and Sufi traditions and emphasize the continued relevance of these articulations in contemporary social formation.

The centrality of dream as a legitimizing tool for the justification of practice of popular piety by Baba Makhan Lal is seen as essential to counter criticism of religious radicals against these practices. The location of the shrine also determines the nature of the dream and its typical association with the community it caters to. Thus, for a businessman, it is a source of *barkat* (prosperity) in trade and material gains; it is a source of power, legitimacy and mobility for a Dalit Christian and fertility and harvest for Jat agriculturists. Contemporary saint veneration should be seen as a continuation of the significant practice of saint veneration, though within the realms of its contemporary social formation. Revelation through a dream of the mythic association of a child to be born, as in the case of Bhikham Shah's dream, situates Bal Gobind's birth as 'world dawn' and the Guru as 'dawn being'.⁷²

It is equally interesting to discuss the historical context within which a dreamer visualizes or articulates his experiences. While dreams have a considerable repertoire of the past, they also have a significant context of the contemporary. They serve as an interface between the living and the dead, the lived and the memory.⁷³ There is an important element of re-establishing (a re-enchanted) relationship between the pre-partition social milieu and the location of saint veneration in the lived lives of particularly non-Muslims in contemporary east Punjab. Shrines also complicate the simplistic interpretation of debates on Islamization in medieval and modern South Asia.

Sites of memory

A significant component of the case studies discussed above is their location in the realms of memory. Both Pirkhana (Abohar) and Khanqah Chishtiya (Makhu) are memorial shrines that emerged as a result of dream experiences. Similarly, the sea of pilgrims who visit the shrine of Bhikham Shah memorialize the significant vision of the Sufi saint and his meeting the Guru twice – at Patna (illustrated through flex banners- see Figure 3.10 below) and later at the village of Ghuram (marked by Gurdwara Milapsar, Figure 3.8 above). These shrines thus become what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory). Memory plays a crucial role in the social space of saint veneration, particularly with the partition of the province in 1947 that permanently reordered the sacred landscapes of migrants. This abrupt transformation didn't leave much scope of coming back and revisiting the familiar spaces and neighbourhood that were left behind as borders became almost permanent with each subsequent decade.⁷⁴ When Baba Makhan Lal narrates his family's veneration of shrines of pirs, his 'quest for memory' becomes the 'search for one's history'.⁷⁵ Pierre Nora laments how memory and history have been pitted against each other and outlines their broader dialectical contours:

Memory is life, borne by *living societies* founded in its name. It remains in *permanent evolution*, open to the *dialectic of remembering and forgetting*, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, *susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived*. History, on the other hand, is the *reconstruction*, always *problematic and incomplete*, of what is no longer. Memory is

a perpetually actual phenomenon, a *bond tying us to the eternal present*; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic-responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection. History, because it is an *intellectual and secular production*, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs *remembrance* within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again.⁷⁶
(emphasis mine)

Thus, the professionalization of history in the nineteenth century rendered memories dubious as a source for the verification of historical facts. ‘Written documents seemed less amenable to distortion and thus preferable to memories. We can also imagine their suspicions of memory as part of a painful effort by academics to separate history as a secular practice from a background of cultural religiosity’.⁷⁷ Further, memories that are ‘considered localized and tied to specific [physical]



Figure 3.10 A flex banner congratulating the birth of Guru Gobind Singh by memorializing the narrative association with Bikhham Shah

places' serve as 'critiques of history. . . . History, on the other hand, tends to receive its power from the ubiquitous locales of the state and is often the domain of the archive, the repository of historical memory'.⁷⁸ Memory is treated as subjective, selective and uncritical while history is seen to be objective, scientific and subject to empirical scrutiny.⁷⁹ But as Friedrich Nietzsche contended, this neat separation was never complete and the 'return of memory discourse suggests that at least some of us have lost interest in maintaining the separation'.⁸⁰

Also, 'memory as re-membering, re-collection, and re-presentation is crucial in the mapping of historical moments and in the articulation of identity'.⁸¹ As Jonathan Boyarin has put it, 'memory is neither something pre-existent and dormant in the past nor a projection from the present, but a potential for creative collaboration between present consciousness and the experience or expression of the past'.⁸² The articulation of this identity is a crucial trope in the recovery of the continuities of historical identity, a kind of therapeutic alternative to the historical narrative that comes to fore in the age of historiographic crisis.⁸³ Thus 'memories shaped by trauma are most likely to subvert totalizing varieties of historicism',⁸⁴ and this pattern get reflected in all the case studies shared above. It will also be crucial to understand the ways in which the terrible phase of militancy in Punjab (re)defined the contours of social space in the region. At the same time, memory ruptures the silences imposed on the historical narratives since partition. Thus, any open-ended historical narrative on Punjab that draws from individual memory⁸⁵ will help recreate a viable resource of 'social memory' with significant threads of continuities and ruptures, dreams and memories. This memory is 'essentially social . . . not a property of individual minds, but a diverse and shifting collection of material artefacts and social practices'.⁸⁶ 'By thinking of memory as dialectic of history, in constant dialogue with the past, we [thus] begin to see how the separation of history from memory becomes more problematic'.⁸⁷

Memory has now become a key term in the lexicon of historical study, an almost obligatory concept for the validation of new modes of historical enquiry and for the revamping of old ones – as Kerwin Lee Klein argues, a 'metahistorical category' that subsumes folk, myth, popular or oral history.⁸⁸ In turning to memory, historians have turned toward 'new ways of organizing and labelling and describing their objects of study, and new ways of conceptualizing the nature of their own discipline and the knowledge it is geared to producing'.⁸⁹ Treating memory as a legitimate form of historical understanding opens new avenues of research where subjective renderings of the past 'become

embedded in the processes of interpretation and are not seen as merely counterpoints to objective facts'.⁹⁰ Narrative function of case studies in the book follow a didactic logic – situating them in region's historical memory, as well as specific local milieus. Thus, myth no longer remains a major concern of objectivity – rather an entry point into historical memory.

Johnson adds a significant political dimension to popular memory that can be a 'vehicle through which dominant, official renditions of the past can be resisted . . . by maintaining oppositional group identity embedded in subaltern memories. The deployment of local and oral histories in the formation of group identities can be a powerful antidote to both state and academic narratives of the past, especially where marginalized groups are concerned'.⁹¹ Thus all case studies in this and previous chapters narrate a significantly complex rendition of a region's past, exploring religious identity, caste, class and gender dynamics embedded in the possibilities of social space. In Punjab history's turn to memory, the region gains an entry into an interdisciplinary arena.⁹²

Memory thus ruptures the unitary discourse of conventional historiography, giving space to continuities as well as transformations. Memory is also 'spatially constituted'.⁹³ Peter Burke suggests that historians should be concerned with memory as a historical phenomenon, what he calls the 'social history of remembering', by identifying the 'principles of selection and to note how they vary from place to place or from one group to another and how they change over time'.⁹⁴ Shrine narratives follow these intriguing strategies of historical selection, ones that are specifically embedded in the contemporary milieu and therefore create possibilities of the shrines' living memory.

Paul Connerton finds a significant connect between memory and spatiality through performance of 'commemorative ceremonies' mostly represented in our case as *chaukis* or celebrated as *urs*. This highly representational 'performative memory' is also bodily expressed. The possession of a 'Hindu' chela by the spirit of a 'Muslim' pir is popularly enacted through bodily performance. Possession is usually accompanied by celebratory beating of drums (*dhholak*) and musical tongs (*chimta*), customarily associated with auspicious occasions. Thereafter, the chela dances and whips himself with iron chains until he is fully possessed by the saint. Such salience of the 'Muslim' past in a 'non-Muslim' present is enabled through double access of memory

to the past and the present. Thus, popular shrines as *lieux de mémoire* are sites of double excess and, as Nora would argue:

Every previous historical or scientific approach to memory, whether national or social, has concerned itself with *realia*, with things in themselves and in their immediate reality. Contrary to historical objects, however, *lieux de mémoire* have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs. This is not to say that they are without content, physical presence, or history; it is to suggest that what makes them *lieux de mémoire* is precisely that by which they escape from history. In this sense, the *lieu de mémoire* is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations.⁹⁵

Dissenting the dominant

The dominant discourse of Sufism in India has until recently focused its discussion on the major *silsilas*, their shrines and *khanqahs*, *sama*, *qawwali* and rituals, Sufi philosophy, and *sajjada nishins*. However, the large number of ‘lesser’ shrines dedicated to rural and popular Sufis and/or local belief systems, and often constructed as ‘sites of memory’, mark the landscape of numerous towns and villages of the Indian subcontinent and constitute the unexplored margins of Sufi idioms in India. These localized shrines have often been labelled as ‘fake and fictitious’. Asim Roy categorizes some of these ‘lesser’ traditions as ‘fictitious pirs’ who sought to be Islamized through the protean process of pirification.⁹⁶ Rizvi says that ‘the lack of literary evidence is the most formidable obstacle to the presentation of any picture of village *khānqahs* where the tombs of local Pirs and fictitious *dargahs*, ascribed to eminent Sufis . . . and the graves of the local martyrs both real and unreal had been- and still are- the sole comfort of their inhabitants in their sufferings and anguish’.⁹⁷ Therefore, contemporary research on Sufism in Punjab has failed to give a satisfactory explanation of the manner in which essentially esoteric mystical traditions might have filtered down to commoners in some sort of comprehensible and appealing form.⁹⁸ Eaton says that one likely reason for the failure to explain the attraction of Hindu non-elites (and Sikhs) to Sufis has been the tendency among scholars of Sufism to concentrate almost exclusively

on the mystical literature as opposed to folk literature, as representing the sum and substance of the Sufi movement.

The discursive practices in the form of stories and written histories, bodily practices like rituals, pilgrimages and physical presence located in the shared space of a shrine are also important in understanding the popular veneration of pirs. The tomb cult is central to this process, as spaces associated with the holy dead are also locations for the circulation of capital- social, political and spiritual, as well as financial. Because caste and religious divisions are no barrier to attendance at most dargahs, these shrines facilitate interpersonal engagement across social and religious lines (Figure 3.11 illustrates a similar aspect through a music performance).⁹⁹ Hindus and Sikh devotees often employ a Muslim style of prayer, holding their hands before their faces in the typical posture of *dua*, or supplicatory prayer. Many Sikh devotees perform *seva*, or service, at the tomb, mopping, sweeping and cleaning it after festivals. Thus, the processes of interaction, identity formation, and conflict pluralize the repertory of language, behaviour, knowledge and power and do not denote distinct groups that define themselves as Muslim, Hindu or Sikh. Members of these communities must be understood in the context, the historical circumstances in which they lived. These circumstances include the entire range of context-specific interests with which these particular identities interacted, as well as the larger contexts¹⁰⁰ that framed various categories of identity.

In the context of Deccan villages, Eaton suggests that until the twentieth century, when radio and cinema took its place, folk poetry of Sufi origin had occupied a dominant position in the folk culture and became a link between the religious philosophy and the popular religion of Islam.¹⁰¹ However, Eaton cautions, this process should not be construed as ‘conversion’ to Islam, nor should the Sufis themselves be considered as Muslim ‘missionaries’.¹⁰² The debate on the role of shrines in conversions to Islam should be analysed through varied dimensions, including the proximity and reach of a particular shrine tradition in the popular domain. But, as Robinson argues that the taking on of Islam in many cases where large-scale conversions seem to have occurred came about by several ‘other’ processes.¹⁰³ In fact, adoption of certain symbols associated with Islam should not be construed as conversion per se. An anthropological understanding of colonial and post-partition Punjab illustrates that individuals and families generally have plural religious affiliations, half Hindu-half Sikh; half Hindu-half Muslim; or partially Hindu, Sikh and Muslim at the same time.¹⁰⁴ Almost all communities throng to the sacred shrines associated with pirs.¹⁰⁵



Figure 3.11 Baggu Brar, a ‘Muslim’ bard/singer, entertaining a non-Muslim audience at the Pirkhana, Abohar

The intriguing question of the continued existence of Sufi shrines in Punjab and the emergence of newer centres forces us to rethink conventional and dominant discourse on Sufism in India. Shrines were earlier considered symbols of distant yet transcendent cultural authority of the Muslim state. Moini illustrates how in the eighteenth century, irrespective of social and cultural divisions, the people of Punjab signed bonds (*vikalatnamas*) – individually and collectively of their association with Ajmer Sharif. They had been inspired by the Chishti exemplars of Punjab to develop intimate devotional links with the shrine of Khawaja Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer, which emerged as a centre of spiritualism and communal harmony.¹⁰⁶ Scholars have related this to ‘Muslim’ consciousness in colonial Punjab, being a region dominated by ‘Muslims’. But how do we explain the post-independence scenario in Punjab where the majority population constitutes of non-Muslims? Socio-anthropological analysis of these shrines strengthens the argument that the post-partition scenario of continued popularity of such dargahs is an expression of the pre-partition milieu of shared

cultural sites. These dargahs could have played an important role in Islamization yet existed as ‘cult centres’ and ‘principal deities’ for Sikhs and Hindus alike. Significantly, these shrines had earlier existed independent of state-control; in the popular domain of the society and as discussed in the previous chapter their *wilayat* extended beyond the political boundaries of either medieval or modern nation-states, providing an alternative expression of social space.

Concentrating on the tomb-shrine of Farid al-Din Ganj-i Shakar (d. 1265), popularly known as ‘Baba Farid’, Eaton seeks to connect the processes of Islamization and peasantization in the western Punjab. Specifically, why and how Jat tribesmen, as they abandoned pastoral nomadism for settled agriculture between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries, gradually took on an Islamic identity.¹⁰⁷ The case study of Khanqah Chishtiya illustrates the tendency of an upward social mobility of ritually low castes, reconfiguring their relationship with high-caste Jat agriculturalists and other ritually high castes in contemporary Punjab. Popular shrines do emerge as an alternate representation of the structures of power and authority. They are also dialogical while dissenting the existing structures and discourses of caste and class hierarchies. Thus, Bohar’s Dalit ‘Christian’ identity does not contradict his family’s associated with the Sufi shrine of Haider Shaikh at Malerkotla. He manifests himself as a reincarnation of a ‘Hindu’ Anant Nath and later converts to Islam.¹⁰⁸ These case studies amply illustrate the significance of establishing an organic relationship between human past and archives. The actual but hidden long-standing relationship between the two gets debunked when one comes across the popular literature of Punjabis.¹⁰⁹

While general distinction between religious identities is informed by different sets of belief and ritual systems, religion also includes everyday life and social exchange.¹¹⁰ Even within the fixed framework of Hindu, Islamic and Sikh norms, we need to understand discrete processes of identity formation and constant interplay and overlap between different religious worldviews.¹¹¹ The love legend of Hir-Ranjha testifies to this. In the popular imagination, Sufi and *jogi* were identical. Both were detached, both practised renunciation of worldly possessions, both lived in a sort of trance or absorbed in the Supreme Reality, both observed service and submission to a *pir* or *guru* and both observed *zikr* or the recitation of the sacred word. Both adopted the use of the rosary and believed in union with the Supreme Being. Both believed in the toleration of other religions and advocated universal love and *bhakti*.¹¹² This ethical and sacred milieu is significantly visible in all the popular Sufi shrines of Punjab. The case study of Pirkhana at Abohar

illustrates how various castes came to be associated with veneration of pirs in late medieval and colonial times. Thus, terms of identity are invariably shaped by the larger frames of knowledge in which they are embedded. It is in the interaction between the particular and the general that we must embed the analysis of identity.¹¹³

In the context of shrines in Punjab in general, it should be noted that not only do Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs visiting such places verbally validate one another's presence but also adopt each other's ritual practices, attend the same spiritual gatherings, visit at the same time of day, make the same offerings, consult the same ritual specialists, and in some cases become possessed by the saint's spirit. These exchanges and encounters reject communalism.¹¹⁴ In the post-partition scenario, a number of popular shrines are associated with ritually low castes, though the visitors also include high-caste Hindus and Sikhs. Case studies of *pirkhanas*, however, illustrate the popularity and almost complete identification of pir as a personal deity by 'upper-caste' Aggravals. These places also dissent symbols and practices of dominant religiosity.

What is equally significant is that the adoption and identification with Islamic idioms like pir, dargah, *khanqah*, *barkat*, *ibadat*, and even construction of mosques and *pirkhanas*, is almost universal in the contemporary popular landscapes of Punjab. In the post-partition milieu, especially after militancy in Punjab, these idioms have emerged as significant symbols of identity formation. Several qawwali *darbars* organized at Amritsar bring together people from varied caste and religious affiliations (in different ladders of social hierarchy) by adopting symbols of an alternative identity. While earlier veneration of popular Punjabi saints like Shaikh Farid and Shaikh Haider and various Qadiri affiliations continue to be associated with Sufi shrines in the state, the emergence of a Sabri branch of Chishtis is most prominent. Also, the assertion of pre-partition social identities in present times is an exercise in a re-configuration of the communal discourse of partition. The emergence of *pirkhanas* and re-configuration of the association of Aggravals with Baba Lakhdata and Shaikh Haider is a crucial process of counter-hegemony and a re-instatement of pre-partition social consciousness. Any argument of political economy cannot deny the centrality of popular veneration of saints that play a critical role in the articulation of power structures of caste and class hierarchies of Punjab.

Emergence of new *khanqahs* and *dargahs* is another feature of contemporary Punjabi consciousness. In significant cases, it is the upper-caste veneration of Sufi saints that is playing an important role in

the emergence of the cult of Baba Lakhdata or Khanqah Chishtiya. Emergence of new lineages and succession has led to the invention of fairs and festivals in the memory of popular saints that mark the rural and urban landscape of Punjab. Significantly, shrines associated with these popular practices have not been affected by the recent incidence of caste violence in Punjab, attesting to its shared value for inter-communal dialogue. The identity of Guru Granth Sahib as a popular text conceptualized from the times of Shaikh Farid and enriched by Sikh Gurus and Bhagat poets, besides rejection of caste and religious differences, is a crucial element of this enterprise. The formation of Gulame Anjuman Chishtiya represents a new form of dissenting associative identities in contemporary Punjab.

These case studies thus bring to the fore the idea that the practices that developed through centuries of organic intermingling of popular ideas and ideals since the early medieval times could not be suppressed despite the sustained onslaught of the social reformers in colonial India, the partition and demographic reconfiguration of the province and the terrible phase of militancy in east Punjab. While dreams clearly weave together elements from the dreamer's past, expressing his disguised impulses and conflicts, they are also a projection into a culturally articulated future that is clearly expressed in the narratives and cultural idioms communicated by the ritual intermediaries and facilitated by the resolution of persistent personal and social conflicts.¹¹⁵

Thus, whether it was discontinuation of the practice of lighting of lamps at the graves of the buried by an urban Bania, the location of a Dalit in the dominant Jat political milieu or the social articulation of memory that foregrounds the relationship of Guru Gobind Singh with a Sufi mystic, all these narratives have considerable relationship with the contemporary social formation. 'To the cultural historian, oneiro-critical and visionary texts (thus) reveal the ways in which a discourse on the imagination finds expression in different historical contexts'.¹¹⁶ In the context of everyday lives in east Punjab, dreams are a potent tool for reclaiming a popular memory of Hindu and Sikh veneration of Sufis and their shrines. In a significant way, this acculturation is enabled through the agency of orality and visuals and keeps alive the potentialities of organic civilizational dialogue, even in the partitioned and reconfigured spaces of South Asia.¹¹⁷ And as Nora suggests, 'for the very possibility of a history of *lieux de mémoire* demonstrates the existence of an invisible thread linking apparently unconnected objects. . . . There is a differentiated network to which all of these

separate identities belong, an unconscious organization of collective memory that it is our responsibility to bring to consciousness'.¹¹⁸

Acknowledgement

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Notes

- 1 Paul Connerton's fascinating study of social memory foregrounds commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices as crucial tools to understand social persistence. He argues that images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by ritual performances. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 39–40.
- 2 For a detailed reading on the tradition of 'dreams' in different religious traditions see Kelly Bulkeley, *Dreaming in the World's Religions: A Comparative History* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).
- 3 Benjamin Kilborne, "Dreams," in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol. 4, ed. Mircea Eliade, 482 (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987).
- 4 Refer two recent works of Anna Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred: Practising Pluralism in Muslim India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Carla Bellamy, *The Powerful Ephemeral: Everyday Healing in an Ambiguously Islamic Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) that situate saint possession at the Sufi shrines in South Asia.
- 5 Bulkeley, *Dreaming in the World's Religions*, 9.
- 6 'Joseph himself, in *Genesis*, has a political divination dream. . . . The dream came to pass, and Joseph became much more powerful than his brothers, who did in fact bow to him. . . . The dream illustrates royal succession and kinship'. Kilborne, "Dreams," 482.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Bulkeley, *Dreaming in the World's Religions*, 19. Lohmann similarly suggests that 'religious experiences in dreams, including imaged contacts with supernatural beings recognized as divine or ancestral, provide dream-memories or "night residues" that can enter into what one might call the manifest content of alert consciousness, facilitating subsequent waking religious experiences'. Roger Ivar Lohmann, "Dreams and Ethnography," in *The New Science of Dreaming*, Vol. 3, Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives, ed. Deirdre Barrett and Patrick McNamara (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 59.
- 9 Lohmann, "Dreams and Ethnography," 50.

- 10 Amira Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter: Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 6.
- 11 Toufic Fahd, *La divination arabe: Études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l'Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966) quoted in John C. Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Tradition of Dream Interpretation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 3.
- 12 Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter*, 7.
- 13 Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Tradition*, 4.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 15 Kilborne argues that 'dreams break the bondage of natural time and space, they make palpable the dualism between the present, "natural" world of the senses on the one hand, and the internal world of past experience, future hopes, and live-in gods, on the other. When we leave our bodies deep in slumber, we have access in dream to theatres of the mind where internal families play out conflicts, wishes, and fears, providing us with a variety of possibilities for understanding, play, and creations'. Kilborne, "Dreams," 491.
- 16 Walter Benjamin, "Dream Kitsch: Gloss on Surrealism," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 2: Part 1, 1927–1930*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) cited in Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter*, 235–236.
- 17 Lohmann, "Dreams and Ethnography," 37–38.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 44–45.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 48.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 52.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 53. Lohmann further elaborates that collected narratives are affected by the 'circumstances under which they are produced'; the situations in which data was collected, the physical and social settings, the occasions, people who were present and in what capacity, the relationship between the narrator and audience members, and the way dream narratives are brought up and placed into the broader context of events. *Ibid.*, 52.
- 23 Katherine P. Ewing, "The Dream of Spiritual Initiation and the Organization of Self Representations among Pakistani Sufis," *American Ethnologist* 17, 1 (1990): 56–57.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 58.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 68.
- 26 Anthony Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 271–272, cited in Ewing, "The Dream of Spiritual Initiation," 69.
- 27 Ewing, "The Dream of Spiritual Initiation," 69.
- 28 James A. Boon, "Symbols, Sylphs, and Siwa: Allegorical Machineries in the Text of Balinese Culture," in *The Anthropology of Experience*, ed. Victor Turner and Edward M. Bruner, 239 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) quoted in Ewing, "The Dream of Spiritual Initiation," 69.
- 29 Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter*, 237.
- 30 Lohmann, "Dreams and Ethnography," 49–61.
- 31 'The Punjabi landscape of colonial times was dotted with saints' shrines called *pirkhānas*. Built on the boundaries of the village out of plastered hollow brick cubes, they were eight to ten feet in each direction, covered

- with a dome and had low minarets or pinnacles at the four corners. In front was a doorway that generally opened out in to a plastered brick platform. Beyond the doorway, there were two or three niches for lamps, but otherwise the shrine was kept empty. Every Thursday the shrine was swept, and lamps were lit. The same day the guardian of the shrine, a *bharia*, collected offerings from the village to the sound of drum. These were mostly grain and came especially from the women'. Cited in Harjot Oberoi, "Popular Saints, Goddesses, and Village Sacred Sites: Rereading Sikh Experience in the Nineteenth Century," *History of Religions* 31, 4 (1992): 371.
- 32 Sakhi Sarwar was the most popularly revered saint of Punjab in the nineteenth century. The following of Sakhi Sarwar must have been sizeable, for his adherents were known by varied names in different localities: Sarvaria, Sewak Sultani, Hindu Sultani, Nigahia, Sarvar Sakhi, Sarvar Sagar, Sultani Ramrae, Sarvar Panthi, Guru Sultania, Khawaja Sarvar, Ramdasia Sultania. Three major fairs held in the Sarvar calendar in the colonial Punjab – Dhaunkal in Gujranwala; the *jhandamela* at Peshawar; and *kadmon ka melo* at Lahore – were complimented by similar festivities on a lesser scale at local shrines, whose formation and endowment manifest the nature of customary culture of Punjab and the extensive worship of the *pir*. The myths and literary narratives illustrating the life of Sakhi Sarwar link him to deities like Bhairava, a manifestation of the Hindu god Shiva, was often represented in the legends as a messenger of the saint. Similarly, Dani, the wife of a Sidhu peasant, is among the ones who were blessed by the saint with a male child. The local votaries offered grain at each harvest, and at the fair visitors were fed free. H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-west Frontier Province*, Vol. 1 (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1919), 566.
- 33 Shaikh Haider's shrine and legend occupies a significant place in the popular memory of Punjabis (particularly) of the Malwa region of east Punjab. The legend of Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan (d. 1712) writing a letter (dated 1705) protesting against the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's (d. 1707) order to execute two sons of Guru Gobind Singh (d. 1708) made the Suhrawardi Saint Haider Shaikh (d. 1516) and the Nawab very popular among the non-Muslims of the region. Anna Bigelow, "Saved by the Saint: Refusing and Reversing Partition in Muslim North India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 68, 2 (2009): 435–464.
- 34 Beyond the doorway, there were two or three niches for lamps, but otherwise the shrine was kept empty. Every Thursday the shrine was swept, and lamps were lit. The same day the guardian of the shrine, a *bharia*, collected offerings from the village to the sound of drum. These were mostly grain and came especially from the women. Cited in Oberoi, "Popular Saints," 371.
- 35 Though other castes like Aroras are also associated with these shrines, it is the presence of Punjabi Aggrawals that was visibly marked at a survey that was conducted at an annual *darbar* on 20 May 2010 at Sri Peerkhana Sabha, Abohar. These *pirkhanas* are primarily located in the southern part of Punjab and areas in adjoining Rajasthan and Haryana. However, such practices were also popular in other parts of Punjab, too. Sunil Aggrawal of Amritsar narrated how his father organized a *darbar*

- (religious gathering) at their house in the walled city that was attended by relatives and people from the community. Sunil Aggrawal was interviewed on 10 June 2010 at Shimla.
- 36 Besides existence of several Sufi shrines, the district was also known for presence of a distinct category of the population who called them Chishtis and drew ancestry from Baba Farid. The ancestry of the Fazilka Chishtis crossed Sutlej from Pakpattan somewhere in the middle of the eighteenth century and constituted a holy tribe. They had the largest presence in Muktsar and Fazilka Tehsils of colonial Punjab. *Punjab District Gazetteers, Ferozepur District 30-A* (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1915), 100.
 - 37 Abohar assumes significance because of its close proximity to the Shrine of Shaikh Farid at Pakpattan in Pakistan. Abohar is 78 km from Pakpattan and before the international fence was put in place, both these were important towns on the early medieval trade route from Multan to Delhi. Pakpattan was an important pilgrim town even when Ibn Batutah visited the town in 1334 CE, seventy years after the death of Shaikh Farid. Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa, 1326–54*, trans. H.A.R. Gibb (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 190–193.
 - 38 Baba Makhan Lal Bansal (50 yrs, younger sibling of Dr. Darshan and originally a native of a *qasba* Bhagtan) was interviewed on 29 December 2009 at Abohar. He acts as an intermediary between the pir and murids. He frequently visits the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh at Malerkotla and Nigaha at village Langiana.
 - 39 Haider Shaikh is believed to reveal himself through his spirit, which in Hindi is termed as *paun* and in Arabic as *ruh*, which enters and manifests through certain devotees who in turn dispense advice, treatments and blessings. Bigelow, “Saved by the Saint,” 449.
 - 40 Dr. Darshan Paul Bansal (60 yrs), an RMP and President of Shri Peerkhana Sabha, Abohar, was interviewed on 29 December 2009 at Abohar.
 - 41 An event where a ritual intermediary gets possessed by patron saint (Shaikh Haider in this case) and (on behalf of the Shaikh) instructs the devotees on their personal issues.
 - 42 Dalits constitute the lowest stratum of social hierarchy and fall outside the *chaturvarna* division (literally four-fold caste division into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) of society in India. Primarily considered untouchables due to their occupational engagement with polluting menial occupations like sweeping, scavenging and tanning, Dalits constitute the most oppressed segment in Indian society. Dalit colonies are usually located on the margins of Indian towns and villages. Punjab constitutes the highest proportion of Dalits in India, and they are organized as Valmikis, Ravidasias, etc.
 - 43 Mr. Suresh Kumar Bansal (Chairman, Shri Peerkhana Sabha, Abohar) and Naresh Bansal were interviewed on 26 December 2009 at Abohar. They also narrated the association of their family with Baba Malerkotla since the times of their grandfather.
 - 44 A *chauki* where more than one ritual intermediary is present.
 - 45 The photograph contains reference to six popular saints of the region, which include Hazrat Ghaus Pak (Abdul Qadir Gilani, d. 1166), Hazrat Bu Ali Sharaf (Bu Ali Qalandar, d. 1324), Hazrat Mahbub-i-Ilahi

- (Nizamuddin Auliya, d. 1325), Hazrat Khwaja Gharib Nawaz (Muinuddin Chishti, d. 1230), Hazrat Khwaja Qutbuddin (Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, d. 1235) and Hazrat Baba Farid Shakarganj (Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar, d. 1265).
- 46 Shaikh Haider's *shagird* (disciple) Rode Shah apparently had a revelation of Mata Masani. For a detailed reading on the narrative of Sakhi Sarwar see Harvinder S. Bhatti, *Folk Religion: Continuity and Change* (Jaipur: Rawat, 2000), 90–132.
 - 47 Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur underline the tendency of framing the syllabus on the history of Punjab, which reduces it to the history of Sikhs. The two terminal dates are 1469 and 1849, the former indicating the birth of the first Sikh Guru and the latter marking the extinction of the Sikh Kingdom. Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, eds., *Sufism in Punjab: Mystics, Literature and Shrines* (New Delhi: Aakar, 2009), 33.
 - 48 Harjinder Singh Bittu (30 yrs), *khadim* (caretaker) at Khanqah Chishtiya and a Jat agriculturist is a local resident of Makhu. He was interviewed on 23 August 2009 and subsequently on 03 December 2009 at Makhu. His father was a friend of Bohar's (now known as Ghulam Farid Chishti) father Bahadur.
 - 49 It is important to underline the names of family members of Bohar. They defy any attempt to categorize them in Hindu, Sikh or Muslim identity. One is reminded of the parallels of such names in Waris Shah's (d.1798) *Heer*; Dhido, Kaido, Aiyali, Chuchak, etc. For a scholarly understanding of understanding of Medieval Punjab through *Hir Waris* see Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy: Exploring Medieval Punjab Through Hir Waris* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2009).
 - 50 He could have been a regional Nath saint, and constructing lineage must have been a local attempt to relate Anant Nath to the larger and dominant identity of Gorakhnath.
 - 51 Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1236) was the founder of Chishti silsilah in India. A direct disciple of Khwaja Usman Harooni (d.1220), Muinuddin's shrine at Ajmer in Rajasthan is the most popular centre of pilgrimage in South Asia. Punjab had intimate devotional linkages with the shrine of Muinuddin Chishti and, according to Moini irrespective of social and cultural divisions, the people of Punjab signed bonds (*vikalatnamas*)- individually and collectively – particularly during the eighteenth century. They had been inspired by the Chishti exemplars of Punjab to develop intimate devotional links with the shrine of Khawaja Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer. Syed Liyaqat Hussain Moini, "Devotional Linkages of Punjab with the Chishtti Shrine at Ajmer: Gleanings from the Vikalatnamas," in *Sufism in Punjab: Mystics, Literature and Shrines*, ed. Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, 378–401 (New Delhi: Aakar, 2009).
 - 52 The three major universities of Punjab viz. Punjabi University Patiala, Punjab University Chandigarh and Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar have produced enormous literature devoted to a predominant understanding of Sikhism and Sikhs. Studies on Punjab failed to acknowledge the vibrant pre-history of the region before the nation-state formation in 1947.
 - 53 Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Popular Literature and Pre-Modern Societies of South Asia* (New Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008), 31–34.

- 54 Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir, *Punjab Re-considered: History, Culture and Practice* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), xv–lii.
- 55 The shrine of Ghuram Sharif was first surveyed on 30 December 2010. The narrative of the story of the saint is painted on the front wall both in Hindi and Punjabi and is also illustrated on several walls through enamel wall paintings narrating the significant episodes of the narrative.
- 56 Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, 529–530.
- 57 Niranjana (Balmiki *sevādar*) interviewed on 20 January 2015. He has a long association with the shrine from pre-partition times. His is a native community that lived on the outer fringe of the village – primarily a cluster of Muslim-dominated villages before partition. His father was a devotee of the shrine, and he, too, has been associated with the shrine for more than four decades. He is involved as a mason for the maintenance and expansion of the dargah premises. Although not a convert to Islam, he desires to be buried after his death, a wish he has already communicated to his sons.
- 58 This discussion was recorded at Ghuram on 20 January 2015.
- 59 Local legend relates the village to Kaushayla, mother of legendary king Rama of Ramayana, who was married to Dashratha here. A temple and gurdwara (an enclosed *baradari*) dedicated to her is located atop a mound. It was built by Maharaja Karam Singh (1813–1845) of the erstwhile princely state of Patiala. The mound must have been a fort of significance and is of archaeological importance. *The Tribune* reported the protest of locals against the removal of the temple and gurdwara located inside the *baradari* (*The Tribune*, 28 December 2009).
- 60 Niranjana (a Balmiki *sevadar* aged 74 years) was interviewed at Ghuram on 20 January 2015.
- 61 Robert Hayden employs a limited reading of the complex process, which determines the social processes at shrines in India and Bosnia by suggesting competition between different identities for control ritual spaces of shrines. But these cases studies provide an alternative lens of everyday and lived history to problematize these arguments. Robert M. Hayden, “Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans,” *Current Anthropology* 43, 2 (2002): 205–231.
- 62 Ronald M. Berndt, “The Dreaming,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol. 4, ed. Mircea Eliade, 479–80 (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987).
- 63 Nile Green quotes texts such as the *Kashf al-Mahjub* of Al Hujwiri (d.1072) of Lahore that are replete with stories of the visions of the early Sufis. Dreams played an important role in Sufism; by the time of the composition of the *Awarif al-Maarif* of Shihabuddin Suhrawardi (d.1234), theories of dreaming were commonplace of Sufi literature. Thus, Suhrawardi devoted a chapter of his book to the role of dreams in *tasawwuf*. Nile Green, “The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams and Visions in Islam,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13, 3 (2003): 294.
- 64 Ewing, “The Dream of Spiritual Initiation,” 58.
- 65 Recent decades have also seen the emergence of everyday histories that further legitimize an understanding of the lived processes. Joe Moran argues that everyday offers a corrective to the spectacularizing discourse of modernity. Everyday thus opens up modernity to historical difference and shows how it carries both survivals from previous eras and the possibility

- for further change. Historical processes are not separated from the everyday as a sweeping macro-force which periodically punctuates the everyday with violence illness death and other disasters. It is a sphere where the modern and the residual can coexist. Joe Moran, "History, Memory and the Everyday," *Rethinking History* 8, 1 (2004): 54–57.
- 66 The scriptural tradition differentiates between three kinds of dreams. These three kinds of dreams are recognized by the Prophet and then by later dream writers such as Ibn Sirin, the eighth-century dream interpreter from Basra, whose book on dreams and their interpretation remains the most popular manual in many Islamic countries today. First come true spiritual dreams, *ru'an*, inspired by God; second come dreams inspired by the devil; third come dreams from the *nafs*, or ego which are considered unimportant. Iain R. Edgar, "The Inspirational Night Dream in the Motivation and Justification of Jihad," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 11, 2 (2007): 60–61.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 68 Green, "The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams," 297. Dreams occasionally played a role as cultural mediators, as when Dara Shikoh attested to having been inspired to patronise a new translation of the Yoga Vasishtha in a dream of the Hindu sage Ramachandra in which the latter embraced him and fed him with sweets. *Ibid.*, 299.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 311. Katz adds that 'the medieval Muslim belief in dreams revolved around a certain number of axioms, the principal one being that some, but not all, dreams were true. As his biographer and the *sunna* report, the Prophet Muhammad gave ample credence to the predictive and prophetic nature of dreams. The very first *hadith* in Bukhari's *Sahih* tells of how Muhammad received his initial revelation in a dream. Most significantly, the *hadiths* do not relegate prophetic dreams to prophets exclusively. All pious believers can be privy to "glad tidings". Oracular or literal dreams in which the Prophet spoke (as well as most of dreams in which the dead appeared) were considered by definition true and required little, if any, interpretation'. Jonathan G. Katz, *Dreams, Sufism and Sainthood: The Visionary Career of Muhammad Al-Zawawi* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 207–208.
- 70 A detailed reading of dream interpretation in Nath, Bhakti and Sufi tradition is outside the scope of this work.
- 71 This reconfiguration of piety after the partition of Punjab province in 1947 had earlier been explored through a Tasveer Ghar fellowship awarded in 2010.
- 72 Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society, Essays and Addresses* (London: Cohen & West, 1952) 166, cited in Berndt, "The Dreaming," 480.
- 73 While discussing Suhrawardis, Green highlights how through its custody of symbols as its mode of communication, this cosmic sphere (or alternatively, level of existence) was seen to act as an intermediary between God's non-delimited knowledge and our own fragmentary understanding the universe. It was also seen to act as the interface between the living and the dead and was in this sense understood as acting as the visionary meeting ground for living Sufis and their dead predecessors. As a proper realm of existence that mediated between different kinds of and levels of being. Green, "The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams," 295.

- 74 See Ishtiaq Ahmed for narratives of partition in which migrants memorialise pre-partition Punjab. Also refer to Table 2.2 for several fairs held in the district of Ferozpur in the 1960s, which were carried as memorial tradition by partition migrants and reinstated in new landscapes. Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Punjab Blooded Partitioned and Cleansed* (Delhi: Rupa, 2013).
- 75 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 13.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 8–9.
- 77 Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse," *Representations* 69 (2000): 130.
- 78 Christian Lee Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 27.
- 79 Nuala C. Johnson, "Locating Memory: Tracing the Trajectories of Remembrance," *Historical Geography* 33 (2005): 166–167.
- 80 Cited in Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory," 130.
- 81 Johnson, "Locating Memory," 166.
- 82 Jonathan Boyarin, *Remapping Memory: The Politics of Timespace* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 22, cited in Johnson, "Locating Memory," 166.
- 83 Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory," 145.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 138.
- 85 Cubitt says that 'when we speak of individual memory, we use the word 'memory' fairly fluidly, allowing it to refer sometimes to the general capacity which allows the individual to recollect past experience, sometimes to the more specific mental processes through which this capacity is actualized, and sometimes to the images or impressions that are the specific products of this recollective effort'. Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 16.
- 86 Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory," 130.
- 87 Johnson, "Locating Memory," 170. Maurice Halbwachs suggests that 'history divides the sequence of centuries into periods, just as the content of a tragedy is divided into several acts. But in a play the same plot is carried from one act to another and the same characters remain true to form to the end, their feelings and emotions developing in an unbroken movement. History, however, gives the impression that everything – the interplay of interests, general orientations, modes of studying men and events, traditions, and perspectives on the future – is transformed from one period to another'. Maurice Halbwachs, "The Collective Memory," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy, 143 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 88 Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory," 128.
- 89 Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 2. Raphael Samuel persuasively argues that the links between memory and history are significant because 'far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system, an image bank of the past, [memory] is rather an active, shaping force; that it is dynamic – what it contrives symptomatically to forget is as important as what it remembers – and that it is dialectically related to historical thought, rather than being some kind of negative other to it'. Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, Vol. 1 (London: Verso, 1994), 17, cited in Johnson, "Locating Memory," 170.

- 90 Johnson, "Locating Memory," 171.
- 91 Ibid., 168.
- 92 Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 2.
- 93 Johnson, "Locating Memory," 171.
- 94 Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy, 189 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 95 Nora, "Between Memory and History," 23–24.
- 96 Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 207–248.
- 97 Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol. 2 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1983), 458.
- 98 Eaton raises this pertinent question in the case of studies on Sufism in India. He tries to substantiate this gap through a discussion on the role of Sufi folk literature in the expansion of Islam in Deccan. Richard M. Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 189–199.
- 99 Anna Bigelow, "Saved by the Saint," 436.
- 100 Jackie Assayag, *At the Confluence of Two Rivers: Muslims and Hindus in South India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 41.
- 101 Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, 190–191.
- 102 The main problem is that both terms 'conversion' and 'missionaries' carry connotations of a nineteenth and twentieth-century Christian movement in India, a context in which 'missionary' denoted a self-conscious propagator of the Christian faith and 'conversion' a self-conscious turning around in religious conviction. Ibid., 199.
- 103 Rowena Robinson, "Modes of Conversion to Islam," in *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*, ed. Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke, 24 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 104 The fascinating outcome of the Anthropological Survey of India's survey in various states of India reveals a composite structure of religious identities in India. There are 87 communities in India that follow both Hinduism and Sikhism, 116 Hinduism and Christianity, 35 Hinduism and Islam, 21 Hinduism and Jainism, and 29 Hinduism and Buddhism. K.S. Singh, *People of India: An Introduction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89.
- 105 Ibid., 112.
- 106 Moini, "Devotional Linkages of Punjab," 390.
- 107 Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, 4.
- 108 The dominant religious identities have been marked in inverted commas to emphasize and problematize the fixed notion of identities in the contemporary context. It is significant to underline that popular identities in contemporary Punjab are fluid and though social mobility tends to appropriate liberal discourses, it does not necessarily indicate conflict of one against the other.
- 109 Singh and Gaur, *Popular Literature*, 4.
- 110 David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, eds., *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking and Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2000), 1.

- 111 Ibid., 2.
- 112 Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy*, 51–52.
- 113 Gilmartin and Lawrence, *Beyond Turk and Hindu*, 3.
- 114 Bigelow, “Saved by the Saint,” 440.
- 115 Ewing, “The Dream of Spiritual Initiation,” 56.
- 116 Green, “The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams,” 312.
- 117 Bigelow’s study of Shaikh Haider’s shrine at Malerkotla and Baba Farid’s shrine at Faridkot further underlines the major role that Sufi mystics continue to play in the lived lives of non-Muslim in contemporary Punjab. Anna Bigelow, “Post-Partition Pluralism: Placing Islam in Indian Punjab,” in *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture and Practice*, ed. Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir, 409–434 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 118 Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 23.

POPULAR ART, CIRCULATION AND VISUALIZATION OF SPACE

Popular art constitutes an important medium of visual material for an understanding of the circulation of the notion of popular piety and sacred spaces. The vast array of both major and minor shrines in contemporary Punjab enable use of images of saints and shrines such as collage posters, videos, paintings, animation and internet-based presentations. Any understanding of the linkages and reproduction of connections between east and west Punjab and within the region on the other are thus mediated by popular memory and visualized both through visual art, modern print and electronic media. This chapter visually encapsulates the social space of saint veneration in Punjab. It has become increasingly important to extend the study of religion to spaces outside of the structures and explore its manifestation in everyday spaces and rituals; bazaars, along the road shrines, popular production of images, posters, audio-visual material, souvenirs, etc. *Urs* and *ziyarat* (pilgrimage) are occasions where boundaries of the participants and observers are blurred. This blurring and overlapping is the everyday corrective to the linear historical discourses that have been laid out in previous chapters.

A major repository of audio-visual material, both in print and electronic media, collected during my surveys consists of posters printed from several places in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. CDs/VCDs/DVDs also play a major role in circulation of legends and local histories, creation of pilgrimage networks, and images of popular saints and their shrines. These images consist of roughly three sets of production material. The first set of images consist of large, medium and small posters, the second set consists of printed images produced for photo frames and the third set of images consists of such smaller versions meant for pockets and wallets. With easy accessibility of print mediums, these

images are also produced as photo prints at local studios, as well as flex banners.

This chapter underlines the significance of visual culture and its circulation in the continued existence of popular Sufi shrines in contemporary East Punjab. It primarily focuses on four types of material. The more important role in circulation of images is played by numerous productions of electronic material in the form of CDs/VCDs/DVDs. The second set of material collected consists of poster and banners, which are a major source of circulation. Bookcovers and illustrations also constitute a fairly significant medium of circulation, especially the ones printed in Punjabi. The bulkiest material was in the form of digital photography and videography of shrine spaces and *urs*.

Social space of popular visual art

Visual culture is as a ‘powerful part of the shared apparatus of memory, national citizenship, and the socialization of the young and of converts. Religions and their visual cultures configure social relations, over time and space and between one lifeworld and another’.¹ The circulation of modern printed images at the shrines of popular Sufis in Punjab can be traced back to the late nineteenth century when the medium of print was assuming significance.² From the early woodcut prints, lithographs/chromolithographs to modern prints, images gave new meaning to the pre-modern depictions of popular saints and their shrines.³ With the adaptation of realism in the painting tradition in early twentieth-century India, ‘realist’ representation of sacred spaces and individuals assumed a new form. Reproduced and printed in the new medium of chromolithographs, these images came to be widely circulated throughout South Asia.⁴

This medium gave a new meaning to piety in the early twentieth century, when the religious boundaries were being contested and religious reformers were frowning upon participation of individuals in public rituals of ‘others’. Circulation of visuals thus provided a much-needed respite to the religious needs of individuals in private spheres of sacred practice, secured form the polemic of reform. Nevertheless, as Harjot Oberoi (1994) significantly illustrates, in the quotidian settings Hindu, Sikhs and Muslims participated in religious festivals of each other; despite the communal politics of the 1940s, the shrines of Sufi mystics, for instance, continued to attract people of various hues. This milieu received a serious blow with the partition of the province in 1947 when people were forced to vacate the familial spaces and



Figure 4.1 Baba Bullae Shah *Sarkar Kasoor wāle* (right and centre, shrine located at Kasur), Hazrat Waris Shah (left, shrine located at Jandiala Sher Khan)

Note: All photographs in this chapter are by the author unless otherwise mentioned.

neighbourhood with which they shared their ‘everyday’. A study of the images can provide a clue to envision the afterlife of popular Sufi mystics, their shrines and festivals that were left behind yet continued to linger in Pakistan in the lives of migrant communities.

Figure 4.1 portrays two of the most famous and celebrated Punjabi Sufi mystics poets, Bulleh Shah and Waris Shah, images most possibly copied productions from Pakistan Punjab. Bulleh Shah’s poetry (*kafi*) and philosophy presents a radical critique of Islamic religious orthodoxy of his times. Waris Shah’s seminal work on the legend of Hir-Ranjha, the story of romantic love in a Sufi genre, is considered one of the most significant contributions to Punjabi literature. Waris Shah, while critiquing orthodox ulema, locates popular Sufis and Nath *jogi* mystics as objects of veneration. Both these poets and mystics are also widely celebrated in Indian Punjab. Their poetry has been sung by most Punjabi singers, and Waris Shah’s *Hir* has been adapted in

several popular Punjab films.⁵ Punjabi Sufi poets and their poetry perhaps constitute an important vertex where the imagined boundaries of religiousities intersect.

Any understanding of religious belonging and practices in the post-partition scenario is, therefore, a challenging task. Conventional historiography does not sufficiently capture the complexities induced by such continuities that mark the presence of Sufi shrines in the physical spaces of Indian Punjab. David Morgan persuasively argues that the ‘history of religion is not the same as the history of theology’⁶ and the ‘study of religious images is best undertaken as the study of ways of seeing’.⁷ This means that *visual practice* is the primary datum alongside *images* themselves and that the two together, insofar as religion happens visually, constitute the visual medium of belief (emphasis mine).⁸ Thus ‘images shape religious meaning by working in tandem with other artefacts, documents, and forms of representation, such as texts, buildings, clothing, food, and all manner of ritual’.⁹ Foregrounding the materiality of religious practice Morgan adds:

[B]elief does not happen without a body. Even when it happens in the discursive form of a proposition, it must be uttered by one person to another, by someone in the presence of a company of people, or argued, circulated, collected, studied, and taught in print. The material culture of religion is the physical domain of belief, the lived practices that constitute so much of the ritual, ceremonial, and daily behavior of belief. Ignoring this wealth of evidence means ignoring most of what people do and how what they do shapes what religion does and means for them.¹⁰

Dominant religious traditions emerge from the critique or appropriation of lived spaces, which are also the primary datum of social formation.

The most significant works on popular poster art in India – Uberoi (2006), Jain (2007), Ramaswamy (2010), Saeed (2012), Brosius and Saeed (2015) – have exclusively focused on the visual content of poster ‘art’, thereby either ignoring such ‘unartistic’ materials which remain in circulation at popular fairs and festivals, or remained elusive to such popular mediums as banners (including flex), print advertisements, book-covers, CDs and DVDs. Fundamentally, these works have also been informed by collections housed in museums in the West where they are stored under problematic classifications or with a private collector who invariably follows a similar schema. Works

on popular art very rarely articulate the space in which they circulate or consumed. While visual content is a significant area of research, its circulation and reception is also crucial in writing a social history of sacred spaces. It is important to underline that the classification of poster art as ‘Hindu’, ‘Muslim’, ‘Sikh’ or various other labels limits the possibility of doing a social history through visuals. These terms may suit ‘visual art’ perspective but does not encapsulate the complexities of their reception in everyday lives. Circulation and consumption thus form most crucial aspects of image production. Figure 4.2 portrays a sculpture of Khwaja Khizr popularly known as Jhule Lal who constitutes an important hybrid deity that traverses the complex contours of geographical spaces from the Middle East to South Asia. Such connected histories of the saint who is popularly venerated as the deity of wells in Amritsar are mediated through text, iconography and orality.

Such images are an ‘integral element of history in the making’ and as Christopher Pinney suggests, they are crucial ‘not [as] a history of art, but [as] a history made by art’.¹¹ Thus, rather than employing visual culture as a ‘mirror of conclusions established elsewhere’ Pinney

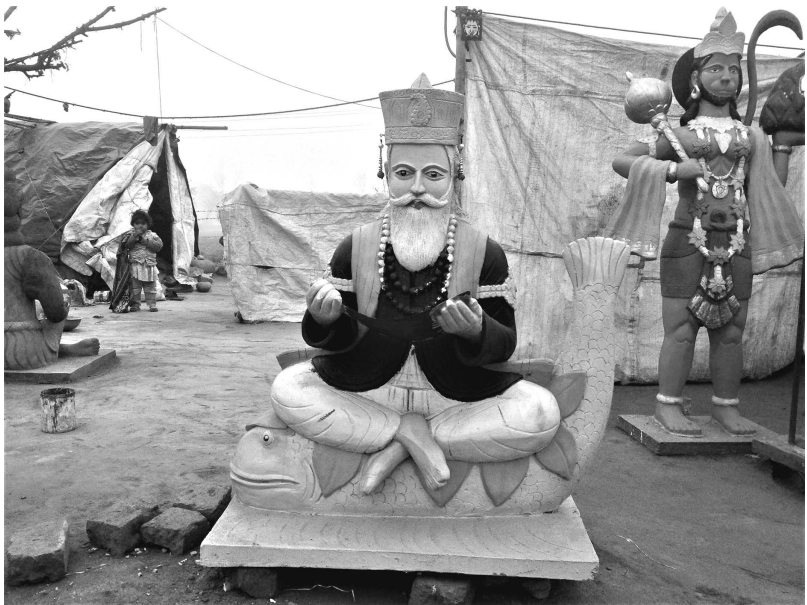


Figure 4.2 Unfinished sculpture at Rajpura forms the same visual template for representation of Khwaja Khizr and Jhule Lal

tries to ‘present it as an experimental zone where new possibilities and new identities are forged’.¹² He further critiques the ‘sedimentary’ approaches to visual art:

The visual possibilities stored in these archives lack any clear sedimentation. The entire institutional art world infrastructure of galleries, curators and historiography has (until very recently) passed these images by. Consequently few of them look ‘quaint’ or so marked by a process of dating and sedimentation that they are excluded from the possibility of one day once again becoming ‘new’. No images ever die, they all remain alive, on stand-by. Images migrate endlessly, cutting back and forth across new times and contexts.¹³

Images thus remain alive in a historical space, signifying a dynamic ‘relationship between *images* and *social reality*’ (emphasis mine).¹⁴ We should therefore seek to develop a rigorous conceptual framework to ‘attend closely to the making, circulation, and cultural work of god pictures themselves, offering insightful readings of individual images to underscore the way they shape the desires and expectations of common people in relation to the dominant politics of modern India’.¹⁵ Figure 4.3 portrays the followers of the Chishti Sabri branch in a predominantly Dalit (Valmiki) neighbourhood near Lahori Gate, Amritsar. The *sangat* recently constructed a small memorial shrine dedicated to Baba Farid. As has been discussed in Chapter 3, Dalit veneration of Sufi saints assumes a significant trope in a dominant ‘Hindu’ or ‘Sikh’ political milieu. Most of the followers of this lineage assume the surname ‘Sabri’ and are members of an organization called Anjuman Ghulame Chishtiya Sabriya representing a new form of dissenting associative identity in contemporary Punjab.

Jürgen Wasim Frembgen laments the lack of interest of ‘orientalist’ academia in popular prints judged variously as “‘primitive”, “hideous”, “vulgar”, and “heartbreakingly kitschy”, thereby brushing them aside as unworthy of any serious academic consideration’.¹⁶ David Morgan adds that ‘art historians have largely had use for popular culture only when it has been appropriated by avant-garde artists like Picasso or Matisse. To care about popular culture itself implied something altogether different than being concerned with fine art, that is, with important art – art that plunged toward the future’.¹⁷ Thus, while writing an introduction on popular ‘Sikh’ art, W.H. McLeod critically argues that even if from the aesthetic point of view, they may not

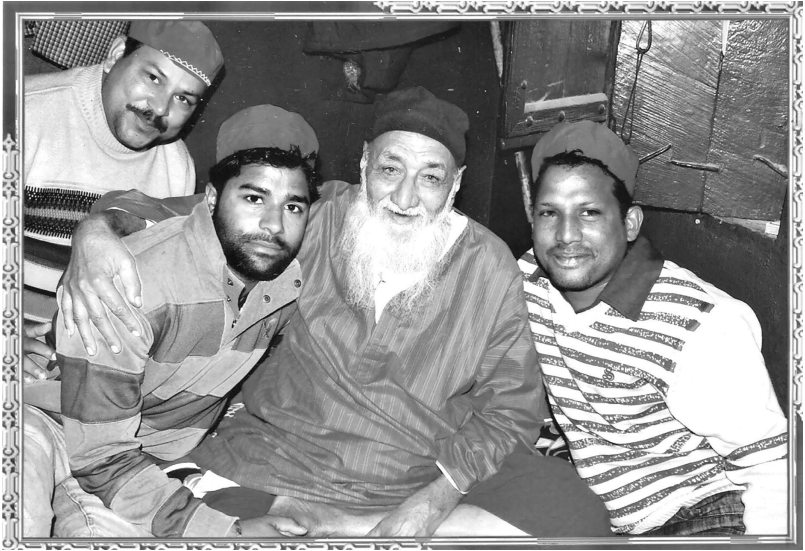


Figure 4.3 Rohit Sabri (front left) and his friends from Amritsar with Ghulam Jilani Baba, Khadim of Kaliyar Sharif

Source: Photo courtesy of Rohit Sabri

appear to be worthy of academic engagement, but a social historian we ‘must view this process with much greater concern’. He adds that:

Popular art, in its many forms, provides valuable evidence of current attitudes and life-styles for those who know how to interpret it. Focussing our attention exclusively on ‘great’ art merely perpetuates a view of history which exults the elite and ignores the ordinary. Most ephemera is either ordinary or eccentrically extraordinary. The social historian may feel able to manage without the latter, but certainly not without the former.¹⁸

However, his suggestion that such works are ‘ephemeral’ and ‘briefly favoured’ or ‘replaced’ or ‘disappear without trace’ requires a serious examination. Despite this, Mcleod rightly argues that ‘focusing our attention exclusively on “great” art merely perpetuates a view of history which exults the elite and ignores the ordinary’.¹⁹ Therefore,

Frembgen labels the ‘Islamic’ religious prints as representative of ‘authentic “lived” experiences’ of people in Pakistan, a ‘legitimate form of popular culture aesthetics’ that is a ‘genuine expression of folk belief and popular piety’ in contrast to barren ‘official [and] normative [representative of] intellectualized Islam’.²⁰ However, both Mcleod and Frembgen essentialize popular art as either ‘Sikh’ or ‘Islamic’ as has been done by other scholars in the case of ‘Hindu’ gods and goddesses (Jain 2007, Pinney 2004, Ramaswamy 2010) by ignoring the social space of their consumption where these categories blur. In the photograph below (Figure 4.4), Baba Ghulam Farid Chishti (a Dalit ‘Christian’ who recently ‘converted’ to Islam) can be seen dressed in blue, standing along with his college ‘Sikh’ friend Harjinder Singh Bittu who is also *khadim* of Khanqah Chishtiya, Makhu, a case study which was earlier discussed in Chapter 3. Shrines like these are spread across the region and provide a critical insight into convenient categories that define religious identities and affiliation in contemporary Punjab.



Figure 4.4 Baba Ghulam Farid Chishti (right) with Harjinder Singh Bittu, Khadim at Khanqah Chishtiya, Makhu

As David Morgan argues, ‘the study of religious visual culture is therefore the study of images, but also the practices and habits that rely on images as well as the attitudes and preconceptions that inform vision as a cultural act’.²¹ As has been studied in Chapter 3, in the context of *pirkhanas* and narrative around Bhikham Shah, religious ‘practice’ determine the ‘context and contours’ of images and vice versa (Figure 3.7 and 3.8). Therefore, besides their aesthetic function, images demonstrate a vivid and concrete belief. Frembgen adds:

Through them, the devotee is given a sense of personal spiritual direction. For the *murīd* (devotee, disciple), the auspicious portrait of his or her *pīr* (saint and spiritual guide) is a sacred object containing *baraka* (power of blessing and healing). As a respected *tabarruk* or amulet, it has also the magical power to protect the house. Colorful and decorative, it diverts the “evil eye” away from the house and wards off malevolent spirits and demons through its inherent power.²²

Photography and visualization of space

Another significant aspect of social space is its visualization through the medium of photography. As a medium, photography has remained a contested domain, and the exaggerated claims of its ‘realism’ have been strongly contested by social-theorists like Pierre Bourdieu (1998), David Tomas (1988) and Pinney (2014). Nevertheless, photography as a medium of understanding the preconceived ‘gaze’ through which the photographer captures social space and its potentiality as a method for visualization of space cannot be undermined. Michael Pye problematizes the tendency among academics to limit ‘photography as essentially illustrative in function’ as has been the case with popular art and ‘therefore optional, indeed dispensable’. He adds that there is a need for more systematic view of both the ‘auxiliary roles of photography in research . . . and the articulation of theory’.²³ Especially in the context of ‘participants’ and semiotics of religious rituals, theory as well as historiography of religion offer limited insights. Thus, the visual exploration can run ‘interestingly beyond the boundaries which a restricted view of religion might have set’, problematizing a naïve view of participants. Photography thus facilitates the ‘physical extension of the data’ to describe the ‘nuances of expression and position’,²⁴ enabling a ‘practice-centered approach’ to the study of popular

religious culture' and exploring the 'narrative life of an image'.²⁵ Pye further adds:

The opportunity, for photographic documentation, is that. . . [it enables] an account of the attitudes of people engaged in a ritual act. . . [and] extension into the physicality of religious behaviour which can scarcely be documented by any other means.²⁶

Problematizing photography as a realist medium of theorization, Pierre Bourdieu argues that 'apart from the explicit intensions of the photographer, [photography represents] the system of schemes of perception, thought and appreciations common to a whole group'.²⁷ Is it then possible to decipher the 'surplus of meaning' in photograph that might betray the hegemonic 'symbolism of an age, a class or an artistic group' and look for methods that rupture rather than obey the 'implicit canons' and 'socially regulated functions' of the photographic practice?²⁸ However, by understanding cultural dimensions of its production, or temporalization, the ordinary or popular practice of photography does dissolve the 'solid and compact reality of everyday perception into an infinity of fleeting profiles like dream images'²⁹ thereby rupturing the very symbolic value it embodies. Therefore, treating photography as a 'method' for theorization may help us capture and analyse the underlying social structures.

It is crucial to spatialize the visual material as much as visualize the space. Moreover, an interdisciplinary approach that visualizes religion and popular culture 'is better able to respond to the fluidity and transience of popular culture, which is driven by markets, consumption, daily ritual, and all manner of human exchange'.³⁰ David Morgan adds:

We need models for studying this, models that will help us describe the varieties of circulation of culture, or *culture as circulation*, in which religion is neither a fixed essence nor a merely economic behavior. The account of religion that will work best is the one that is practice-centered – able, in other words, to describe what people *do* in addition to what they *say* they believe.³¹

Morgan uses the concept of gaze, for instance, to mean 'the visual network that constitutes a social act of looking' as a trope to understand the meaning that are imbued in images. He classifies a 'gaze' into

several parts: ‘a viewer, fellow viewers, the subject of their viewing, the context or setting of the subject, and the rules that govern the particular relationship between viewers and subject’.³² Thus, ‘a gaze is a projection of conventions that enables certain possibilities of meaning, certain forms of experience, and certain relations among participants’ that can enable meaning-making and visualize popular piety. Morgan elaborates:

Gaze designates the visual field that relates seer, seen, the conventions of seeing, and the physical, ritual, and historical *contexts of seeing*. The central structure of the gaze as it is most frequently constructed in visual experience is the relation between *subject and viewer*. These two exist in a rough symmetry: subject and setting correspond to *viewer and audience*.³³

(emphasis mine)

The following Figure 4.5 illustrates one such visual experience of gaze. Representation of popular murids along with their Pir constitutes an important mode of sustaining shrine’s relationship with popular piety. Thus, when Gurdas Mann (dressed in the traditional green kurta and lungi) fixes his gaze on the mountains remembering Baba Ladi Shah, who recently died at Nakodar, the latter appears to him through *zannat* (across the mountains). This representation articulates ‘physical, ritual, and historical contexts of seeing’ as well as situates the subject, object and audience of the visual gaze. It also illustrates Mann’s relationship with the Pir and his role in the present-day management of the shrine, which has been bestowed (*barkat*) upon him by the Pir itself. The hedge, which physically separates the Pir and the murid in time, however, connects them through a gaze.

In a similar vein, Figure 4.6 represents Baba Lal Badshah of Nakodar, the patron saint of popular Punjabi Sufi/folk singer Hans Raj Hans who also recently died at Nakodar. Hans Raj Hans (dressed in traditional white kurta and lungi) is represented sitting in front of a garden (*zannat*), fixing his gaze on the Pir and praying as well as seeking his blessings. Data Lal Badshah is seated on a sofa in one image and blessing the singer from the other image, thus separating yet connecting the singer with his Pir through memory as well as ‘chosen grace’. Photo-shop images like these capture the contours of saint veneration in a variety of ways. To the viewer, these are guides to the flow of *barkat*, transferred, as it appears, from the pir to the murid. The possibility of creating this medium in local studios spatializes their production and



Figure 4.5 Popular Sufi/pop music star Gurdas Mann contemplating on Baba Ladi Shah

become guides to popular piety. Images mark everyday with sacred meanings: devotion, contemplation, veneration, submission, *barkat*. They are a powerful medium that localize as well as navigate spaces, circulate ideas and ideals of veneration, induce dreams, sustain memories of belonging and materialize saint veneration.

Sacred space is also imbued with significant rituals. Pilgrimage and rituals are the primary fulcrums that negotiate the complex relationship between shrine and social space, mediated especially during *urs*. In the case of shrines associated with Haider Shaikh, the ritual medium of ‘possession’ plays a functional role in defining the participation of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. While the shrine of the mystic at Malerkotla is managed by the ‘Muslim’ *sajjada-nishins*, ‘saint possession’ creates a web of relationships that enables Hindu and Sikh participation in the sacred complex through *chelas* (network of disciples). These *chelas* flock the shrine during *urs* (Figure 4.7). They act as mediators between the pilgrims and Haider Shaikh, suggesting resolutions to their everyday problems through ‘possession’. Locally called *chauki*, possession is a powerful medium in which a



Figure 4.6 Hans Raj Hans seeking the blessings of Baba Lal Badshah



Figure 4.7 A chela performing *chauki* at the shrine of Haider Shaikh

non-Muslim channel the Shaikh's spirit and become source of *barkat* (Figure 4.7).³⁴

Pilgrimage to the shrine of Sufi saint (*ziyarat*) is another important function of saint veneration. There are several networks that guide these pilgrimages (Figure 4.8). The one significant network is guided through the Chishti Sabri shrines at Batala, Amritsar, Patiala, Ferozepur and Ropar that are connected to major centres like Kaliyar Sharif (Rorkee), Bu Ali Qalandar (Panipat), Nizamuddin Aulia and Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (Delhi) and Muinuddin Chishti (Ajmer). Another network connects the loosely called Qadiri shrines at Nakodar and Banga with those at Phillaur and Phagwara, only major centres left in Punjab after the relationship with Lahore was severed. A third network of pilgrimage connects pilgrims from all parts of Malwa to the Suhrawardi shrine of Shaikh Haider, the only shrine of this lineage in Punjab. As has been discussed at several places, Shaikh Haider has a special significance for Hindus and Sikhs who come in large numbers during annual *urs* and offer goat at the shrine (Figure 4.8), symbolically identified as the horse (*ghoda*). The narrative of this offering was discussed earlier in Chapter 1.



Figure 4.8 Pilgrims heading towards the shrine, one of them holding the symbolic *ghoda*

Thus, images ascribe and attribute meaning and legitimacy, memorialize sacred space, idealizes the saint and shrine, circulate ideas, reaffirm sacred icons and structures of ritual practice, network and visualize saint's charisma. Besides images, saints are memorialized through possession, pilgrimage and veneration of symbolic graves and shrines spread across Punjab.

Urs and memory making

After the partition of Punjab, a large number of shrines that were earlier under the control of Muslim caretakers remained desolate; even when taken over by a new set of caretakers, restoration of ritual practices took a longer time. Several of these shrines were looted and plundered and mosques converted into private residences. The restoration of ritual practice was a long-drawn process and involved absorption of the shrine into the transformed demographic milieu as old patrons left for Pakistan. Some of these shrines were major centres of veneration in pre-partition milieu. There was no clarity on the status of these shrines, and the state perceived them as 'enemy' properties. However, for the people who were leaving their familiar spaces in Pakistan, location of these shrines at least partially substituted the lived landscapes. For instance, in the case of Panj Pir dargah at Abohar, it is the Kamboj family which after migrating from Montgomery, helped rejuvenate the



Figure 4.9 Darbari qawwals from Kaliyar Sharif performing at Amritsar

shrine by instituting langar and ritual practices on Thursdays as well as annual fairs. However, in the case of shrine of Haji Rattan, partition induced an end to dargah's relationship with Naths who used to come for Baba Rattan's *urs* and participated in the wrestling tournaments (*kushti*).³⁵

One of the most fascinating aspects of this rejuvenation was the beginning of *urs* celebrations at Sufi shrines (Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10). *Urs* has been a predominant occasion of celebration at most Chishti, Qadiri and Suhrawardi shrines particularly associated with *sama* and qawwali. Frembgen reports *kafi* singing and trance rhythms during *urs* at the shrine of Imam Gul in Pakistan – 'the songs of the wandering dervishes, and above all the ecstatic love poetry of the qawwali singers, [which] are a genuine component of celebrations of Muslim saints throughout the subcontinent'.³⁶ He further elaborates the contemporary scenario of *urs* celebrations in Pakistan:

Just as drummers usually precede a wedding procession, here too at the 'urs festival of Imam Gul they introduce the musical programme. On the day commemorating the death of a saint everywhere in Muslim South Asia, his 'urs- his 'wedding'- is celebrated, understood as the mystical wedding of the lovers with Allah, the Beloved. Soon a trumpeter joins the dhol-wallahs. This is Jana, the 'Miles Davis of Lahore', a very modest musician who plays Indian ragas on his instrument. In the course of the raga, the tones become increasingly powerful, increasingly energetic. Spontaneously, several young boys leap onto the stage and dance *dhamaal* ecstatically. Over the tent bats fly frantically, diving up and down as if following the cascade of sounds.³⁷

Unlike the processions of Muharram that are usually marked by ritual mourning, '*urs* is an overcoming of physical death, a testimony of life after life and its meaning consists not in the mourning for the saint but in the joy from contact with his *baraka*. That is why near a tomb you will see neither tears nor hear sorrowful moans – here you will come across altogether different sounds'.³⁸ Since the pir's tomb is present on an earthly plane, he is accessible to ordinary believers. Also, precisely 'because the Pir has achieved his '*urs* (union with his beloved, the ultimate goal of Sufi gnostic experience), he is in far closer communion with Allah than a living person could ever hope to be. Hence his

capacity to act as an intercessor'.³⁹ Roger Ballard narrates his observation on Sufi shrines of Doab:

Although virtually all the indigenous Muslim population of the Doab fled west to Pakistan over half a century ago, careful inspection revealed that a significant number of rural shrines were those of *pirs*, since the shrouds covering such well-tended tombs and the flags which flew over them were green – the colour of Islam. The largest of these shrines became hives of activity on each *juma'raat* (the evening preceding the Islamic day of prayer on Friday) and positively burst with energy at their annual *'urs* of the saintly *pir* entombed within it – even though the local Muslim population had long since disappeared. It follows that virtually all those making use of the shrine belonged to local Hindu or Sikh families.⁴⁰



Figure 4.10 A musical concert at the shrine of Data Gulami Shah (Banga) during the annual mela organized and attended primarily by Hindus and Sikhs

Yousuf Saeed gives a typical argument regarding the popularity of pilgrimage to popular Sufi shrines among Muslims by arguing that ‘since a sizeable number of Indian Muslims are unable to travel to Mecca for Hajj, local shrines and folklore play an important role in their religious lives’. He adds that the ‘devotees from smaller towns embark on many lesser pilgrimages, covering in a trip many tombs of saints’ such as Nizamuddin Auliya at (Delhi) or Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti (Ajmer), especially during their *urs* celebrations (Saeed 2007, 78). These teleological arguments limit the spatial dynamics of saint veneration and do not explain the participation of non-Muslims particularly during annual *urs*.⁴¹ This kind of argument is particularly extant in Western academia and has been critiqued by Irfan Ahmad, who argues against the use of problematic conceptual categories:

[I]s “cult” analytically useful to describe Muslim practices? . . . I also disagree with the description of Muharram as “carnival” – indeed the “carnival of Muharram” as he [Green 2011] puts it . . . and the explanation that the ‘*urs* “tapped into the same demand for entertainment that funded the expansion of music halls in Bombay and . . . cinemas as well”’.⁴²

Among the significant transformation of sacred landscapes of Punjab is the emergence of *urs* celebrations at several public places and organized by neighbourhood communities (Figure 4.10). Several such festivals are organized at Amritsar, a city that is particularly popular for the veneration of popular saint like Baba Lakhdata (Lalanwala Pir Nigaha), Gugga Pir (also popular as Zahir Pir) and Khwaja Khizr (locally venerated as Jhule Lal). Amritsar also has substantial influence of the Chishti Sabri *silsila* through the shrine of Kaliyar Sharif that plays an important role in the circulation of literature, mystic ideology (via ritual intermediaries and musicians) and associated with a network of shrines from Amritsar, Batala to Patiala.

One such *urs* has been annually organized by Sai Baba Gope Shah ‘Chishti Faridi Sabri’ in the walled city for the past 11 years.⁴³ In the year 2007, the practice of organizing a qawwali *darbar* was also started. Since then, Daman Sabri, the *darbari* qawwals of Kaliyar Sharif perform from 9:30 pm to 4:00 am (Figure 4.9). On the occasion of the annual *urs* organized in 2010, Sufi Rashid Mian (Delhi), Sai Baba Mehshi Shah ‘Chishti Faridi Sabri’ (Batala Sharif) and Baba Gope Shah (Amritsar) were present. Figure 4.11 visualizes the *urs* at the telephone exchange chowk in the walled city of Amritsar. Baba Meshi Shah is received by Baba Gope Shah. A jubilant murid (follower) is



Figure 4.11 Baba Mehshi Shah (Batala Sharif) being received by Baba Gope Shah during the annual *urs* at Amritsar

dancing in the backdrop. The fair is attended dominantly by a non-Muslim audience (except for migrant Kashmiri Muslims artisans who participate)⁴⁴ and is organized under the banner of Anjuman Ghulame Chishtiya Sabriya an umbrella organization of Chishti Sabri followers in Punjab founded by Baba Ghulam Jilani of Kaliyar Sharif that includes Hindus and Sikhs from several castes. The current president of the organization is Dr. Kittu Grewal (Jalandhar). The organization consists of Aggrawals, Aroras, Brahmans, Jats, Khatri, Mahajans, Majhabis, Masihs and Valmikis from among Hindus, Sikhs and Christians. The branch at Amritsar does not consist of Muslims.

The *urs* is popularized through banners and posters, and it is pertinent to note the posters of parent, sister and adjacent shrines that circulate at various shrines in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Some of them are congratulatory banners giving details of the organizing committee or individuals, special guests, or the affiliation of the shrine with other centres (Figure 4.12). Others are printed posters that give a detailed programme of events and rituals organized during *urs*. Usually these festivals last for two to three days, and



Figure 4.12 A flex banner displayed at Manakpur Sharif (Ropar) congratulating the pilgrims at the annual *urs* of Shaikh Hafiz Musa

these posters give a detailed description of the patron saint in whose memory the *urs* is being organized, ranging from mystics of Chishti, Qadiri, Suhrawardi and Chishti Sabri orders. One such poster (Figure 4.13) from Batala Sharif (Batala)⁴⁵ details the programme of *urs* (also popularly called *mela*) in the memory of Pir Buddhu Shah in the year 2010, which was attended by pirs and *khadims* from Ajmer Sharif, Kaliyar Sharif, Panipat Sharif and Ghuram Sharif, besides *qawwals* from Malerkotla and Phillaur.⁴⁶ The programme includes *fatiha khani*, *kushtiyan* (wrestling), *chadarposhi*, *qawwalian*, *langar* and *gusal sharif*.⁴⁷

Everyone's Baba, multiple shrines

Some important mystics and popular pirs in Punjab assumed a distinction of being shared not just in the sense of being common sources of veneration but also as inspiration for dedication of multiple shrines. While most Sufi shrines are shared, some communities construct exclusive shrines dedicated to them. This aspect has earlier been discussed in

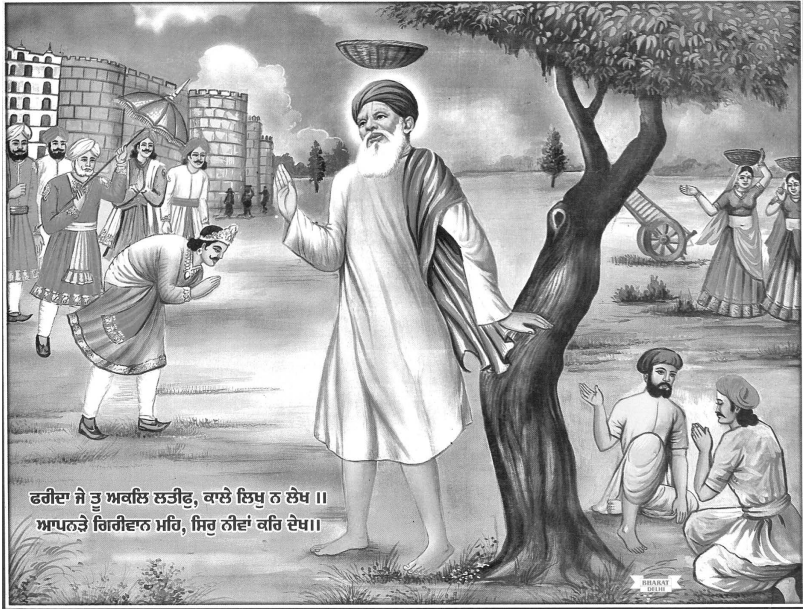


Figure 4.14 A poster representing a popular story of Shaikh Farid's visit to Faridkot

by Sikh Gurus and Bhagat poets.⁵¹ This reception saints and their poetry as 'connected' is widely extant in the popular spaces of Punjab and ruptures the linear narratives of historical tradition.

After the partition of Punjab, Hindus and Sikhs were severed of their association with the shrine of Baba Farid. However, Farid's visit to Faridkot continues to enliven him in the popular memory, which remembers his celebrated visit to the town (then known as Mokhalpur) the construction of the main fort complex was in progress. The construction officials forced the saint to work on the site and when a basket full of clay was kept on his head, it started floating over Baba's head. When this incident was reported to the King, he apologized before the saint and sought his pardon. Before the arrival of Baba Farid at Mokhalpur, several failed attempts to settle the city had been made. Subsequently with the blessings of the saint, the city prospered and was renamed as Faridkot. This narrative appropriation and

incorporation of Baba Farid into the ‘landscape, personal lives, and oral traditions of the largely Sikh population [is conceived] through stories of the origins of the shrines, accounts of miracles past and present, and the strategic performance of poetic works attributed to the saint’.⁵²

Anna Bigelow (2012), who also studied this town, notes two shrines in the area: first, Tilla Baba Farid, consisting of three structures – a relic shrine, a gurdwara and a mosque- providing ritual spaces for all Baba Farid’s devotees. ‘These sites memorialise the saint’s encounter with a Hindu king who became his devotee but did not convert. This encounter set a local precedent for non-Muslims who can now participate in the worship of a Muslim holy man without abandoning their own religious identities’.⁵³ The other site is a memorial to Godhri Sahib Gurdwara just outside of town at a site believed to be the place where Baba Farid performed his meditational *chilla*. Figure 4.15 portrays the popular representation of the saint, five lamps, green flags and an old tree venerated by a ‘Sikh’ devotee. The Gurdwara is located within the premises of the relic shrine and shares a common wall with a Mosque in the name of the saint that is under the management of ‘Muslim’ caretakers. Gurdwara Tilla Sahib is managed by a trust Tilla Baba Farid Religious and Charitable Society presided by Inderjit Singh Khalsa, an advocate and a prominent Punjabi figure of the region. The trust also runs several educational institutions.

During annual festivities celebrating the arrival of the saint (Shaikh Farid *agam parb*), several flex banners commemorating saint’s arrival are put up throughout the city by various political parties. Subhash Parihar notes that ‘although there is hardly any Muslim population in the city, the number of daily Hindu and Sikh visitors to the local shrine of the saint and particularly of those who visit it on every Thursday is far greater than the number of the visitors to any local Hindu temple or Sikh *Gurūdiwārah* [gurdwara]’.⁵⁴ There is a popular legend of Baba Farid conversing with a crow and speaking the following couplet (Figure 4.16):

*The crows have searched my skeleton, and eaten all my flesh.
But please do not touch these eyes; I hope to see my Lord.*

This couplet is visualized in this image and represents an elderly Baba Farid with long white beard, almost bald. He is bare-chested, wears a blue dhoti (waistcloth) and a necklace of multicoloured beads. His body has been injured at several places on the feet by the crow, and the saint is suggesting him to spare his eyes for he yearns for



Figure 4.15 A 'Sikh' devotee offering prayers at Tilla Baba Farid, Faridkot



Figure 4.16 A popular poster of Saint Shaikh Farid in a contemplative mood

vision of the beloved. The background represents a dense forest along with two white langurs in a playful mood located far away from the city. The saint is comfortably lying on a blue sheet along with a pot of water on his left. Embedded in a local landscape, this particular image can be located in several popular shrines in Punjab, painted on walls and occasionally along with the couplet.

In a neighbouring town, Bathinda, the shrines of Baba Haji Rattan also encapsulate the multiple narratives of belonging as well as legitimacy for respective identities- 'Hindus', 'Muslims' and 'Sikhs' who claim Baba Haji Rattan to be their own (Figure 4.17). According to one legend, he was a companion of the Prophet Muhammad and was blessed to live for over 700 years. The first references to Haji Rattan in Islamic literature date back to the twelfth century.⁵⁵ The shrine of Baba Haji Rattan is associated with the popular legends of the visits of 'Sikh' Gurus; Guru Nanak, Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh.⁵⁶ There are several narratives around Baba Rattan. Some accounts ascribe him a Nath identity and relate him as the son of Raja Mankiya Parikshak of Dang town in Nepal where he became a disciple of Gorakhnath and established a temple there.⁵⁷ Bouillier and

Khan (2009) give a detailed account of the multiple identities of Haji/ Baba Rattan. He is one of the very few saints who had been noticed, documented and contested by writers and chroniclers from South Asia, Central and West Asia, Spain and Syria. A major reason for his reference is because of a narrative claim of his being associated with the Prophet Muhammad, who foretold his birth at Mecca in Arabia where he travelled (Haj and therefore the surname Haji) before finally settling at Bathinda after his reported conversion to Islam.⁵⁸

Subhash Parihar structurally situates the tomb of Haji Rattan in the thirteenth century that been subsequently repaired by both Hindu and Muslim officials of the area since medieval times.⁵⁹ He also notes the splendour of the fair that was held at the dargah pre-partition through a poem of Babu Rajab Ali (1894–1947), who migrated to Pakistan post-partition:

I have spent eighteen years bearing sharp spears on my heart. Separation is killing [me]. Yearning for the native land I always have. Bungalows of Canal [colonies] and festival of Ratan I do not forget.

The sand dunes of [Haji] Ratan where singing concerts were held, haunt me.⁶⁰

Partition had a profound impact on the dargah. Before partition, the dargah owned a vast landed property that was subsequently taken over and reserved for public buildings or public space such as the vegetable and grain market. A part was given to a nearby Sikh gurdwara which also had the charge of dargah administration between 1947 and 1960. In 1960, the dargah administration was taken back from the Sikhs and returned to the Muslims and to the Bhatinda department of the Punjab Waqf Board, which had its headquarters in a small modern building, inside the dargah compound.⁶¹

The official narrative related to ‘Sikh’ association with Baba Rattan is displayed on a large board inside the gurdwara:

Shri Guru Gobind Singh ji passing through village Bhuchoo and Bhagu reached Bathinda on 21 June 1706. He called upon Baba Haji Rattan and gave discourses to him and liberated him from the cycle of birth and death. A gurdwara is enshrined on this spot. When the people (*sangatan*) of Bathinda came to know about the visit of Guru Gobind Singh at Baba Haji Rattan, they came to the place to have a glimpse (*darshan*) of the Guru. The *sangat* was overwhelmed listening



Figure 4.17 Dargah of Haji Rattan (left) and newly constructed mosque (right) with Gurdwara in the background (centre)

to the discourse of Guru. Later they requested him to come to the Qila (fort) rather than staying in this desolate place. The Guru then asked the disciples if they have any worries. They narrated that they have long been troubled by a one-eyed devil (*deo*) who lives in the fort and keeps destroying the living places of the people. They sought Guru's blessings for redemption from the devil. The Guru called upon the devil and asked him the reason for his mischiefs. The devil said that he has been hungry for a long time and pleaded to the Guru for redemption from hunger, as a result of which he will leave the fort forever. Guru Gobind then visualized and said that in a nearby village Nat Banger there lives a bull commonly shared by ten villages. People have been very troubled by this bull. Guru asked Bhai Mailagar Singh to lead Singhs and fetch the bull. They fetched the bull and the Guru asked Bhai to sacrifice the bull and offer the same to the devil to satiate his hunger. The devil was then instructed to proceed to Sirhind where his services were required and to never return. People

then requested the Guru to take along with him droughts from Malwa to Deccan who kept the word.⁶²

This version is met with some scepticism by the people of the dargah. Everybody agrees to the visit paid by Guru Gobind Singh, but, according to the Maulvi, at that time the dargah was already there. Gobind Singh was fed and taken care of. Then he declared that a gurdwara should also be constructed on the spot in order to give shelter to the pilgrims. Pir Chand Shah, who was at that time the *sajjada nishin*, gave him ten *bighas* of land. Subsequently, the name of Haji Rattan was added to that of Guru Gobind Singh on the gurdwara.⁶³

Despite Waqf Board being the formal custodian of the dargah, a Muslim Human Welfare Society has been running the affairs of the dargah (Figure 4.18). ‘Hussain’ narrated to Yoginder Sikand how due to notoriety of the Board some local Muslims had to set up their own committee. Besides the ‘Waqf board people are mostly Deobandis, who have no faith in the Baba . . . and displayed little interest in the proper running of the Baba’s shrine’.⁶⁴ ‘Akbar’, who is an official of the Waqf Board, was not pleased by Sikand’s conversation with Hussain and asked ‘what those grave-worshipping Barelwis’ said. Akbar

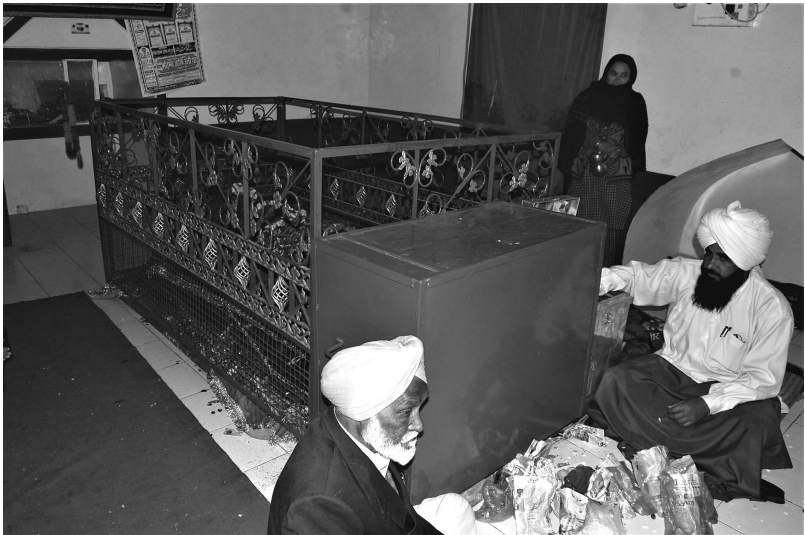


Figure 4.18 The members of the Muslim Human Welfare Society manage the dargah

contested the story around Baba Rattan and ‘proclaimed. . . [that he] was a scheming imposter and a pathetic liar who had falsely claimed to be a companion of the Prophet’,⁶⁵ corroborating the polemic around the identity of Baba Rattan. These narratives attest to the complexities around the receptivity of Haji Rattan and how mainstream ‘Sikh’ tradition as well as reformed ‘Islam’ looks upon the tradition of saint veneration in the contemporary spatial contexts.

The partition also brought to an end the dargah’s relationship with Naths who used to come for Baba Rattan’s *urs* and to participate in the wrestling tournaments (*kushti*) from a nearby village, Nathana (some 20 km from Bhatinda). In the middle of the village stands the temple of Kalunath or Kalunath Mandir, which had formerly close relationships with Rattan’s dargah.⁶⁶ However, the legends of Baba Haji Rattan’s ‘Nath’ as well as ‘Brahmin/ruling class’ antecedents are still extant in the popular narratives. The ‘inclusive nature of this tradition, its historical developments, and the fact that it has multiple connections and ramifications should warn us against any simplistic classification. Some medieval texts see even the “Jogis” as belonging to a religious category distinct from “Hindu” and “Muslim”, making the Nath Yogi sect a successful medium for expressing the close relationship between Hinduism and Islam’.⁶⁷

Rekindling Shaikh Hafiz Musa, Ropar⁶⁸

Hafiz Musa was a disciple and *khalifa* of Syed Mohammad Azam, a Chishti Sabri mystic of Ropar from the lineage of Miran Bhik whose shrine is at Ghuram Sharif near Patiala. After the death of his Pir, Hafiz Musa went to Manakpur near Kurali (Ropar) and settled there permanently until he passed away in February 1832. One of the foremost disciples of Hafiz Musa was his *khalifa* Muinuddin Shah Khamosh of Hyderabad. Shah Khamosh left his home at the age of 15 in search for his Pir. He travelled to Ajmer Sharif and Khwaja Muinuddin instructed him (in his dream) to proceed toward Punjab where Hafiz Musa his *pir-o-murshid* lives. Hafiz Musa who too had a dream revelation of the arrival of the Shah Khamosh ceremoniously received the latter. Shah Khamosh remained in service of Hafiz Musa for a period of 60 years. In the meantime, Shah Khamosh performed miracles and attained the stature of Pir. Hafiz Musa asked him to leave and spread the message of *silsila* in and around Hyderabad. Shah Khamosh resisted but the Pir didn’t relent. Subsequently, he left for Hyderabad and had the current shrine complex constructed (Figure 4.19).



Figure 4.19 Panoramic view of the dargah of Hafiz Musa during the *urs* celebrations in 2010

Mian Abdur Rehman, who was the *khalifa* of the shrines pre-partition, left for Pakistan in 1947. The shrine thus remained desolate for some period. Later, the 912 *bigha* land associated with the dargah was transferred to the Punjab Wakf Board. A local Ropar ‘Muslim’ Welfare Roza Committee, Manakpur now takes care of the shrine. Rana Ali (Figure 4.20) is associated with the eleven-member managing committee since 1980 along with Faqir Muhammad Sabri, Mangat Khan (an employee of Punjab Roadways and then president of the Committee), among others. The rejuvenation of the shrine of Hafiz Musa is credited to the efforts of the incumbent Pir/*sajjada nishin* of Shah Khamosh shrine in Hyderabad. He established a Chishti Sabri mosque at Chandigarh and gave strength to the followers of the tradition who were until now ‘living in disguise since 1947’. He also reinstated the ritual tradition at Manakpur Sharif, remained in Mankanpur for few weeks and thereafter left for Hyderabad. Baba Ruknuddin Shah, a Baba of Majri started taking care (*khidmat*) of the shrine but was not a murid of the *silsila*. In the meanwhile, a managing committee was formed during 1980–81. Gradually, the rituals of the shrine



Figure 4.20 Raunak Ali displaying the poster announcing the first wrestling competition being organized at Manakpur Sharif in 2010

were reinstated and its links with Shah Khamosh were strengthened. One of the important initiatives in the year 2010 was the beginning of a wrestling competition (*kushti dangal*) at Manakpur Sharif with the cooperation of ‘Sikh’ and ‘Hindu’ community of the area.

After the death of Baba Ruknuddin Shah in 1992, the shrine was embroiled in disputes over *gaddi nishini* and did not have a formal caretaker for more than a year.⁶⁹ Finally, Faqir Muhammad of Majri was declared the *gaddi nishin*, but since he did not remain in *khidmat* of their guru Pir for long time, Mehdi Hasan (Figure 4.21) did a majority of work of the shrine for the past 20 or more years. Mehdi Hasan shared how the shrine experienced violence, gun-fight, bombing and even killing over property disputes and litigation during these years, owing to which he spent long spells especially during Ramzan and *urs* at Manakpur. The *urs* and other ritual activities have now become a regular and vibrant part of the shrine’s life as *sangat* has increased day by day.

Mehdi Hasan narrates the contours of violence that the Manakpur Sharif shrine experienced during partition and subsequently during the



Figure 4.21 Baba Mehdi Hasan ties the ritual *jhanda* (flag) at Manakpur Sharif

1980s. He situates violence in the Indian context (*mulk*) in the genesis of partition and the politics of Muhammad Ali Jinnah (and not Gandhi) that created duality (*dui paidaki*) and separation (*wand*) among communities along with the British:

His politics led to the murder of innocent people and destroyed the region for the lust of power (*jhooti kursi*). I am not from Pakistan but do not hesitate in saying all this and console myself thinking that probably this is what Allah desired (*allah ko manzur tha, uske hukm ke bagaer kuch nabin hota*). However, divisions are created when the rulers (and jurists) do not dispense ‘complete’ justice. They then try to control these divisions (and rebellion against them) through use of force (*bandook ke jariye*). They cannot convert his lies into truth and hence makes use of violence. Violence then leads to further divisions (*bagad*). Post-partition, these divisions began developing in Punjab with Sikhs (*ugarwadi*) demanding Khalistan.

(recorded by the author on 24 October 2010)

Hasan narrates several other incidents of violence that engulfed the region with the demand for Khalistan:

I had heard something of this kind for the first time in my life of 65 years. They were neither bothered about themselves nor others, and engaged in fearless killings. We had a servant (*langri*) at the shrine who was shot dead by the militants. Militants also planted a bomb in one of the outer walls and exploded it, damaging the building. On another occasion, 60 rounds of bullets were fired on the main gate (*buland darwaza*) of the shrine while the congregation (*chauki*) was on. At the neighbouring shrine of Nathan Shah at Majri (under Faqir Muhammad) a man was shot dead right after the *maghrib* prayer (namaz). Shots were also fired at the Burail shrine in which one person was severely injured.

These were difficult times for the shrine, and Mehdi Hasan had to stay for longer durations ‘as the name of the *guruji* (his Pir) was at stake’. The *darbar* used to remain desolate for several months and no one from the managing committee dared to stay there. There was an environment of fear all around. Only one local Majhabi (Kukki) stayed and cooked food for him. But since then times have changed and after more than two and a half decades of peace, shrine has rejuvenated and people from all across the region come and participate in the annual festivities. *khalifas* and pirs from Amroha, Malerkotla, Nukkad (UP) and other parts of Punjab and Haryana also come to the shrine during *urs*. The painting below (Figure 4.22) is on the outer wall of Manakpur Sharif, which was once bombed but now narrates the popular lore of a woman Rudi⁷⁰ who lost his family ferrying the river and how Gauz Pak (Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani) rescued it. Also seen is the image of legendary singer Gurdas Mann.

Circulation of popular audio-visual

An equally significant medium of circulation of images and memories of pirs and dargahs are modern disc formats of songs, qawwalis, *qisse*, etc. on compact disc (CD), video compact disc (VCD) and digital video disc (DVD). The easy production and reproduction of these formats at local studios has virtually wiped off conventional cassettes from the marketplace. These discs primarily focus on the production of audio recording along with dramatic performances narrating the legends and life of popular pirs (saints). These audio recordings are also mixed



Figure 4.22 A painting narrating the story of Rudi praying Gauz Pak to rescue his family, and legendary singer Gurdas Mann

with the musical performance of singers and images of pirs and shrine spaces. An important function of these productions is the reproduction of popular Punjabi folk compositions from Pakistan that includes albums of Alam and Arif Lohar, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Rahat Fateh Ali Khan, among others. The centrality of these four singers at Sufi shrines can be felt at almost every *urs* organized in Punjab where, in absence of local qawwals, their compositions are played throughout the festivities. Among these, the VCD reproductions of qawwali compositions of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan are most popular. The front cover of Figure 4.23 portrays the popular painting of the love legend of Sohni Mahiwal on the top and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's (the legendary Sufi qawwali and singer of South Asia) photograph below. Produced at Jalandhar, similar reproductions on Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan are also available through production houses in Phagwara and Delhi.

Qawwalis constitute an important element of production with primary focus on qawwals from Malerkotla in Punjab.⁷¹ Many other collections of Kaliyar Sharif, Ajmer Sharif, Baba Lakhdata, and Ramzan,

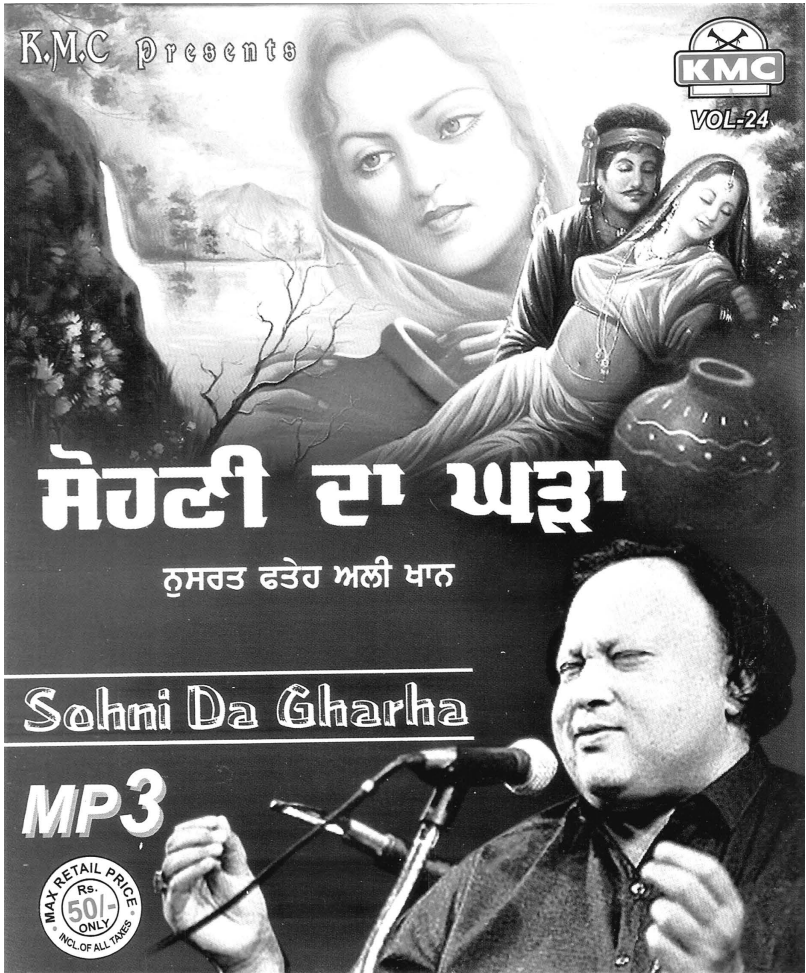


Figure 4.23 *Sohni da gharha*

Artist: Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan

etc. produced outside the state are also in circulation, for instance, a VCD collection⁷² of popular music sung on the eve of Ramzan by Anuja, Sandeep, Radha, Geetika and Nazim. The front cover of the album portrays the image of the singer and the image of Jama Masjid, New Delhi. There is a wide variety and diversity in the profile of singers and actors that include ‘Muslims’, ‘Hindus’ and ‘Sikhs’. Figure 4.24



Figure 4.24 Aya Baba de gulaman vich naam

Artist: Maqbool Ahmed

is a VCD collection of popular qawwalis sung by Maqbool Ahmed (Nazar Ali) of Malerkotla. The front cover of the album portrays the image of the singer along with the image of a popular legend of Rudi and Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani. Production centres located in Delhi focus primarily on the qawwals from Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan and sung dominantly in Urdu. Productions in Punjab, however, focus

on Punjabi compositions. The subject matter of these compositions constitutes qawwalis sung for Muinuddin Chishti, Gauz Pak, Sabir Pak and Baba Farid, besides local compositions for Baba Lakhdata and Haider Shaikh.

The cover of Figure 4.25, a telefilm on Baba Lakhdata, portrays the image of the saint on the top and the image of the actors below. This music album is produced by Payal Music, Bathinda (Punjab) and sung by Harinder Sandhu, Harnek Gharu, Gurtej Komal, Muhammad Jirpal, Maanjir Kaur, Ranga Khan Langeana, Makkan Mastana, Gurjant (Jatta), Manjit Mannu and Vishal Masti. Albums on Baba Lakhdata are also produced from Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan. In a similar fashion, music and video productions on pirs of the Doab recreate the life and on some occasions are first attempts to record their narratives/



Figure 4.25 A telefilm on Saint Lakhdata

histories. One such VCD collection⁷³ of Punjabi compositions has been sung by Jamna Rasila, presented by Mintu Uppal and produced by P.S. Sodhi at Nur Mahal. The front cover of the album portrays the image of the performers, Baba Lal Badshah and his successor Sai Lovely Shah. Similar productions on the history of shrine Mandhali Sharif, Banga and its successors, productions on current debates on Islam and interfaith dialogue are also in circulation.

Also significant are the productions of Sufi Foundation India which organizes Sufi musical concerts in Punjab.⁷⁴ Figure 4.26 is a collection of Sufi compositions sung by some of the most renowned singers from both sides of Punjab. Produced at Chandigarh, the cover of the album

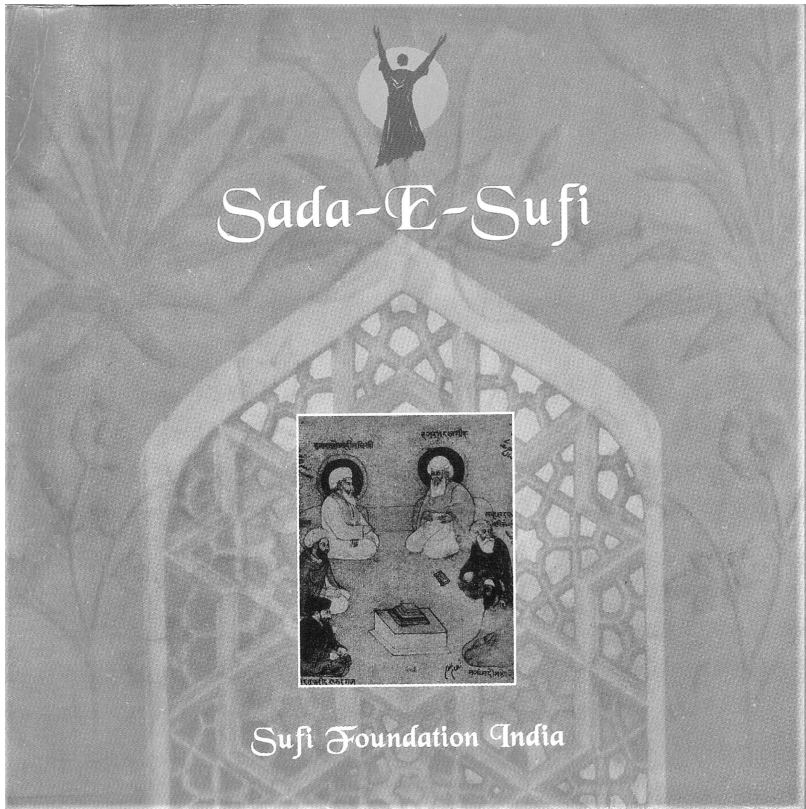


Figure 4.26 *Sada-e-Sufi*

Source: Photo courtesy of Sufi Foundation of India, Chandigarh

portrays the image of six popular saints of the North sitting around a copy of Quran. The inner cover portrays Abida Parveen and Hans Raj Hans singing their compositions.

Conclusions

The circulation of images plays a significant role in the contemporary articulation of saint veneration at various Sufi shrines in Punjab. Partition meant not only the catastrophic migration of people, reconfiguration of demography and division of physical boundary of the region; it also divided the sacred landscape of Punjabi religious sphere. In the post-partition scenario, it is the reproduction of images of Sufi mystics and their shrines in west Punjab and other parts of the Islamic world which has kept alive memories of saints like Shaikh Farid, Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, Bulleh Shah and Waris Shah, etc. Besides, the images of popular/folk saints like Sakhi Sarwar/Lalanwala Pir of Nigaha in Dera Ghazi Khan and Khwaja Khizr of Bakhar among others. The shrines associated with these saints are continually recreated in the popular spaces of contemporary east Punjab and more recently among Punjabi NRIs.

Modes of image production, visualization and its circulation are significant tools to understand translation of pre-partition memory in the current scenario and emergence of new network of shrines in contemporary east Punjab. It needs to be underlined that after 1947 Sufi shrines continued to exist and after a brief period of lull, many of these were taken over by new caretakers who reconfigured the shrine's relationship with a new demographic transformation in the wake of partition. There were such minor shrines which were never recorded in dominant historical narratives and the new caretakers reconfigured their relationship with the existing Sufi *silsilas* of India. Significantly this social formation has remained unrepresented in the colonial and post-partition historiography of Punjab. Current trends of historiography continue to focus on conflict between Sikhism, Hinduism and Islam and deny any possibilities of organic relationship between religious traditions and its practitioners. Rose wrote in the early twentieth century that Guru Gobind Singh was bitterly opposed to Islam without looking into the lived experience of social landscape of Punjab.⁷⁵ Circulation of images and audio-visual material tell a different story, a historical narrative that needs to find its due place in the history of religious traditions (see, for instance, Figure 4.27).

This work, therefore, presents a critique of communalized and reformist representations of historiography of Punjab. On the contrary,



Figure 4.27 A popular representation of saint veneration: Khwaja Khizr, Sai Baba and Krishna holding hands and floating above the sea

saint worship and pilgrimage to Sufi shrines continues to be a vibrant tradition in east Punjab. Though networks of Sabri shrines existed in several places from Kaliyar to Lahore pre-partition, Kaliyar Sharif (Roorkee) has more recently emerged as the most significant guiding shrine for absorption of unknown shrines with a new set of lineages and networks of Chishti pilgrimage, linking them with other major

shrines at Ajmer, Panipat and Delhi. Amritsar and Batala, for instance, which were known for their Qadiri links with Lahore owing to Hazrat Mian Mir, are now known for their intimate relationship with the Chishti Sabri *silsila*. This new relationship is mediated through the organization of *urs* in the walled city throughout the year where qawwals from Kaliyar perform. Kaliyar helps in legitimizing Punjab's relationship with Shaikh Farid and Baba Lakhdata. Sabir Pak was a murid, nephew and *khalifa* of Baba Farid. This new relationship is further mediated through popular 'Sabri' identity.

Images also reflect upon the nature of pilgrims who visit the shrine. It is pertinent to note that even at places like Malerkotla and Ropar which has significant Punjabi Muslim population, it is the 'Sikh' and 'Hindu' veneration for the Sufi saints like Haider Shaikh and Hafiz Musa which is most prominent. Shrines are thus marked as shared spaces of popular veneration. It is through the images of these saints and their shrines that popular traditions are replicated across the rural and urban landscape of Punjab (Figure 4.28). Pirkhanas at Abohar and adjoining areas in Haryana and Rajasthan, and dedicated to a Haider Shaikh and Baba Lakhdata are primarily run and managed by non-'Muslims'. A majority of them emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century. These shrines also define the nature of pilgrimage and ritual practice. Significantly, the Sabri tradition, while retaining the Islamic modes of *dua*, *ardas* and *kalmia*, interweaves the shared Punjabi tradition of saint veneration by emphasizing the unitary principles of Guru Nanak's teachings and significance of Guru Granth Sahib as a shared religious text.

Besides images of qawwali *darbars*, saint veneration also assumes significance through mediation of folk and modern pop singers who have based a majority of their productions on popular Sufi literature. Most famous among these are Wadhali Brothers, Gurdas Mann and Hansraj Hans. The image of these stars with their Pir also plays a significant role in transcultural circulation among NRIs. Cable networks and more recently websites like Youtube, broadcast several clippings of live performances by these singers at popular Sufi shrines.⁷⁶ These recordings, together with recent technological invention of compact discs and digital versions, have led to mass circulation of such audio-visual productions. These audio-visual productions of popular devotional videos about Sufi shrines are at times dramatically videographed in a studio or staged settings. Qawwali reproductions from west (Pakistan) Punjab, most significantly by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, are available at all major or minor *urs* at popular Sufi shrines in Punjab. Such production centres are located in the entire region and adjoining



Figure 4.28 A display of visual material at the *urs* of Haider Shaikh, Malerkotla

states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh and enable interlinking of various shrines of the region.

These productions emanate from both major cities of Punjab like Jalandhar, Phagwara, Ludhiana, Bathinda, Malerkotla and Chandigarh and even minor cities like Banga, Nur Mahal, Moga, Mandi Gobindgarh, and semi-urban centres like Khamano and Jhunir, too. Circulation of productions from Jawalamukhi in Himachal Pradesh, Panipat in Haryana, Ajmer and Padampur in Rajasthan, Lucknow and Hamirpur in Uttar Pradesh and significantly from New Delhi can be easily located at various *urs*, dargahs in cities and villages of contemporary Punjab. The covers of these productions are inscribed with images of shrines and pirs of the region. Circulation of images of shrines like Kaliyar Sharif and Deva in Uttar Pradesh, Gauz Pak in Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh) and Ajmer Sharif (Rajasthan) also constitute a significant flow of images. Similarly, with the localization of production, transcultural flow of images and legends get altered and adapted in the local environment. Significant music production of legends, songs and qawwalis dedicated to pirs and dargahs includes performances by non-‘Muslims’ particularly folk singers and even young artists.

Posters pertaining to *urs* at shrines in Uttar Pradesh can be located at several places in Punjab and are crucial in the circulation of images in the regional, sub-regional and local context. Posters related to various shrines in Punjab were found in associated shrines in the region which were again crucial in building network of shrines and pilgrimage in the region. There were three set of posters in circulation. The traditional ones in single-colour print were more visible in the rural areas and minor shrines, while multicoloured posters were marked in the major cities of the region. Modern print medium of digital flex printing was also especially marked in urban centres where large hoardings and smaller banners of shrines and associates were visible.

Tracts and pamphlets in regional Punjabi medium, Hindi and Urdu are also in circulation at popular Sufi shrines (Figure 4.29). Texts and images inscribed on their covers (front and back) also play a significant role in circulation of history, legends and narratives about a local saint or his shrine. This medium is less popular among urban Dalits who also constitute a majority illiterate population. These bookcovers and illustrations continue to be a relevant resource for circulation of images and narrative hagiographies of popular Sufis and their shrines, which are translated into audio-visual productions. Conversely, in the case of Mandhali Sharif, an audio-visual production in 2010 has been the first attempt to record the local narratives of Sufi mystics.

The composition of shrine spaces is perhaps the most significant constituent of social production. While images and their circulation perform an important task in disseminating memory, shrines spaces are actual indicators of articulation of popular beliefs systems. Photography and videography of these shrine spaces, especially during *urs*, consisted of recording pilgrim profiles, identifying the structural markers of shrines- their architecture and landscape, nature of sanctum sanctorum, ritual performance, wall murals and paintings, etc. in the shrine complexes, nature of *urs* and its cultural production and makeshift market places and commodities on sale. There are important linkages between modern poster representations of Sufi mystics and early representation of saints in the form of wall paintings and sketches at various Sufi shrines of Punjab. The most significant example in this case is that of Baba Lakhdata. Pilgrims buy and carry images of shrines and saints for veneration. This constitutes an important link to circulation and standardization of images in contemporary Punjab. Images also juxtapose shrines with their successors, caretakers along with images of major Islamic shrines, symbols of various religious traditions, liberal usage of Islamic symbols and represent a cross-cultural

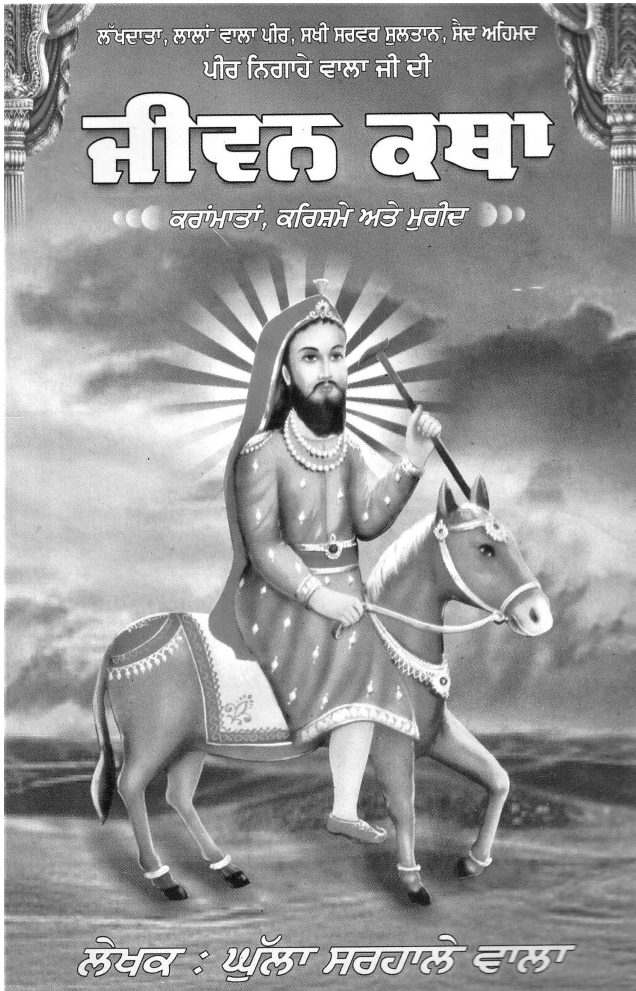


Figure 4.29 A popular book in Punjabi by Ghulla narrating the life of Baba Lakhdata

Source: Photo courtesy of Ghulla Sarhale Wala

perspective to understand the nature of Sufi shrines in contemporary East Punjab (Figure 4.30).

Frembgen suggests that in the ‘eyes of devotees, the spread and circulation of posters of their Pir throughout the province or the country marks his *wilayat*, that is to say his spiritual dominion. At last it is the



Figure 4.30 Data Ali Ahmed Shah Qadiri's wall painting inside his dargah at Mandhali Sharif with Kaba in the backdrop

community of devotees who feels the need for such concrete manifestations of the divine which finally results in the making of Sufi poster art within mass consumer culture'.⁷⁷ The concept *wilayat* also denotes the spiritual and political territory attributed to Sufi Shaykhs. While several Sufi saints had spiritual authority over fragments of the land of South Asia, Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti's (Ajmer) *wilayat* spreads across the whole subcontinent. In this way, he represents the prominence of the Chishti ethos across South Asia.⁷⁸ Modern devotional posters demonstrate murid's bond with his pir and express his individual identity that 'strengthen his system of values as well as the solidarity with other followers of that saint'.⁷⁹

Posters act as souvenirs, objects of memorialization, the 'social meaning and value of. . . [which] may be located in its human transactions, through its historical circulation by following its forms, contexts of uses, and its trajectories – "it is the things-in-motion that illuminate the human and social context"'.⁸⁰ They are thus 'devotional objects [that] help to "manufacture" personal charisma' and 'strengthen his

system of values as well as the solidarity with other followers of that saint. This feeling of being a member of a wider community (pirbhai, bound by common veneration of a pir), which helps to construct a collective religious identity, is no doubt enhanced through the mass distribution of such symbols'.⁸¹

Acknowledgement

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Notes

- 1 David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 9.
- 2 Jürgen Wasim Frembgen traces the antecedents of the modern portraits of saints and depictions of their shrines back to the religious painting of Iran. As early as the fifteenth century, biographies of the prophet and other literary works such as hagiographies were illustrated with miniatures showing Muhammad with human features, members of the holy family, and saints. Especially Sultan Husain Mirza's Majalis al- 'Ushshāq – 'the assembly of the lovers' – created toward the end of the fifteenth century at the Timurid court in Herat, is considered an important and pioneering work. The Iranian iconographical tradition was continued and developed by the rulers of the Mughal Empire. Islamic painting received further stimulation in the subcontinent from the well-established Hindu tradition of depicting deities. Jürgen Wasim Frembgen, "Saints in Modern Devotional Poster-Portraits: Meanings and Uses of Popular Religious Folk Art in Pakistan," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 34 (Autumn 1998): 186.
- 3 Frembgen adds, 'concerning the influences on modern Indo-Pakistani prints, there is, on the one hand, the continuity of classical miniature painting and, on the other, nineteenth-century developments such as: reverse-glass, oil, watercolour, and mica paintings; woodcut posters; early lithographs; and imported Roman Catholic devotional pictures. Because the actual printing of posters started in the 1910s and 1920s, we can assume that there was further mutual influence between the respective Islamic, Hindu, and Sikh traditions'. Ibid.
- 4 Looking into the origins of when and how the Muslim images entered the realm of the popular printing industry, one predictably finds the earliest examples coming out of the famed Ravi Carma Press, as early as 1910. Later on, many other publishers such as Hemchand Bhargava (Delhi),

- H. Ghulam Muhammad and Sons (Lahore), and now, Brijbasi (Delhi) and J.B. Khanna (Chennai), among others, have focused on Muslim themes employing a number of famed artists such as H.R. Raja, Balkrishnan, Mohideen Husain, Swarup, B.M. Kamal, Kishore, Bhatia and so on. You-suf Saeed, "Mecca versus the Local Shrine: The Dilemma of Orientation in the Popular Religious Art of Indian Muslims," in *India's Popular Culture: Iconic Spaces and Fluid Images*, ed. Jyotindra Jain, 78 (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2007).
- 5 A sample selection on films produced on Waris Shah may include some of the popular ones in India and Pakistan- *Heer*, Directed by Nazir Ahmad, 1955 (Pakistan), Punjabi; *Heer Ranjha*, Directed by Masud Pervaiz, 1970 (Pakistan), Punjabi; *Heer Raanjha*, Directed by Chetan Anand, 1970 (India and Pakistan), Punjabi; *Heer Ranjha*, Directed by Harmesh Malhotra, 1992 (India), Hindi; *Waris Shah: Ishq Daa Waaris*, Directed by Manoj Punj, 2006 (India), Punjabi; *Heer Ranjha*, Director by Harjeet Singh and Ksshitij Chaudhary, 2009 (India), Punjabi.
 - 6 Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, 8.
 - 7 In Hinduism, for example, *darshan* is the ritual act of seeing and being seen by the deity, an encounter that occurs within the gaze of a statue or image in the temple or at a shrine. Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, 48.
 - 8 *Ibid.*, 6.
 - 9 *Ibid.*, 52.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, 8–9.
 - 11 Christopher Pinney, "Photos of the Gods": *The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 8.
 - 12 *Ibid.*
 - 13 *Ibid.*, 206.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, 12.
 - 15 Ajay J. Sinha, "Visual Culture and the Politics of Locality in Modern India: A Review Essay," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, 1 (2007): 190.
 - 16 Frembgen, "Saints in Modern Devotional," 185.
 - 17 Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, 22.
 - 18 W.H. McLeod, *Popular Sikh Art* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 1.
 - 20 Frembgen, "Saints in Modern Devotional," 185.
 - 21 Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, 3.
 - 22 Frembgen, "Saints in Modern Devotional," 186–187.
 - 23 Michael Pye, "Photography in the Study of Religion," <http://archiv.ub.uni-marburg.de/es/2015/0007/pdf/amp.pdf> (accessed on 20 November 2015), 3.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, 5.
 - 25 David Morgan, "Studying Religion and Popular Culture: Prospects, Pre-suppositions, Procedures," in *Between Sacred and Profane: Researching Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. Gordon Lynch, 27 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).
 - 26 Pye, "Photography in the Study of Religion," 5.
 - 27 Pierre Bourdieu, "Introduction," in *Photography: A Middle Brow Art*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu, et al., trans. Shaun Whiteside, 6 (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

- 28 Ibid., 7–8.
- 29 Pierre Bourdieu, “The Social Definition of Photography,” in *Photography: A Middle Brow Art*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu et al., trans. Shaun Whiteside, 76 (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).
- 30 Morgan, “Studying Religion and Popular Culture,” 26.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, 3.
- 33 Ibid., 4.
- 34 Bigelow details the process of *chauki*. After some period of head rotation, the chela stops and so does the music. The chela speaks, first praising Haider Shaikh, inspiring responses of *jai Babaji* – “victory to Haider Shaikh” – from the gathering. The music and the head rolling resume, usually for a shorter period. The chela stops, the music stops, and the question-and-answer period commences. The chela usually asks what the concerns of the assembly are. For example, he or she inquires who has come with “child work” or job-related issues or health problems. Some audience members will rise, and one is selected. The music resumes and the chela’s head rolls. Then the music stops, and the chela addresses the petitioner, both telling about his or her situation and asking questions from the supplicant. Anna Bigelow, “Saved by the Saint: Refusing and Reversing Partition in Muslim North India,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 68, 2 (2009): 450.
- 35 Véronique Bouillier and Dominique-Sila Khan, “Hājji Ratan or Bābā Ratan’s Multiple Identities,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 37, 6 (2009): 568.
- 36 Jürgen Wasim Frembgen, *Nocturnal Music in the Land of the Sufis: Unheard Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 43. Virinder Kalra recently published a book on music tradition in Pakistan. Virinder S. Kalra, *Sacred and the Secular Musics: A Postcolonial Approach* (London: Bloombury, 2014).
- 37 Frembgen, *Nocturnal Music*, 27.
- 38 Anna Suvorova, *Muslim Saints of South Asia: The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2004), 33.
- 39 Roger Ballard, “Popular Islam in Northern Pakistan and its Reconstruction in Urban Britain,” in *Sufism in the West*, ed. Jamal Malik and John Hinnells, 164 (London: Routledge, 2006).
- 40 Ibid., 165.
- 41 Moini explores the devotional linkages of Punjab with the Chishti shrine at Ajmer through *vikalatnamas*. Syed Liyaqat Hussain Moini, “Devotional Linkages of Punjab with the Chishti Shrine at Ajmer: Gleanings from the Vikalatnamas,” in *Sufism in Punjab: Mystics, Literature and Shrines*, ed. Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, 378–401 (New Delhi: Aakar, 2009).
- 42 Irfan Ahmad, “Anthropology of Islam: History, Culture, Power,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 51, 4 (2013): 498.
- 43 11th Urs Mubarak in the Memory of Lakhdatta Sakhi Sarwar Sultan on 20 January 2010 at Chowk Telephone Exchange Amritsar. Organized by Mahatma Ashwini Sabri, Babbi Sabri, Bagga Sabri, Jimmy Sabri, Prince Sabri, Pamma Pehalwan Sabri, Gurdip Pehalwan Sabri, Bau Ram Sabri, Rocky Sabri, Vikas Sabri, Sham Lal Sabri, Manjit Singh Sabri, Tinku

- Sabri, Jivan Sabri, Billa Sabri, Vijay Sabri, Ashwini Sabri, Gulshan Sabri and D.K. Sabri. Interview of Prince (Bharadwaj) Sabri (40 yrs) who is a government parking contractor and Pamma Pahlwan (Valmiki) Sabri (39 yrs) who is an ASI in Punjab Police, on 20 January 2010 at Chowk Telephone Exchange.
- 44 After the partition of Punjab province in 1947, the entire population of Punjabi Muslims of Amritsar migrated to Pakistan. Thus, Muslim population at Amritsar is either comprised of Kashmiri entrepreneurs and largely artisans engaged with the woollen industry of the city, besides carpet weaving and wooden carving or migrant labourers from the Gangetic plains.
- 45 The adjoining town of Batala constituted a major centre of Islamic learning in medieval India but was destroyed as a result of raids by Banda Bahadur in the early eighteenth century. It was also a residence of several Qadiri saints. H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-west Frontier Province* (Vol. 1) (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1919), 497.
- 46 After the partition of Punjab, many shrines were left desolated until new occupants took them over. Many such shrines developed new lineages (where the identity of the older shrines was unknown), and new *sajjada nishins* (caretakers) emerged. At a minor shrine of Pir Buddhu Shah at Batala, Baba Meshi Shah Chishti, the present caretaker and the pir of the shrine is represented along with his wife standing before the larger frame of shrine at Mecca and Medina, and Quran. Refer Image 38 in Yogesh Snehi, "Replicating Memory, Creating Images: Pirs and Dargahs in Popular Art and Media of Contemporary East Punjab," in *Visual Pilgrim: Mapping Popular Visuality and Devotional Media at Sufi Shrines and Other Islamic Institutions in South Asia*, ed., Yousuf Saeed and Christiane Brosius, <http://kjc-sv006.kjc.uni-heidelberg.de/visualpilgrim/essay-detail.php?eid=18> (accessed on 23 November 2015).
- 47 Frembgen gives details of such banners in Pakistan Punjab and Sindh. 'Unlike *'urs* posters in the Punjab which give detailed information on the rituals and ceremonies taking place at the saints' festivals, Lahori pilgrimage placards advertise and publicize the event as such. Thus, they usually provide basic data about the date of the festival, the departure of the *qāfila qalandrī* from Lahore railway station and the place (*qiyām*) in Sehwan Sharif, sometimes also about the *langar*. The latter is found in a small section entitled *progrām* at the bottom of the placard. *Shām-e Qalandar* placards, on the contrary, focus more on different ritual events, such as the actual Qalandar-night, *mehndī* and *dastar-bandī* ceremonies as well as the departure of the *qāfila* to Sehwan (No. 3). The programme on placard No. 18 starts with *qur'ānkhwānī*, *chadar-o-dhammāl* performed after evening prayers, followed on the next day by *mehfil-e samā'* mentioning the names of the *qawwalī* singers and *pehlī dhammāl qadīmī*. The *La'l Shabbāz Qalandar mehfil-e sama'* is ended by *rasm sehrā*, the ceremony of the binding of garlands'. Frembgen, Jürgen Wasim, "From Popular Devotion to Mass Event: Placards advertising the Pilgrimage to the Sufi Saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan Sharif (Sindh/Pakistan)," http://tasveergharindia.net/cmsdesk/userfiles/file/workshop/From%20Popular%20Devotion_%20LSQ_%20placards.doc (accessed on 19 November 2010), 7–8.

- 48 Ritual complex instituted at the shrine of Baba Farid included spiritual initiation, *dastar-bandi*, *urs*, qawwali, Bihishti mela and langar khana. Richard M. Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 206–207.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 230–248.
- 50 Saeed Ahmad, “Baba Farid: The Pioneer of Punjab Sufi Poetry,” in *Sufism in Punjab: Mystics, Literature and Shrines*, ed. Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, 198 (New Delhi: Aakar, 2009).
- 51 Interview conducted on Baba Mehshi Shah on 07 February 2010 at Batala Sharif, Batala.
- 52 Anna Bigelow, “Everybody’s Baba: Making Space for the Other,” in *Sharing the Sacred: The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations around Holy Places*, ed. Glenn Bowman, 34 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 Subhash Parihar, “The Dargah of Baba Haji Ratan at Bhatinda,” *Islamic Studies* 40, 1 (2001): 115.
- 55 Yoginder Sikand, *Sacred Spaces: Exploring Traditions of Shared Faith in India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003). For a more detailed account of Haji Rattan and his shrine, see Parihar, “The Dargah of Baba Haji Ratan at Bhatinda,” 105–132.
- 56 Rose mentions several other versions of the tradition of Baba Haji Rattan. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes*, Vol. 1, 551–552.
- 57 Sikand, *Sacred Spaces*, 202.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 196–214.
- 59 Parihar, “The Dargah of Baba,” 109.
- 60 Cited in *Ibid.*, 119.
- 61 Bouillier and Khan, “Hājjī Ratan or Bābā Ratan’s,” 566.
- 62 Recorded by the author on 13 February 2015.
- 63 Bouillier and Khan, “Hājjī Ratan or Bābā Ratan’s,” 568.
- 64 Sikand, *Sacred Spaces*, 206.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 210.
- 66 Bouillier and Khan, “Hājjī Ratan or Bābā Ratan’s,” 568.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 593.
- 68 This narrative was recorded from Baba Mehdi Hasan (Age 61 years in 2010) and Raunak Ali (63 years in 2010) on 24 October 2010 at Manakpur Sharif.
- 69 There were pressures from the *gaddi nishins* of Majri and Burail, and while the caretakers of the latter proposed the name of Baba Mehdi Hasan, the former opposed it. The next year, local congregation once again brought forward the issue of *gaddi nishini*. It was argued that Faqir Muhammad Shah of Majri lives nearby while Baba Mehdi Hasan lives with his children in Chandigarh. Therefore, the former would not agree to the name of latter. Subsequently, Baba Nazir Shah of Burail congregated all the local pirs and dervish of the *akharas* and pushed for the name of Mehdi Hasan. But yet again the secretary of the managing committee Faqir Muhammad argued that Mehdi Hassan will not be able to handle the affairs of the shrine and the committee is managing it well. In 1994, Baba Mehdi Hasan was made the Khalifa of Manakpur Sharif after resolving the opposition posed by the *sajjada nishins* of shrine at Majri. It also came to light that

- a third claimant (not named) wanted to take over the shrine and Faqir Muhammad started interfering in the everyday matters of the shrine. Baba Mehdi Hasan confessed that it was becoming difficult for him to manage two people at the same time. Finally, Mehdi Hasan requested that the *pagri* (successorship) be handed over to Faqir Muhammad and he will wholeheartedly support him for *gaddi-nishini*.
- 70 The popular iconography of Gaus Pak narrates the story of a woman Rudi who on one occasion forgot to pay her donations for Gyarvi Sharif. In the same week, it was her son's wedding, and people invited on the wedding ceremony had to ferry across a river. As soon as the ferry took off, it started to sink. After watching this happening, the mother had so much depression that for 11 or 12 years, she kept wandering in a jungle. One day she met a faithful who queried her about the problem. After hearing the problem, he asked Rudi to raise her hands and supplicate to Allah. After supplication to Allah, the ferry that had sunk around 12 years ago started rising. Everyone except one emerged safe. The friend of Allah asked the woman, "Did you remember to donate generously toward the Gyarvi Sharif?" The woman replied "No". He told her that she should keep donating generously to Gyarvi Sharif. Narrating this tale people strongly recommend celebrations at Gyarvi Sharif on the eleventh day of every month. The story continues to be popular in east Punjab. In the backdrop of the image is the shrine of Gaus Pak at Baghdad. Rudi is praying to Gaus Pak and subsequently the saint rescues the ferry carrying her relatives.
- 71 Salim Muhammad, "Shrine of Shaikh Sadruddin at Malerkotla: History, Politics and Culture," in Singh and Gaur, *Sufism in Punjab*, 372–375.
- 72 Refer Image 57 in Snehi, "Replicating Memory, Creating Images."
- 73 Refer Image 59 in Snehi, "Replicating Memory, Creating Images."
- 74 Sufi Foundation of India, "Welcome to Sufi Foundation of India," <http://sufifoundationindia.com/Sufi/index.php> (accessed 18 February 2011).
- 75 Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes*, Vol. 1, 695.
- 76 "Gurdas Mann Live Baba Murad Shah," *YouTube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhq4TRs-Ac0 (accessed 18 February 2011).
- 77 Jürgen Wasim Frembgen, *The Friends of God: Sufi saints in Islam: Popular Poster Art from Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 136–137.
- 78 Ronie Parciack, "Islamic *deshbhakti*: Inscribing a Sufi Shrine into the Indian Nation-Space," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 48, 2 (2014): 269.
- 79 Frembgen, *The Friends of God*, 137.
- 80 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), cited in Jyotindra Jain, "Introduction: Image Mobility in India's Popular Culture," in *India's Popular Culture: Iconic Spaces and Fluid Images*, ed. Jyotindra Jain, 13 (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2007).
- 81 Frembgen, "Saints in Modern Devotional," 190.

EPILOGUE

Sites of memory

The absence of textual narratives complicates the task of exploration of popular Sufi shrines in post-partition Punjab. In the contours of Indian historiography, such shrines have long been peripheralized as a residue that lacked hagiographical accounts or any other major documented history of their existence. Yet these stood, sometimes lonely, often silently and perhaps the only witness to the partition of Punjab in 1947. At the same time, shrine spaces are imbued with memory of decades, sometime centuries, of visitation, veneration and association – both as a quotidian observer as well as guide to long stream of pilgrims and disciples. In the contours of post-partition contemporary (Indian) Punjab, popular Sufi shrines stand as the only testimony to social contours of the space pre-partition. Religious radicals have made several violent attempts to erase these remnants of the past, facilitating the electoral politics post-partition – a process of othering that has been very anxiously utilized to sustain the fragile nation-states in contemporary South Asia. However, twenty-first century Indian Punjab has not only witnessed continued existence but also the emergence of a new set of Sufi shrines that have been established and sustained by ‘non-Muslims’. This fascinating feature of contemporary Punjab, existing silently but significantly, had to be documented.

Prevailing tools of ‘modern’ historical scholarship, particularly methods to understand religious practices, were inept to chart the process of continued existence and also the emergence of a new set of popular Sufi shrines in Indian Punjab, intriguingly within a decade after violent militancy in the region. This work therefore ventured into some fascinating debates on dreams, memory, spatiality and circulation and argued that academic territorialization of religious practices hinders any objective exploration of the complexity of popular shrine spaces. Thus, focus on ‘practice’ involved decoding rituals, semiotics

and narratives around popular Sufi shrines. Significantly, despite their local embeddedness, these narratives were vibrantly connected to notions of power and sovereignty embedded in shrines – a worldview kept alive through pilgrimage and circulation. Increasingly, circulation of visuals has assumed a dominant form due to shrinking possibilities of pilgrimage to sacred spaces in Pakistan. Circulation was also mediated through the agency of dreams, visions and memories of saints and veneration, which often played a major role in setting up a new shrine or practices like *urs*. Amid the impossibility of crossovers in the historical landscape of Punjab, divided and sustained by heavily guarded borders, popular Sufi shrines emerge as significant ‘sites of memory’, particularly for the partition migrants to Indian Punjab. As a witness to the lived lives of Punjabis, they are like a critical historical connection to social space pre-partition.

The centrality of popular Sufi shrines in this book has also been foundational in broadening historical discourse and methods on the historiography of Punjab, one that centres its engagement with such sacred spaces that exist on the margins of ‘modernist’ religious discourses. I have attempted to invert the process of understanding Punjabi landscapes by foregrounding practice and quotidian milieus in the extant historical discourses of religion – which are predominantly informed by the reformist debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This spatialization of shrines and rituals play a significant role in the construction of an organic historical narrative – informed as much by the continuity as by change – thereby enriching the ‘practice’ of history. Sufi shrines also present a fascinating insight into the processes that societies forge to reconcile their violent past. These ‘sites of memory’ are forging reconciliation around the tragedy of Punjab’s partition, and therefore, offer an intriguing insight into ‘in the making’ processes of historical formations. This work has also attempted to construct a historical narrative of shrines beyond the binary tropes of secularity or conflict and therefore hopes to enrich crucial debates on shrines in contemporary India.

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