

Mystic Peregrination: Visualising the Tombs of Women Sufis

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Abstract

We began research on the dargahs (shrines) of two female Sufi saints of Delhi in October 2018. The project, funded by the Research Centre, Janki Devi Memorial College, Delhi University, was titled 'Barakat of the Sufi 'Mothers': Case Studies of the Mazars of Bibi Zulekha and Bibi Fatima.' It was an attempt to examine an area of relatively later focus in medieval and modern Indo-Islamic studies: the presence of women saints and the socio-religious praxis at their shrines. It was to be contextualised within the historical presence of Chisti Sufism in Delhi and how it has sustained as well as adapted to the evolving urban environment and forces of globalisation. As we visited each shrine, we began to capture the general milieu of the dargahs and the oral testimonies of relevant persons. One of the outcomes of this exercise was a two-part documentary titled Impeccable Heart. Subsequently, we also created a video/audio archive of the oral testimonies, with some of these being made accessible online. In our paper we will outline the process of undertaking ethnographic cum historical case studies and creating digital archives.

Keywords: barakat, dargahs, Islam, Sufism, gender, space

‘*When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning.*’ (Jean Baudrillard)

The paper outlines the travels and travails of a minor research project begun in October 2018 by a small team of trained historians and novice ethnographers. The project, funded by the Research Centre, Janki Devi Memorial College, Delhi University, began with the aim of examining the Sufi concept of *barakat* (blessings/ divine grace) and its association with the *dargahs* (tomb-shrines) of female Sufi saints. The saints in question are two women who achieved some status of reverence within Delhi, particularly within the Chisti Sufi order. They are Bibi Zulekha, mother of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, and Bibi Fatima Sama, a Sufi saint of obscure life-story but profoundly respected within the Chisti Sufi milieu. Our aim was to focus on a comparatively recent trend in medieval and modern Indo-Islamic studies, the presence of women saints and the socio-religious praxis at their shrines. This also involved tracing their references in Sufi hagiographies and memoirs contemporary to their lifespans, that is, the 13th century Delhi Sultanate. We aimed to further trace their memory over time, ending with the evolution of the veneration at their tomb-shrines as repositories of their accumulated spiritual prowess in the contemporary cosmopolis of Delhi. Thus, the research was conceived of as a multi-disciplinary project combining history, ethnographic study and gender studies. The inherently qualitative visual medium was found to be particularly appropriate for documenting our peregrinations into the world of the mystics. As we visited each shrine, we began filming the *mise-en-scène* of the *dargahs* and recording oral testimonies of relevant persons. Among the outcomes of this exercise was a two-part documentary titled *Impeccable Heart*¹ and the creation of a video/audio archive of the *dargahs*, with some samples being made accessible online.²

¹ View the preview at: <https://youtu.be/VDHvk2GmT3k>

² To view the samples, visit: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_peB8lZrfazYAtS-ZM8Zq6lcQXQw73kn

The odd ones out!

The seeds of our research were sown when a Muslim domestic aid wove convincing tales of a dargah of a woman saint, Mai Sahiba, in Adchini. Visiting her grave is believed to bring about desired results due to her powers of barakat. Such shrines of miracle-working mystic saints are popular sites of pilgrimage as they are connected with stories of miraculous events and special powers emanating from the tombs. This belief is based on the principle of contagious magic (Haviland *et al.* 2017: 313).³ My knowledge about Sufism at that time was rather superficial (as I realised later), rooted more in the popular renderings of their song-texts and a vague remembrance of medieval history course work I had undertaken as a student. Sufism was in vogue at that time among the Delhi glitterati and literati and was hailed as a glorious example of syncretism. The traditional Sufi predilection for *sama* (musical gatherings), which are considered beneficial for spiritual nourishment and a means of inducing a mystical state of ecstasy, has been pointed out as one of the main reasons for their visibility in popular culture till this day (Manzar 2006: 235–45). Women’s participation in the rituals of Sufi shrines in Pakistan and their renditions of *sufiana-kalam*, or Islamic mystical poetry, has been well researched (Abbas, 2002). We are witnessing the growing number of female qawwals and performers in Sufi settings, though the number of those who perform in intimate settings at established shrines remains low (Pemberton 2015). This shift towards an increasing presence of women in the more visible public arenas of mystical Islam is thought to reflect the ongoing socioeconomic changes that are impacting Sufis, as is the role of professional music and film industry in popularising qawwali (Pemberton 2015: 115).

³ That is, any material substance physically associated with a miraculous event or person itself becomes revered as holy or sacred.

There was also something deeper at work here since my roots went back to Punjab, which has retained its fascination for Islamic mysticism and the Punjabi communities, including the subaltern, had never really followed rigid religious boundaries at the ground level. I took this eclectic approach for granted, though studies have demonstrated the socio-cultural implications and historical processes connected with the intermingling of religious boundaries (Oberoi 1994: 12). The role of the various communities of Punjab has been examined in the continued patronage of sufi shrines and 21st century Punjab is said to have ‘experienced a resurgence of the practice of Saint veneration through the complex processes of dreams, memory, circulation of images and acculturation’, emphasising the discussion of religion in the realm of quotidian lived practices (Snehi 2019: 27, 84).⁴

I have been trained in ancient Indian history at the master’s level; my research was on Sanskrit narratives from the early medieval period. Nonetheless, after discussing with colleagues, we formed a small enthusiastic team from the History Department at Janki Devi Memorial College, Delhi University. This in addition to Smita Mitra as the modern period specialist and Khurshid Alam as the medievalist included other staff of the History Department and students to aid in the fieldwork.⁵ We also learnt about the tomb shrine of another female Sufi, Bibi Fatima Sam, which was located in Kaka Nagar in Delhi. This further fuelled our fascination and we were particularly keen to investigate the manner in which the notion of barakat was associated with these two shrines. Barakat, or ‘the intangible capacity of a saint to

⁴ Oberoi had questioned the use of the categories Muslim, Sikh and Hindu, suggesting that religious life of the people is marked by a continuum with inter-penetration and overlapping of communal identities.

⁵ All the students associated with us in the fieldwork, mostly between November 2018 and end 2019 went on to enjoy successful careers—Pooja is pursuing her MPhil from the History Department, University of Delhi on the History of Military Cantonments in Colonial Uttarakhand; Ankita Sadhukhan is working towards her MPhil from the History Department, University of Delhi on the History of Colonial Prisons in Bengal; Anjana M Nair is enrolled for a PhD from University of Hyderabad on Violence, Dissent and Punishment in the Light of Women’s Agency in Ancient India; Veena Kumari is a sub-inspector with Bihar Police (undertraining); Shalini is doing her LLB from IMS Law College; Anshika is preparing for competitive exams.

wield spiritual power', was supposed to be transmitted to the saint's descendants and also to their tomb (Eaton 1978: xxx). It is well known that the mother motif is of central significance in Islam and in the mystical tradition the soul is feminised, leading to 'bridal imagery', which characterises the tradition in Indic zones (Schimmel 1997: 21–23). Various studies have been conducted on the role of the feminine in mystical Islam and the role of women in religious healing, Sufi rituals and Sufi pilgrimage in modern context (Schimmel 1997; Elias 1988; Diaz 2015).

Our fieldwork was targeted towards the case studies of the two dargahs, but as we also wanted to bring out a comparative perspective, from November 2018 to February 2020 we undertook intense fieldwork at the tomb-shrines of other prominent saints of the Chisti order, within and outside of Delhi. To familiarise ourselves with the language of the texts and context, Smita and I registered at the Persian language course offered by the Persian Studies Center, Iran Culture House, New Delhi. This also formed our connection with the Center and the director, Dr Ehsanollah Shokrollahi, who found our task very noble and consented to aid us in our research work. I went on to do five levels of the Persian language course, including completing three levels online during the Covid-19 pandemic and its 'work-from-home' phenomenon.

Our preliminary investigations also brought us in contact with two persons who would be instrumental to the research centred on the shrines of the two holy women. We met the *mutawalli* (person appointed to manage the *waqf*) of Bibi Fatima Sama's dargah, Haji Baba Adbul Rashid, on our preliminary excursion to the dargah situated in Kaka Nagar. Likewise, on our first visit to Mai Sahiba's dargah we met Dr Syed Ali Nizami, *sajjada-nashin* (caretaker) and founder of the Nizamia Charitable Trust. The research work would have clearly been lacking without these two pious, simple and dedicated men. However, the pandemic stalled our work and in 2021 we had to

deal with the unfortunate loss of Smita Mitra, one of our principal investigators. Her contribution towards the research remains invaluable, especially due to her exceptional organisational skills and capability to bring together a motley crew. Her interactive conversational acumen was very useful in the fieldwork to build rapport with others.⁶ After the Covid-19 hiatus, we were determined to complete the task and undertook some more field enquiries between January and March 2022. This was undertaken by Khurshid and me, with a simultaneous mix of poignancy and increased piety.

When we began our fieldwork and undertook the preliminary historiographical recce, we found various scattered papers, historical enquiries and anthropological and urban studies that included a study on women mystics and an odd work that focused solely on women mystics in the sub-continent and their continued reverence (Pemberton 2015). There were also some recent works on the practices at the dargahs and the textual representation of the two women saints that we sought for our case studies (Kakar 2006; Khan 2017).

Cultural-historical anthropology and the visual medium of research have been established fields of research since a few decades. Our methodology assumed that we would 'learn from the field' since in sociology and social anthropology there is no specific tool kit that can be given to researchers, instead they choose the appropriate tools from the available repertoire of methods and techniques and modify them or supplement the standard procedure in light of the situation they encounter. (Srivastava 2004: 3). To unravel culture, understood as practice and meaning, textual, historical and ethnographic analysis have been considered indistinguishable and mutually sustaining (Dirks 2015: 70). Ethnography itself is a type of fieldwork, or first-hand study of people, that uses participant observation and/or interviews as the

⁶ I was quite unaware about the extent to which ethnographers can become invested in fieldwork and form bonds with the 'subject', people and spaces.

main research methods (Giddens and Sutton 2021). The move towards history and practice was motivated by the ‘sense that studies of meaning had become too aestheticized, too abstracted from the everyday contexts in which meanings are produced, reproduced, and manipulated’ (Dirks 2015: 111). Our research pertained to the site of ritual action as an aspect of urbanity, contextualising the undercurrent of female reverence in Islamic praxis in Delhi, while understanding that Sufi mysticism underwent changes over time.

The Interior Voice

I (Khurshid Alam) would like to share my experience of visiting the dargahs of Delhi. I come from a Sunni Muslim family, yet my parents were strong believers in Sufism. They had deep faith in the Pir-o-Murshid tradition and the *karamat* (miracle) of Sufis dargahs. My mother used to visit the shrines of *buzurgane din* (saints) of my hometown. Like my entire family, I too have developed faith in Sufism and love to visit dargahs and shrines of Sufi saints. Luckily, my senior colleagues, late Ms Smita Mitra and Dr Tara Sheemar got an opportunity to work on female Sufi saints of Delhi and included me in this wonderful project. For the first time in my life, I visited the dargah of Hazrat Bibi Zuleikha, popularly known as Mai Sahiba, one of the favourite destinations of believers in Delhi as well as outside Delhi.

When I visited the dargah for the *Urs* (annual ritual), I became very emotional and started believing in the miracles of Bibi Zuleikha. Everyone who had come for the Urs was talking about the power and miracles of Bibi Zuleikha. *Zaireen* (devotees) not only visit the dargah every Wednesday to seek *barakat*, but also visit it to attend the monthly and annual ritualistic celebrations. The only point of distinction is that at this dargah Wednesdays, not

Thursdays, are considered to be auspicious for visiting. This may be because the great Shaikh perhaps used to visit here on this day or maybe it is because he was born on a Wednesday. Hundreds of people gather here with sweets and cooked biryani, *zarda* (sweet rice) etc, and distribute them among the visitors. We spoke to them about the purpose of their visit and they shared the *mannatein* (wishes) fulfilled by visiting the dargah and several stories about the miracles of Mai Sahiba.

One Wednesday, during our visit to the dargah I went to the *wazu khana* for ablution (*wazu*, the act of washing yourself clean) and found a two thousand rupees note there. Thinking that it is a fake note thrown by a child, I left it there. When we were seated with Imam sahib for an interview, a woman came with that very note and told the Imam sahib that she had found it in the *wazu khana*. He told her that it was hers to keep. I realised then that the note was a *barakah* from Mai Sahiba which I could not receive because I did not take the note. Since that incident, I have become very emotionally attached to Bibi Zuleikha's dargah.

I started reading about her and found that Bibi Zuleikha was a remarkable lady with an evolved personality. Though she was born in a prominent family, she had to face hardships due to changed circumstances, which she bore with great patience (Kakar 2006). Instead of complaining or breaking down, she became inured to suffering and instead became very pious and resigned to the will of God. I learnt that she had moulded her son's thoughts and personality through her own example, displaying qualities of endurance and moral excellence, especially in the midst of adversities. Her only obsession in life was to educate her son to the best possible extent. The deprivation, fasting and struggle ended with her untimely death and she did not live to see her son attain a glorious status when he would host food distribution for hundreds every day in the community kitchens of his *khanqah* (hospice), instead of himself being a 'guest of

God'.⁷ Bibi used to prophesise about her son's bright future by looking at his feet, but when he questioned about its timing, she would reply with a sense of premonition, 'When I am dead' (Kakar 2006).

People from all communities visit her dargah in large numbers and offer prayers and perform rituals. This is a very good example of the composite culture of India. The dargah is similar to that of most Chisti saints: male *khadims* (attendants) perform the services inside the tomb and recite the *fatiha* (prayer), the annual death anniversary celebrations include washing the *ghusl-e-mazar* (grave), offering sandalwood paste and rose petals, performance of instrumental music and the distribution of *tabarukat* (food sharing)(Kakar 2006). The architecture of the tomb is very simple. There is no dome on Mai Sahiba's tomb, the wall is plastered and painted white. There is a mosque adjacent to the tomb and in between the two buildings there is a small room where she used to do *ibadat* (prayer) of the Almighty. The tomb and the mosque have recently been renovated. There are many stories about the tea and other foods served there. There is no charge for this because these are paid with the money found early in the morning in the dargah.⁸ This is one of the miracles of Mai Sahiba. People have faith and high regard for her not only because she was Nizamuddin Auliya's mother but also because she herself was very holy, pious and saintly. You can feel the simplicity and serenity when you visit the dargah.

Bibi Fatima Sam's dargah is located in Kaka Nagar, Delhi. We met the mutawalli of the dargah who patiently answered all our questions about Bibi. This dargah is one of the cleanest and most serene dargahs of Delhi. It used to consist of a simple roof built over her grave. The

⁷ Bibi Zulekha would tell her son that they were 'guests of God' on the days when there was nothing to eat at home (Kakar 2006).

⁸ This is an oral narrative of the tea server and the Imam of the mosque attached to the dargah.

modern building, which is a big hall with smooth marble flooring, is credited to be built by a businessman from Daryaganj. In the 13th century, the dargah used to be on the outskirts of Inderpat village, near the Nakhas Gate of Delhi.⁹ It was a sprawling complex that had a mosque attached to it as well as a small pond. Bibi Fatima Sam was a very pious lady and Baba Farid and Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya often came to her dargah when they wanted complete peace.

The Chishti Sufi saints of 13th and 14th centuries have mentioned Bibi Fatima Sam in their *malfuzat* (*table-talk*). According to a recent paper, they sanctified Bibi Fatima Sam as a saint and role model through specific literary tropes and rhetorical devices to motivate and encourage women to take to the mystic path (Khan 2017). Shaikh Nizamuddin, commending her asceticism, devotion and spiritual achievements, invoked the words of his spiritual master, Fariduddin, to state that actually Bibi Fatima Sam was a man who was sent in the form of a woman (Khan 2017).¹⁰ Shaikh Nizamuddin also said that when a lion roams in the jungle no one asks whether it is male or female (Khan 2017).¹¹ Others have shown how spiritually gifted women are equated with being a man in Sufi circles (Pemberton 2015: 21–26) and in the literature gender reversal among the early Sufis also included expressing the seeking soul (of the disciple/*murid*) in the feminine.

Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya fondly described his frequent visits and interactions with her. He recounted that Bibi Fatima Sam was quite advanced in age when he met her. He was taken in by her skill as a poetess and recounted that she could instantly compose and recite apt couplets for every occasion. The Shaikh on account of his proximity to her, recollected and recited one of her couplets (Khan 2017):

⁹ <https://ranasafvi.com/dargah-of-fatima-bin-sam/> (accessed on 4 December 2022)

¹⁰ *An Zan* (Fatima Bin Sam) *mardist ke o ra ke dar surat i zanan furastadah and.*

¹¹ *Shir az bisheh birun ayad kasi napursad ke in shir nar ast wa madah.*

(Hum Ishq talab kuni jan khwahi

Her duw talbi wali moyassar nashawad)

You desire both love and life.

But they cannot be gotten together.

The manner in which the Chishti Shaikhs memorialised and eulogised Bibi Fatima Sam suggests that her image was to initiate women into their fold. It appears that by referring to her, the Shaikhs were trying to appropriate her spiritual legacy to perpetuate and propagate the Chishti tariqa (Khan 2017). This claim becomes manifest from the manner in which Nasiruddin cited the example of Bibi Fatima Sam's rigorous devotion and discipline to illustrate that a Sufi is a *al sufi ibn-al waqt* (master of time). For Shaikh Nizamuddin it seems that Bibi Fatima Sam was not just an individual exemplar for women initiates but was also an excellent exemplar for all Sufis – open to emulation by men and women. The early Chishti Shaikhs not only helped in building her charisma and myths for their adherents but also transmitted the same by memorialising her as a paragon to be emulated in the broader Chishti tradition. The larger purpose on the part of the Sufi Shaikhs was to demonstrate how women could take to mysticism and excel in spirituality. This broadens the scope and relevance of Bibi Fatima from her initial estimation as an exemplar for individual women to emulate.

Author Sadia Dehlvi writes: 'Bibi Fatima Sam died on 17 Shaban 644 Hijri/1246 AD. She is called the Rabia of Delhi, after Rabia of Basra, the famous mystic of the eighth century'.¹²

The Chistiyya Redux

¹² <https://ranasafvi.com/dargah-of-fatima-bin-sam/> (accessed on 4 December 2022)

The Chisti order can be described as ‘a complex of spiritual practice, historical memory, and ethical models, which continues to evolve from its medieval Islamic origins in response to the political, ideological, and technological transformations of the contemporary world’ (Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 1–3). It had been called the experience of spiritual remembrance of God, along with embedded historical memory of the lineage of previous masters. Among the dominant traits found in nearly every medieval Sufi *shaykh* (leader) is the emphasis on the role of the mother in the formative years of education (Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 71). Women disciples were admitted to the Chisti fold and in their initiation the master used a special procedure where the woman placed her hand in a cup of water to avoid inappropriate physical contact (generally for male disciples the master would clasp his hand), after which the master would put his own hand in the water (Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 25). While they allowed women considerable space in the religiosity but not in the formal memorialisation, which is visible in the *shijra* (lineage/family tree). The space of the shrines became a centre of elite and non-elite women’s devotional practices very early in Indo–Islamic history since women were not allowed in the more male-centred domains of the mosque (Abbas 2002: 131).

The relation between religious beliefs and practices and urban forms — of settlement, infrastructure economy and social organisation — has become the focus of intense scholarly attention over the past two decades. This is partly due to the ‘worldwide resurgence of religion’ and emergence of ‘post-secular’ societies, which refer to the return of religion to public life from its private haven. (Chaudhuri 2022: 1–12). Urban sociologists attempt to understand the specifically urban character of religious ideas, practices and institutions and the role of urban space in shaping ‘urban religion’ with emphasis on concepts such as agency, aspiration, spatial

imagination, and appropriation. Attention has been drawn to the multiple religions that are embedded in contemporary Indian urbanisation involving agents and communities who bring a range of religious imaginations and practices to the city (Chaudhuri 2022: 1–12). Thus, the emphasis is on examining the ‘lived’ religion of Indian cities and how ritual performance and centres produced specific ‘mediations of the space of the city and its markets’ while they constructed memories of older places and the sacred (Srinivas quoted by Chaudhuri).

The role of the Chisti Sufis in carving out a *modus vivendi* (reflected in music, painting, architecture, growth and development of vernacular literature, and evolution of ‘syncretistic’ communities that incorporated beliefs and practices common to Islam and other religious currents) in the medieval environment of Delhi has been remarked upon (Aquil 2022: 48–61). The Sufis are seen as playing an important role in shaping political culture and controlling the involvement of religion in it. Opening the doors of their hospices and shrines to all sections of people meant creating a spiritual space where boundaries could be crossed. These shaped the liberal heterogeneous character of the city, which is visible in the various regular festivals and ceremonies at the shrines. The 21st century is supposed to be marked by ‘self-ascription’ and it has been suggested that the wave of Chistiyya may benefit from cyberspace as it earlier benefitted from print technology; they may shift from print to ‘Net Sufism’ (Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 143–144).

The research was particularly about the rituals and ritual occasions in urban spaces earmarked for the purpose. Rituals are significant sites that construct or reconstruct the fundamentals of culture, including the cultural construction of authority and the ‘dramatic display of the social lineaments of power’ (Dirks 2015: 116). A two-way interchange is seen to lie at the ‘heart of many social processes’, that is, the micro-level social encounters and the

macro level of social institutions (Giddens and Sutton 2021). The vicissitudes of Sufi shrines have been demonstrated in the study of the two Sufi shrines of Delhi (Kumar 2016), which also serve to show the ‘structuration process’¹³ (Giddens,1984: xvi–xxii) in operation at sites that are ‘liminal’¹⁴ (Haviland *et al.* 2017: 313). Group identities have a diminished role in urban areas but are often over communicated in context of interaction (Eriksen 2001: 247). In our research, we aimed to examine the manner in which the identities were expressed in the public rituals of the Sufi shrines.

Studies have shown how some Sufi shrines developed while others went into oblivion, emphasising the role and ability of the caretakers, who take over the shrine and build its reputation through storytelling, establishment of rituals and draw upon established modes of Sufi discourse, for example, the mention of dreams (Sunil Kumar 2016). An enquiry into the role women played in the Sufi orders and the ‘lived religion’ they experienced daily has been placed within the larger prescriptive discourses devised by male religious Muslim elites who reconstructed Islamic womanhood that allowed women, especially female relatives of the presiding pirs, to participate and exercise ritual agency and authority (Pemberton 2015). It emphasises ambiguous speech and nonspeech (language of the body—body movements, gestures, deportments) as communicative social acts inscribed with cultural meaning, allowing communication between actors of different genders.

Collection of data via the visual medium had been an integral part of our research, and though originally begun as a personal endeavour of mine, one of the outcomes of the research process was the aforementioned documentary. Our early 2022 research coincided with the audio-

¹³ The manner in which the ‘structure’ (of the tomb, of Islam, of Sufism etc) and ‘action’ (of individuals, women saints, visitors to the dargahs, the *sajjadas*, etc) are related to each other.

¹⁴ Sacred sites are in a transitional or liminary zone between the natural and supernatural, the secular and spiritual, earth and heaven.

visual editing of the documentary, which was completed in May 2022. The videos themselves are much more expansive and demonstrate the depth and insight of the research and they constitute an archive on the subject matter. The appropriateness of the visual medium for anthropological research has been recognised since quite a while and the ethnographic films of various anthropologists are testimony to the effectiveness of visuals as an incomparable medium (Haviland *et al.* 2017: 66).¹⁵ It has been noted that in recent years researchers are making use of digital technologies and devices to document certain areas of social life (Giddens and Sutton 2021). Perhaps the visual medium can best capture the ‘ambiguous speech and nonspeech’ of the actors and demonstrate the subjectivity of the medium.

Whatever be the issues with the visual documentation, one cannot deny that in the age of digitisation when the humanities have taken to integrating research and documentation methods with digital technology, visuals will sustain as research methods along with other field methods of anthropology, all of which face issues connected with representation — something akin to an altering of the ‘reality’, of a purported ‘actuality’, by the subjects of study as well as the filtering that comes about through the medium of the researcher (Ruby 2000: 4).¹⁶ Thus, the reflexivity of the researcher has become more and more significant as a multifaceted concept that requires the researcher to systematically and rigorously reveal their methods and themselves as the instrument of data generation and ‘reflect upon how the medium through which they transmit

¹⁵ Also check the site of Documentary Educational Resources at <https://www.der.org/> (accessed on 20 November 2022), detailing the rich collection of documentary resources available as an archive of the peoples, cultures and identities of the world.

¹⁶ Questions of voice, authority and authorship are a serious concern for cultural anthropologists in context of the relationship between ethnographic and documentary filmmakers and the people they film.

their work predisposes readers/viewers to construct the meaning of the work in certain ways' (Ruby 2000: 152–54).¹⁷

Visual research has been seen as an 'actively, and perhaps inherently, collaborative project between image maker and image subjects' (Banks 2001: 112). Most anthropologists and sociologists recognise that social knowledge is a processual aspect of human social relations, not a static thing to be discovered and seized. The multivocality of visual images means that they can address different audiences in quite different ways, creating a 'problem of audiences' (Banks 2001: 140). A variety of film strategies have been proposed, including insertion of analysis into the text of the film itself, inserting anthropological analysis directly into the internal narrative of the film in formalist ways or recourse to 'participatory cinema', that is, to encourage the film's subjects to speak for themselves (Banks 2001:150).

Everyday religion also engages in *place making*, the continuous claiming or appropriation, often subaltern and non-elite, through material signs and tokens. Lefevbre called this lived space as *l'espace vécu* (Chaudhuri 2022: 1–12). Julia Kristeva remarked that 'we live in a dislocated chronology, and there is as yet no concept that will make sense of this modern, dislocated experience of temporality', and Proust creates a world where the readers can discover a coherence between time and space, and their dreams can be realised (Kristeva 1993: 4, 6). This, according to her, is a place that is sadly lacking in modern reality. In our opinion, this unity of space and time is experienced by the visitor to the tombs, an experience of life in death, a coalescence of space, time and memory. We are sharing some of the visuals of this 'lived space' of the dargahs with the readers in the hope that they will speak for themselves.

¹⁷ This involves the producer→process→product→reader/viewer in a relationship begun with a self-conscious revelation by the producer to the audience of the process employed and the resultant product.

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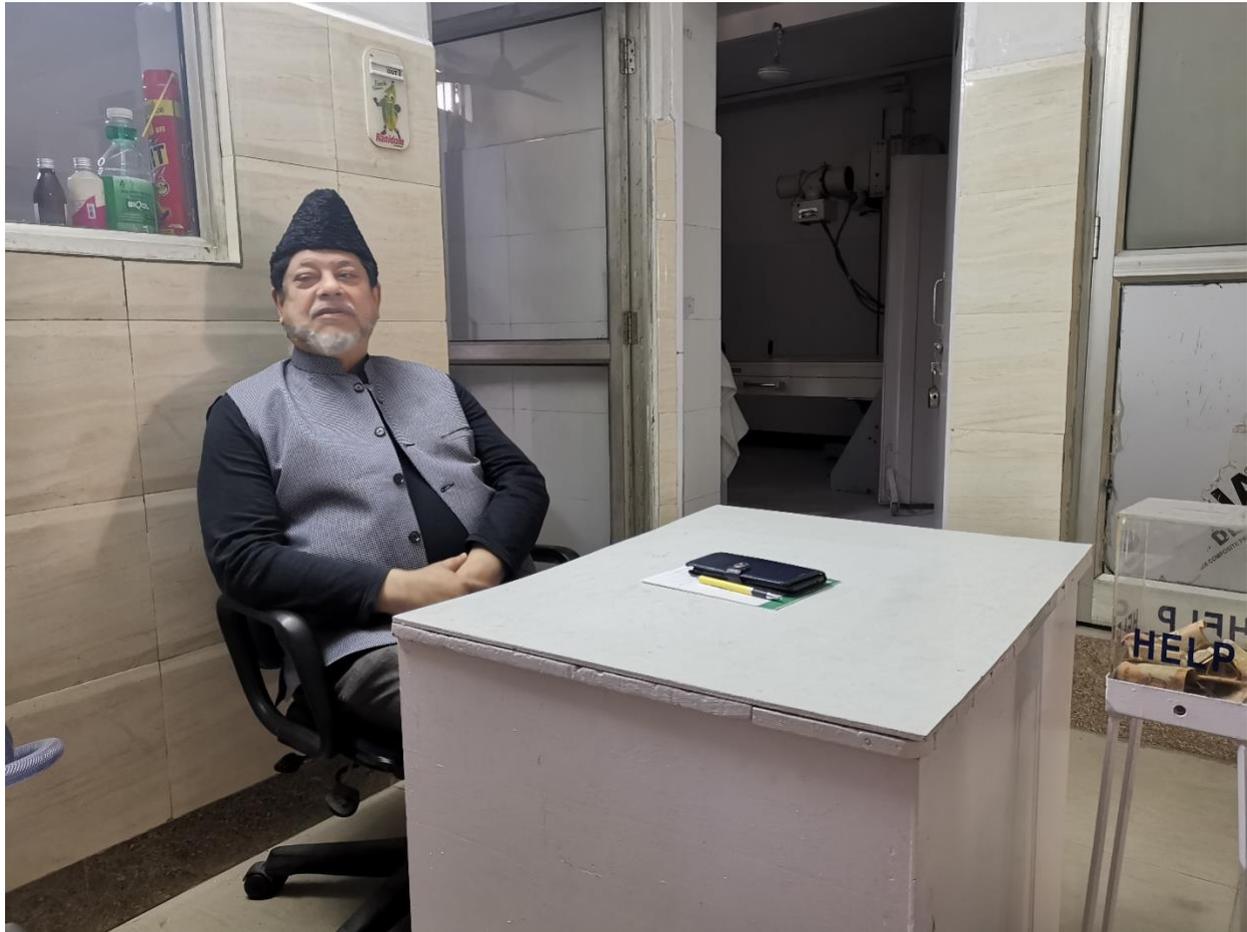


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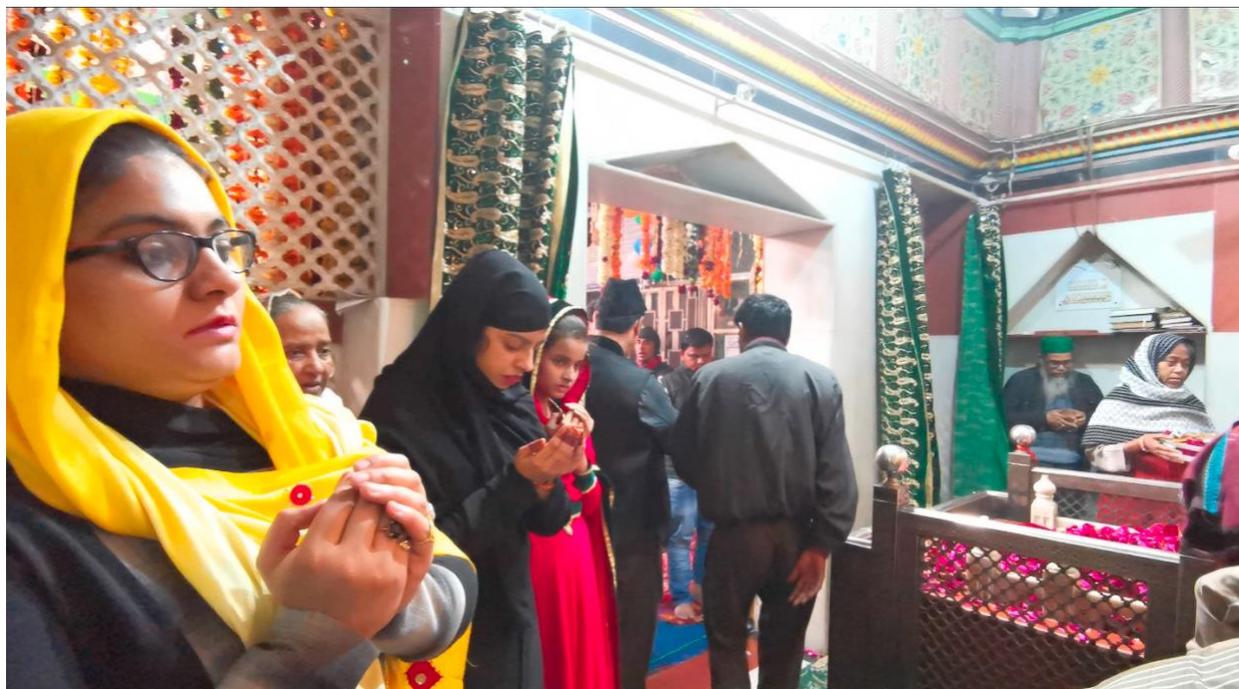


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