



SACRED WORLDS

AN ANALYSIS OF MYSTICAL MASTERY OF NORTH INDIAN *FAQIRS*

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DECLARATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGES
<u>LIST OF FIGURES</u>	v
<u>LIST OF PLATES</u>	v
<u>LIST OF MAPS</u>	vi
<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>	vii
<u>ABSTRACT</u>	viii
<u>CHAPTER ONE : SACRED COSMOS: DOMAINS OF MYSTICAL MASTERY</u>	1
METHODOLOGY	2
ETHNOGRAPHY OF NIZAMUDDIN SHRINE AND <i>BASTI</i>	7
THE <i>BASTI</i>	9
SUFISM: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF <i>FAQIRS</i> IN INDIA	10
THEORETICAL ISSUES: ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES OF SUFISM	14
INTERSUBJECTIVE DOMAINS OF MASTERY	16
STRATEGIES FOR REAUTHORING THE SELF	19
CONCEPTIONS OF THE "OTHER"	21
STRUCTURE OF THESIS	25
<u>CHAPTER TWO: MYSTICAL IDENTITIES AND AMBIGUOUS BODIES</u>	29
INTRODUCTION	29
A PARADOXICAL DOMAIN	31
MYSTERIOUS WAYS	33
STRIKING BODIES: <i>FAQIR</i> AND <i>CHISTI PIR</i>	36
PROLOGUES INTO VISCERAL DOMAINS: ANDROGYNISING THE FIELD-WORKER	39
ANDROGYNOUS DIMENSIONS	40
JUST LIKE A WOMAN: JOURNEYS INTO ALTERITY	42
ROSARY AND STAFF: EXCESSIVE SYMBOLS AND ONTOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES	44
THE "JALALI" <i>FAQIR</i> AND THE "JAMALI" <i>CHISTI PIR</i>	47
THE "INVISIBLE" <i>FAQIR</i> AND VISIBLE <i>CHISTI PIR</i> : MARGINAL IDENTITIES AND ELUSIVE BEINGS	51
THE KINASTHETICS OF AMBIGUITY AND BEAUTY	53
PERIPHERAL WORLDS	55
CONCLUSION	58
<u>CHAPTER THREE: ATTAINING THE MYSTICAL BODY: EXPLORATIONS IN SENSUOUS AWARENESS</u>	60
INTRODUCTION	60
"HERE! LOOK AT MY BODY"	62
<i>NAFS</i> : REQUIEM OF THE BODY	63
<i>KHALWAT</i> AND THE SEQUESTERING OF THE SELF	68
TEXTURES OF FASTING	73
I FEEL WORDS IN MY BODY	75
AN ENCHANTED LANDSCAPE: SENSUOUS AWARENESS IN SACRED DOMAINS	82
VISION	90
TOUCH	93
TASTE	95
SMELL	96
HEARING	99
CONCLUSION	102
<u>CHAPTER FOUR: JOURNEYS INTO IMAGINING: MYSTERIOUS BEINGS AND AMBIGUOUS WORLDS</u>	103

INTRODUCTION	103
TYPES OF SPIRIT BEINGS: THE SAINTS	105
THE <i>JINN</i>	110
POWER AND PREJUDICE: APPROPRIATION OF HINDU SYMBOLS IN THE MORAL UNIVERSE OF THE NIZAMUDDIN <i>BASTI</i>	116
CONTESTING THE SPIRITS: SOCIAL CHANGE, FEAR, AND RE-NEGOTIATING THE <i>BASTI</i>	121
LIFE-WORLD	134
THE SHRINE AS MORAL UNIVERSE: AMBIGUOUS SPIRITS AND SACRED DOMAINS	138
CONCLUSION	

CHAPTER FIVE: TALES OF MASTERY: MUWAKIL IN FAQIRS' RELIGIOUS

<u>IMAGINATION</u>	140
INTRODUCTION	140
<i>MUWAKIL</i>	141
BIOGRAPHY OF BABA ALI	150
SPEAKING WITH <i>MUWAKIL</i>	153
BIOGRAPHY OF AHMAD SHAH	156
CONCLUSION	160

CHAPTER SIX: MAINTAINING THE MYSTIQUE: THE UNVEILING OF STRANGE ORACLES

INTRODUCTION	162
STRANGE ORACLES	164
INTERPRETING HIDDEN DOMAINS	169
DIVINATION AS MYSTICAL MASTERY: DIVINATION APPROACHES OF TWO <i>FAQIRS</i> : BABA ALI'S DIVINATION APPROACH	173
NEEMA	174
NEEMA'S SECOND VISIT	180
MUSLIM MAN	182
NAZIM BABA'S DIVINATION APPROACH	183
FIVE PEOPLE	185
ANALYSIS OF BABA ALI'S AND NAZIM BABA'S DIVINATION APPROACHES	187
CONCLUSION	191

CHAPTER SEVEN: PULEETA: ICONIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE INNER AND OUTER COSMOS

INTRODUCTION	193
NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL AFFLICTIONS: THEORY OF ILLNESS AND CURE	196
EXORCISM RITUAL ONE	213
EXORCISM RITUAL TWO	214
SYMBOLISM OF <i>PULEETA</i> : INVOKING THE SACRED	216
THE COSMIC UNFOLDING OF NUMERALS	232
THE BREATH AND WIND (AIR) AS CARRIERS OF MIND	242
SACRED TIME IN <i>ILLO TEMPORE</i> : THE BATTLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL	245
CONCLUSION	248

CHAPTER EIGHT: SPEAKING WITH THE SAINTS: HUKM AS A CREATIVE SOURCE OF FAQIRS' MYSTICAL EXPRESSION

INTRODUCTION	250
<i>HUKM</i> : THE EMBODIMENT OF THE INVISIBLE IN THE VISIBLE	253
SOCIAL CONTEXT OF <i>NARA</i>	257
<i>NARA</i> : MYSTICAL EXPRESSION AND THE RUPTURING OF BEING	258
" <i>USNE PIYAR KA IZHAR KIYA</i> :" GESTURE AS THE UNFOLDMENT OF DIVINE TRUTH	264
<i>SALAMI KARNA</i> : MYSTICAL GESTURES AS EXPRESSIONS OF <i>HUKM</i>	266
<i>AANA</i> : ("TO COME")	266

<i>BEKARAREE</i> (“AGITATION” “INTENSE DESIRE”)	267
<i>DEKHO</i> (“TO SEE”)	270
<i>AAMNE-SAAMNE</i> (“FACE TO FACE”)	271
<i>SHIKAYAT</i> (“TO COMPLAIN”)	272
<i>HAQIQAT IZHAR KARNA</i> (“TO SHOW THE TRUTH”)	273
<i>UDASI</i> (“SADNESS” “MELANCHOLY”)	274
<i>SUNNLAR</i> AND <i>SHUKRIYA</i> (“TO LISTEN” AND “THANKFULNESS”)	276
<i>DUA</i> (“PRAYER”)	278
<i>SOCH</i> (“TO THINK”)	280
CREATIVE EXPRESSION AND MYSTICAL MASTERY	282
CONCLUSION	284

CHAPTER NINE: DOMAINS OF MASTERY **286**

<u>APPENDIX I</u>	292
THE SHRINE OF NIZAMUDDIN AULIYA	292

<u>APPENDIX II</u>	293
<i>KHILJI</i> MOSQUE	293

<u>APPENDIX III</u>	293
TOMB OF AMIR KHOSRAU	293

<u>APPENDIX IV</u>	295
DIVINE ATTRIBUTES (<i>ASMĀ UL-HUSNA</i>)	295

<u>APPENDIX V</u>	296
TAXONOMY OF SPIRIT BEINGS	296
<i>JANN</i>	296
<i>PARI</i>	296
LAILA MAIMUNA	296
LAILA MALIKA	296
KHWAJA KHUR HAYAT	297
QAWIZ/KAWIZ	297
CHINAL	298
MARID	298
IFRIT	298
CHALAWA	298
BHATAKTI ATMA	298
MAHAKALI	299
<i>GHUL</i>	300

<u>APPENDIX VI</u>	300
PHARMACOPEIA	300
<i>ASHAKTI</i> /WEAKNESS: REMEDY 1	301
<i>ASHAKTI</i> /WEAKNESS: REMEDY 2	300
BODY ACHES/STIFFNESS: REMEDY 1	301
BODY ACHES/STIFFNESS: REMEDY 2	301
BODY ACHES/STIFFNESS: REMEDY 3	301
BOILS	301
BROKEN BONES	301
CIRCULATION	301

COLD/COUGH: REMEDY 1	302
COLD/COUGH: REMEDY 2	302
COLD/COUGH: REMEDY 3	302
CONSTIPATION	302
DIABETES: REMEDY 1	302
DIABETES: REMEDY 2	302
ERECTION/PROLONGED	302
HAIR STRENGTHENER	303
IMPOTENCY	303
JAUNDICE: REMEDY 1	303
JAUNDICE: REMEDY 2	303
JAUNDICE: REMEDY 3	303
LOOSE MOTIONS OF BOWELS	304
LOW BLOOD PRESSURE	304
MASSAGE OIL/MAKING OF	304
MISCARRIAGE: REMEDY 1	304
MISCARRIAGE: REMEDY 2	304
PARALYSIS	304
PILES: REMEDY 1	304
PILES: REMEDY 2	305
STOMACH WORMS	305
TOOTHACHE	305
WHITE SPOTS ON SKIN/LEUCODEMA	305

APPENDIX VII **305**

CLASSIFICATION OF SPIRITUAL ILLNESSES	305
ASRAT	305
JHAPTA	306
DIET AND <i>WAZIFA</i>	307
<i>ASEB</i>	307
MAJNUN	307
<i>GARHAN</i> AND MYTHOPOIESIS OF <i>MAJNUN</i>	309
MADZUB	310
GHAIB	310

APPENDIX VIII **311**

CHART OF NUMERICAL CORRESPONDENCES OF ARABIC LETTERS	311
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GLOSSARY **312**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **317**

<u>LIST OF FIGURES</u>	REFERENCE PAGE
FIGURE 4.1: DIAGRAM OF SITES WHERE SPIRIT BEINGS EXIST AT THE <i>BASTI</i>	131
FIGURE 6.1: DIVINATION SQUARE	176
FIGURE 6.2: DIVINATION SQUARE	176
FIGURE 6.3: DIVINATION SQUARE	177
FIGURE 6.4: DIVINATION SQUARE	177
FIGURE 6.5: DIVINATION SQUARE	178
FIGURE 6.6: DIVINATION SQUARE	178
FIGURE 6.7: DIVINATION SQUARE	179
FIGURE 7.1: HOUSEHOLD TALISMAN	203
FIGURE 7.2: <i>PULEETA</i>	219
FIGURE 7.3: <i>PULEETA</i>	221

FIGURE 7.4: <i>PULEETA</i>	226
FIGURE 7.5: MAGIC SQUARE	230
FIGURE 7.6: <i>PULEETA</i>	238
FIGURE 7.7: MAGIC SQUARE	239
FIGURE 7.8: MAGIC SQUARE	240
FIGURE 7.9: MAGIC SQUARE	241
FIGURE 7.10: <i>PULEETA</i>	245
FIGURE 7.11: <i>PULEETA</i>	247
FIGURE 7.12: <i>PULEETA</i>	247

LIST OF PLATES

	REFERENCE PAGE
PLATE 1.1A: SHRINE OF NIZAMUDDIN AULIYA	8
PLATE 1.1B: SHRINE OF NIZAMUDDIN AULIYA	8
PLATE 1.2: NIZAMUDDIN <i>BASTI</i>	9
PLATE 2.1: <i>FAQIRS</i> AT THE NIZAMUDDIN SHRINE	36
PLATE 2.2: WELL KNOWN <i>CHISTI PIRS</i>	37
PLATE 2.3: <i>SUHAGAN FAQIR</i> DISPLAYING ATTIRE	41
PLATE 2.4: <i>FAQIR</i> WEARING VEIL DURING MEDITATION	43
PLATE 2.5: THE <i>FAQIR</i> NAZIM BABA	45
PLATE 2.6A: <i>FAQIRS</i> DISPLAYING CLUB AND ROSARY	46
PLATE 2.6B: <i>FAQIRS</i> SITTING OUTSIDE NIZAMUDDIN <i>CHILLA</i>	46
PLATE 2.7A: <i>CHISTI PIR</i> GIVING BLESSED FOOD TO DEVOTEES	50
PLATE 2.7B: <i>CHISTI PIR</i> OFFERING BLESSED ROSE WATER TO DEVOTEES	50
PLATE 2.8: <i>CHISTI PIR</i> BLESSING DEVOTEES	54
PLATE 2.9: <i>FAQIR</i> SITTING IN FEMALE AREA OF <i>KHILJI</i> MOSQUE	56
PLATE 2.10: <i>HUJRA</i> OF <i>CHISTI PIRS</i>	56
PLATE 2.11: SPATIAL DISTANCES OF <i>FAQIRS</i> AND <i>CHISTI PIRS</i>	57
PLATE 2.12: <i>CHISTI PIR</i> AT HIS <i>HUJRA</i>	57
PLATE 3.1: <i>CHILLA</i> OF NIZAMUDDIN	87
PLATE 4.1: <i>SAMSHAT GHAT</i>	116
PLATE 4.2: <i>PANC BIRAN KABRASTAN</i>	116
PLATE 4.3: WALL SEPARATING <i>SAMSHAT GHAT</i> AND <i>PANC BIRAN KABRASTAN</i>	117
PLATE 4.4: <i>SHIV MANDIR</i>	119
PLATE 4.5: <i>JINN WALI</i> MOSQUE	128
PLATE 4.6: SHRINE OF SAYYED MUHAMMAD NUR BADUNI	128
PLATE 4.7: <i>KALI</i> MOSQUE	129
PLATE 4.8: <i>CHAUSATH KHAMBA</i>	130
PLATE 4.9A: SCENES OF THE <i>BASTI</i>	132
PLATE 4.9B: MORE SCENES OF THE <i>BASTI</i>	132
PLATE 4.10: <i>MAQBOOL JAALI</i>	134
PLATE 4.11: THE <i>BAOLI</i>	134
PLATE 4.12: THE TILTING GRAVE OF KHWAJA ABDUL REHMAN	135
PLATE 4.13: TOMB OF ATEGHA KHAN	136
PLATE 4.14: COMMERCIAL PRACTICES AT THE NIZAMUDDIN SHRINE COMPLEX	137
PLATE 7.1A: NAZIM BABA LAYING HIS HANDS ON FEMALE PATIENT	197
PLATE 7.1B: NAZIM BABA PLACING PAPER TALISMAN IN BOTTLE	199
PLATE 7.1C: PATIENT DRINKING FROM BOTTLE	199
PLATE 8.1: <i>FAQIRS</i> SMOKING <i>CHILLUM</i>	259
PLATE 8.2: <i>FAQIR</i> PERFORMING <i>NARA</i> , JULY 1995	262
PLATE 8.3: <i>AANA</i> (“TO COME”)	266
PLATE 8.4: <i>BEKARAREE</i> (“AGITATION” “INTENSE DESIRE”)	267
PLATE 8.5: <i>DEKHO</i> (“TO SEE”)	270
PLATE 8.6: <i>AMNE-SAMNE</i> (“FACE TO FACE”)	271
PLATE 8.7: <i>SHIKAYAT</i> (“TO COMPLAIN”)	272
PLATE 8.8: <i>HAQIQAT IZHAR KARNA</i> (“TO SHOW THE TRUTH”)	273
PLATE 8.9: <i>UDASI</i> (“SADNESS” “MELANCHOLY”)	274
PLATE 8.10: <i>SUNNAR</i> (“TO LISTEN”)	276
PLATE 8.11: <i>SHUKRIYA</i> (“THANKFULNESS”)	276
PLATE 8.12: <i>DUA</i> (“PRAYER”)	278
PLATE 8.13: SHAMS PERFORMING WITH PEACOCK FEATHER DUSTER	278

PLATE 8.14: SHAMS HOLDING HANDKERCHIEF	279
PLATE 8.15: SHAMS IN <i>HAL</i>	279
PLATE 8.16: SHAMS PERFORMING WELCOMING GESTURES	279
PLATE 8.17: <i>SOCH</i> ("TO THINK")	280
PLATE 8.18: SHAMS IN <i>HAL</i>	281
PLATE 8.19: <i>BIKH</i> ("TO BEG")	281
PLATE 8.20: SHAMS IN <i>HAL</i>	281
PLATE 8.21: <i>CHADDAR BOSI</i>	281
PLATE 8.22: <i>QUDDUM BOSI</i>	282

LIST OF MAPS

MAP 1.1: LOCATION OF THE NIZAMUDDIN SHRINE	7
MAP 1.2: THE NIZAMUDDIN SHIRNE COMPLEX	8
MAP 1.3: THE <i>BASTI</i>	9
MAP 4.1: NIZAMUDDIN SHRINE AND <i>BASTI</i> CIRCA 1920'S	121

REFERENCE PAGE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the nature of the mystical complex of *faqirs* who live in North India. *Faqirs* are Muslim mystics who regularly engage in various mystical and ascetic practices. I argue that a *faqir's* mystical complex derives from his concern to express mystical mastery. My focus on *faqirs'* mystical mastery draws attention to their engagement with the spirit world which informs and shapes their worldview and practices. My ethnography of *faqirs'* mystical mastery is based on my fieldwork at the thirteenth century Muslim shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya.

I examine how *faqirs* incorporate various kinds of mystical mastery in their every day lives. I explore how *faqirs'* mystical practices are ways of expressing mystical mastery. A *faqir's* mystical practices are shown to underpin his concern with personal autonomy, power and existential control. A *faqir's* mystical practices also underscore his associations with various spirit beings. My analysis seeks to highlight the experiential dimension of *faqirs'* mystical mastery which is intrinsically linked to the spirit world. In so doing, I reveal the nexus between *faqirs'* religious imagination and experience. I also demonstrate that a *faqir's* relation with spirit beings is on going and plays a crucial part in shaping his mystical identity.

As I will show, *faqirs'* mystical practices are complemented by their various physical and intuitive perceptions which frame their experience of mystical mastery. My analysis steers away from more traditional accounts of Islamic mysticism which tend to focus on a mystic's attempt towards achieving mystical union with the Divine other, to an exploration of a *faqir's* existential struggle for power and personal autonomy. My investigations of the every day lives of *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine provide insightful trajectories for exploring these themes and offering a different approach for examining Indian *faqirs*.



CHAPTER ONE

SACRED COSMOS: DOMAINS OF MYSTICAL MASTERY

Great saints are ever living
Fariduddin Attar

This thesis examines the different kinds of mystical mastery among *faqirs* living in North India at the thirteenth century Muslim shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya in New Delhi. *Faqirs* are Muslim male mystics, who are regularly engaged in various mystical and ascetic practices. In this thesis I have chosen to use the term *faqir* since this is the term which my informants used to refer to themselves. The term *faqir* also aptly reflects the nuance of my informants' lives, as in Arabic it means "poor".¹

The central argument of this thesis is how can we attain a greater awareness of *faqirs'* mystical complex. By a mystical complex I mean the total of a *faqir's* beliefs, values, practices, and experiences. I contend that a *faqir's* mystical complex is predicated upon his need to achieve and exercise mystical mastery, and that this is mainly articulated by his engagement with the spirit world. Mystical mastery informs the interplay between a *faqir's* beliefs and practice, between his values and experience. However, I argue that mystical mastery is not excluded to the private domain of a *faqir's* mystical practices, but also informs and shapes his engagement within the social context of the Nizamuddin shrine and the Nizamuddin village, colloquially referred to as the *basti*. Thus, I explain how mystical mastery encompasses and conjoins the subjective and intersubjective domains of a *faqir's* life. I also explain how various types of mystical mastery are important for shaping a *faqir's* engagement with spirit beings, and how these various engagements elicit different types of experience.

My contention throughout this analysis is that a *faqir* lives with a sense of spiritual others, which distinguishes him from devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine, *basti* locals,

¹ Other terms for *faqir* are "sufi" or "dervish". Sometimes these terms are also used by *faqirs* to describe themselves.

and the descendents of Nizamuddin Auliya called *Chisti Nizami*. His relation to spiritual others is conveyed through various kinds of aesthetic, kinaesthetic, performative, and written media. These media not only express a *faqir's* intense involvement with his mystical craft but are a means of renegotiating and reauthoring his relationship with both the visible (ie. lifeworld) and spiritual domains of existence. Central to this analysis is how *faqirs* are resolved in establishing and maintaining their sense of personal authorship and *auctoritas*. A *faqir's* need to reauthor his life evokes various types of experience. Throughout this thesis I will explore various aspects of *faqirs'* experience and how they constitute types of mystical mastery. Mystical mastery denotes a mastery over oneself as a way of negotiating with those forces outside himself. Thus, a *faqir's* life is founded on the premise that the inner and outer worlds are inexorably linked. A *faqir* contours his life in accordance with spiritual others, which shape and contour his beliefs, actions and experiences.

Methodology

In September 1994 I arrived in Delhi, India. As a visiting research scholar I was affiliated with the Department of Anthropology at Delhi University, which was headed by Professor Bhattacharya. Professor Bhattacharya assisted me in finding accommodation at the Delhi University guesthouse.

During the following week I went to the headquarters of the Sufi Movement, located at the shrine of Inayat Khan, and there I met Professor van Lohuisen. He took me on a tour around the shrine and the Sufi Movement which operated opposite the shrine. He explained how the Sufi Movement implemented various health and educational services on behalf of the poor local population. After an hour had passed he politely asked me whether I would like to see the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya. From there we journeyed to the Nizamuddin shrine.

It took only a couple of minutes on foot to get to the Nizamuddin shrine. In order to get there, we had to pass through several winding narrow pathways of the Nizamuddin village (*basti*). My first impressions of the Nizamuddin shrine were a mixture of fascination, excitement and unease. It was as if I had plunged into a domain where the

norms and customs of my own lifeworld had little relevance. My senses had little defence against the assault of colours, sounds, smells which seemed to penetrate my body. The lifeworld of the Nizamuddin shrine epitomised “otherness.” There were crowds of people everywhere, arriving and leaving, standing and sitting, chatting, and praying quietly or aloud. We slowly made our way to the house of Haji Mubarrak Nizami, one of the descendants of Nizamuddin Auliya, otherwise known as a *Chisti Nizami*. He was a corpulent middle-aged man of medium height. He wore a long white shirt and pants, and a white cap. Professor van Lohuisen introduced me to him, after which he gestured for us to sit down. Some tea was brought out. Professor van Lohuisen explained to him the purpose of my visit to India. Haji Mubarrak recounted how he was related to the saint and that it was his duty to look after me from here onwards. Soon afterwards, Haji Mubarrak’s son, Mukhtar, brought out a logbook and opened it for me to sign. Professor van Lohuisen told me that this was the usual practice at the shrine. After signing the book, Haji Mubarrak ordered some more tea. Unbeknownst to me, by signing the book I had officially made myself his guest (*mehman*), and he became my protector (*wakil*). As I was to learn during the course of my fieldwork, this relationship had various obligations and duties which I was expected to fulfil. These mainly consisted of giving Haji Mubarrak money donations during important religious days at the Nizamuddin shrine. As his guest, I was prevented from becoming the guest of another *Chisti Nizami*. I had inadvertently become bound to him.

In the following days, Professor van Lohuisen introduced me to Shahida, who became one of my informants. Shahida was a well-educated woman and one of the disciples of Khwaja Islamuddin Nizami, the congregational leader (*imam*) at the Nizamuddin shrine, and a renowned Sufi teacher.² Apart from being a practising Sufi, Shahida also had an impressive knowledge of Sufi doctrine, and was very helpful in advising me of the “do’s and don’ts” when at the Nizamuddin shrine. As our relationship developed during my fieldwork she insisted on my calling her “*baaji*” (older sister), a term of respect.

Shahida was an independent woman and sometimes flouted segregationist practices between non-related males and females. For example, during my interviews with her, she had the door of the room closed, much to the chagrin of the old housemaid. Shahida

was instrumental in introducing me to the *faqir* Shams. She told him about me and arranged a meeting for us. When I had first had met Shams, he told me that he had seen me in a dream and that he was ordered by a spirit being (in this case, one of the saints) to guide and protect me during my stay in India. Shams sometimes alerted me to my favoured status, pointing out that many other people had asked him to guide them into the *faqirs'* mystical complex. Through Shams, I was introduced to other *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine and elsewhere.

The first few months of fieldwork were mainly spent developing relationships with both *faqirs* and *Chisti Nizamis*, and busily analysing the ritual practices at the Nizamuddin shrine. Sometimes *faqirs* introduced themselves to me. One of these men became a key informant. His name was Baba Ali. Most *faqirs* I had met took a liking to me. I suspect that they saw how eager yet naïve I was. Consequently, some *faqirs* became protective of me and often acted as advisors. Sometimes they gave me special prayers to recite or certain objects to wear in order to avert evil spiritual forces from harming me.

As an ardent fieldworker, I attempted to become acquainted with the *weltanschauung* of my Muslim hosts. This process was difficult due to my newness in the field as well as the suspicious nature of some of my hosts. It took several months of effort to get some of my hosts onside. Wax reminds us, that there is a process of consensus always occurring between fieldworker and host “involving numerous accommodations and adjustments” (1971:43). Similarly, Mewett argues that fieldwork is a process of social construction between fieldworker and host (1989:82). My relationship with each *faqir* had its own obligations and ties of friendship. I was expected to be loyal to each of them and never divulge any secret information I was given to another *faqir* or *Chisti Nizami*. This proved to be a veritable juggling act. When one old *faqir* whom I had befriended had found out that I was associating with Shams, he told me to desist my ties with Shams immediately or else he would no longer see me. Such threats taught me the need to be discrete at all times. In time I became aware that my presence had the

² Sufism refers to Islamic mysticism which will be discussed in the next section.

capacity to cause tensions between various *faqirs* and *Chisti Nizami*. The need to gather information from various informants posed the problem of seeming disloyal. I tried to overcome this by not talking about my associations with others when in the company of my host. As a way of cementing my loyalty with a particular host, it was sometimes necessary for me to buy certain food items for him. This kind of material exchange was a concomitant part of my continuing friendships with *faqirs*.

The process of adjustment during my fieldwork entailed a construction, or rather, a reconstruction of my identity. While *faqirs* and *basti* locals knew that I had come to study Sufism at the Nizamuddin shrine, none of them knew what an anthropologist was. Consequently, I was thought of as a scholar of religious knowledge. As a male in my early thirties, most *basti* locals treated me with regard in accordance to my age. In order to detract attention from myself when at the Nizamuddin shrine, I wore a long shirt called a *qasimi* and *pyjama*. Having rather dark features further enabled me blend in to the point that people often mistook me for being either an Afghan or Kashmiri. Some people even referred to me as “*khan sahib*” a term given to Afghan males.

I gained most of my information by being with *faqirs* and watching them during their healing sessions or when they were engaged in their mystical practices. I also participated in public rituals at the Nizamuddin shrine. The Nizamuddin shrine had numerous religious ceremonies daily, which gave me ample opportunity to explore their symbolic, sociological, and performative aspects. Sometimes, I participated in offering money to singers at the Nizamuddin shrine in the traditional manner of offering, by holding the money in the right hand and going to the foot of the shrine, where I reverently bowed before the saint’s tomb. This was then followed by approaching the singers to where the money was placed before them. As my relationships with *faqirs* developed they became more open to giving me knowledge. By this time, I had become very close to one of the old *faqirs* who had demanded that I call him “*chacha*” (uncle). As his “adopted nephew” I became privy to a large amount of his mystical knowledge and practice.

Earlier on in the course of my fieldwork I found out that most *faqirs* did not like being tape-recorded. They were just as uncomfortable for me to write while they talked.

Consequently, after each session with them, I hurried to a room allocated to me by staff from the shrine of Inayat Khan and quickly wrote down from memory what I had been told. At the end of each day I made it a habit to write up my fieldnotes. This was a difficult exercise as I was often tired from Delhi's intense heat and frequent bouts of "Delhi belly" and constipation.

Apart from the Nizamuddin shrine, I went to several other famous Muslim shrines in Delhi and Ajmer, including the shrines of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Bibi Zuleykha, Moinuddin Chisti, and others. This allowed me to conduct a comparative study of the rituals being performed there, as well as becoming acquainted with other *faqirs*. One *faqir* called "Baba" who stayed at the shrine of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, invited me for the death celebration of a *faqir* saint. During the celebration dozens of *faqirs* congregated, smoking *hashish* (cannibus) and chanting aloud.

I also befriended healers from other traditional systems. One of them was a Hindu male in his forties who conducted healings from his house, where he used a type of seed called *rudraksha*. He possessed several *rudraksha* seeds and used them for healing. I also befriended a practitioner and lecturer in *unane* (Greek) medicine, which is a popular form of medicine in North India. Some concepts of this medical model proved insightful, as they seemed to inform *faqirs'* conceptions of food and emotions.

As my fieldwork progressed, my attention turned towards *faqirs'* mystical practices and therapy. Although this was not intentional, my increasing time spent with *faqirs* shaped my research. In relation to the *faqirs'* therapy, I collected several case studies of patients and taxonomies of illness and their aetiology, and was allowed to witness several types of healing methods from different *faqirs*. I was also allowed to be present during *faqirs'* healing and divination sessions.

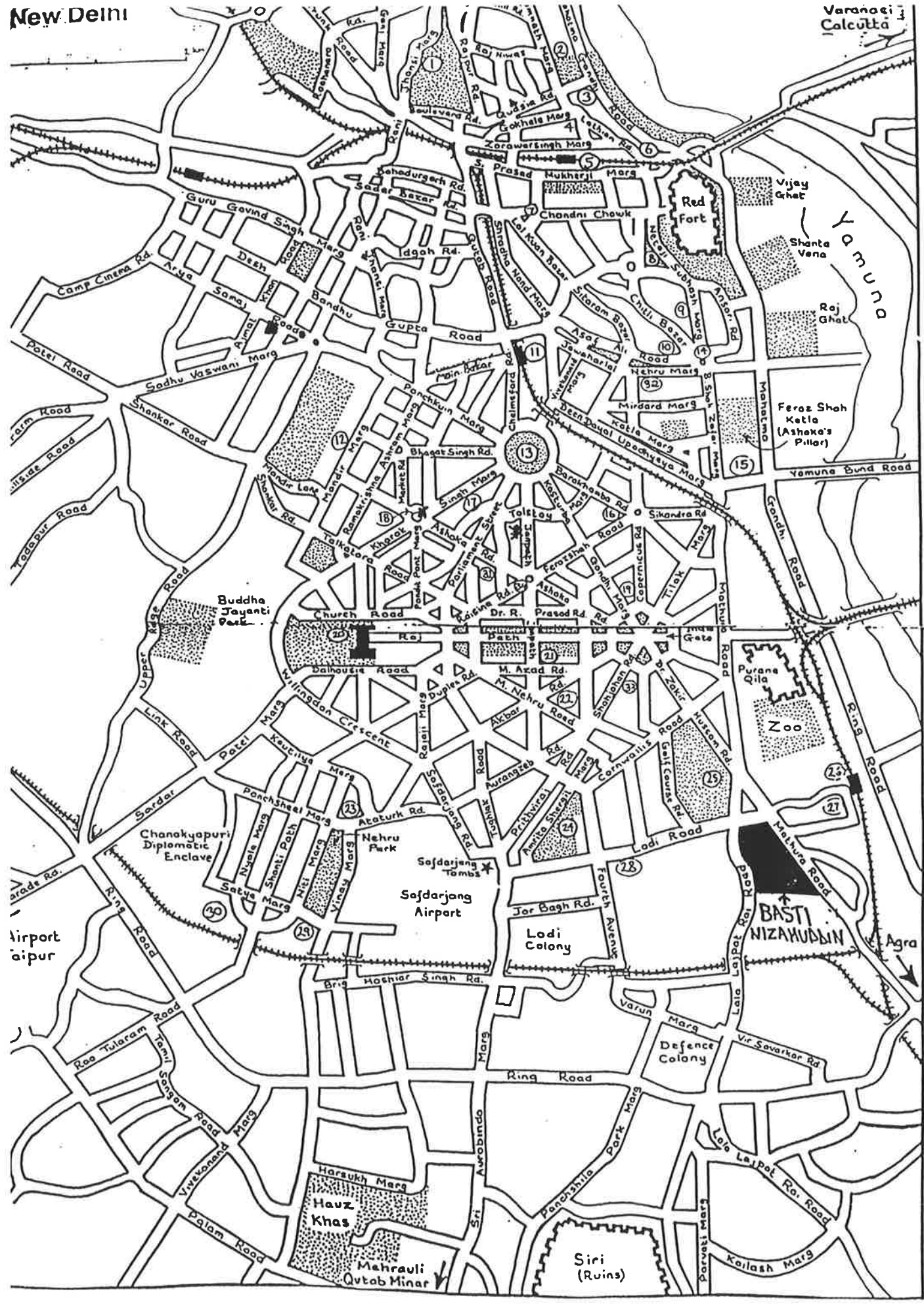
During my fieldwork, I also conducted archival research at the Delhi Archives and the Jesuit library in North Delhi, called Vidya Jyoti. At these places I accessed information relating to architectural and historic knowledge of the Nizamuddin shrine and aspects of Indian Sufism. Moreover, I conducted research at Delhi University, Jamia Milia Islamia University, and the Teen Murti libraries.

In the next sections I will give an overview of the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* as these areas were where *faqirs* lived and conducted their healing and mystical practices. These two domains are central not only for my own interest in understanding *faqirs'* mystical complex but also for the participants themselves. *Faqirs* and *basti* locals consider these two domains as harbouring various kinds of spirit beings and spiritual forces, and play a significant part in their religious imagination.

Ethnography of Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*.

The Muslim shrine (*dargah*), of the thirteenth century Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya (1243-1325), is one of the most celebrated shrines in the Indian sub-continent. The shrine is located in New Delhi and is approximately 7 kilometres southeast from the city centre (Map 1.1). The Nizamuddin shrine is one of the largest Muslim shrines in India, and attracts thousands of devotees from various religions, including Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians. Devotees coming to the Nizamuddin shrine represent almost every spectrum of Indian society: rich and poor, powerful and powerless, the crippled, beggars, criminals, politicians, artists, intellectuals, and the common lay. The Nizamuddin shrine is renowned as being a thaumatological shrine, as conveyed by thousands of devotees who journey there seeking cures for various physical and spiritual ailments, including spirit possession. The Nizamuddin shrine is encompassed by the Nizamuddin village, known as the *basti*, where hundreds of mostly poor Muslims dwell. Much of the housing at the *basti* was established after partition (1947), which saw hundreds of Muslim refugees from the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Muradabad regions settling at the *basti* due mainly to the shrine's fame. The *basti* is the social and economic hub of the entire Nizamuddin region, and is characterised by its winding alleyways, congested squatter housing, medieval mosques and buildings, and *bazaars*.

The suburban areas surrounding the *basti* include Jangpura and Lajpat Nagar which lie towards the southeast of the shrine, and are large commercial areas. Towards the south end of the shrine are located Defence and Lodhi colonies, which were in the recent period the residence for British infantry. Nizamuddin West and East, located towards



Map 1.1: Location of the Nizamuddin shrine

the western end of the shrine are divided by Mathura road.³ These areas are predominantly 'up-market' and are inhabited by the growing middle-class in Delhi, anecdotally called the "new rich". The majority of these residents are Hindus and Sikhs. These areas are characterised by their wide, ordered streets and many parks, and starkly juxtapose the squalid environment of the *basti*.

The shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya is a conglomeration of hundreds of monuments, tombs, and other shrines which have been constructed around the central shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya during the last 700 years (Map 1.2). The entire shrine complex is also historically significant as it contains the tombs of a number of royal Moghul personages,⁴ including disciples and descendants of the saint and other devotees.

The central focus of devotional activity is the tomb of Nizamuddin Auliya, which was constructed in 1325, soon after Nizamuddin's death (Plate 1.1a, Plate 1.1b). Other important buildings located there include the Khijli mosque, shrine of Amir Khosrau, who was the disciple of Nizamuddin. Amir Khosrau's shrine is located 16 metres south of Nizamuddin's shrine.

The entire Nizamuddin complex is overseen by Nizamuddin's descendants, who are called *Chisti Nizami*.⁵ Many of the male *Chisti Nizami* are spiritual teachers and are called "*pir*" meaning spiritual teacher or guide. *Chisti pirs* may also act as healers. For this analysis I will refer to them as *Chisti pirs*. *Chisti pirs* are organised according to the principle of patrilineal descent. The *Chisti pirs* are divided into three major lineages

³ Nizamuddin East is the location for the mausoleum of the Mogul ruler, Humayun (d. 1555), father of Akbar (1542-1605). This mausoleum is believed to have been the prototype for the famous Taj Mahal in Agra, built and completed in 1653 by the emperor Shahjahan.

⁴ These include Muhammad Shah (1702-1748), Jahanara Begum (1614-1681), and Mirza Jahangir.

⁵ Their name denotes that they belong to the *Nizami* branch of the *Chistiyyah* Sufi order, founded in India by Moinuddin Chisti in the eleventh century.

KEY TO NIZAMUDDIN SHRINE COMPLEX

1. *Dargah* (shrine) of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya (“*Bari Dargah*”)
2. *Maqbool Jaali*
3. *Dargah* of Hazrat Amir Khosrau Dehlavi (“*Choti Dargah*”)
4. *Khijli* mosque
5. Tomb of Jahanara Begum
6. Tomb of Muhammad Shah
7. Tombs of Mirza Baba and Mirza Jahangir
8. *Shijra Nasab* (spiritual lineage) of Nizamuddin Auliya
9. “*Bis Dari*” (“Twenty Pillars”)
10. *Sahan Astana* (southern courtyard)
11. *Sirhana Astana* (northern courtyard)
12. *Wuzu Khana* (ablution area for “*Bari Dargah*”)
13. *Sabil*
14. *Mana Ka Piala* (marble cup)
15. *Malam Darwaze*
16. *Mafil Khana*
17. *Kabrastan* (cemetery) Nawab Ismail
18. *Madrassa Jamia Nizamia*
19. Mosque store
20. *Tosha Khana*
21. Northern prayer area of *Khijli* mosque
22. Southern prayer area of *Khijli* mosque
23. Mosque store
24. *Hujra* (cell) of Sayyed Farhat Ali Nizami
25. *Jinn Wali* mosque
26. *Hujra* of Pir Fazil Nizami
27. Tomb of Hazrat Khwaja Iqbal Sahab
28. *Neem* tree
29. *Wuzu Khana* (ablution area for “*Choti Dargah*”)
30. *Kabrastan*
31. *Hujra* of Khwaja Hasan Nizami
32. Grave of Hazrat Ziauddin Barni
33. *Sahan Astana* (southern courtyard for “*Choti Dargah*”)
34. Flower shop of Ashraf Nizami
35. Tomb of Shamsuddin Maeru (nephew of Amir Khosrau Dehlavi)
36. *Hujra* of Imam Khwaja Islamuddin Nizami
37. *Hujra* of Hasan Musamna Nizami
38. *Hati* (elephant) *Ki Mazar*
39. *Sufia* library
40. *Hujra* of unknown pir
41. *Andheri Kothri*

42. *Hujra* of Pir Zameen Nizami
43. *Hujra* of Pir Fazil Nizami
44. *Mashal Khana*
45. Tomb of Qazi Qutbuddin Kashani
46. Tomb of Haji Lal Muhammad
47. Area where *chiragh* (lanterns) are kept
48. *Kirni* tree (300-400 years old)
49. Flower shop of Ashraf Nizami
50. Tomb of Hazrat abu Bakr Chisti (founder of *Hindustanian khandan*)
51. Tomb of Hazrat Khwaja Haroon (founder of *Haroonian khandan*)
52. *Hujra* of Ruhul Hasan Nizami
53. Grave of Khwaja Abdul Rehman ("Tilting Grave")
54. *Dalan* and *Hujra* of Haji Mubarrak Nizami
55. Eastern gate from "*Bari Dargah*" side
56. Eastern gate from "*Choti Dargah*" side
57. *Langar Khana*
58. Flower and book shops
59. Tree of *Barr*
60. Old cemented tank for *wuzu*
61. *Langar Khana* and *Kambal Posh*
62. *Ahata* Kambal Posh
63. *Dargah* of Kambal Posh
64. *Buland Darwaze*
65. *Dargah* of Ategha Khan
66. Tomb of unknown *Chisti* saint
67. Open area for cooking and distributing *langar* during '*urs*
68. *Hujra* of Hanif Nizami
69. *Hujra* of Badruddin Nizami
70. Flower shop of Zameen Nizami
71. Flower shop of Badruddin Nizami
72. *Hujra* and shop of Abid Ali Nizami
73. Second *Hujra* of Haji Mubarrak Nizami
74. Outside gate of *Dargah*
75. Flower shop of Idris Nizami
76. *Hujra* of Idris Nizami
77. *Hujra* of Pir Zameen Nizami
78. *Hujra* of Gulam Husnain Nizami
79. *Hujra* of Afzal Nizami
80. Second *hujra* of Imam Khwaja Islamuddin Nizami
81. *Phool Wali Gali*
82. *Hujra* and tomb of Qazi Sayyed Safdar Ali Nizami
83. *Chatta* (covered passage)
84. *Baoli* ("*Chasmai Dil Kusha*")
85. Tomb of Hazrat Kirmani Sahab
86. Bangladesh *Bhawan*
87. Bookshop of Jamal Nizami

88. *Hujra* of Sayyed Arif Ali Nizami
89. Shop of Nazeem Nizami
90. Free dispensary of *Dargah Sharif*
91. Flower shop of Javed Nizami
92. *Hujra* of Mujahid Nizami
93. Stairs going up to the *Chabutra Yaran*
94. *Sardar Darwaze* (Main entrance gates)
95. *Mehman Khana* of iqbal Nizami
96. Flower shops of Ashraf Nizami
97. Flower shops of Sayyed Asif Ali Nizami
98. Flower shop of Sayyed Lal Nizami
99. Old mosque
100. *Hujra* of Pir Zameen Nizami
101. Old *Musafir Khanna*
102. *Kabrastan* of Dada Maulana
103. Tomb of Dada Maulana (founder of the *Naberagan khandan*)
104. Open area

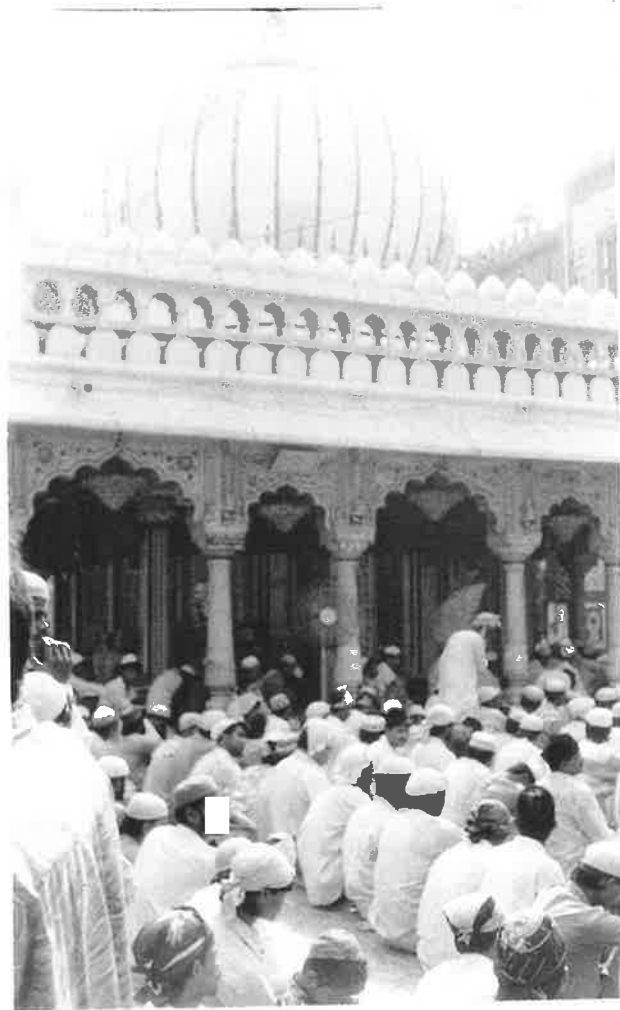


Plate 1a: Shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya



Plate 1.1b: Top photograph gives a view of the front entrance of the Nizamuddin shrine from behind the latticed wall of the tomb of Muhammad Shah. Bottom photograph shows a *qawwalli* (see glossary) singer playing in the front courtyard (*Sahan Astana*) of the Nizamuddin shrine.

groups called *khandan*. The three existing *khandan* are the *Nabera-gan*, *Qazi zad-gan*, and the *Hindustanian*.⁶

The *basti*

The present day *basti* is a convoluted collection of houses, medieval monuments, graves, mosques, open sewers, ghettos, rubbish tips, flea markets, and hotels (Plate 1.2). While the majority of *basti* locals are poor Muslims, smaller numbers of Hindus and Christians also live there. A small population of Afghan and Bangladeshi refugees also reside at the *basti*. Up until the period of partition (1948), the geography around the Nizamuddin shrine complex mainly consisted of forests, medieval buildings and hundreds of graves, that during the last fifty years have been gradually replaced by the present day *basti*.

Many *basti* locals regularly visit the Nizamuddin shrine, and are devotees of Nizamuddin Auliya. The Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* are interconnected by two major paths that begin at the northern and eastern entrances of the shrine complex, which serve as the main arteries of human movement for the entire *basti* (Map 1.3). These arterial routes lead into the major social and commercial areas of the *basti*, where they further branch into a labyrinthine system of smaller paths and alleys. The *basti* has several flea markets (*bazaar*) located mainly on its northwestern and southeastern areas. The *basti markuz* has many shops and hawkers come to a point of intersection with the entrance of the *Bangle Wali* mosque, which is located at the *markuz*.

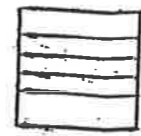
Apart from its many medieval buildings, most of the *basti* is squalid. Human faeces, rubbish, and offal waste (from the *basti's* *halal* shops) litter many of the *basti's* paths. This refuse attracts scores of rats. Diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, hepatitis, meningitis, and digestive disorders are common among *basti* locals. Some children

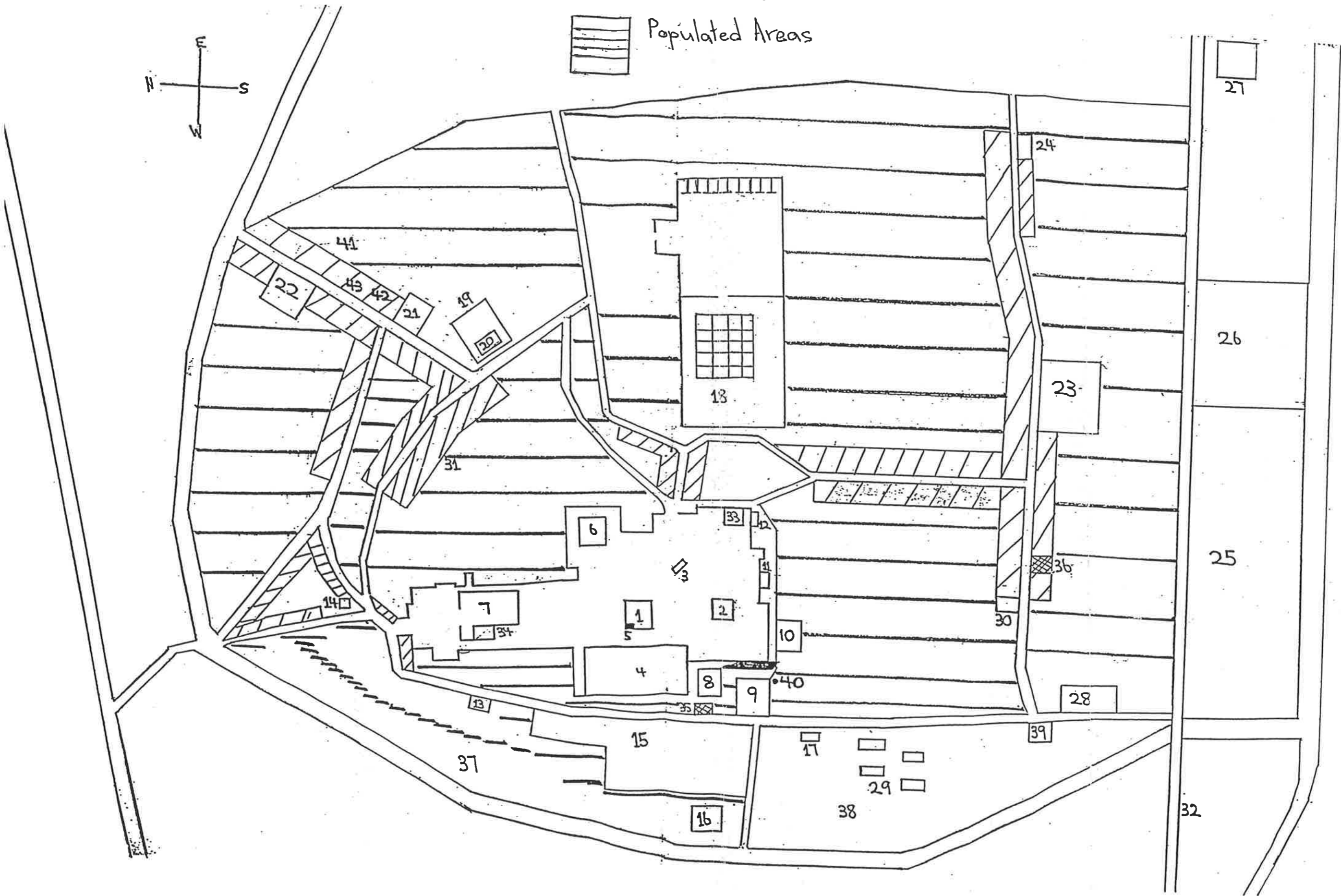
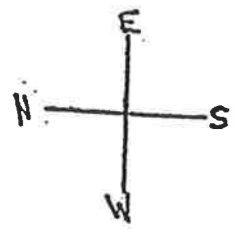
⁶ The three *khandan* tend to follow a system of endogamy following the Indian Muslim custom of marrying between parallel cousins, or second and third cousins. This system seems to be a characteristic feature of a number of Sufi brotherhoods such as the *Hamadsha* of Morocco (Crapanzano 1981). The maintenance of endogamy between the three *khandan* is also tied to retaining the title of *sayyed* (indicating one's descendancy to Ali, cousin and son-in-law to the Prophet Muhammad). Present-day estimates of descendants (*khandani*) are: *Qazi zad-gan* 220 *khandani*, *Nabera-gan* 170 *khandani*, *Hindustanian* 150 *khandani*. See appendix IV for further discussion of *Chisti Nizami*.



Plate 1.2: The *basti*. Top photograph shows the main entrance (*sarwar darwaze*) to the Nizamuddin shrine complex. Bottom photograph shows slum dwellings along the eastern region of the *basti*.

Map 1.3: The present day *basti*

 Populated Areas



KEY TO NIZAMUDDIN BASTI (VILLAGE)

1. Dargah (shrine) of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya
2. Dargah of Amir Khosrau Dehlavi
3. Tilting grave
4. Khijli mosque
5. Maqbool Jaali
6. Dargah of Ategha Khan
7. Baoli (well)
8. Jinn Wali mosque
9. Dargah of Hazrat Inayat Khan
10. Dargah of
11. Hasan Nizami
12. Mosque
13. Dargah of Zameen Nizami
14. Nizamia clinic
15. Qalandar Dhoona
16. Main rubbish tip
17. Shiv Mandir (temple)
18. Grave of Hayat Boumann
19. Lal Chabra
20. Lal Mahal
21. Chausath Khamba
22. Tabliki Jama'at mosque and headquarters
23. Kali mosque
24. Hotel Qureshi
25. Panc Biran kabrastan
26. Samshat Ghat (Hindu cremation ground)
27. Dargah of Hazrat Sayyed Nur Muhammad Badauni
28. Animal stables
29. Graves
30. Mosque
31. Afghani quarter
32. Open sewer canal
33. Nul Wali mosque
34. Old mosque remains
35. Halal shop
36. Halal shop
37. Rubbish tip
38. Open area
39. Rubbish tip
40. Asar tree (Old Tamarind tree)
41. Markuz Nizamuddin

suffer from the effects of malnutrition as manifested by their distended stomachs. The plight of many *basti* locals is further compounded by a lack of basic amenities.⁷

Sufism: historical background of *faqirs* in India

As some features of the ideology and practice of *faqirs* in North India stem from traditional Sufism as practised in India, and elsewhere in the Islamic world, it is necessary to historically locate *faqirs* in the context of Indian Sufism, and how *faqirs'* mystical complex represents a divergent stream of Indian Sufism.

Sufism or *tassawuf* (Arabic for mysticism) is a form of Islamic mysticism with the fundamental anima of experiencing a direct communion with the Allah, which in Sufism thought is called *fana fil-haqq* (annihilation of truth). Sufism stipulates that this kind of engagement with Allah is achievable through the cultivation of intuitive and emotional faculties as a means of diminishing the nature of the false ego or false self (*nafs*), which prevents human beings attaining union with Allah. Nicholson (1914) and Stoddart (1994) suggest that the nature of this union between mystic (Sufi) and Allah aims in the mystic's detachment from the *nafs*, toward absorption into the Divine (*fana*).

The origins of Sufism traditionally begin with the Prophet Muhammad (570-622), who is considered to be the quintessential Sufi, embodying the perfect combination of mystical and devotional qualities.

Through the ages, Sufis have attempted to legitimate such claims by quoting from several Quranic passages (Chapter 73: 1-3; Chapter 74: 1) which they have interpreted as disclosing the mystical tendencies of both the Prophet Muhammad and some of his companions. According to Stoddart (1994) Schimmel (1976), Knysch (2000), Izutsu (1967-68), Farrukh (1957), Adalbert (1893), Burkhardt (1960), and Horten (1927-28),

⁷ Many people have limited access to clean water and electricity. Like other parts of Delhi, running water is available for short periods of the day. The *basti* has a paucity of available taps. Each tap must cater for virtually hundreds of people. This is particularly problematic during summer when running water is further cut due to overt water consumption. During the summer period it is common to see dozens of *basti* locals lined up in the early morning hours waiting to fill their buckets. Moreover, the unlawful practice by some *basti* locals in connecting makeshift electrical contributes to frequent power shortages at the *basti*. In May-June 1995, during my fieldwork, the *basti* and Nizamuddin shrine complex were hit by prolonged power shortages. Some power cuts lasted as long as twenty-four hours.

elements of Sufi ideology and practice were influenced by various religious and philosophical schools of thought, for example, Judaism, Christianity, Neo-Platonism, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism, as well as other “ancient oriental” influences (Schimmel 1976:10). Stoddart claims that early Sufi thinkers had “sometimes borrowed formulations deriving from Neo-platonic and other spiritual doctrines” in order to enrich and broaden Islamic thought (1994:43). Sufism’s ability to incorporate beliefs and practices from other cosmologies probably enabled it to adapt to the particular social milieu it found itself in. Schimmel (1978), Titus (1959), and Trimingham (1971) have suggested that Sufism was a religious response to the moral excesses and hedonism of the Ummayyad dynasty (7th century). These scholars also suggest that the growing formalism and institutionalism of Islam during this period prompted some Muslims to cultivate a more personal and experiential approach to Allah.

A spirit of quietism, rigid asceticism, and isolation characterised the lives of the first Sufis (i.e. Rabia Adawiyya, Hasan al-Basri, and Ibrahim bin Adam).⁸ As Knysh (2000:6) notes, the goal towards achieving Divine union was undertaken “through meticulous contemplation on the Quranic revelation, a thorough imitation of the Prophet’s piety, introspection as well as voluntary poverty and self-mortification.” However, the tenth century onwards saw the rise of the first Sufi orders or brotherhoods called “*tariqa*”. These Sufi orders became highly organised and developed their own particular dogmas. Sufi members had to follow the rule of obedience to a spiritual master, who was usually the head of the order, and strictly observe the rules and requirements of the order. Sufi orders spread throughout the Islamic world and became important centres for learning and in the promulgation of Islam.

The arrival of the first Sufi orders into India during the 10th century had an influential impact upon the outstanding spiritual traditions of the Indian sub-continent. Rather than remaining religiously exclusive, these orders quickly adapted into the unique spiritual milieu of Indian society, imparting a spiritual and intellectual dynamic to its religious, social and literary institutions. While such orders as the *Chistiyyah*, *Qadiriyyah*, and *Suhrawardiyyah* emphasised observance of Islamic canon (*shariah*), they espoused a

⁸ See Sells (1996) and Khan (1995).

more mystical interpretation of Muslim religious life. These orders in time became popular amongst both Muslims and Hindus. Not only did they assist in the spread of Islam in India, but became syncretic, integrating religious symbols and practices of both Islam and Hinduism (Titus 1959). There is no doubt that these early orders adopted a more liberal understanding of Hinduism, and emphasised communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims. As Khizer (1991:109) points out:

The Sufis, unlike the 'ulama'⁹ did not keep themselves aloof from Indian mainstream. They adopted local idiom and preached the message of love and universal brotherhood.

Among all the Indian Sufi orders, the *Chistiyyah* or *Chisti* order was probably the most outstanding, mainly due to its broad range of humanitarian activities, and practice of religious tolerance, which became an integral ideological bridge between Islam and Hinduism (Rizvi 1965; Sizji 1992; Nadwi 1977).

Apart from these organised Sufi orders, other mystics came into India bringing a distinct and divergent form of mystical practice. These early mystics were colloquially called "*azad*" or "free" since many of them were not affiliated to any of the regular Sufi orders. Essentially the *azad* were itinerant mendicants who regularly practised extreme ascetic styles of religious devotion, as a mark of their "other worldliness". According to some historical narratives, the *azad* or *faqirs*, as they became commonly known, wandered between villages "giving demonstrations of their ability in magic and sleight of hand, telling fortunes, writing amulets, and making charms" (Titus 1959:133). Rizvi claims that some *faqirs* called *Qalandars* "generally remained engrossed in a state of *sukr* (mystical intoxication)" and roamed about semi-naked, eating grass and being "miracle-mongers" (1965:29-30).

It is impossible to determine how widespread the *faqirs* are in India, and the extent of their social influence, since there has been scant historical and anthropological attention given to them. This has been exacerbated by the apparent secrecy surrounding *faqirs*'

⁹ Arabic word for "Islamic canonists".

knowledge and practices; *faqirs* were reticent about giving knowledge, and unlike many established Sufi orders which had strong literary traditions, *faqirs* tended to pass their knowledge down orally. Consequently, their histories and practices have not been properly recorded. Unfortunately, what is known about *faqirs'* traditions outside of India is equally as sparse and in need of theoretical scrutiny. The little that has been written on them is oftentimes restricted to folk narratives, focusing either on *faqirs'* supposed 'superhuman' powers, or their lack of observance of *shariah*. This latter theme was particularly taken up by the religious canonists who slammed *faqirs* for their predilection towards smoking *hashish* (*cannibus*) and for their uncouth and 'abstracted' behavioural repertoire, factors which are intrinsic to *faqirs'* mystical complex today. Williams scathingly refers to *Qalandar faqirs* as "Islamic beatniks" who freely "violated the social norms of Islamic society" (1961:152). Nonetheless, even by their seeming aberrant behavioural repertoire, what these medieval *faqirs* developed and expressed were highly idiosyncratic understandings and practices of Indian Islam, a legacy which has continued to this present day by *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine.

Arguably, the traditions of *faqirs* in North India can be traced back to Uwais ul Qarani, a contemporary of the Prophet, who is said to have had "spiritual contact with the Prophet in spite of never having met him" (Shah 1973:79). Although Uwais was unacquainted with the Prophet he is said to have received secret initiation by the Prophet's spirit after the latter's death. According to Hujwiri, Uwais was prevented from seeing the Prophet while he lived, due to his frequent ecstatic states. Some important points arise from this "*Uwaisi doctrine*" (1991:83). Firstly, it highlighted the supernatural underpinnings of *faqirs'* mystical complexes. Secondly, it acknowledged isolationism in preference to communal existence, as a way of focusing on one's spiritual path. Thirdly, it relegated the dependency on a living, spiritual master (*pir*), which was central to the regular Sufi orders, rather than seeking communion with the spirits of deceased saints or other spirit beings for guidance, facilitated through dreams, visions or other non-ordinary states of awareness.¹⁰ These characteristics are also prevalent in present day *faqirs'* mystical practice.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that the *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine were knowledgeable about Uwais and spoke of him as being one of the keepers of the secret tradition, from which their own tradition had arisen.

Early in Islam, a number of adherents to the *azad* tradition became popularised for their intense ecstatic states and utterances (*shatahat*) (Rahman 1966:135).¹¹ As such performances of contrived or sanctified madness (*madzub*) did become identifiable forms of spirituality among some sectors of Muslim communities, widened their acceptance towards more mystical kinds of religious expression. In India, *faqirs* continued this tradition of “sanctified madness”. Although various irregular orders were developed, these lacked the organisational features of the regular Sufi orders.¹² The majority of *faqirs*, however, did not belong to any distinct order but were said to receive their initiation by a specific saint through an auspicious dream or vision. The belief in *faqirs*’ special connection with the spirit world became a source of personal charisma, and the motif for numerous stories regarding their mysterious powers.

Theoretical issues: Anthropological approaches of Sufism

Considering the large amount of Sufi orders existing throughout the Islamic world, they have had relatively little anthropological attention. Fortunately, the few anthropological studies in this area have been highly insightful. Evans-Pritchard’s classic study of the *Sanusi* of Cyrenaica (1954) was one of the first ethnographies of a Sufi order, and aroused a generation of studies of North African Sufi orders (Gellner 1969, Gilsenan 1973, Eickelman 1976, Crapanzano 1981, Hoffman 1995). As Evans-Pritchard pointed out, the austere nature of Islam in North Africa was considered by many lay Muslims as too rigid and complex (1954:1-3). Evans-Pritchard states that Sufi adepts adopted more individualistic and experientialist approaches which find their social expression in present day saints’ cults. His notion is also followed by Gellner (1969:8). Along with Gilsenan’s study of Egyptian Sufi orders (1973), an underlying feature of these works is based on the notion of saints’ blessedness or holiness (*baraka*; in Hindi and Urdu, “*barkat*”) as being an ordering principle for Sufi orders, and how the social systems and rituals of Sufi orders are designed to obtain blessedness from the dead or living saint.

¹¹ Outstanding Figures of the ecstatic or “abstracted” (*majdhub*) sufis were Abu Yazid Bistami (died 874), and Mansur al Hallaj (died 922). Abu Yazid was renowned for such ecstatic phrases as “There is nothing under my cloak but Allah”, “Praise be to me, how great is my majesty”, and “I am your Lord”. Al-Hallaj’s famous utterance, “*ana al-Haq*” (I am the truth) during an enraptured state earned him the death sentence by the canonists.

¹² These orders were known as “*bay-shar*” due to their seeming non-compliance with some aspects of Islamic canon.

The ritualised dispensation of a saint's blessedness is a central feature of Crapanzano's comprehensive study of the *Hamadsha* (1981). Crapanzano takes the reader through the rich symbolic world of the *Hamadsha's* psychotherapeutic system, via an exploration of their central ritual called the *hadra*. Anxieties and other repressed impulses in both Sufi adepts and lay people are allowed to be acted out during the *hadra* with the hope of achieving a cure - if not a temporary alleviation of their psychological malaise. Denoted in Crapanzano's analysis is a form of negotiation between the Sufi adept or devotee and the spiritual other, where the former uses the saint's *barakat* (blessedness) "to enter an extraordinary state (*hal*) in which they all — in varying degrees — have the ability to pass on the *barakat* of the saints (Crapanzano 1981:167). Furthermore, the belief by the *Hamadsha* that the *hadra* enables people to "renew their relationship" with *Aisha Qandisha* - the most revered of *jinn* (a type of spirit being, discussed in Chapter Two), further suggests a way for reauthoring one's life from those ambiguous forces that threaten to diminish an individual's power to act. One of the aims of my analysis is to examine how *faqirs* constantly engage with various spiritual beings as a way of reconstruing their relationship with those non-human powers which are considered to be ambiguous and uncontrollable.

My analysis diverges from these previous sociological studies of Sufism since *faqirs* do not belong to any regular Sufi order. Moreover, *faqirs'* understandings and experience of their mystical complex are not necessarily reliant upon a physical spiritual teacher, nor are they concerned with issues of spiritual or biological lineage, which *Chisti pirs* believe privileges them with the saint's blessedness by virtue of their biological descendancy. Implicit in my analysis is the continuing religious and social importance of *faqirs* in the religious imagination of *basti* locals, devotees and patients. Whereas, in Egypt, as Hoffman proposes, "dervishism" has tarnished the image of Sufism, my own research does not support this notion (1995:197). This is not to suggest that *faqirs* do not have their critics or reprimanders. However, generally speaking, many Muslims and non-Muslims respect *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine. I attribute this to the high value placed on renunciation by various Indian religious traditions, as well as the important role of certain "holy" individuals who are believed to mediate between human beings and spiritual others.

Intersubjective domains of mastery

My analysis is informed by Michael Jackson's phenomenological theory of intersubjectivity. Jackson argues for a theory of subjectivity which demarcates from western approaches, which he claims are concerned with assigning "ontological primacy" to "both individual persons and objects" during intersubjective encounters (1998:7).

Jackson categorises seven types of intersubjectivity, two of which are relevant to this analysis. Firstly, Jackson's "field of intersubjectivity" includes human beings, material objects, spirit beings (i.e. ancestral beings and other supernatural entities) and collective representations. My own analysis further elaborates on the range of spirit beings to include Allah, *jinn*, spirit familiars (*muwakil*), saints' spirits, various evil spirit beings (*shaytan*), ghosts (*bhut*), as well as the saints' blessedness which allegedly emanates from their tombs. According to Jackson:

within this field, objects tend to become charged with subjective meanings and social destinies, and human beings become subjects for themselves and objects for others (1998:9).

As a way of understanding this premise, Jackson, citing Povinelli (1993:152), discusses how hunting among the Aboriginal people of Belyuen is fused with language, so that through the conjunction between labour and speech the land is assigned with sentience and the power to penetrate their sensory perceptions and consciousness (Jackson 1998:9). Throughout my analysis I will explore the inter-subjective field between *faqir* and spiritual others, and how a *faqir's* participation within this field not only provides him with personal meaning but also enables him to view his destiny as being fused with spiritual others.

Secondly, Jackson asserts the vacillating nature of human consciousness — the way our awareness continually shifts between different experiential states, or as he puts it between "ecstatic and recessive extremes." At times we experience a sense of

disembodiment and at other times a sense of unity of body and will (Jackson 1998:10).
As Jackson notes:

One might say that self stands out momentarily against a backdrop of otherness, only to become ground in turn for the figure of the other (1998:10).

Jackson's claim that the self is continually immersed in reciprocal relations with other selves is reminiscent of both James' (1950:294) and Bateson's belief that human beings possess numerous selves, and that the manifold aspect of self is crucial to its ontological security (Jackson 1998:10). As Bateson points out:

A man has many social selves, as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind (1973:285).

Jackson's thesis on inter-subjectivity does not, however, de-emphasise the importance of subjectivity, for following on from Merleau-Ponty (1963) and Mead (1934), he reminds us that subjectivity is informed by inter-subjectivity and experience is situated in inter-experience (Jackson 1996:28). Jackson returns the self into the inter-subjective arena in which experience is formed and mediated through various intra-human and extra-human relationships. For Jackson, the lifeworld — the experiential ground of the self, is not reduced to a coherent, predictable domain of human actions and events, but is a domain of tension, ambiguity, resistance, irony and contradiction (Jackson 1996:27). In so far as that experience arises from the ground of incongruous forces, events, and circumstances, it thus limits the imposition of habitual models for and of human action. Each human being is in a sense more exceptional than typical (Jackson 1996:27). Similarly, Abu-Lughod considers the human existential experience,

not as automatons programmed according to "cultural" rules or acting out social roles, but as people going through life wondering what they should do, making mistakes, being opinionated, vacillating, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragic losses, enjoying others, and finding moments of laughter (1993:27).

Crucial to Abu-Lughod's discourse is the primacy of human agency to meaningfully engage in the lifeworld. An implicit element of human encounters (I would also include here encounters between humans and non-human others), as Jackson explains, is a need to establish a sense of personal authorship over one's life, to be given voice during interactions with others, without countermanding one's feeling of propriety. The key element here is that human beings need to believe that they are masters of their own lives, and to be allowed to exercise various strategies — ways of maintaining “self-determination and self-identity” while adjusting to the Other (Jackson 1998:19). “We are “the authors of ourselves,” writes Myerhoff (cited in Bruner 1986:12). Bruner calls for anthropology of experience in which human beings are viewed as “active agents in the historical process who construct their own world” (1986:12). Dilthey further explains that those cultural manifestations that are contiguous with inter-subjective life are the domain “in which the subject discovers himself” (1976:203). Like Devisch (1996:95), my interactions with *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* led me to question the idea of culture as merely text (Geertz 1971,1973; Ricoeur 1976,1981) or human action as the continual production of cultural practices, that is “characterised as a structured disposition” (Bourdieu 1977:95).

Jackson notes that this existential “juggling act” between “existential mastery” (Jackson 1998:21), and redressive action with the Other is an ongoing process of negotiation, entailing a movement between overlapping domains — the domain of people and the spiritual domain, private and public domains, natural and cultural domains (Jackson 1998:20). Abrahams (1986:67), and Schutz, had earlier claimed that human beings operate “both within and between various worlds and their realities” (1970:225). No matter how people construe this movement between abstracted and physical worlds or between ordinary and extraordinary states of awareness, it entails a co-existence between the individual and Other. My own position is that this movement pervades *faqirs'* experience, and by so doing, enables them to engage in different experiential and perceptual domains and states of conscience, which are vital for achieving mystical mastery.

An interesting feature throughout my fieldwork were the various ways *faqirs* authored their self identity and portrayed themselves as active agents in their lives. Jackson's

notion of the need for human beings to be given voice as a way of acknowledging the significance of their existence both to themselves and to others is crucial to my analysis in understanding *faqirs'* mystical mastery. However, I elaborate on Jackson's notion by contending that *faqirs* need to be active agents in influencing their engagement with spiritual others, where they actively negotiate with various spirit beings i.e. saints, *jinn*, and spirit familiars.

Strategies for reauthoring the self

Like Foucault (1980), I am interested in exploring "techniques of the self" in relation to *faqirs'* everyday lives, and how these enable them to reauthor their lifeworlds. I contend that mystical mastery is a form of reauthoring the self, in that *faqirs'* mystical complexes permit them to transform and modify themselves through various operations on their bodies, thoughts and behaviour (Foucault 1980; Miller 1993:321-322). Levi-Strauss (1976) had earlier pointed out, that in many societies individuals have a penchant towards reconstruing and modifying personal or collective symbols as a way of finding accordance with their experiences, which he refers to as *bricolage*. Anthropologists like Stephen point out that where cultural categories do not fit with an individual's subjective experiences, or are inadequate to express new and ambiguous occurrences, then he/she will adjust, modify or innovate on "given cultural schemata" (Stephen 1989:43).

In her article "*Life Not Death in Venice: its Second Death*," Myerhoff tells us that human beings create various ways of making sense to themselves and others through storytelling, dramatised performances, or making visible to others desired aspects of themselves (1986:26). Myerhoff's study focuses on an elderly group of Eastern European immigrant Jews living in California. Aware of their "marginal" status some of the elderly citizens embarked upon publicising their activities through their imaginative efforts and creativity. Consequently, they became adept in manipulating images and combining various customs, rituals and other cultural memorabilia as a way of dealing with their present circumstances (Myerhoff 1986:261-262). Thus, by being seen these elderly citizens refused their impotency and invisibility, coming "into being on their own terms as authors of themselves" (Myerhoff 1986:263).

While reminiscing on his fieldwork experiences among the Kuranko, Jackson explains that he was surprised how Kuranko rituals and narratives apparently displaced or annulled orthodox values and conduct (Jackson 1989:37). Such contrivances, Jackson claims, disclose an existential imperative, to live in the social world not in a spirit of acquiescence to prevailing social structures but as a “set of possibilities” realised through “purposeful” activity (Jackson 1989:37). This idea will be unpacked in Chapter Two in relation to *faqirs*’ body image and conduct at the Nizamuddin shrine.

Aspects of Jackson’s thesis arise from Heidegger’s notion of “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*); human beings are born into the world not of their choosing, a world which existed prior to their own existence, and which will continue after their passing. Notwithstanding the ostensible indeterminacy of our “thrownness” condition, Jackson opines that most human beings revoke it through various kinds of strategies (i.e. resistance, criticism and fantasy) (Jackson 1989:14).

For Luhmann (1989,1992), the training of western magicians incorporates all of these modes. Luhmann observes that magicians are expected to creatively engage in their ritual practices and mind altering techniques with the aim in developing a “new language in which to talk about world,” and gain “new possibilities for organizing it” (Luhmann 1992:245). Luhmann further claims that magicians become highly adept in inventing their own personal myths and histories by using them to interpret experience and increase their symbolic mastery (Luhmann 1992:244).

While Myerhoff’s and Luhmann’s studies provide useful trajectories in explaining how human beings employ various strategies for recovering existential retrieval, my own analysis elaborates from Jackson’s notion of personal critique as a way of restoring self empowerment (1989:14). This idea will be taken up in Chapters Two and Six, where I analyse how ambiguity is used by *faqirs* in their body representations, demeanour, and within divination practices as a means of promoting their mystique to patients at the Nizamuddin shrine, as well as challenging social mores and norms. What I want to impart in this analysis is the idea that the ways in which *faqirs* come to experience their mystical complexes enables them to reauthor their sense of personal mastery and autonomy.

Conceptions of the “Other”

An underlying concern of this thesis examines conceptions of the “Other”, and how it is “imagined and experienced by the self” (Stephen & Herdt 1989:5). The view of the Other as a source of mystery, power, awe, and creativity is developed within William James’ notion of the “ontological imagination” (James 1963). According to James, the ontological imagination is where the real, the imagined and the extraordinary become crystallised, real, and active, and conflate in the reality of everyday existence. James writes:

Such is the human ontological imagination, and such is what it brings to birth. Unpicturable beings are realised, and realised with an intensity almost like that of an hallucination. They determine our vital attitude as decisively as the vital attitude of lovers is determined by the habitual sense, by which is haunted, of the other being in the world (1963:72).

Bercovitch suggests that James was alluding here to the “invisible realm of religion,” and that it could represent regions of the “subliminal consciousness” that is independent from conscious awareness (1989:122). This is tied into James’ pragmatic view of religion as conveying to believers, aspects of their “individual beings and interests (Bercovitch 1989:122).¹³ Rudolf Otto’s classic work, “*The Idea of the Holy*” (1958), views the Divine Other as being posited on the principles of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* — which evokes mystery, fear and awe, and at the same time attracts and fascinates. Otto suggested that the *tremendum* pole dealt with the transcendent nature of the Divine Other which is inherently unapproachable and demands the maintenance of correct ontological distance. Alternately, the *fascinans* pole, was more aligned with mystical interpretations of the Divine Other. Numerous mystical narratives interpret the Divine Other in relation to its ontological proximity, or as an experience of unimaginable quality. For instance, the Quran draws attention to the *fascinans* aspect:

¹³ Pruyser notes, that it is this power of religion over the imagination that swayed Freud’s interest in religion (1985:257). For Freud, the power of religion “overwhelms reason and science” (1939:123). In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud espoused his idea of the sacred as a complex of power relations and manoeuvres for controlling the inherent incestuous proclivities of the human species. This primeval impulse was constrained through elaborate ritual behaviour that, for Freud, in part satisfied our “deep seated ambivalence (loving and hating, making love and killing)” (Pruyser 1985:258).

“It is We Who created man, and We know what dark suggestions his soul makes to him: for We are nearer to him than his jugular vein” (Quran 50:16). Being closer than one’s ‘jugular vein’ implies that the Divine Other is more intimately attuned to the innermost state of human existence than is the human self (Ali 1976:141). Tillich (1951), who diverges from other philosophers of religion, views the transcendent Other not as a distinct being but as being itself.¹⁴ Bouma in his discussion of religious transcendence, writes that “the everyday form of transcendence” is elicited through human acts of “submission before ultimate, the mystery” (1992:70). Bouma goes on to say that in “this mode of transcendence” all religious action relies on imagery in pointing to, or representing the mysterious and powerful Other (1992:70).

While theorists such as Otto and Tillich have given different theological interpretations of what the Divine Other is, anthropologists over the last thirty years have shared an increasing interest in religious experience in various cultures, as evinced by numerous studies (i.e. Lewis 1971; Geertz 1973; Turner 1969, 1987; Obeyeskere 1981; Kapferer 1983; Stephen & Herdt 1989; Csordas 1990, 1994a, 1994b, 1997). William James (1963) claimed that religious experience is a source of personal revelation, insight, and moral power. For James, the power of religion derives from the strength of a person’s religious belief, or as F.R. Tenant (cited Barbour 1974:135), refers to as the “sustained effort of the will”. James divides religion into two areas: “the experiential and the relational” (Berkovitch 1989:122). According to James, religious experience serves a variety of subjective purposes; one such purpose could be encountering different modes of self awareness as a way of apprehending the mysteries of the Divine Other.¹⁵ James’ ideas are useful in apprehending how spirit beings from various cultures are understood, experienced and made part of “the self’s symbolic world” (Herdt 1989:30). Stephen also asserts that hidden or unknown aspects of the self are often revealed during religious experience (1989:235).

¹⁴ Tillich (1951:245), who elaborates on this idea from a Christian perspective writes: “Personal God’ does not mean that God is a person. It means that God is the ground of everything personal and that he carries within himself the ontological power of personality... Ordinary theism has made God a heavenly, completely perfect person who resides above the world and mankind...God is not God without universal participation.” Elsewhere, Tillich writes: “This means that “being” and “person” are not contradictory concepts (1955:83-84). Being includes personal being: it does not deny it. The ground of being is the ground of personal being, not its negation”.

¹⁵ It is the symbolic and mystical properties of religion that for James “may represent areas of subliminal consciousness that people are not ordinarily aware of in themselves” (Berkovitch 1989:122).

Gilbert Herdt observes that western conceptions of “selfhood and the religious imagination” have been influenced by ancient Greek notions of the self (1989:30-31). Among the Homeric Greeks notions of the “Other” were associated with the psyche. This “Other” could manifest as a “dream image” or “the shade” (Vernant 1983:308). As Herdt (1989:30) reminds us, the Homeric Greeks did not ascribe any abstract duties to the psyche:

The origins of mental life and the sources of intentionality were generally ascribed to agencies outside the person. Intense mental states, such as courage on the battlefield, were infusions from the gods.

For example, the frenetic ecstasies of the early *Bacchae* (followers of Dionysus, Hellenic god of wine) or the inspired madness of the oracle of Delphi were attributed to external divine forces.¹⁶ This belief was maintained through to the time of Socrates. Thus, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates states:

Madness, provided it comes as the gift of heaven, is the channel by which we receive the greatest blessings...madness comes from God, whereas sober sense is merely human.

The eighth century poet, Hesiod, described the “Other” in terms of a guardian of humans (*daimones*) who wandered throughout the earth in invisibility. Some of these *daimones* could act on their host’s behalf to wreak punishment to a particular family, and were given the special title of *Alastor* (Phillips 1989:3). Other *daimones* resembled the Islamic notion of the *qarin* as they were attached to an individual from birth till death.¹⁷ Stephen (1989:235) asserts, that in many cultures, religious experiences are

¹⁶ Dodds (1951), claims that Hellenic rationalism never totally divested itself from supernaturalism as testified by the various ecstatic cults that are located in that period. Even the Greek dynamism for intellectual inquiry did not obviate from its oracular tradition, so important to the Hellenic people. Moreover, Simon’s analysis (1978), enhances our understanding of the “psyche” in Greek culture, maintaining that it combined “natural and metaphysical elements” (Herdt 1989:19).

¹⁷ The Quran (50:21), refers the *qarin* as “the one united” or “companion”. According to Islamic tradition, the descendants of Adam and Eve were each assigned to a companion, a kind of double that was the progeny of the devil.

nurtured to the point where they can assume a personalised identity — the “bush soul” of tribal societies (Jung 1964:24) (i.e. the *koogu* of the Sambia (Herdt 1989), the *patros* of the Mayotte (Lambek 1981), the *amô* and *ajumâq* of the Angakkut) (Jakobsen 1999).¹⁸

Taussig (1993) claims that the Other is apprehended by what he calls the “mimetic faculty” — the human ability for grasping that which is strange and other “through resemblances” and copying it (Stoller 1997:66). Taussig indicates how the human faculty for mimicry enables “the capacity to Other” (1993:19), for gaining comprehension and mastery (Stoller 1997:66). In this way, “knowing is corporeal”, human beings copy the world in order to make sense of it through their bodies (Stoller 1997:66). Knowing is sensuous, the “Other” is recognised and felt through the body. Similarly, Jackson (1996), like Stoller (1989a, 1989b, 1997), explore the sensuous interface between the body and the Other. As Jackson points out, for the Warlpiri people of Northern Australia, the human body is metaphorically tied to the land, “in terms of internal, visceral physiology” (1996:33). In this way, relations between people and the land are understood according to bodily processes of eating, digestion, excretion and procreation (Jackson 1996:32).

During my fieldwork, *faqirs*’ and devotees’ conceptions of the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* were often engendered in cultural understandings of the body. For example, the tombs of Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khosrau were treated by both *faqirs* and devotees as though they were the living bodies of the saints. Thus, the practice of covering their tombs with large sheets of cloth was thought of as “covering their nakedness.” Likewise, Muslim styles of body cleansing were incorporated in the devotional practices there, as depicted in the way the saints’ tombs were ritually washed (*ghusl*), and scented with aromatic oils, incense, and rose petals. *Faqirs* as did *basti* locals, also, tended to designate the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* to qualities of the body (i.e. clean and unclean, pure and polluted).

¹⁸ Western societies pathologising of such inner experiences has led to what Jung calls the “loss of soul”, (Jung 1964:25). For Jung, any attempt by the individual or society to repress “reactions of the unconscious” were doomed to fail (Jung 1964:222). His ideas of the symbolic manifestations of the

In a *faqir's* case, it is probably more relevant to talk of Taussig's mimetic faculty in terms of his "capacity to *others*". As I will show, a *faqir's* mystical complex requires him to engage with various spiritual others. Each relationship which a *faqir* forges with a spiritual other, is constituted on a certain negotiative style. By indicating how *faqirs* negotiate with various spirit beings I also examine how different kinds of mystical mastery are elicited, and how these various kinds of mystical mastery assist *faqirs* in shaping their identities.

Structure of thesis

In this analysis, each chapter focuses on different areas of mystical mastery and its implications for *faqirs'* mystical complex. Through my focus on different areas of *faqirs'* mystical complex, I aim to explore the interface between experience and meaning, and how it constitutes various ways of mystical mastery. Although my analysis does not claim to examine all areas of *faqirs'* mystical complex, it does explore those areas which I believe are integral to *faqirs'* mystical practice, and how mystical mastery is conveyed and negotiated within subjective and intersubjective domains of experience. Thus, my analysis diverges from more conventional studies of Sufi mystics, which have tended to focus on historic and organisational features of Sufi brotherhoods.¹⁹

In Chapter Two I begin by locating *faqirs* in relation to their body image and comportment. In order to draw out the distinctive elements of a *faqir's* body image and comportment, I use a comparative analysis between *faqirs* and *Chisti pirs*. I argue that the salient features of a *faqirs'* social identity embody notions of ambiguity, mystery and awe. Drawing from Jackson's notion of the "existential imperative" I reveal how *faqirs'* body representations constitute ways of reaffirming personal autonomy. A

unconscious in the cultural realm have inadvertently prompted anthropological enquiry into previous forbidden domains such as dreams, possession, and ecstatic states.

¹⁹ Crapanzano's study of the Hamadsha (1981) is an exception, as he employs psychoanalysis to explaining their system of therapy. Moreover, Hoffman (1995), analyses modern day Egyptian Sufi orders in relation to increasing urbanisation and secularism and its impact on Sufi religious ideals. Hoffman also makes a comparative analysis between Sufis and Coptic Christians within the context of Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt.

faqir's concern in maintaining personal autonomy is often conveyed by his apparent non-observance of Muslim practice in relation to attire, behaviour, and social space.

In Chapter Three I shift my focus the sensuous awareness of *faqirs'* mystical mastery via an exploration of their mystical practices. I argue for the centrality of sensuous awareness in informing *faqirs'* awareness of their bodies' viscera and sensory perceptions. I also examine the role of the sensory perceptions in their engagement with the Nizamuddin shrine complex, and how their sensory perceptions mediate their bodies' presence with its spiritual landscape as a way of drawing the saint's blessedness (*barkat*).

Chapter Four further explores the arenas of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* in relation to social changes since partition (1947), and how such changes impacted on *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' perceptions of these domains. Subsequently, *faqirs* and *basti* locals implemented various strategies for countervailing the threat of boundary crossing by evil spirit beings, and for retrieving a sense of existential control in response to what they perceived to be Hindu encroachment in the *basti*. I explain the tensions between *basti* locals and Hindus as a consequence of the construction of a Hindu cremation ground called the *Samshat Ghat* which was built next to the local Muslim cemetery. The construction of *Samshat Ghat* was deeply resented by *faqirs* and *basti* locals, as it was believed to impose upon the moral integrity of the Muslim cemetery. Some *faqirs* and *basti* locals also believed that its construction was instigated as a way of promoting Hindu-Muslim tensions, and for humiliating Muslims. Consequently, some *basti* locals and other Delhi Muslims attempted to prevent the construction of the *Samshat Ghat* which led to violent riots between them and Hindus. Yet, despite their efforts, the construction of the *Samshat Ghat* went ahead. I also examine several recent events which had occurred at the *basti* prior to the construction of the *Samshat Ghat*. Not only did *faqirs* and *basti* locals construe these events as morally debasing the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*, but they were also considered as exposing their domains to evil spirit beings.

Chapter Five explores the relationship between *faqirs* and their spirit familiars called *muwakil*. My purpose in this chapter is to reveal the dynamics between *faqirs* and

muwakil and its implications for reaffirming a *faqir's* sense of mystical mastery. *Muwakil* provide a compelling example into the ways in which *faqirs* comprehend and explain their mystical prowess, and how their mystical powers are imagined. I explain how *muwakil* are construed in *faqirs'* religious imaginations. *Faqirs'* conceptions of *muwakil* are based on cultural representations as well from their personal experiences. I also explore how *muwakil* are captured and controlled by *faqirs*, and how this process underscores a *faqir's* sense of personal power and existential control. It is because *faqirs* believe that the invoking and capturing of *muwakil* is tied to a special kind of mystical prowess that I probe into the ways this kind of mystical power is developed in the lives of two *faqirs*. By exploring their personal narratives I show how these *faqirs* interpret their experiences as an assertion of their investiture with mystical power for controlling spirit beings.

In Chapter Six I move my analysis to *faqirs'* curative practices through an examination of *faqirs'* divination. I argue that *faqirs'* divination practices provide an important experiential arena for conveying *faqirs'* mystical mastery to patients via their alleged mystical insight. I take the reader through various ways in which *faqirs'* alleged mystical insight is manifested within divination. It is in the close interaction between *faqir* and patient that I probe how divination practices are articulated. I discuss the importance of dreams and dream sharing for *faqirs*. Dream sharing provides an important avenue for conveying *faqirs'* mystical mastery to both patients and other clients. I also explore the divination approaches of two well known *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine. I discuss similarities and differences of their divination methods and the ways in which they attempt towards reaffirming their mystique to patients. Divination also provides a negotiating arena where a patient is included in the process of resolving their problem situation.

Chapter Seven further explores *faqirs'* curative practices and how they convey mystical mastery via a symbolic examination of *faqirs'* mystical designs called *puleeta* (charm wick). I contend that a *puleeta's* various levels of symbolism enable a spiritual transference of the *faqir's* psyche into the patient where it facilitates in the attempted expulsion of the host spirit being from the "possessed" patient. *Puleeta* are discussed as providing a means for negotiating with the spirit world while enabling a redressive

course of action for curing a patient. *Puleeta* involve various stratagems for invoking sacred power and for controlling, intimidating, and expelling a host spirit being. The creation and employment of *puleeta* enables *faqirs* to symbolically manipulate the other, and in so doing, this allows *faqirs* to recover their sense of existential control and mastery. In order to draw out some of the symbolic and cosmological levels of *puleeta* and its relationship to spirit possession, I examine spirit possession within the Indian Muslim social context of spiritual illnesses, as well as explaining their various types and symptoms.

Chapter Eight explores the mystical relationship between *faqirs* and the spirits of saints, and how this relationship generates mystical expressions, manifested through various performative genres. An analysis is given into *faqirs*' mystical performances as a way of exploring the nexus between mystical mastery and creative expression. I examine two different types of ritual performances and how they allegedly convey a *faqir's* mystical tie to the saints. In the second type of ritual performance I discuss the underlying significance of its postures in the everyday lives of *faqirs*, and how they inform a *faqir's* relationship with the saints.

Chapter Nine gives concluding remarks of the chapters and their implications for increasing our awareness of the various kinds of mystical mastery.

CHAPTER TWO

MYSTICAL IDENTITIES AND AMBIGUOUS BODIES

*Allah is the First and the Last, the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden.
Quran: Sura of Iron, 3.*

Pointing to his fingers, Shams said, "You see, each of these rings has its own raz (mystical power) — it is the faqir's way. We understand the power of these stones while others do not. A faqir knows how to play with their power.

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore *faqirs'* body image and how they are distinguished from others at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*. I am particularly interested in examining how *faqirs'* body image and comportment embody the notions of ambiguity, inordinance, alterity and mystery. Shams' narrative in the quote above alludes to a certain type of cultivation of the body through the manipulation of bodily symbols, by which the "qualities of the self" are projected (Becker 1995:129). It is to this theme of body cultivation as embodied self which I will now turn.

For both Comaroff (1985:6-7) and Merleau-Ponty (1963:82,146) the body is "the tangible frame of selfhood in individual and collective experience", "the vehicle of being in the world". The body mediates action within the lifeworld and constitutes the self "which it is part". Yet the body is not just a thing in itself isolated from the lifeworld. It is subjected to natural and cultural forces throughout its existence, whereby its form is continually shaped and transformed. This process of change is both a product of biological ageing, as well as a consequence of purposeful manipulation. According to Becker, the "cultivation of the body" (1995:127) has been given extensive analysis in western cultures, and has been characterised by "careful and ostentatious staging" of body representations (Foucault 1988:85). Social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu argue that individuals "rationally calculate" their bodily appearance through "manipulation and exploitation of bodily symbols, from which they stand to profit" (Becker 1995:128, Bourdieu 1984:192,202). Concurring with Bourdieu, Becker (1995:128) notes that western styles of cultivating the body are posited on capitalist derived values, which encourage "competitive work on the self to promote it above other selves".

Sufism, with its emphasis on personal experience and intuitive understanding of the sacred other, also allows for a personal cultivation of the body via Sufis' mystical practices, and are often characterised by "extreme objectification of bodies" (Becker 1995:130). *Faqirs'* body image and actions often convey extreme forms of body objectifications. As I shall argue, the extent to which *faqirs* portray idiosyncratic styles of body appearance and behaviour not only confers upon them marginal status by others at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*, but also enables them to creatively shape their identity. *Faqirs'* creative manipulation of their bodies as an "expression of personal identity" brings our attention to Jackson's notion of "existential imperative" (Jackson 1998). The existential imperative, as Jackson tells us, "is founded in our ability to gainsay and invent, to countermand in our actions and imagination the situations that appear to circumscribe, rule, and define us (1998:29). For Jackson, the capacity to do things "in one's own time and in one's own way, to think of the world as something one creates" rather than merely reacting to it, are all grounded in the existential imperative (1998:29). The ability for *faqirs'* to seemingly 'do things in their own way' is invariably conveyed by various body presentations that express indeterminacy and paradox.

As a way of exploring how the existential imperative is grounded in *faqirs'* body image and comportment, I begin by taking the reader on a journey through the Nizamuddin shrine, in which I was accompanied by the *faqir*, Shams. I will then briefly examine the nature of *faqirs'* involvement with *tariqah* (mystical, inner path) as a means of experimenting with reality, and inventing new possibilities for understanding the self in relation to the sacred other. As a way of exploring some of the complexities of *faqirs'* embodied representations, I will provide a comparative analysis between *faqirs* and the *Chisti pirs*,¹ where I will examine aspects of their body image and kinaesthetics. *Chisti pirs* serve as liturgical specialists and healers at the Nizamuddin shrine, and contrast in appearance and deportment from *faqirs* there. This kind of comparative analysis will serve in exploring the nature of their differences and how they are conveyed at the Nizamuddin shrine.

¹ The *Chisti pirs* were discussed in Chapter One.

A paradoxical domain

It was one of my initial visits to the Nizamuddin shrine. I was still captivated by the 'exotic' environment and the pageantry of life operating there. Hundreds of devotees, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs gravitated towards the major shrine of the saint Nizamuddin, while many devotees sat and talked at the large courtyards surrounding the shrine. A cavalcade of colours, sounds, smells and tastes were continually assaulting my senses. It was as if my body in this affirmation of sentience had become awakened to its synaesthetic potentialities which had largely been dormant in Australia. Paul Stoller attributes this lack of bodily awareness as being grounded in western civilisation's philosophical and practical engagement with Cartesian dualism (1986, 1987). For Abram, Cartesian dualism condemns the body to the tyranny of a "predetermined mechanism"—lacking animateness (1997:49). At the Nizamudin shrine there was neither hiatus from one's senses, nor the luxury of remaining diffident from the torrent of emotion which was constantly being expressed by hundreds of devotees. The apparent unrestricted display of strong emotion by devotees was also reflected in the various kinds of behaviours which they regularly engaged in at the Nizamuddin shrine; a devotee claiming to have been healed of a life-long complaint, a "spirit possessed" woman thrusting her hips in sexual innuendo, men counting money in the mosque while others prayed nearby.

A few days later Shahida asked me if I would like to be introduced to one of the local and more well-known *faqirs*. I was excited by her invitation. "Just go to the shrine of Hazrat Inayat Khan at *maghrib*.² He will be there. His name is Sher-khan. I will tell him about you." She also said that he was known for his 'wild' appearance and uncouth manner.

I had gone to Inayat Khan's shrine at the time of *maghrib*. I was on time. The calls of the many *muezzins*³ in the *basti* filled the air by their cadence. The local guardian of the shrine, who was also a religious teacher, had just finished his Quranic class with some of the *basti* children. He was indifferent to my presence. A tall, thin man, he acknowledged my presence with an indifferent nod of his head and made his way for

² Late afternoon formal prayer commencing just before sunset

³ A *muezzin* is a Muslim caller of prayer. The Muslim call to prayer is called the "*azan*."

prayer. I was alone. Suddenly, the entrance doors opened. A man entered. He was short with a beard and small piercing eyes. I guessed him to be around forty years of age. He wore a long shirt (*qasimi*) and pyjama like pants, and his head was covered with a turban. His fingers were covered with rings and his wrists jangled with the sound of metal bracelets. His manner was rather hurried as if mindful of undertaking some specific duty. "Are you Sher-khan?" I asked him. "Yes I am," he replied in broken English, while looking at me intently. I quickly introduced myself and told him that our mutual friend referred me to him. "I've come here to study the *faqirs*," I added. He told me that his real name was Shams but many *basti* locals called him Sher-khan because of his wrathful nature. He gave a little laugh and grabbed me by the arm, saying, "Lets go to the *dargah* (shrine) and pay salaam to Hazrat Nizamuddin".⁴

One of the first things that struck me was that his deportment. He moved stealthily along the darkening alleys, sometimes arresting his movement abruptly, before regaining his rhythmic composure. It was as if his maladroit behaviour was a means of contradicting and countermanding Muslim edict, which places an onus on a controlled bodily demeanour. We entered the Nizamuddin shrine complex and headed towards the Nizamuddin shrine. Nearby the shrine were some *faqirs*. He greeted them and sat with them. All of them had long, unkempt hair and their bodies were covered in an array of colourful accoutrements. One of them who was called "Baba" was sitting on a makeshift bed while he conversed. We left them and went to the shrine of Amir Khosrau, and sat along its perimeter wall. An old Muslim woman was sitting and chanting with her rosary (*tasbeeh*). She would periodically pick up the bottle of water next to her and blow in it several times. Shams told me that this technique was called "*dum*" and was a particularly powerful healing method.⁵ She told us, "I have been suffering from blood pressure and have prayed here for a long time. I am getting better now because of the saint's blessing." We then went to Nizamuddin's shrine and again sat down. I remained silent. Within a few minutes Shams became incoherent. His ring laden fingers moved nimbly in the air as if he was engaged in a kind of cryptic gesture language which, I was to learn during my field-work, was intrinsic to the *faqirs'* mystical complex.

⁴ The term "*Hazrat*" in Arabic and Urdu-Persian languages is cognate with the English word 'saint'.

I remained there for a while observing the rich pageantry of life unfurl before me. A man approached me asking for *bakshish* (money handout). I refused him. He then began to weep. Shams took no notice. The next day, I met Shams at the *basti*. As we talked he pulled up his long shirt in order to tighten his sash around his waist. "You know, the colour of a *faqir's* sash has spiritual meaning. It is secret". He told me. Shams then added, "A *faqir's* life is *raz* (secret)".

It was late afternoon when I returned to see Shams. I had caught him in the middle of eating. It was a meagre repast consisting of a piece of flat bread (*chappati*) and a glass of water. Concerned over his penurious state, I offered to give him some money for food. He quickly rebuked me while outstretching his forefinger saying, "a *faqir's* body looks like this finger. This is *tariqah*. His stomach does not rule him. *Faqirs* are not like those fat *mullahs*".⁶

Mysterious ways

My initial encounter with the *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine exposed me to various aspects of their worldview and sensibilities. It was particularly through my meeting with Shams which provided me an insightful inroad into the *faqirs'* body image and identity. An important feature of Sham's interpretation and understanding of his body appearance is his adherence in maintaining a desired body image, which is intrinsic to his mystical identity. Clearly, body adornment, comportment, and thinness are ways in which *faqirs* construct and establish their mystical identities and maintain their difference from others. For Shams, as well as for other *faqirs*, his explicit appearance and deportment apparently derives from his mystical involvement with *tariqah*, or the mystical or inner path.

Faqirs are fond of using the word *tariqah*. *Tariqah* seems to be a major axis of description: "this is *tariqah*", or "this isn't *tariqah*". *Tariqah* is often used in the context of the body. To eat little was *tariqah*, to wear bangles and other ornaments, or to behave in a seemingly uncouth manner was usually understood as being *tariqah*. But what is *tariqah* and how does it express itself in *faqirs'* body image and

⁵ A further explanation of this healing technique is provided in chapter eight in relation to *faqirs'* system of therapy.

⁶ The term "*mullah*" refers to an Islamic religious leader.

comportment? *Tariqah* can probably be best described as a *modus operandum* of *faqirs'* life and thought; a way or method for "structuring one's entire life" and for encountering the Divine and the spirit world, that is largely independent from the encumbrances of religious dogma and social prescriptives (Ewing 1984:359).⁷

According to *faqirs*, a fundamental difference which distinguishes them from other Muslims is their observance of *tariqah*. Shams and other *faqirs* would regularly made a point of this to me. *Faqirs'* concern with making this kind of distinction is congruent with the style of their spiritual approach that is qualitatively different from the religious approach of other Muslims. The latter, as *faqirs* persistently told me, followed *shari'a*.⁸ Shams often pointed out this distinction by saying, "We are *tariqah* people and they are *shari'at* people".

For Muslims in general, the *modus operandum* of *shari'a* is *adab* (outward conduct), that regulates and co-ordinates social relations between Muslims. Indeed, *adab* serves as the moral adhesive for many Muslims. Generally speaking, social relations between *basti* villagers are characterised by politeness and "personal propriety"⁹ in accordance with *adab*. For instance, *basti* locals consider self-restraint as being a necessary quality for maintaining harmonious relations with others. Public displays of strong emotion such as anger or jealousy are usually avoided since they threaten the flow of communication between people.¹⁰ This is especially the case where there is a potential

⁷ See also Metcalf (1996) on *tariqah*. My enquiries into *tariqah* often came to an abrupt impasse. The idea that *tariqah* necessitates an intuitive understanding of life made it difficult for *faqirs* to discuss its nature openly with me. I was sometimes rebuked with exasperation or laughter by my *faqir* friends for delving into areas which I had no understanding. I came to the opinion that for *faqirs* *tariqah* represented a way out of the intellectualist trap associated with formalist religion. Bateson (1973, as cited in May 1978:93) suggests that non-rational modes of experiencing the world i.e. intuition, dreaming, involves letting go of rationalistic structures and being "carried by the life process". Stoller (1986:36-38), and Merleau-Ponty (1964:16), suggest that aesthetic experience confounds the Cartesian mind/body distinction which has been at the heart of the western scientific model over the last two centuries. In my experience, no *faqir* ever found himself caught up in theological debates with others at the shrine. *Faqirs* do not seem to be interested in this kind of discourse and generally avoid it.

⁸ The basis of *shari'a* is the Quran and the *sunna* (prophetic traditions). Essentially, *shari'a* is the social and moral prescriptive of Muslim life, guiding Muslims in every domain and aspect of life, from the cradle to the grave. According to the *sunna*, it is incumbent for all Muslims to observe *shari'a*.

⁹ Borrowed from Desjarlais (1994:76).

¹⁰ The concern with communal relations is also shaped by the penurious conditions faced by many *basti* locals, where close family and friendship ties serve in providing material and emotional security. *Basti* locals, like many other Indians which I encountered, enjoyed conversation. It was commonplace to see *basti* householders sitting on benches or makeshift beds in front of their houses, engaging in conversation with passers-by and catching up on the local gossip

for public or private conflict. In a society where sorcery (*jādu*) and cursing (*badua*) are commonly employed to avenge personal slights, *basti* locals and Muslims in general place a precedence on social conformity.

Basti locals and other Muslims tend to scrutinise the behaviours of others to see whether they fall within or outside the parameters of *adab*. *Basti* locals were apt to conform their behaviours in response to how others might regard them (Desjarlais 1994:77). At the heart of every *basti* local's concern is "what will people say or think of them." At the *basti* and Nizamuddin shrine few things go unnoticed. The constant surveillance of others is a ubiquitous and accepted part of social interactions. What people do and say is always open to public scrutiny. This factor alone is enough to caution an individual from violating collective mores since any contravention of these carries with it public condemnation. Such censure usually comes in the form of gossip and backbiting, where an individual is exposed to public ridicule and embarrassment. An implicit assumption is that each person is entitled to observe the behaviours of others, sometimes to the point of spying. For example, closed doors are often viewed with suspicion, especially where non-related men and women are involved.¹¹

It is this very aspect of social conformity and loss of personal autonomy that *faqirs* seek to avoid. While *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* acknowledge that *shari'a* plays an important role in inculcating respect for Islamic values, they claim that *shari'a* is mainly concerned with the everyday level of things, and does not allow a person to penetrate the mystical nature of existence. "*Tariqah* is not like *shari'a* you know. *Tariqah* is deep, but *shari'a* is only interested on the surface level," one old *faqir* told me. This is not to argue, of course, that *faqirs* absolve themselves from the core requirements of Islam. This is not so. From my experience, many *faqirs* performed the obligatory prayers (*namaz*) five times a day, and the fast during the month of *Ramadan*.¹² However, it seemed that *faqirs* were more interested in exercising their own personal understandings of Islam beyond the domain of ordinary Muslims. *Faqirs'* body image and identity not only express a disregard for *shari'a*, but is also characterised by their penchant for self-expression, invention and gainsay.

¹¹ I alluded to this aspect in Chapter One.

¹² Prayer and fasting during the holy month of *Ramadan* are two of the five pillars of Islam which are incumbent upon all Muslims.

Faqirs' immersion in *tariqah* is grounded in the existential imperative, allowing them “new possibilities” for exploring and re-inventing the self, and for “denying the determinacy” of being “thrown” into the “world which has been made by others,” through gainsay, “critique or sheer perversity” (Jackson 1989:14; Krell 1977a).

In this way, a *faqir's* appearance, dress, and comportment are all ways for expressing the existential imperative. It is the *faqirs'* body image that I now turn my theoretical attention.

Striking bodies: *faqir* and *Chisti pir*

By most accounts, *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine embody a *liminal* state (Turner 1969, 1974).¹³ Many *faqirs* seemingly strive to absolve themselves from the symbols of public conformity. Even at an explicit level, *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine convey ambiguous dimensions. *Faqirs* are usually middle-aged or older, sometimes younger. Many *faqirs* have long and dishevelled hair, enhancing their “wild appearance” (Plate 2.1).¹⁴ On some occasions their hair resembles the twisting platted masses of Hindu *sadhus* (Hindu ascetics or renunciants). Some *faqirs* choose to don colourful turbans (*safa*) consisting of one or more small shrouds (*chaddar*) appropriated from their visits to various saints' shrines. The *faqir's* body is usually emaciated as a result of frequent fasting.¹⁵

Faqirs' style of dress show a wide variation. Some *faqirs* don sackcloth, while others wear the simple *loongi*.¹⁶ Drawn and thin, they carry around with them their meagre belongings in cotton bags or large cans. Many *faqirs* have a penchant for adorning themselves with rings, bracelets, and sometimes-even anklets.¹⁷ *Faqirs*, such as Nazim

¹³ As Turner states: “Liminal figures are neither here nor there; they are between and betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (1969:95). Turner's concept of *liminality* is relevant here, since he argues that it has the capacity for questioning and violating social reality. For Turnbull, “liminality is integrative of all experience, both on the conscious and subconscious levels of being” (Turnbull 1990:80). Among the “Mbuti ritual priests and prophets” liminal states are “coexistent at all times with the normal state of being” (1990:79).

¹⁴ See Berg (1951); Leach (1958) and Obeyeskere (1981) on hair symbolism.

¹⁵ Some *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine derive their food from the charity of devotees and *basti* locals. Other *faqirs* living in the *basti* usually eat a paltry diet of lentils (*dhal*). Lentils are often cooked in a large pot and consumed between *faqirs*.

¹⁶ A *loongi* is a popular form of male dress consisting of a long piece of cloth which is tied around the waist, worn by Hindus and Muslims.

¹⁷ Here I touch upon androgyny among *faqirs*, a theme which will be discussed later on.



Plate 2.1: *Faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine. *Faqir* on left is Jalali baba. *Faqir* on right is praying at the tomb of Amir Khosrau. His food can is next to him.

Baba wear a black armband on the left arm, symbolising their association with Ali and the Prophet Muhammad, and their rejection of the social world.¹⁸ A *faqir's* symbolic positioning with the left side mirrors his mystical nature and stands in opposition to the everyday world of *basti* villagers and Muslims in general. Many *faqirs* make little attempt in modifying their “physical body” to male Muslim requirements of the ‘social body’, i.e. short, well-groomed hair and clean appearance (Douglas 1969). Tough and wiry, a *faqir's* unkempt figure often acquires an air of foreboding.

Interestingly, the “wild”, uncouth appearance of many *faqirs* belies the refined quality of their sensibilities. Shams, for instance had an extensive knowledge of Sufi poetry which he would often use as a teaching medium. Similarly, Baba Ali's talisman's (*tawiz*) and charm wick designs (*puleeta*),¹⁹ convey a high degree of aesthetic finesse and imaginative prowess. Most *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine are reclusive (*ahl-i-khilwat*). A *faqir* usually lives alone, engaged in prayer, chanting (*wazifa*) and meditation. With rare exception *faqirs* are not married, or if married renounce family ties.

In contrast, the appearance of the *Chisti pir* portrays an aura of respectability, refinement, and sophistication. The accent of a *Chisti pir's* life reflects his constant observance with the edicts of Muslim etiquette (*adab*). *Chisti pirs* are the embodiment of *adab*. Many *Chisti pirs* are full-bodied and handsome figures, neatly dressed and groomed in accordance to the formal requirements of *adab*. *Chisti pirs* usually wear a long shirt (*khurta*) and pyjama like pants, with an overcoat and shawl (*doshala*). Their heads are always covered either with a traditional Muslim skullcap (*topi*), fez, or turban (*taj*) (Plate 2.2). Some wear a tall yellow cap (*rumi-fez*) symbol of the *Chisti Nizamia* brotherhood. More flamboyant *Chisti pirs* wear long robes giving them an air of distinguished importance.

Chisti pirs strive to follow *shari'a* in their personal lives. Usually, a *Chisti pir* is a hereditary Sufi (*juddee mashaikh*), and has the authority to initiate disciples. Many

¹⁸ Ali ibn Tālib was the cousin and son-in-law to the Prophet Muhammad. Amongst Muslims he is known by the title “*Sher-I-Khuda*” (the lion of God). The importance of Ali for *faqirs* will be further in chapter eight.

¹⁹ *Puleeta* will be analysed in Chapter Seven.

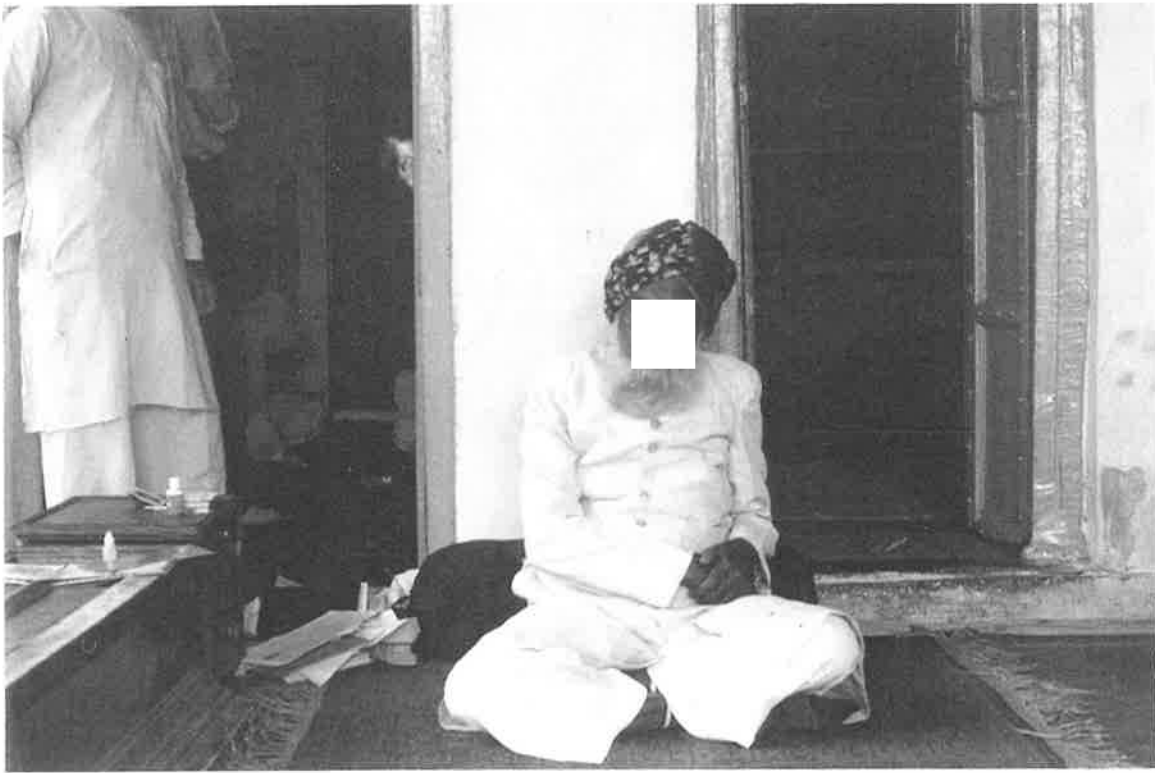


Plate 2.2: Well known *Chisti pirs*. Top photograph is Khwaja Islamuddin Nizami seated in front of his cell (*hujra*). Bottom photograph is Kashani baba at his clinic which is located at the *basti*.

Chisti pirs act as spiritual teachers to a large number of male and female disciples (*murids*).²⁰

In contrast, the *faqir* is a non-hereditary Sufi (*khoolfae mashaikh*). In keeping with Islamic tradition (*sunna*), the *Chisti pir* is always married and enjoys family life. Marriage, I was told, is an obligatory condition for all *Chisti pirs*. Arguably, a *Chisti pir's* popularity at the Nizamuddin shrine is, to a certain extent, dependant upon his observance of *shari'a*. Many Muslim devotees coming to the Nizamuddin shrine have an expectation that *Chisti pirs* will behave with a high degree of piety, as befits their high religious status. As such, *Chisti pirs* are constantly being scrutinised by devotees. While this kind of constant surveillance by others does not apparently affect the *Chisti pir's* performance of his liturgical duties at the Nizamuddin shrine, it can lead to increasing tensions and rivalries between *Chisti pirs*. Several descendants of the saint explained to me that petty jealousies between *Chisti pirs* were commonplace, who were more than happy to tarnish the reputation of a fellow *Chisti pir* whom they feel had slighted them. The cause of most rivalries between *Chisti pirs* tends to revolve around the appropriation of money.²¹ Apart from a few leading *Chisti pirs* who have large land holdings around the *basti* and who own flower shops at the Nizamuddin shrine, the major source of most *Chisti pirs'* income derives from the monies offered by devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine (*bari-dar*).²² Although, *Chisti pirs* tend to avoid publicly contesting each other, in private, backbiting is commonplace.

Only several weeks into the field, I became aware of explicit differences between *faqirs* and *Chisti pirs*. Initially, my approach in the field was to seek patterns or regularities between *faqir* and *Chisti pir*. My method at that time reflected my own need for order and intellectual security, a consequence of having been thrust into an environment which to a great extent was an inversion from my own secure and placid life-world in Adelaide, South Australia. However, as my field-work progressed I became less concerned with patterned categories and more interested in exploring the nature of

²⁰ Upon the death of a *Chisti pir*, his disciples are obliged to remain loyal to his oldest surviving son who acts on his father's spiritual authority.

²¹ Patricia Jeffrey (1981) has written on the sources and manifestations of tensions between *Chisti pirs* via public religious ceremonies at the Nizamuddin shrine.

²² This was explained in Chapter One. One descendant confided to me that this money was not enough to survive on, so *Chisti pirs* have had to become dependant on monies obtained from other means, i.e. opening a flower shop, donations from disciples and from guests (*mehman*).

faqirs' lived experience. On this theme, Jackson, warns anthropologists of the dangers of subjugating "lived experience to the tyranny of reason or the consolidation of order," (1989:16), and calls for the cultivation of "that quality which Keats called negative capability" of "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason..." (Keats 1958:193). Furthermore, Jackson (1989:15), concurring with Dewey (1980:291), points out that:

One such escape from lived experience is provided by the intellectualist notion that knowing is a kind of outside beholding rather than a matter of participation in the ongoing drama of the world.

While Jackson does not suggest that anthropologists should "go native" he invites us to "throw off" the conceptual chains of closed systems of knowledge. He argues, that by our commitment to them inevitably leads us to misrepresenting our subjects' life worlds (Jackson 1989:17).

Prologues into visceral domains: androgynising the field-worker

My initial experience of *faqirs'* body image began early in my fieldwork. During one weekend when I had been staying with Shams, he began to comment on some of my facial features, which he had found appealing. I took his flattering remarks with some degree of embarrassment and quickly forgot this episode. The next day, Shams surprised me with small gift; an attractive woman's hair brooch. He then carefully placed it in my hair. Somewhat bemused by his well-intentioned gesture, I thanked him and adjusted it to my hair. He then told me that my eyes would look more beautiful if I tinted their edges with black eyeliner — a common practice employed by Muslim and Hindu women and some men. I reluctantly declined his offer.

These episodes conveyed to me the *faqirs'* high aesthetic sense, which was interwoven with their mystical experience. As I will demonstrate, Sham's endeavours to androgynise my body were an attempt to influence my aesthetic awareness of the contours of his mystical sensibilities — to his patterns of aesthesis. I concur with Desjarlais who explains that much of the fieldworker's experiences are tacitly imprinted "at the level of the body" (Desjarlais 1994:26). Moreover, he suggests that,

For when a fieldworker begins to participate in the myriad of moments that make up the practice of everyday life, these interactions soon shape his or her understanding of local values, patterns of action, ways of being, moving, and feeling (Desjarlais 1994:26).

Reminiscent of Desjarlais, my everyday interactions with various *faqirs* initiated a process of reevaluating my thinking and feeling of the body: imparting to me a different way of thinking about and experiencing my own body. I became more drawn to the way *faqirs*' bodies conveyed their association with *tariqah*. These incidences also gave me an invaluable entry point for reaching into *faqirs*' experiences where I would otherwise have been estranged. On this theme, Jackson (1989:5; James 1976: 21-27; Schrag 1969:8) endorse an approach between field-worker and informant which emphasises their "connectedness", and is in opposition to traditional empiricism,²³

Which assumes that the knower and the known inhabit disconnected worlds and regard experience as something passively received rather than actively made, something that impresses itself upon our blank minds or overcomes us like sleep (Jackson 1989:5).²⁴

Androgynous dimensions

A *faqir's* evocative attire resembles Eliade's views of the shamanic costume as constituting "a religious hierophany and cosmography; it discloses not only a sacred presence but also cosmic symbols and metapsychic 147).²⁵ Many *faqirs* strongly identify with their dress and assorted paraphernalia as outward expressions of *tariqah*. *Faqirs*' bodies often assume ambiguous dimensions as conveyed by their penchant towards exaggeration.²⁶ They often wear metal arm bracelets (*chureean*), and women's

²³ (Dewey, as cited in Boisvert 1998:18) refers to those who adhere to "a truncated empiricism" as falling into the "fallacy of intellectualism".

²⁴ Jackson (1989:9) further reminds us that this kind of connectedness is achievable if fieldworkers "desist from taking notes, to listen, watch, smell, touch, dance, make mats, light a fire, farm — such practical and social skills should be constitutive of our own understanding as verbal statements and espoused beliefs." Jackson's idea is reaffirmed by Bourdieu who asserts that, "The ethnologist who does not know himself, who does not have an adequate knowledge of his own primary experience of the world" places the subject at a distance (2000:3).

²⁵ Eliade further notes that the wearing of sacred costumes and other regalia assists the shaman in transcending temporal time and space, in preparation for entering the sacred world (1964:147).

²⁶ Mary Douglas's theory of bodily margins (1969) suggests that internal psychic states often present themselves in excessive displays of behaviour conterminous with *faqirs*' bodily sensibilities.

anklets (*to-ray*).²⁷ Their fingers invariably display several rings inset with diverse gemstones believed to be invested with mystical powers. A *faqir* may also wear several rosaries (*tasbih*), or iconic like objects i.e. talismans, pictures of Muslim saints, around his neck.²⁸ itineraries” (Eliade 1964:145-147).

Whether or not a *faqir's* androgynous appearance is a conscious attempt towards obfuscating gender margins between men and women is a difficult proposition. I once asked Shams whether the *faqir* saw himself as being closer to women than men. Bemused by my question, he retorted that the *faqir* saw himself as being both a male and female. Shams' answer can probably be understood in relation to *faqir's* emphasis on the development of intuitive and feeling states that are “culturally considered as being quintessentially feminine,”²⁹ and is sometimes conveyed by some *faqirs* being called “*suhagan*” (married woman), a name denoting their mystical tie to a specific saint (Plate 2.3). According to Ewing (1984:362), the *suhagan's* engagement with a saint approximates to the subordinate position of Muslim women in relation to their husbands and older male relatives.³⁰ In both cases, the roles of *faqir* and Muslim women is one of obeisance to the will of those endowed with higher social and spiritual authority. Admittedly, I found it difficult to distinguish between *faqirs* and *suhagan faqirs* other than by the overt display of women's jewellery that is worn by the latter. Otherwise, both types of *faqirs* share a subservient role in their mystical communion with a saint.³¹ Interestingly, Halifax (1991:23) mentions that “assuming the role of the opposite sex gives the shaman the opportunity to recognise and understand the condition of

²⁷ Ewing has made a welcomed analysis of the *Qalandar faqir's* habit of wearing bangles, which she asserts symbolises their betrothal to God (1984:363). While my experiences could not totally support her assertions, the wearing of bangles by *faqirs* do generally have deep spiritual significance. Alternatively, at the shrine, bangles may be given between *faqirs* as a way of denoting ties of friendship between them as “spiritual brothers”.

²⁸ One of the reasons for wearing jewellery, I was told, was that it distinguished *faqirs* from other Muslims and non-Muslims.

²⁹ Borrowed from Metcalf (1996:3), in her discussion on Islamic women within the *Tabliki Jama'at*, an Islamic movement operating in Pakistan, and North India. Metcalf's article gives an overview of the movement's history and its operation by *Tabliki* men and women.

³⁰ Here, I digress from Ewing's assertions by suggesting that a *faqir's* relationship to a saint, manifests a mode of engagement which is grounded in those “structures of subordination” with which the majority of Muslim males must comply (Metcalf 1996:2). As Metcalf, explains: “Boys are not only subject to the authority of elders within the family but, as they move into the public world, are expected to respond unquestionably to the authority of teachers and spiritual leaders and to exercise control over women in their families” (1996:2).

³¹ The mystical tie between *faqir* and saint called *hukm*, will be discussed in depth in relation to *faqirs'* performative genres, in Chapter Eight.



Plate 2.3: *Suhargan faqir* (middle) with other *faqirs* displaying staff and other attire.

femaleness or maleness and ultimately to become total.” Halifax’s comments do have some resonance with *faqirs*’ close association with the left hand. This is posited on *faqirs*’ belief that the left hand corresponds with spirituality, intuition, emotion, and receptivity; sensibilities that are synonymous to women. In contrast, the right hand is considered as male and corresponds with rationality and worldly activities.

Just like a woman: journeys into alterity

Generally speaking, *faqirs*’ conceptions of women are less than flattering, and reflect Muslim male views of women as being sexually inimical and intellectually inferior.³² I was constantly advised by *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine to keep away from women if I were to remain spiritually unsullied. The credo that “women are dirty” regularly contoured *faqirs*’ understandings of women.³³

It is perhaps some measure of many *faqirs*’ need to embody alterity in their explicit appearance that the female image becomes *the* chosen image of mimesis *par excellence*. This is reminiscent of Bloustein’s comment that “identity is as much about exclusion as inclusion — who we are” (Bloustein 1999: 64). According to Taussig, identity wavers between the aspects of mimesis and alterity, “activity and passivity” where “bodily copying of the other is paramount” (1993:46). Taussig’s formulations are valuable and insightful here since they draw upon Benjamin’s notion of mimesis as being posited on a desire to be another, to be similar to, so that an individual shares a simulacrum with the person or object which they wish to objectify, yet still maintain their difference from them (Benjamin 1979, Taussig 1993:66). For Taussig, “this bodily mirroring of otherness” is a means of establishing an ontological connection with the other; a kind of virtual reality for ‘feeling’ the other (1993:46). Taussig puts this notion of body mirroring, or what he calls as “active yielding”, in the context of South American Indian healers, who by putting on ‘western’ clothes seek to achieve “physical contact with the West, the touch, the feel, like putting on a skin” (1993:191).

³² The theme of Muslim conceptions of women is taken up in Chapters Four and Seven.

³³ Catherine Ewing poses an interesting argument that the *malang* (devotee) (in this case the *Qalandar faqir*), equates himself with woman, since both devotee and woman are committed to a lifetime of subservience to their married partner (1984:362-363). Ewing further states that: “the analogy implies that God is to *malang* as man is to woman. Just as woman is married to man and is subservient to him, the *malang* considers himself to be betrothed to God and is, of course, subservient to him” (1984:362).

This putting on to 'feel', to embody the other, was illustrated to me one day at my small *barsati* flat, nearby Humayun's tomb.³⁴ It was evening. I was preparing to make some tea for Shams who had visited me. It was one of his rare visits, and I enjoyed seeing him outside of the shrine environment. Although, he looked out of place in my flat at first, his wit quickly dispelled. For me, Shams was the quintessential *faqir*, a combination of "holy man" and "holy fool", the kind of fellow I had so often read about in Indries Shah's books on the dervishes.³⁵ Having made the tea, I carried his glass to him. Shams was sitting upright, with his legs folded in the yogic lotus position.

His face was covered with a green, silken scarf. He sat motionless. I dared not interrupt him. After some minutes he took the scarf off his face and drank his tea. I asked what he had been doing. "This is a special technique of the *faqirs*. The woman's *hijab* (veil) prevents eyes from looking on her face. However, the *faqir* covers his face so he can focus inwards" he replied. Shams' use of the veil reflected both mimesis and alterity³⁶ (Plate 2.4).

A *faqir's* mimesis of the female other is also reflected in his bodily praxis. In many ways, a *faqir* approximates to woman. A *faqir* seeks in his mystical practices to develop his intuitive faculties which are perceived to be inherent in women. This bodily correspondence is also shared by their porosity. Just as a *faqir's* body is believed to be a site for the transference of spiritual powers entering and leaving his body, i.e. the saints' blessedness (*barkat*), precognition (*kashf*), sanctioned curse (*badua*), similarly, a woman's body is a nexus for psycho-physical substances, for example, male sperm, menstrual blood, and children. Nevertheless, whereas Muslim society deems women's bodies to be seething with illicit sexuality, a *faqir's* symbolic taking up of female characteristics are e-femulated of their threatening qualities and sublimated via his

³⁴ Famous tomb of the Moghul ruler, Humayun (died 1556), which is located 1-1½ kilometres from the Nizamuddin basti.

³⁵ Idries Shah is a famous author on Sufism. His books include *Oriental Magic* (1973) and *Thinkers of the East* (1979).

³⁶ The case of men's veiling in Islam has been discussed by El Guindi (1999), who mentions it as being practiced by various Muslim tribal cultures i.e. the Berbers of Morocco, and the Tuareg, a Berber-Hamitic speaking group of sub-Saharan Africa. According to El Guindi, men's veiling was practiced by pre-Islamic Arab men, "who were known by the title *thu khimar* (the veiled ones) (1999:121). Welhausen (1897), Westermarck (1926), and Asbahani (1927) have suggested that the practice of men's veiling was "due to the fear of the evil eye" (El Guini 1999). *Faqirs* told me that men's veiling was practised by some medieval Sufi masters, not due to fear of the evil eye, but to protect others from their gaze which was believed to have the power to destroy.



Plate 2.4: Rare photograph of *faqir* wearing veil during meditation at the shrine of Inayat Khan, 1995.

mystical engagement with a saint (*hukm*). This phenomenon may help to shed some light in explaining why *faqirs*' have the capacity to enter "female" space at the Nizamuddin shrine, and to talk to unrelated women in close quarters.³⁷ Here, I argue, that by incorporating androgyny, a *faqir* symbolically takes up and alters those "polluting" elements of women which threaten the moral fabric of Muslim society. He is like a woman, but still a man, but not like other men, something in between. Androgyny as a means of disclosing the existential imperative reflects *faqirs*' penchant for maintaining ambiguity via their inordinate body image; "a magnificent excessiveness over and beyond the fact that mimesis implies alterity as its flip-side" (Taussig 1993:192).

Generally speaking, a *faqir's* life is seemingly immersed in immoderation, from the contours of his body to his kinetic rhythms conveying the notion of excess. In a society where wide scale poverty looms over the human landscape, and threaten to disturb the delicate social fabric operating at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*, *faqirs* seems to be at odds with those cultural norms which strive towards permanence and social harmony. The themes of excessiveness and ontological disruption which will now be explored through an examination of *faqirs*' rosary (*tasbih*) and staff (*chu'huree*).

Rosary and staff: excessive symbols and ontological possibilities

The rosary is usually an important item in a *faqir's* mystical costume. The rosary is pivotal to a *faqir's* mystical practices; its central function being in the practice of chanting (*wazifa*) where it serves as a "focussing device," facilitating the process of mystical engagement with the sacred world (Drury 1987:9).³⁸ Many *faqirs*' rosaries are often distinguishable from the more traditional rosary (*sawwabhi*), used by lay Muslims. The traditional Muslim rosary conveys harmonious proportions, in accordance with Islamic convention; consisting of ninety-nine beads — representing the ninety-nine Divine Attributes (*asmā al-husnā*).³⁹ These are divided according to three divisions of thirty-three beads, separated by marker beads; the hundredth bead or "leader bead

³⁷ This theme will be examined later on.

³⁸ On a point of interest, the *faqir's* use of the rosary is analogous to the way in which the drum of Haitian voodoo practitioners functions in creating "an atmosphere of concentration and resolve enabling him to sink into trance as he shifts his attention to the journey of the spirit" (Halifax 1991). See also Bourguignon (1973).

³⁹ The ninety-nine Divine Attributes will be explained later on in relation to *faqirs*' wrathful nature.

signifies the completion of one cycle of devotion or one has come full circle” (Mycko 2001: 4).⁴⁰

In contrast, *faqirs*' rosaries are often externally crude and embody the notion of excessiveness; their exorbitant and ambiguous appearance aptly mirrors a *faqir's* wild and uncouth nature (Plate 2.5). Unlike the mass produced *sawwabhi* rosary of the Muslim lay, a *faqir's* rosary is a personalised item, imbued with his own expressive signature. In this way, no two *faqir's* rosaries are alike. They are idiosyncratic items of a *faqir's* association with *tariqah*. *Faqirs*' rosaries are usually extravagant in their size, sometimes consisting of several thousand beads; their exorbitant dimensions reminiscent of coiled snakes. Their inordinate length can be understood in relation to *faqirs*' incessant practice of chanting; a practice which often requires a *faqir* to recite a certain Divine Attribute or spell tens of thousands of times over the course of days or weeks. *Faqirs* believe that their rosaries embody mystical power, rooted in a *faqir's* understanding of the spirit world. For instance, unlike the *sawwabhi* rosary, which is predominantly used for prayer, *faqirs* refer to their rosaries as “*taskhir-i-jinn*” (*jinn* controlling rosary).⁴¹

Many *faqirs* produce their rosaries from a variety of materials gathered from their ventures. The rosary of the *faqir* Nazim Baba (who regularly visited the Nizamuddin shrine) consisted of a hotchpotch of various coloured beads made from glass, wood, and plastic. Shams' rosary also comprised hundreds of different coloured glass beads which had their own attractive assemblage, especially as they moved between Shams' fingers while chanting. *Faqirs* are also attentive to the aesthetic dimensions of their rosaries and endow them with a certain sensuous presence. A *faqir* called Shah Alam once offered me his rosary, gesturing for me to smell it. It was permeated with a delicate smell of sandalwood.

On many occasions, I observed how *faqirs*' rosaries served as a means for playing out their mystical identities to others, and for toying with “new possibilities” (Jackson 1998:29). Shams' comical mimicry provided an interesting example of this play

⁴⁰ See also Erikson (1993); Francis (1994); Jargstorf (1995) and Dubin (1987) for an analysis on rosaries from various religious traditions.

⁴¹ The *jinn* are a supernatural and invisible race of beings and will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.



Plate 2.5: The *faqir* Nazim baba who died in 1997. Nazim baba was the epitome of a *faqir*, mysterious and powerful. He wears a black band on his left arm denoting his mystical tie with Ali ibn Talib, the spiritual custodian of *faqirs* (see chapter eight). Notice Nazim baba's large rosary to his left.

imperative. One Friday afternoon Shams and I were sitting inside the Khijli mosque, located at the Nizamuddin shrine complex. Having finished his prayers, Shams turned to me and asked me whether I wanted to see his machine gun. "A machine gun!" I exclaimed with surprise. He pulled out from his shirt's pocket an enormous rosary, saying, "This is my machine gun, it has much power." He then began to laugh, while he pointed it at me, as if he was holding a gun.

Faqirs tend to treat their rosaries with utmost care. A *faqir's* rosary cannot be used by another person. Consequently, *faqirs* seldom offer their rosaries to others to touch. The rosary is never used in front of others, nor is it used for general prayer. A *faqir's* rosary necessitates a particular kind of comportment that conjoins the visible and hidden realms. When not in use a *faqir's* rosary is either hidden from sight or located either on or near the *faqir*. *Faqirs* maintain that a rosary breaking during chanting manifests the completion of a certain religious task, such as the achievement of a religious vow he has made to a particular saint.

In contrast, many *basti* men and *Chisti pirs* can be seen carrying their rosaries in their hands in public, a practice that is generally frowned on by *faqirs*. *Faqirs* deem such practices as being insincere; pointing out that true piety has no need to advertise itself. As one *faqir* said to me, "You know, they just want to appear pious before others. For what other reason would they show off their *tasbih*," In contrast, *faqirs* do not use their rosaries in public.

Like the rosary, a *faqir's* staff is also intimately connected to his mystical identity, and provides a pertinent agency of a *faqir's* 'subjective self' (Luhmann 1992:245) (See Plates 2.3, 2.6b). Decorative symbolism is a pronounced feature of many *faqirs'* staffs. Like their rosaries, *faqirs'* staffs are idiosyncratic creations and are infused with cryptic meaning. *Faqirs'* staffs are invariably made of wood (sometimes a tree branch, or a long cane), and embellished with an assortment of paraphernalia i.e., feathers, pieces of thread, semi-precious stones and other trinkets, its upper end being wound by a handkerchief (*romal*, *dastmal*). Many of these items have been appropriated from various Muslim shrines, and testify to their highly itinerant lives. Some *faqirs* carry around with them a small stick or club (*asa*) (Plates 2.6a, 2.6b). A *faqir's* staff is usually



Plate 2.6a: Shams and Nazim baba displaying club (*asa*) and rosary (*tasbeeh*).



Plate 2.6b: Shah Alam and Shams sitting nearby the Nizamuddin *chilla*. Shah Alam is wearing a sack cloth. Notice the length of Shah Alam's rosary which is held by Shams.

carried in the right hand and always accompanies him.⁴² *Faqirs* ascribe the use of their staffs to the Prophet Muhammad.⁴³ Here, the staff's constant presence serves to reaffirm the *faqir's* bond with the spirit world by reminding him of his duty to the saints.

Faqirs like to imagine that their staffs are endowed with various mystical powers, and sometimes show off their innovative prowess with them. Shams sometimes used his staff like a telephone during his mystical dialogues with saints or other people, as he would tell me. His conversations were always quiet, highlighting their secretive nature. "You know I can talk with anyone with this," he said confidently. During these occasions he became oblivious of my presence. While holding the staff, Shams would speak into it from one end while the opposite end was stationed next to his ear. Having finished, he would then carefully hang his staff on the wall of his small room, ready for use when needed again. Shams' use of his staff is not too dissimilar to Levi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage*, or the "odd job man" who can cleverly utilise "anything lying about" which will serve his needs (Levi-Strauss 1976; Crick 1984:68).⁴⁴

While a *faqir's* appearance embodies notions of ambiguity, inordinance, and mystery, it is via his comportment that these inform the nuance of his interactions with others at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*. Yet inordinance often becomes expressed in effusive actions, which characterise a *faqir's* '*jalali*' nature.

The "*jalali*" *faqir* and the "*jamali*" *Chisti pir*

Faqirs often refer to themselves as being "*jalali*." Some *faqirs* also appropriate this term as their first names. For example, on one of my visits with Shams he introduced me to one of the local *faqirs* who was called "*jalali* baba." When I had asked Shams why he was called this he replied that it was due to his wrathful and unpredictable

⁴² In Islamic lore, the right hand is associated to notions of sincerity, righteousness, purity, judgement, activity, and emulation of the Prophet Muhammad.

⁴³ In western and eastern magical traditions, the staff or the ritual wand serves in directing the practitioner's intentions to a point in time or place (Weaver 1975:165). Landsburg (1977) and others (Luhmann 1989; Lyons 1972; Summers 1974) alert us to the use of magic wands during rites of invocation in magician's covens. The wand plays a central part during a magician's ritual performance, alongside other mystical paraphernalia i.e., candles, daggers, chalices, bells, and swords etc.

⁴⁴ Levi-Strauss introduces the term "*bricolage*" in his famous work *The Savage Mind* (1976). As Crick (1984:68), suggests "whereas a scientist uses special equipment and special technical terms, an odd job man tends to use anything...which will do the job in a satisfactory way".

nature. The word “*jalali*” implies a wide range of meanings and is invariably used for *faqirs*. The term “*jalali*” derives from the Arabic word “*jalal*” denoting power, strength, majesty, and unusual force, and is associated with the aspects of Allah as the powerful (*Al-Jalal*), and the “Lord of Majesty and Bounty” (*Dhul Jalal Wal Ikram*).⁴⁵ *Faqirs*’ conceptions of the term “*jalal*” also associate it to anger, wrath, awe, and ambiguity. As the *faqir* Nazim Baba, once said to me “You know Baba Ali has a lot of *jalal*.” Denoted by his remark was that Baba Ali had a wrathful nature. Shams was also known widely by both *basti* locals and devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine for being “*jalali*.” Although passionate emotions like anger and wrath are not exclusive to *faqirs*, they are more likely to be labelled “*jalali*” by others at the *basti* and the Nizamuddin shrine. One reason for this can be attributed to the widespread belief among *basti* locals and devotees that *faqirs* possess mysterious powers and are ineffable by nature. *Faqirs*’ conceptions of *jalal* as being associated with unusual power and force closely parallels their mystical roles. Although *faqirs* are predominantly healers they may also resort to sorcery.

The word “*jalali*” forms an intrinsic part of *faqirs*’ vocabulary, and is often used by *faqirs* for distinguishing themselves from others. For example, while *faqirs* often refer to themselves as being “*jalali*”, they ascribe the term “*jamali*” to the *Chisti pir*. The term “*jamali*” also derives from the Arabic term “*jamal*” meaning beauty, and is the opposite of *jalal*. *Faqirs*’ conceptions of *jamal* also associate it with receptivity, openness, visibility, approachability, goodwill, compassion, kindness, sociability, and femininity.⁴⁶ Whereas, the nature of *jalal* is to overpower, *jamal* works in tandem with those emotions which are beneficial in fostering subjective and social harmony. One *faqir* explained to me the differences between *jalal* and *jamal* in the following example:

If someone tells a lie in front of a *jalali* and a *jamali*, the *jamali* would gently admonish the person by saying that its not right to lie.

⁴⁵ In the Quran, the Divine Attribute (*Al-Jalal*) also denotes Allah as the Transcendent, Glorious, and Subliminal; “blessed be the name of thy Lord, Mighty, and Glorious” (Quran 55:78).

⁴⁶ Although *jamal* is not included among the ninety-nine Divine attributes, the Sufi master Al-Ghāzallī (1059-1111), suggests that it is related to human sensory sensibilities, whereas, *jalal* is concealed to the regions of cognate perception (1970:84). Al-Ghāzallī (1970:84) further states: “The name *al-Jamil* originally coined for the visible (whatever it might be) that is discerned by the sight and to harmonise and agree with sight”. See also Chittick (1989), and Bakhtiyar (1991), for a further discussion of *jamal* in relation to the ninety-nine Divine Attributes of Allah.

He would say, "I know that you're lying, but so and so." However, the *jalali* would fix up the person then and there.

A striking feature of *faqirs'* "*jalali*" nature is their penchant towards wrathful and violent behaviour. Clouting a person on the head, a grave threat, or violent innuendo, are all ways by which *faqirs* may sometimes employ to make their point before others. This is not to suggest that *faqirs* take delight in such methods. Rather, *faqirs* believe that they are forced to act in this way because of the venality of others.⁴⁷ "Why are *faqirs* so *jalali*?" I once asked Shams. He tersely replied, "because they cannot stand the dishonesty of others." However, it became clear to me during my fieldwork that *faqirs'* *jalal* manifested itself in various ways which struck a accord with the disruptive principle of their lives.

Of all the *faqirs* I knew at the Nizamuddin shrine, probably no one embodied the inclement aspect of *jalal* more than Shams. Shams' *jalal* was always tinged with an air of the unexpected. Shams was a veritable tiger ready to be unleashed as denoted by his nickname "*Sher-khan*," (Hindi, meaning "tiger"). While only a small man his ebullient nature often made him appear to have the physical power of a larger man. I had been present on several occasions when Shams' *jalal* was conveyed in its abrupt fury and effusiveness. Sometimes while we talked he would suddenly stand up and smash his glass of tea against the wall in a frenetic outburst, only to sit down again and casually carry on with our conversation. Such truculent displays were common to many *faqirs* I knew, and conveyed their capacity towards disruption — one of the key characteristics of *faqirs'* bodily demeanour.

On this theme, Heidegger states that violence is necessary in order to dissolve those human habits and proclivities that inhibit self-discovery, as a way getting to truth or "*aleitheia*". Unless this process of violence is instigated by wresting oneself from the semblance of obfuscating tradition, reality remains inauthentic, creatively impotent

⁴⁷ Discerning the purpose of *faqirs'* *jalal* was not an easy task since its meaning often belied its explicit action. This made it difficult for me to analyse *faqirs'* *jalal* in relation to anthropological theories of violence which tend to view it as having "several explicit purposes" (Riches 1986:5). Riches rightly notes that Anglo-Saxon explanations of violence are inadequate towards an examination of violence from a cross-cultural view (1986:8). Needless to say, I found that some western notions of violence were inapplicable to an analysis of *faqirs'* *jalal*. For example, *faqirs'* wrathful behaviour towards others is not "liable to censure" (1986:8). Secondly, sometimes its explicit appearance does not seem to have a specific aim in mind.

(Heidegger 1967; Bové 1980:58). When Shams' *jalal* was directed at an individual it was usually explosive and severe. In one example, a young man had been playing with a knife in his hand while sitting next to Shams. Shams had heard from other *basti* locals that the young man had been threatening people. "So you think you're so tough with that knife," Shams shouted to him, while he unleashed a flurry of heavy slaps across his face and head. He then grabbed the knife from the young man's hand and threw it away. The young man then left, still dazed from Shams' blows.

A *Chisti pir's* concern in maintaining a respectable visual presence is intrinsically linked to his social activities at the shrine. His pleasant appearance reaffirms the notion of him as the "people's friend" (Plates 2.7a, 2.7b). The *Chisti pir's* ultimate focus is in serving the saint via a series of public duties. These range from liturgical specialists, spiritual teachers, and healers. *Chisti pirs* officiate over every collective ritual performed at the Nizamuddin shrine.⁴⁷

Another important social role is the *Chisti pir's* maintenance of inter-religious harmony at the shrine. As suggested in chapter one, the shrine is an important pilgrimage site for Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. Kurin suggests that Muslim shrines have a particularly important role in fostering communal harmony (1992:278).⁴⁹ This is certainly the case of the shrine of Nizamuddin, which has a large Muslim and non-Muslim following. Many of the shrine activities as well as the syncretism of Hindu symbolism employed by the *Chisti pirs* are geared towards inter-religious harmony. Furthermore, *Chisti pirs* enjoy the patronage of large numbers of Hindus and Sikhs at the shrine, some of whom are disciples. On this point, I was often told by *basti* locals and Hindu pilgrims that it was important to maintain friendly relations between each other, since any serious communal strife in the *basti* had the potential to cause tensions between the different religious groups. This was often engendered in terms that it was the saint's wish that "all people should be friendly with one another". One leading *Chisti pir* even compared the Nizamuddin shrine to an "open bar". However, the communal aspect of many *Chisti pirs'* social roles is contrasted by the seclusive nature of most *faqirs*.

⁴⁸ These include opening of the shrine doors daily (*kharka*), lighting ceremony (*roshni*) and service routine (*khidmat*) twice daily, after which food is distributed to the poor (*langar*).

⁴⁹ Goldziher (1917); Begg (1972); Uttam (1991); Khizer (1991); Grewal (1991) and Banu (1991) discuss the relationship between Sufism and communal harmony in India, and the impact this has had on both Indian Islam and Hinduism.



Plate 2.7a: *Chisti pir* giving blessed food (*tabarruk*) to devotees after *Milad* Ceremony, which is performed on Thursday evening at the Nizamuddin shrine.



Plate 2.7b: *Chisti pir* Iqbal Nizami offering blessed rose water to devotees during the washing ceremony (*ghusl*) at the Nizamuddin shrine, July, 1995.

The “invisible” *faqir* and visible *Chisti pir*: marginal identities and elusive beings

Faqirs tend to engage in their mystical practices at night. In order to understand *faqirs*' predilection for the night it is useful to analyse this in relation to Muslim conceptions of night and day. Night and day by are associated with the hidden and visible domains of life. For *faqirs* and other Muslims, the idea of rhythmic flow and continuity is an inherent feature of day. Such conceptions coincide with Jackson's and Dewey's ideas that all experience, in one way or other, is involved in contrasting the visible and the concealed, between the substantial and the non-discernible (Jackson 1996:14; Dewey 1958). Dewey further claims that this distinguish-making process of perception not only makes human experience, but is a characteristic feature of diverse cosmologies in relation to the way in which they distinguish between the natural and the supernatural domains (Dewey 1958:43-44). Jackson notes that this idea is expressed in the Kuranko cosmology, where day-time is viewed as symbolising “secular authority,⁵⁰ and is in contrast to night-time which symbolises “wild power” (1982:9-10”).

The cyclical manner in which the sun rises and sets, and the explicit flow of interacting bodies at the *basti* are abruptly interrupted by the onset of night. Night discontinues daily social patterns, making people's movements less apparent to others. Night embodies the notions of danger, mystery, ambiguity, unpredictability, concealment, and evil. Such notions are generally confirmed by people's behaviours at the *basti*. As evening approaches *basti* locals tend to gravitate towards their houses. Few people dare to venture out in the *basti* after sunset in fear of being attacked by evil spirit beings that are believed to come out after sunset. Night discloses a “heteroglossic world” (Jackson 1998:161), of spirit beings, both good and evil, but always ambiguous.

Alternately, day is associated with the visible domain of life. People's activities in the *basti* are mostly conducted during day. During this time, the *basti* is bustling with all sorts of human activities. This highly visible feature of *basti* life during the day reaffirms the moral order. In a society where others constantly monitor people's movements, the ability to see becomes crucial to fostering social harmony. Night threatens this moral order. Visibility is brought to a minimum making it difficult to

⁵⁰ The Kuranko are an indigenous people who are located in Sierra Leone.

observe others. *Basti* locals' fear of the night and the ensuing need to seek the protection of their dwellings by night further increases this degree of non-visibility.

The idea of flow and interruption is further represented via the distinction between sorcery (*jādu*, *shaitaniyyat*) and the healing arts (*ruhaniyyat*). In Muslim thought, night is associated with sorcery, while day is associated with healing. One reason for this belief may be attributed to the *faqirs*' notion of the sun as being a symbol of life, fecundity, and regeneration; qualities which *faqirs* hope will be transferred to the patient during healing. Consequently, the most efficacious time for healing is from morning until noonday, since the sun reaches the zenith of its power during this period. As a general rule, *faqirs* do not perform healing after sunset. Alternatively, sorcery (*shaitaniyyat*, *jādu*) is most efficacious after sunset, especially after midnight. While healing is visible, sorcery is conducted in secrecy; away from the sight of others.⁵¹ Night was the time when Baba Ali would visit graveyards, and perform his cryptic spells and chants.

Another distinct feature of many *faqirs*' movements is their habit of visiting the saints' shrines during night. *Faqirs* derive a sense of connectedness with the spirit world during nighttime. Night is the favourite time for *faqirs* to visit these places, in contrast to other Muslims who frequent them during daytime. Shams would often take me to tombs of diverse Sufi saints, via dark, vacant alleys and paths of the *basti* and the surrounding areas, undeterred by the threat of danger from wandering *dacoits* (bandits) or malicious spirits.⁵² Similarly, Baba Ali would regularly visit the Nizamuddin's shrine where he would sit and meditate for hours until sunrise, waiting to catch a glimpse of the saint's spirit leaving and returning to its sepulchre. Baba Ali told me that the spirits of the *Chisti* saints left their tombs every night and congregated somewhere above the world every night, and discussed with each other what had transpired during the day in

⁵¹ Although Islam forbids sorcery, it is a widespread phenomenon among Muslims. Even so, accusations of sorcery among *basti* locals are rare, and are in most cases uncorroborated, mainly due to its secretive nature. Sorcery is a serious source of concern for Muslims and Hindus, and provides a way of explaining various types of personal misfortune and psycho-physical malaise.

⁵² Some parts of New Delhi are notorious by night. It is common to observe streets in the affluent areas of New Delhi blocked off by iron barricades and overseered by guards to prevent criminals from gaining access.

the world. In both cases, the non-conspicuous nature of their movements seemed to fuse with the darkness of the landscape, making them disappear from sight.⁵³

The kinasthetics of ambiguity and beauty

Another aspect of elusiveness and ambiguity relates to *faqirs'* motility. *Faqirs'* movement evokes an aesthetics of stealth. The *faqir* tends to walk alone, seeking to remain unnoticed. I was told by *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine that a 'true' *faqir* does not draw attention to himself. He must always live with a sense of humility. A *faqir's* apparent concern with remaining unnoticed is further emphasised by his habit for living along the spatial peripheries of the *basti*, a feature which increases his sense of mystery.

Many *faqir's* assume a sedentary lifestyle most of the time, being in accordance with the quietist attitude of their lives. Their body is typically engaged in sitting and crouching. The *faqir's* nearness to the ground symbolises his deference to the saints, and can be understood in relation to the prescribed veneration style when at the tombs of Muslim saints.⁵⁴ While on the ground, a *faqir's* comportment is characterised by sedentariness. His seeming lack of animation and limited use of physical space implies a break from the active rhythms of daily life, underscoring his concern with drawing himself inwards. This inward inflection is illustrated by a crouching posture commonly employed by *faqirs* during meditation, or during discussion. The posture involves a *faqir* sitting in a foetal position, with knees tucked into the body and the arms crossing over each other and resting on top of the knees, the head bent down between the torso and arms so as to conceal the face. The shape of this posture is reminiscent of Heidegger's notion of a physical "horizon" in that it withholds its presence from others by the fact that the head is lowered preventing eye contact; the body's crouched position makes it appear smaller. Moreover, the body's concealment is accentuated by *faqirs'* habit to cover their heads and upper bodies in a shawl.⁵⁵

⁵³ I am reminded here of Abram who explains that perception involves the attunement or synchronisation between one's bodily rhythms and the "rhythm of the things themselves;" their shape, form, and texture (Abram 1996:54). By assuming a symbiotic synchronisation between bodily awareness and the physical world. We are constantly integrated with the rhythms of the lifeworld.

⁵⁴ This aspect will be examined in Chapter Eight in the context of *faqirs'* ritual performances.

⁵⁵ Heidegger (1967:473, as cited in Abram 1997:209) employs the term "horizon" as a "structural metaphor" alluding to something "unfolding beyond itself", as a horizon discloses a landscape yet concealing what exists beyond it.

In contrast, a *Chisti pir's* movement conveys a sense of elegance and finesse, denoting his *jamali* nature. His walk around the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* is visibly upright and controlled, characterised by its visual harmony. This sense of kinetic smoothness is often enhanced by his long costume. His walk is never hurried but assumes a constant poise. Smoothness of motion is further conveyed by his bodily gestures, which utilise generous bodily space. The ample extenuation of his arm movements, for instance, corresponds with his charitable nature. This link between bodily motility and generosity is a prominent feature in many of the shrine's rituals involving a *Chisti pir*. Even when sitting (this is usually on cushions or upon a clean mat), a *Chisti pir* holds a noble, almost regal-like presence. Whether upright or seated the *Chisti pir's* body imposes a sense of openness. Moreover, his well-rounded body reaffirms his fecund nature. From every level the *Chisti pir's* presence underscores abundance.

Afzal Nizami was the epitome of a *Chisti pir*, elegant and flamboyant. He was short, corpulent man, who wore long yellow robes and a tall yellow Nizami hat. He walked around the Nizamuddin shrine like a man with a purpose, chatting with many devotees. After every Friday prayer he conducted the *Milad* liturgy⁵⁶ nearby the *maqbool jaali*.⁵⁷ His loud voice echoed throughout the shrine courtyards. The entire congregation would sing along with him. It was a beautiful service. Always the showman, Afzal wanted a photograph of himself, which I had obliged. I bought my camera to one of these services and waited until it was completed. After the service I waited while throngs of devotees passed him, kissing his hand, or allowing him to place his hand on their heads. Seeing my chance, I took some photographs. Having noticed me Afzal posed for the camera while blessing his devotees (Plate 2.8). It was an impressive pose and typified Afzal's flamboyant character. A few days later, I had one of the photographs developed, mounted it on a frame, and presented to him. He looked at it with glee. He thanked me in his broken English and asked me to return, which I did some weeks later. Like other *Chisti pirs*, Afzal could recite his entire family tree, stemming back to Nizamuddin Auliya to the present, an ability which he took pride in. He knew the personal details of dozens of his ancestors. He repaid my kindness with lots of details on the *Chisti Nizamis* and their social organisation. Like other *Chisti pirs*, he desired to be liked by others, a feature that proved to be rather comical at times. For instance, when I

⁵⁶ A special ceremony in praise of the Prophet Muhammad.

⁵⁷ This is located at the shrine building. See Chapter Four for a discussion of this.



Plate 2.8: *Chisti pir* Afzal Nizami blessing devotees after Friday prayer at the Nizamuddin shrine.

was first was introduced to him, he said to me “you know I love you,” an amusing error, instead of saying, “you know I like you.” I looked at him with surprise, replying, “you don’t even know me.” He smiled. His demeanour was indicative of a *Chisti pir*, friendly and proud. His use of space also enhanced his presence to others at the Nizamuddin shrine, and was in contrast to the solitary seeking *faqirs* who tended to live along the peripheries of the *basti* and the Nizamuddin shrine complex.

Peripheral worlds

In keeping with their need to be left alone, most *faqirs* tend to live on the outskirts of the *basti* and its surrounding areas. Some of these places include dilapidated medieval buildings or isolated places. Many of these sites are sources of fear for many *basti* locals. *Basti* locals regularly told me that all kinds of spirit beings frequented these places. A *faqir’s* habit of residing in places others avoid reinforces peoples’ beliefs in his mystical powers. A *faqir’s* choice to live on the peripheries of society also derives from his close communion with the spirit world. A *faqir’s* need to be left alone is essential for communion with the spirit world. In this way, spatial margins function as places for exercising mastery play⁵⁸, and underscores a *faqir’s* avoidance of the domestic sphere.⁵⁹

A *faqir’s* use of marginal space is also conveyed by his regular habit of sitting along the social peripheries of the Nizamuddin shrine complex, often by himself, or sometimes alongside beggars and itinerants. *Faqirs* like Nazim Baba expressed their “peripheral” nature by sitting in the female praying area of the Khijli mosque, in defiance of Islamic social edict which requires segregation between the sexes when praying at mosques

⁵⁸ See also Goffman (1959), who suggests that there is a greater “freedom to toy with new possibilities” of thinking and acting within marginal spaces (Jackson 1998:29).

⁵⁹ This process of living on the margins of the social world is closely tied to Muslim conceptions of lived space, and will be examined in detail in Chapter Four.

(Plate 2.9) ⁶⁰ As in other areas of their lives, a *faqir's* tendency to cross between the private and public domains is a means of reauthoring his lifeworld by absolving himself from those social conventions that contour much of Muslim life.

Although many *Chisti pirs* had publicly condemned Nazim Baba's behaviour, he was never ordered to vacate the female praying area. On one occasion Nazim Baba was sitting in the female prayer area with Shams alongside him. An old woman had approached Nazim Baba for some advice. Her son had also accompanied her.⁶¹ During this time, some women were also praying there and were seemingly indifferent by the male encroachment of their prayer space.

In contrast, a *Chisti pir* is usually noticeable to most devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine. Many *Chisti pirs'* cells (*hujra*) are located along the perimeters of the southern and northern courtyards (*sahan* and *sirhana mastana*) of the shrine from where they conduct their everyday affairs (Plate 2.10). On any day one can observe the *Chisti pirs* sitting outside their cells, engaged in discussion with their disciples and guests. The central location of their cells allows them to gauge devotees' movements around the Nizamuddin shrine and to be seen by others. Little seems to escape their attention. The importance of monitoring devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine can be understood in the light of the *Chisti pir's* need to maintain his subsistence and social prestige. Unsurprisingly, any new devotees going there are quickly brought to the attention of *Chisti pirs* via their network of followers. The efficacy of this network was brought to my attention one day when I had come to the saint's shrine. A disciple of Khwaja Islamuddin, a highly respected *Chisti pir*, asked me if I could take a photograph of his master together with the latter's grandchildren. Although I had not met Imam Islamuddin that day he had been quickly notified of my arrival at the Nizamuddin shrine. My own guardian (*wakil*), whose house was located nearby the Nizamuddin shrine, would often spy along the shrine's central arena from his fence, eagerly noting who was there. Whenever he saw me he would call me over for some tea and a chat.

⁶⁰Spatial segregation between men and women at mosques was implemented during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime as a way of checking against indiscriminate mingling between the sexes, as it was believed that such inter-mixing would have a disruptive impact on prayer.

⁶¹ According to Islamic edict, women should be accompanied by either their husbands or male relatives when in public.

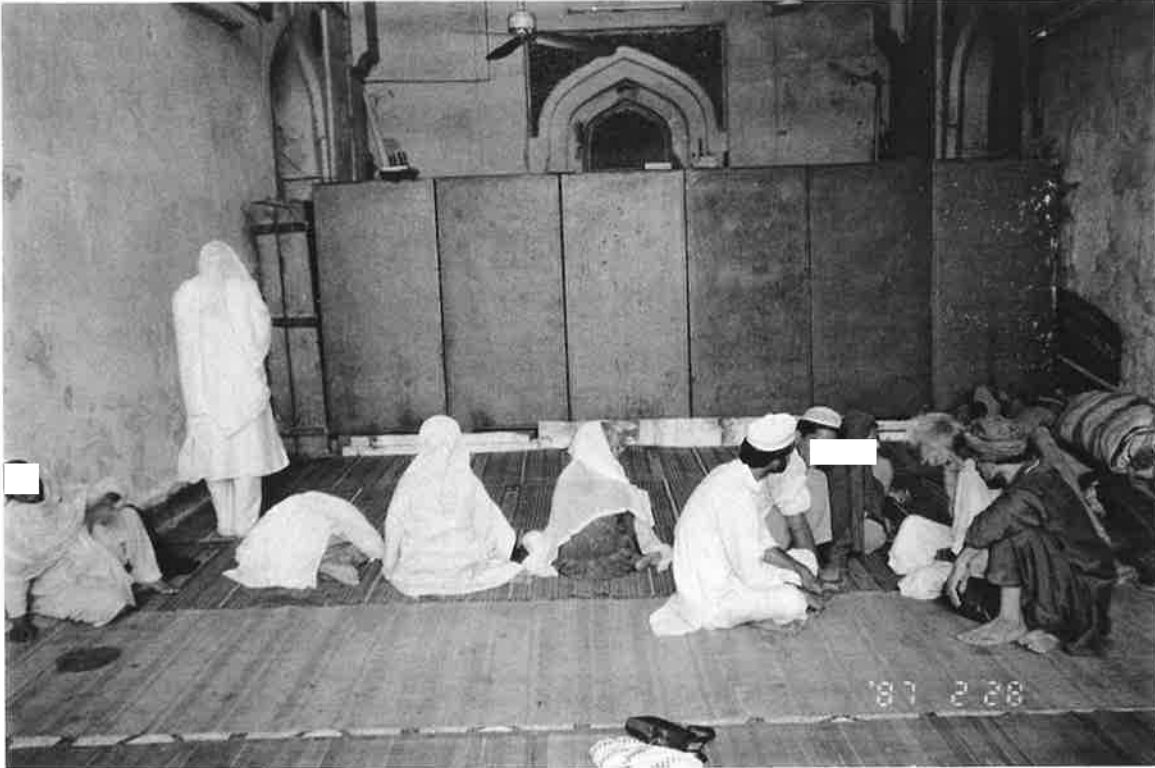


Plate 2.9: Shams sitting alongside Nazim baba who is talking with an old woman in the women's section of the *Khijli* mosque. The old woman's son is accompanying her.

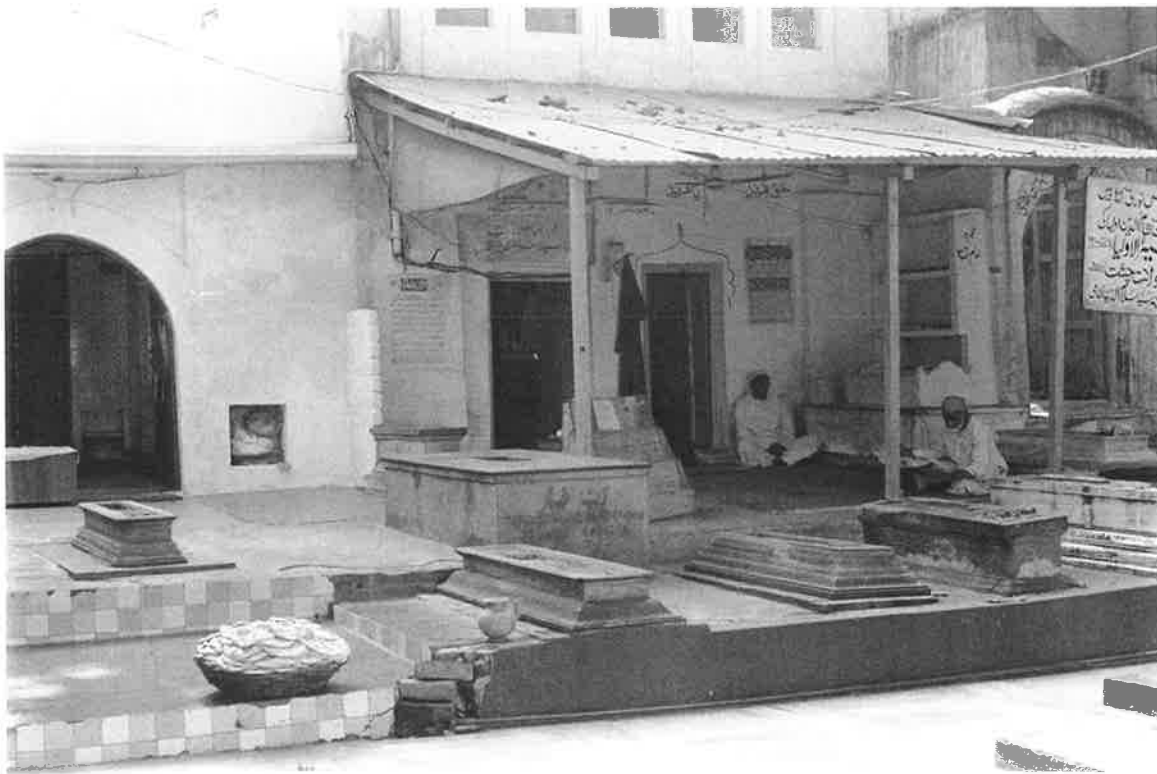
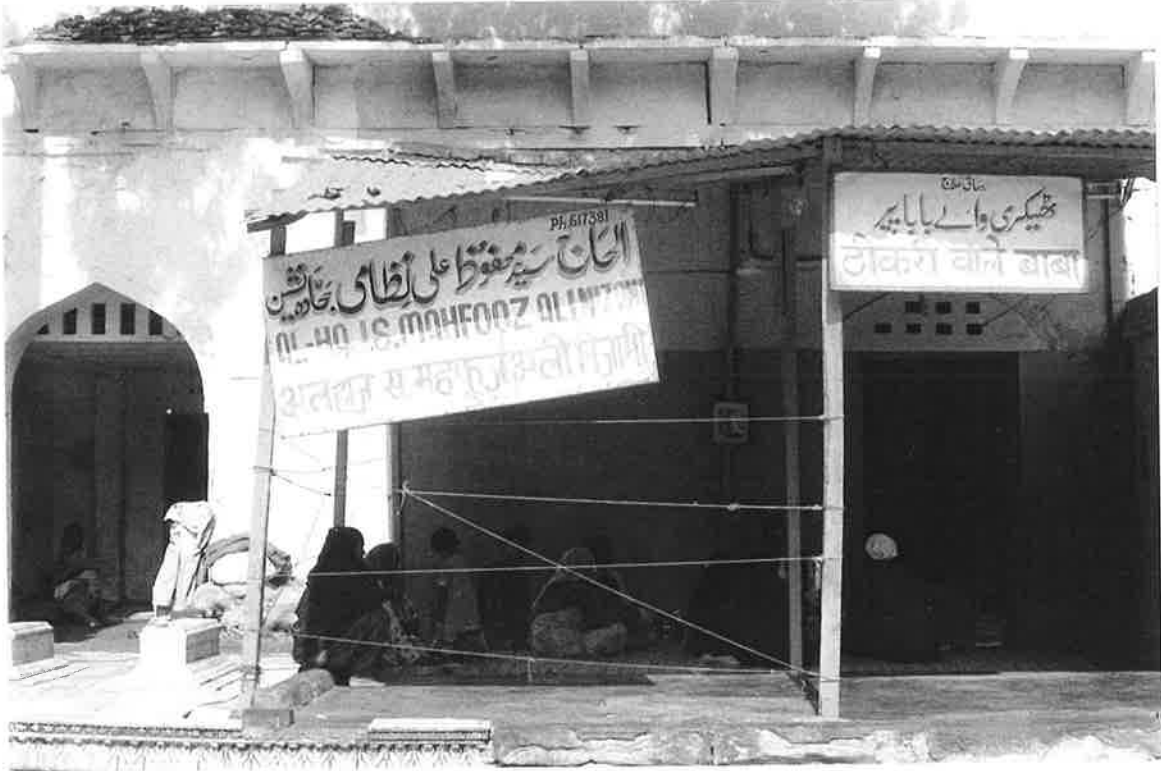


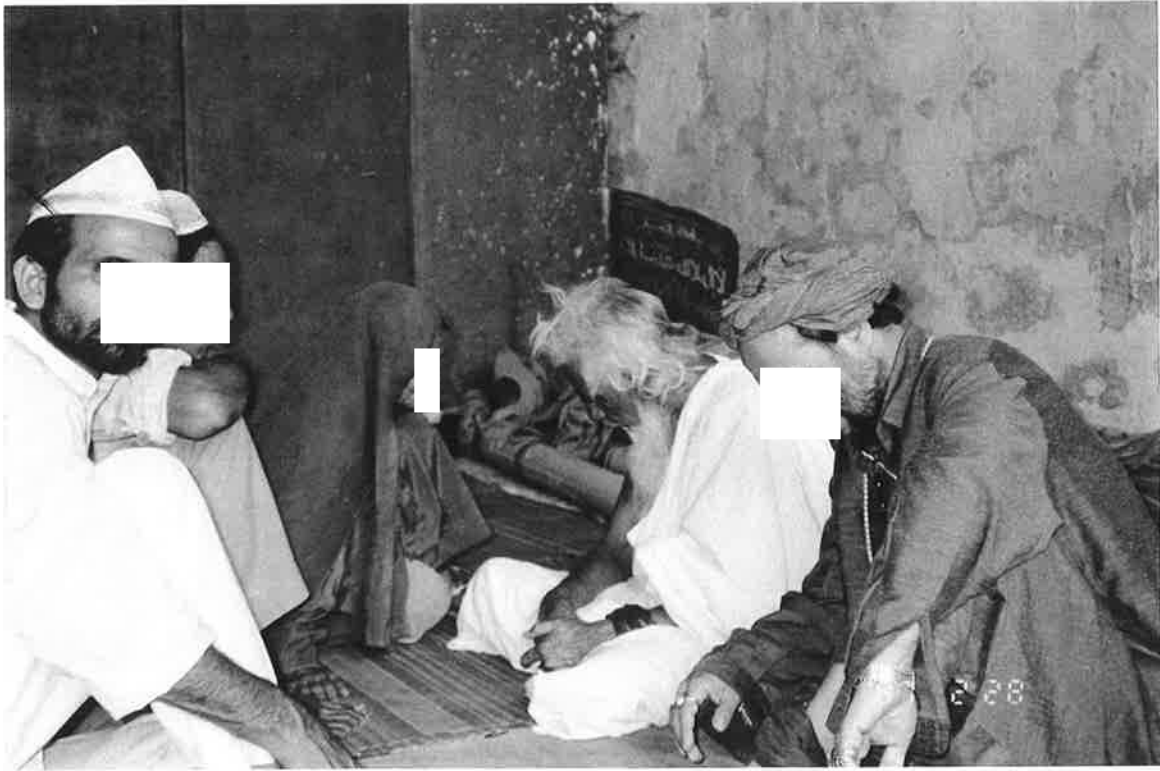
Plate 2.10: *Hujra of Chisti pirs.* Top photograph is the *hujra* of Mahfooz Ali Nizami, located along the northern courtyard. Bottom photograph is the *hujra* of Khwaja Islamuddin Nizami, located opposite the shrine of Amir Khosrau.

The *faqir* and the *Chisti pir* are also distinguished by their use of space when interacting with others. Again, *faqirs* use of space seemingly flouts Muslim social conventions. Generally speaking, *faqirs* are less concerned with how far or close people should sit to them, unlike the fastidious *Chisti pirs*, and was conveyed to me on many occasions where *faqirs* would freely mix with men and women at the Nizamuddin shrine (Plate 2.11). It was also common practice for some *faqirs* to sit with the local transvestites (*hijras*). On this note, the fluidity of *faqirs*' interactions with people of both genders at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* is reminiscent to the ways in which some kinds of spirit beings are believed by Muslims to freely move among people.

What is important here is how *faqirs*' crossing into people's personal space enables them to exercise a degree of existential control over the other. *Faqirs* and some kinds of spirit beings, are believed by many Muslims to be able to cause affliction, to heal, and to bewitch by their touch. *Faqirs* are aware of various bewitching techniques that can be transmitted via touch. Baba Ali once told me of such a technique to bewitch a woman. Thoughts in the form of cursing (*badua*), sorcery, or healing are also believed by *faqirs* and other Muslims to have the power to affect people. *Faqirs* are alleged masters of thought transference, and are able to heal or cause misfortune by the act of willing it. Moreover, like spirit beings, *faqirs* are credited with the ability to enter the dreams of others.

A *faqirs* apparent disregard of the immediate spatial boundaries between him and others is opposed to the protracted use of space between a *Chisti pir* and devotees and disciples. In accordance with Muslim social etiquette, a *Chisti pir* usually observes a formal spatial distance when interacting with devotees, disciples, or clients (Plate 2.11). The maintenance of spatial distance also reinforces a *Chisti pir's* sense of authority and exclusiveness from others. Even when at his cell a *Chisti pir* maintains a "respectable" distance between himself and his disciples and clients (Plate 2.12).⁶²

⁶² This is similar to Goffman's idea of "boundary markers;" objects that are employed in order to ensue the user's personal space (1959:42). It is interesting how *faqirs* and *Chisti pirs* use space in order to distinguish themselves from others. Although their appropriation of space discloses their different religious understandings of Islam, space is intrinsically tied to the formation and maintenance of identity.



**Plate 2.11: Different spatial distances expressed by *faqirs* and *Chisti pirs*.
Top photograph shows Nazim baba talking with an old woman in the women's section of the *Khijli* mosque. Bottom photograph shows the *Chisti pir* Afzal Nizami in discussion with guests at his *hujra*. Note the marked spatial distance.**



Plate 2.12: The *Chisti pir* Iqbal Nizami sitting at his *hujra* in front of his father's grave. As other *Chisti pirs*, he is always visibly separated from his disciples and guests.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed aspects of *faqirs'* body image and comportment, and how these embody notions of ambiguity, inordinance, and alterity. I began by examining *tariqah* as a modus operandum of *faqirs'* life, and its emphasis on mystical experience. I argued that integral to *tariqah* is the need to exercise self mastery via body image. It is through a *faqir's* engagement with *tariqah* which apparently allows him freedom to invent and explore new possibilities of experiencing the self and communicating with the sacred other. In this way, *tariqah* provides various ways for constituting the existential imperative. The chaotic accent of his explicit identity and demeanour superimposes and disrupts the social world, enabling him to "experiment with alternatives," thus, leading him to new kinds of self awareness (Jackson 1998:30-31).

My comparative analysis between the *faqir* and the *Chisti pir* has also attempted to flesh out differences in body image and comportment. I have also shown, *faqirs'* and *Chisti pirs'* body image are linked to notions of accessibility, control, and marginality in relation to their physical proximity to the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*, as well as their daily interactions with devotees and *basti* locals. Their mode of interaction with devotees and *basti* locals also plays an important part in the reaffirmation of their social and religious roles.

A *faqir's* appearance generally conveys an absence of uniformity, highlighting his difference from others. It is through his unpredictable conduct, vacillating between flux and flow, that correlates him with the wild and volatile aspect of existence, or as Dewey might say, as illuminating, "a dark landscape...the continuity of an ordered temporal experience in a sudden discrete instant of climax" (Dewey 1958:24). Over time I learnt that a *faqir's* objective presence constituted more than a critique of temporal existence, but rather, an awareness that chaos and order are infused and evade our attempts to separate them. This was brought to my attention one day when I had asked Shams why he purposefully wore his jacket inside out. He could only reply that "it was *tariqah*."

While this chapter has examined how *faqirs*' convey their social identity in the public arenas of the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*, I will now explore the aspect of sensuous awareness of mystical mastery in relation to *faqirs*' mystical practices.

CHAPTER THREE

ATTAINING THE MYSTICAL BODY: EXPLORATIONS IN SENSUOUS AWARENESS

Man's physical senses are weak but the inner soul is strong and a grand creation.

Rumi

I have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad

The Prophet

Introduction

In this chapter, I draw attention to the expression of sensuous awareness in mystical mastery in relation to *faqirs'* mystical practices. My understanding of the term sensuous awareness here is partly influenced by Paul Stoller's idea of "sensual scholarship", (1986; 1989a; 1997) which incorporates the body's mosaic of senses and textures into ethnographic analysis (Stoller 1997:xiv). For Stoller, the body contains a secret history which is unveiled through its carnal presence: how it moves, eats, shits, farts, dances, talks, feels and experiences emotion, senses, performs coitus, engages with the visible and spirit worlds, and conveys the skein of human ambiguities, frailties and hopes (Stoller 1997:xv). In my argument *faqirs'* mystical practices aim to ameliorate the lower or base self, which *faqirs* refer to as *nafs*.¹ I contend that such mastery is achieved by an awareness of the body's contours, textures, and rhythms, and by its participation with the lifeworld.²

¹ *Faqirs* use the word *nafs* in the singular sense. Traditional Sufi thought recommends the use of certain mystical practices in both taming the *nafs* and for attaining higher spiritual states, and finally, to a "passing away" or dissolution of a Sufi's self (*fana*) into the Divine Reality: Knysh (2000:309); Stoddart (1994); Nicholson (1963); Schimmel (1976); Nicholson (1976); Williams (1961); Lings (1975); Schuon (1970); Arberry (1950); Nasr (1966); Hoffman (1995) and Bakhtiar (1991).

² By lifeworld I mean the phenomenal world that is experienced "through embodiment, with both physical and social reality" (Gill 1991:71).

In the first section, I will examine *faqir's* notion of *nafs*, and how it influences their knowledge of the self and body. This is important since the belief in *nafs* is integral to understanding the sensuous underpinnings of most *faqirs'* mystical practices. From there, I examine various types of mystical practices employed by *faqirs* and how they shape *faqirs'* sensuous awareness, and are shaped by it. In the third section, drawing from the phenomenological ideas of Merleau-Ponty (1963, 1968); Abram (1997); Connor (1999); and Seres (1998), I explore the ways in which *faqirs'* engage sensorially with the Nizamuddin shrine complex, and how this engagement may be considered mystical practice.

Faqirs spend years of their lives engaged in a rigorous regimen of mystical practices. These form a central part of their daily lives. The engagement is painstakingly slow and tedious with many emotional pitfalls being experienced as the *faqir* is taken to the brink of his psychological and physical limits. Years of constant effort and physical deprivation may bring only minimal results, without any assurance of further progress. Engagement in these practices demands an unusually strong will and determination. Even so, the monotonous nature of mystical practices may increase the likelihood that a *faqir* falls into a state of ennui. From another level, a *faqir's* engagement in mystical practices allows him to understand aspects of his psyche and new ways of thinking and experiencing that would otherwise remain latent. As he becomes more adept in his mystical practices a *faqir* may feel a sense of personal achievement and satisfaction. Consequently, his mystical powers may increase manifesting in an array of alleged intuitive and psychic abilities such as precognition, telepathy, hyperaestheticism and the ability to heal or cause harm, such as sorcery. The vigour by which *faqirs* daily engage in their mystical practices is supposed to gradually transform them into mystical virtuosi. As I will show, *faqirs'* mystical practices not only provide different ways for experiencing their bodies, but also incorporate various sensory perceptions which allows them them to mystically engage with the lifeworld. As an entry point for this discussion I turn to my initial encounter with the *faqir* Shah Alam which highlighted the inter-relationship between mystical mastery and sensuous awareness.

“Here! Look at my body”

In early January 1995 I was writing up some of my data in a small room next to the shrine of Inayat Khan, located nearby the shrine of Nizamuddin.³ I heard a knock on my door, after which Shams walked inside and greeted me. He seemed happy. He said in his usual emphatic manner, that he wanted to introduce me to one of his friends "You are very lucky today. My friend Shah Alam is a great *faqir*", he told me. Shams hurriedly made his way outside and brought Shah Alam in. I stood up and greeted him with the formal Muslim greeting "*asalam alaikum*" (peace be with you). His appearance was in keeping with a *faqir's* customary 'look', barefoot, with a mass of long unkempt hair and beard, and wearing sackcloth. Shams quickly intervened, saying that Shah Alam did not engage in verbal speech as he had given an oath (*manat*) never to speak. No sooner had I introduced myself than Shah Alam grabbed the bottom end of his sack and lifted it up, exposing his penis to me. His action took me totally by surprise; I sat there speechless, unable to comprehend what was happening. Shah Alam stood motionless, apparently content in showing me his genitalia. I turned towards Shams nodding to him for a cue. While pointing to his friend's appendage Shams said, "Look! Do you see? He has not touched any woman. His spirit is strong". "Oh! I see. Yes". I answered perplexed. After Shah Alam pulled down his sack he approached me grabbed me by the back of the head and pulled it violently towards his chest. He had a vice like grip on my head. "Do you hear it?" Shams asked. "What am I supposed to be hearing?" I retorted. "His heart! His heart! Listen to his heart", Shams exclaimed. I then focussed my attention on hearing Shah Alam's beating heart. "Yes! I do hear it. So?" I replied. Shams then said, "Do you hear what its saying?" "Saying? What is it supposed to be saying?" I exclaimed. He responded, "Can't you hear? His heart is saying "Allahu! Allahu! Allahu!" Shah Alam let go of my head.

³ Inayat Khan (1882-1927), was the first leading exponent of Sufism to travel to the west in ther early 20th century in order to spread the teachings of Sufism. His shrine is located in Nizamuddin *basti*. This site is also the location of the Hazrat Inayat Khan Memorial Trust which operates as an educational and medical centre to *basti* locals.

Shah Alam's desire for me to survey the explicit and visceral regions of his body poignantly conveys the inter-relationship between mystical mastery and sensuous awareness of the corporeal. The exposure of his penis to my gaze, an act which had flummoxed me, was doubtless a way of legitimating his moral uprightness to me, as was his desire to direct my attention to his 'reinvented' body itself — a body pulsating with the name of God. By allowing me to transfix my visual and aural gaze upon the visible and visceral domains of his body, Shah Alam was allowing me an insight into the "uniqueness" of his bodily presence. The sight of his dangling penis, the violation of my private space, the feel of his chest against my face, his hand locked at the back of my head, and the cadence of his soundscape, all of these demanded a breakdown of my empirical barriers, which Jackson argues, draw "a definite boundary between observer and observed" (1989:3).⁴ However, because this episode incorporates Muslim ideas of embodiment a discussion of the *nafs* will be explored here.

Nafs: requiem of the body

"You know, the *nafs* is like the other god", a *faqir* at the Nizamuddin shrine explained to me. Unlike other areas of the *faqirs'* mystical complex, my initial attempts to learn about the *nafs* were not veiled in secrecy. *Faqirs* were more than obliging when explaining the *nafs* to me; this powerful, inimical other whose existence demanded the most intensive resolve to countermand its authority over them. Indeed, *faqirs'* explanations of the *nafs* led me into the rich world of their religious imagination.

The idea of the *nafs* is pan-Islamic and is referred to in the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions (*hadith*) as the human conscience (Hughes 1988:427). Early Sufi thinkers deliberated upon a complex philosophy of the *nafs*, quoting at least six different types of

⁴ Stoller agrees with this sentiment when he bluntly notes that ethnographers tend to, "avoid acknowledging the contingent nature of situated experience, which distances (them) from the ambiguous, from the tangential, from the external textures and sensuous processes of our bodies" (1997:23).

nafs, their proclivities, manifestations, inter-relationships, and transformations.⁵ In contrast, *faqirs'* concepts of the *nafs* lacks the sophistication and abstraction of medieval Sufi theorists. For instance, *faqirs* use the term *nafs* in the singular sense. *Nafs* may be understood to mean either the “lesser self”, “base self”, “animal self”, or the “satanic self”. Some *faqirs* consider the *nafs* as being a soul-like substance that exists in the body while other *faqirs* believe that the *nafs* inhabits human blood and semen.⁶ I was told that during intercourse the man's *nafs* enters the woman's womb via his semen. Therefore, every child conceived receives *nafs* from each of its parents. However, women's *nafs* is believed to be more powerful and assertive than a man's *nafs* since she is more prone to the influence of the devil (*shaytan*). The human foetus is especially susceptible to attack from evil spirit beings. If a pregnant woman becomes possessed during pregnancy the child may become intellectually handicapped.

The belief that the *nafs* physically inhabits the body's organs and circulatory system informs *faqirs'* body conceptions and influences the nature of many of their mystical practices. For instance, *faqirs* associate the body's interior visceral regions to various human emotions, feelings, desires, cravings, and impulses. Although some *faqirs* consider the *nafs* to inhabit the blood and male semen, it is believed to especially gravitate towards the lower torso — the bowels and uro-gential areas; sites connected to human instinctual drives i.e. food and sex.⁷ It is, perhaps, not surprising that some of the core practices of

⁵ Schimmel cites three types of *nafs* found in the Quran, and their mystical meanings. Firstly, there is the *nafs* which incites humans to commit sin (*an-nafs al-ammāra bi'-su'*); “the soul commanding to evil” (Quran 12:53) (1976:112). According to Schimmel this “forms the starting point for the Sufi way of purification” (1976:112). Secondly, there is the *nafs* as the “blaming soul” — *an-nafs al-lawwāma* (Quran 75:2), which corresponds to the human conscience; and thirdly, the *nafs* after having been purified (*mutma'inna*) (Quran 89:27). In this state, the *nafs* is purged of any incendiaristic qualities, and is “at peace” with Allah. Al-Kubra (1958), provides a comprehensive exegesis on the various kinds and stages of the *nafs*. See also Al-Hujwiri (1991).

⁶ Medieval Islamic physicians and philosophers compared the *nafs* with *ether*, which was believed to be “emitted from the heart” and transported via the blood throughout the body “giving it life” (Phillips 1989:17).

⁷ In his book, *The Body in the Mind*, Johnson elucidates a “geography of human experience” by identifying the main forms and junctions by which human experience and understanding are rendered (Johnson 1987:XXXVII). Johnson claims that certain “embodied schemata” (1987:XXXVI), structure and make sense of human experience, or as he puts it “putting the body back into the mind”(1987:XXXVI).

faqirs, for example, celibacy, fasting, isolation, are intended to mitigate the *nafs* control over these regions.

Faqirs define these particular instinctual drives as being at the root of human evil, and, therefore, must be rigorously controlled. As one *faqir* put it, “the *shaytan* lives down there. If you want to tame him you must not feed his desires”. *Faqirs* believe that mystical practices such as ritual fasting, chanting, prayer and seclusion, allows them to gain control of the *nafs*. However, to control the *nafs* requires vigilance and constant effort.

The idea of the *nafs* as residing in the lower torso is interwoven with Muslim moral assumptions of bodily boundaries. As I explain in Chapters Four and Eight, physical excreta, such as faeces, urine, menstrual blood and semen, are deemed by Muslims as being physically and spiritually polluting substances. In Muslim thought, a person’s state of ritual purity⁸ is rendered defunct by the act of touching or soiling their clothing, leaving them susceptible to psychic attack. This is not to say that all bodily substances are deemed to be polluting. For instance, the breath, which is believed by Muslims to contain the spirit/soul (*ruh*), is used in certain healing practices. Related to this notion of polluting substances is the belief that evil spirit beings are naturally drawn to human excrement and feed off it. Baba Ali told me of a certain technique to invoke an evil spirit being, which consisted in chanting a certain sequence of words during the act of defecation. This had to be done for forty days without break. Intimated here is the notion of the bowels as a site of boundary crossing. The Islamic requirement to recite prayer whenever the anal and genital regions are exposed is meant to ward off evil spirit beings.⁹ Mary Douglas (1969) argues that the body’s orifices are especially polluting since they oppose social conceptions of bodily order. Interest in controlling bodily margins is not only

⁸ This is maintained by performing the obligatory ablution (*wuzu*), prior to formal prayer.

⁹ The classic text, the *Mushkil Kusha*, states certain requirements for Muslims when following nature’s call. These include not undressing oneself when in a forest, nor cleaning one’s private parts with bone, pebbles, coal, or dried dung (Dehlvi 1994:9). According to one saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, the devil laughs whenever a person’s private parts are exposed during nature’s call. However, reciting prayers can avert this (Dehlvi 1994:9).

symptomatic of western conceptions of bodily order (Douglas 1969, Elias 1978), but arguably, reaches its zenith in Islam.

The body in Islam is meticulously controlled by an ongoing repertoire of body techniques that are aimed towards a “complete and absolute cathecting or investment of the body” (Bouhdiba 1985:56). Most Muslims are brought up with a total mistrust for dirt and uncleanness, especially where it compromises their immediate surroundings (Bouhdiba 1985:56). This is especially the case where dirt invades the bodily domain, promoting a rigorous response by the individual to remove it. Several techniques may be employed to free oneself from the polluting aspects of dirt, including religious ablution (*wuzu*), reciting of religious formulas, wearing of clean clothes, keeping one’s surroundings clean, keeping the orifices clean, and bathing after coitus. As Bouhdiba puts it, “Eating, drinking, urinating, farting, defecating, having sexual intercourse, vomiting, bleeding;” all compromise in varying degrees one’s control over bodily boundaries (1985:55-56). What is important is that the body must be restored to its previous state of purity, since it is only through this state that the believer can continue their “quest for spirituality” (Bouhdiba 1985:55). The point to emerge here is that bodily purification, or its lack, is coextensive with the pan Islamic view of keeping the bodily orifices in check. The famous Islamic saying, “Cleanliness is part of faith. Dirt is the work of the devil” (Bouhdiba 1985:55), poignantly sums up this prevailing attitude.

What became clear to me in *faqirs*’ discourses of the *nafs* was its association with animality. *Faqirs* would often draw attention to the way in which the *nafs* revealed a person’s animal nature. Thus, physical desires and the emotions which they foster, threaten control over bodily orifices, by revealing a person’s animality. Unlawful coitus, non-sharing of food, farting and burping aloud, laughing and eating in such a manner that it exposes the inside of the mouth to another person’s sight, drunkardness, and uttering obscenities, all exhibit the *nafs* in one way or another. Among *faqirs* the constant surveillance of body orifices plays a significant aspect of their bodily patterns at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*. To eat or not to eat? To speak or not to speak? To check

whether the penis and anus are clean of urine or remnants of faeces. Physical cleanliness is particularly vital for *faqirs* since they must constantly deal with the spirit world. *Faqirs* consider themselves as being especially susceptible to attack from all kinds of spirit beings due to their constant contact with people who are believed to be victims of spirit possession.

Whereas the *nafs* and its effects are insidious, a person's *ruh* (soul, spirit) is of Divine origin, being immortal and inviolable by the *nafs*. The *ruh* gives both life to the body and discloses the Divine aspect inherent in all human beings. As in the case of the *nafs*, *faqirs*' view the *ruh* as being intimately associated with the body's visceral regions. The *ruh* is believed to inhabit the heart (*dil*),¹⁰ the site of Divine cognition, compassion, spiritual knowledge, and personal honour.¹¹ Notions of purity pervade *faqirs*' conceptions of the heart. *Faqirs* liken the heart to "a court without a judge", or as "the speaker of truth". *Faqirs* also link a person's actions as mirroring the state of their heart. A pious person is said to have a strong "*iman*" (faith), denoting that their heart is pure. Alternatively, impiety is referred as "*bay-iman*" (without faith) — having an unclean heart.

Faqirs tend to describe the *ruh*/heart connection in biological terms, as attested to the belief that the heart circulates *ruh* throughout the body via the blood (*khun*).¹² When asked about the heart's function and its relation to *ruh*, Shams explained,

the heart's purpose is to purify the blood. There are two kinds of blood: blood that is in ordinary people. This blood is dirty (*kasif*). The other kind of blood is in pure people like the saints (*auliya*). Their blood is clean (*saf*): *nafs* does not live in them.¹³

¹⁰ The symbolic and metaphoric significance of the heart will be further discussed in Chapter Eight, in relation to the *puleeta*'s centre.

¹¹ The allusion to disclosing one's heart is given cultural expression amongst *basti* villagers by the saying, *chati kolke challo* (always put your chest in front) or in other words, showing to others that one is honourable. This notion is also reflected in the Muslim greeting of placing one's right hand over the left side of their chest, after shaking another's hand.

¹² Although *ruh* pertains to the spiritual nature of humans it resembles *nafs* by its association with the blood.

¹³ This partly resembles the Prophet Muhammad's saying, "Verily, Satan flows in the bloodstream of Adam's descendants". Narrated by Anas in *Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.) vol. III, pp. 1188.

Faqirs speak of spiritual power as deriving from the heart (*qudrat-I-qalb*; literally, “heart’s power”). This power is held to circulate from the heart, via the blood throughout the body. In this way, the body is purified from its “bad blood” (blood that is polluted by *nafs*).¹⁴

Both *nafs* and *ruh* express notions of selfhood and inform the nature of *faqirs*’ mystical practices. However, as I have shown, these terms should not be viewed purely philosophically, but rather, as grounded in the body. While *faqirs* make distinctions between the *nafs* and *ruh*, each one is “mutually necessary as well as intimately connected” (Jackson 1989:186). Thus, the loss of sexual desire, or the lack of appetite may be interpreted by *faqirs* as either their mastery over the *nafs*, or the *ruh*’s action in purifying the body, or both. To my mind, a *faqir*’s mystical repertoire is about immersing himself in an existential struggle for meaning as much as it is for attaining self-mastery. The decision to fast, to retreat for days or weeks, or engage in harsh penances, not only permits a *faqir* to enter into different “domains of experience” (Jackson 1989:186), but allows him to develop a personalised repertoire for understanding his practices, experiences and sensations invoked by them. The mystical practice of retreat conveys the inter-relationship between mystical mastery and sensuous awareness of the corporeal.

***Khalwat* and the sequestering of the self**

Most *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine tend to keep to themselves. The need to maintain a seclusion from others could be seen as the oeuvre of a *faqir*’s life. The term “*khalwat*”, meaning seclusion or isolation, not only constitutes a central method of *faqirs*’ mystical practice but also denotes a way of self-surveillance (Knysh 2000:316). From my experience *khalwat* incorporates a certain body praxis and psychological technique for

¹⁴ In addition, animals are considered to possess “bad blood” by nature and are thought as *haram-zade*. *Haram-zade* is a difficult term to translate. In Arabic, the word “*haram*” denotes prohibition. The term “*zade*” in Urdu-Persian means “son of”. The term *haram-zade*, therefore, suggests that animals are inherently unruly as a consequence of their animal nature, and are analogous to the *nafs* in human beings.

negotiating space between self and other. Firstly, a *faqir's* performance of *khalwat* is conveyed by his physical sequestering from others at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*, where he is immersed in protracted prayer and chanting.

One of the favourite places where some *faqirs* liked to perform their practices was within the *Khijli* mosque, which was directly opposite the Nizamuddin shrine. With its thick walls and dark interior, this mosque was an ideal spot for such practices, or simply to get away from the bustle and commotion of devotees around the shrine courtyards. I sometimes followed *faqirs*, using the mosque as a retreat whenever I needed a break from the shrine crowds and the seething Delhi heat. It was always cool inside and was a welcoming respite both for myself and Muslim males, some of whom enjoyed an afternoon nap there.

As *faqirs* tend to gravitate to various places (i.e. Muslim shrines, mosques, caves, or buildings where saints alleged to have prayed or lived), in order to perform *khalwat* has implications for the way in which *faqirs* view their bodies. Although all these places have special significance in the Muslim religious imagination, saints' shrines, in particular, are outstanding for their holiness *par excellence*. Many Muslims believe that holy places such as the Nizamuddin shrine, and other Muslim shrines, emanate the saints' blessedness (*barkat*),¹⁵ a spiritual quality that survives after their death, and that is invested with several miraculous qualities.¹⁶ In relation to Muslim shrines, Kurin notes that blessedness is commonly viewed of as a transcendent spiritual (*ruhani*) quality originating from Allah", that is imbued with many miracle-working properties referred to as "*karamat*" (1992:282). Clifford Geertz states:

Literally "barkat" means blessing, in the sense of divine favor. But spreading out that nuclear meaning, specifying and delimiting it, it encloses a whole range of linked ideas: material prosperity, physical well-being, bodily satisfaction, completion, luck, plenitude, and, the most stressed by Western writers anxious to force it into a pigeonhole with mana, magical power. In the broadest terms, "barkat" is not, as it is often been represented, a

¹⁵ The word *barkat* derives from the Arabic word *baraka*.

¹⁶ The saints' blessedness and holy places is given further discussion in Chapters Four and Eight.

paraphysical force, a kind of spiritual electricity — a view which, though not entirely without basis, simplifies it beyond recognition. Like the notion of the exemplary center, it is a conception of the mode in which the divine reaches into the world (Geertz 1968:4).

Faqirs believe that praying and chanting at such places provides a means for transferring the saints' blessedness into themselves, where it purifies the body and diminishes the *nafs*. It is the consequences of a *faqir's* spiritual transference of *barkat* which I would like to examine. Throughout my fieldwork, many *faqirs* expressed the view of the importance of performing mystical practices at Muslim shrines, as this facilitated in accomplishing mastery over the *nafs*. Their narratives also indicated that such mastery involved a proxemics of space where physical closeness to the saints was significant in enabling their bodies to absorb the saints' blessedness.

The importance of *khalwat* in conveying mystical mastery was indicated to me on one occasion when I met up with a *faqir* called Imran at the *basti*. Imran wore a large ring on his finger. He asked me to look carefully at his ring. It had a large milky gem. It had a slight discoloration at its centre. When I observed it closely a face was impressed on it. He said that one night during his vigils the rays of the moon descended onto the ring and had created the face in it. Imran believed, as did other *faqirs* and devotees, that it was a heaven-sent sign. The importance of Imran's account for me was not whether the face in the ring was a miraculous sign of Divine favour, but rather how such constructions emphasised his sense of mystique to other people.

This kind of bodily inscription finds its homologue in some Muslim shrines in Delhi, where certain parts of them are attributed to some miraculous event which bears an impression. For instance, devotees assign several areas of the Nizamuddin shrine with thaumatological significance.¹⁷ I would argue that the kind of body in which a *faqir* creates (for his body is an act of self-making), resembles that of spirit beings more than a man — a feature which I have already alluded to in Chapter Two. A *faqir's* body is usually lean and light. Like spirit beings, *faqirs* may wander through the night to isolated places (i.e. Muslim

shrines,¹⁸ derelict buildings and cemeteries) where he communes with the spirit world. This similitude is also conveyed by the *faqir's* capricious nature; like the saints a *faqir* is both benign and wrathful, aspects which are embodied by his ability to heal and to inflict harm on others. He is ambiguous acting as both healer and sorcerer. Peoples' perceptions of the *faqir* as a man of mystery and having spirit-like powers heightens their fear of him. Like the saints, *faqirs* are renowned for having mystical insight (*kashf*).¹⁹ Although being a man he is considered to be more like a spirit-man.

Alternately, a *faqir's khalwat* seems to cultivate in him a kind of objectivist stance. One of the social manifestations of this capacity is an extensive observation of human behaviour. I found that *faqirs* are not much different to anthropologists in the field; both share a childlike curiosity for everything, and assume that life contains many hidden truths awaiting to be revealed by persistent endeavour. For *faqirs* and anthropologists the skin of everyday events and social encounters have underlying patterns of meaning and complexities that are ready to be unfurled by the scrutinising mind.

A *faqir's* conceptions of devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine are often articulated in terms of *jalal* and *jamal*. *Faqirs* are usually fascinated by bodies: men's bodies, women's bodies, young bodies, old bodies, fat bodies, thin bodies, how they look and how they are carried.

The surveillance of others is a part of their mystical practice and training. *Faqirs* explained to me that they could ascertain a person's inner character, or the kind of illness they were suffering from just by examining their external appearance. This kind of sensual gaze was considered to play an important part in the diagnosis of illness and curing. *Faqirs* often informed me that the way a man sits and walks, or how a woman turns her body while washing clothes, reflects their association with either *jalal* or *jamal*. Women's

¹⁷ Chapter Four discusses several thaumatological sites within the Nizamuddin shrine complex.

¹⁸ Some Muslim shrines in Delhi are closed during the evening. However, *faqirs* tend to visit them.

¹⁹ *Faqirs'* mystical insight is discussed in Chapter Six.

movements are more pleasing to the eye than men's since their physical characteristics are more coterminous with *jamal*. Alternately, men are more disposed to *jalal*, their actions are not as smooth as women's and are more prone to anger. Even when angered a woman's *jamal* is said to temper her intense emotions. Although a woman is predisposed to *jamal*, her *nafs* is considered by *faqirs* as more domineering than a man's, since her nature is intimately connected to sexual desire.

In consonance with this kind of sensual gaze is a *faqir's* fascination for the eyes. "The eyes are the soul's mirror" as I was regularly informed by *faqirs*. *Faqirs* believe that they can know a person's inward nature by gazing at their eyes. While the eyes of some saints are believed to transmit their *ruh* in the form of an immense spiritual force referred to as *jalal*, sorcerer's eyes are devoid of *ruh*. Baba Ali informed me that "One can spot out a sorcerer by looking at his eyes, for they are dark with maggots emerging from them". Here, a sorcerer's eyes disclose the putrefactive state of his soul.

Since *faqirs* consider the eyes as revealing the person's inward state, their physical boundaries must be constantly checked. I became aware how *faqirs* incorporated a repertoire of practices around keeping the eyes protected from outside influences. One such practice was by placing a saint's tomb shroud (*Chaddar bosī*) on the eyes so that it would spiritually cleanse them. Some *faqirs* would also regularly gaze into a fire at night for hours, a practice which they claimed enabled them to both draw into them the fire's power and to communicate with the *jinn*. I realised that a *faqir's* sensuous awareness was as much to do with the consumption of power as it was in the surveillance of the body's viscera and sensorial domains; to gaze into fire was to imbue oneself with the powers and potentialities of the invisible other — the *jinn*. In a way, this kind of embodied consumption resonates in the vicissitudes and struggles of a *faqir's* life. Aware of his own powerlessness before the forces of fate and the capriciousness of the spirit world, a *faqir* seeks to resolve this imbalance by preventing his *nafs* from consuming him, and by so doing temporarily ceases the fear of uncertainty and loss of bodily control. Fasting seeks to redress this imbalance.

Textures of fasting

Fasting is an important mystical practice in which sensuous awareness fuses with mystical mastery. *Faqirs*' at the Nizamuddin shrine always seemed to be fasting. A *faqir's* act of fasting is a constant reminder of his separation from "life in its material earthly form", and of his dependence on Allah for all material things (Delaney 1991:295; Sabbah 1984:80).

All the *faqirs* I knew regularly fasted. Daily fasting was referred to as *roza*, and like the obligatory fast of *Ramadan* required a *faqir* to abstain from food and fluids from sunrise to sunset.²⁰ While Islam does not consider *roza* to be an essential part of Muslims religious practice, *faqirs* considered it as being an indispensable part of their mystical training. While *faqirs* pointed out the spiritual merit for performing *Ramadan*, the *nafs* needed to be constantly monitored due to its rambunctious nature. This is where *roza* serves its indispensable function.

A central idea emerging from *faqirs*' explanations of *roza* was the idea of the consuming *nafs*. Baba Ali pointed out to me that the *nafs* has a rapacious appetite for food and sex. *Faqirs* told me that the major reason for performing *roza* was to starve the *nafs* from its incessant quest for food and sex.²¹ What *faqirs* were referring to was the excessive compulsion for food and sex. To be possessed by a strong *nafs* denoted a lack of bodily control. For *faqirs* the principle manifestations of this loss of bodily control were gluttony and lasciviousness. As I have indicated in Chapter Two, for Shams it was essential for a *faqir* to remain thin, in opposition to the 'fat' *Chisti pirs*. His beliefs epitomised a *faqir's* concern in adhering to an 'ideal' body image, that of 'thinness'. Thus, thinness denotes bodily control while fatness, its antithesis, denotes the loss of it. From my experience, most *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine considered the *Chisti pirs* the embodiment of

²⁰ *Ramadan* takes place on the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. While it can be argued that the performance of *roza* is an act of personal piety, since it is a non-obligatory fast, the *Ramadan* fast emphasises the Muslim collective, an aspect which even *faqirs* are expected to perform with others.

²¹ See also Head (2001) on ascetic practices in the Christian tradition. Head notes that the vigorous ascetic practices among some early Christian monastic orders were based on constructions of holiness as marked by one's non-attachment to material life. This idea, as Head points out, is also comparable to social constructions of holiness in non-monotheistic religions (i.e. Hinduism, Buddhism).

gluttony and excess. For *faqirs*, then, *roza*, provides a means of closing their bodies from the excessive flow of human desires and wants, contrasting with the body of other Muslims whose bodies were “characterised by openness” (Falk 1994:25) (i.e. regular food intake, sex, and material comforts).²²

In addition, the daily practice of *roza* allows *faqirs* to continually gauge and control what enters and leaves their bodies, when, and how. From this perspective, the performance of *roza* is intertwined with social constructions and practice of celibacy. Like *roza*, a *faqir's* control of sexual desire through celibacy is, as Delaney notes constructed on the Islamic idea of bodily containment; a pre-requisite to physical and spiritual purity (Delaney 1991:86).²³ While the practice of celibacy may be another way in which *faqirs* are distinguished from other Muslims, I argue, that it is the alleged de-spiritualising aspect of sexual intercourse that makes *faqirs* defy the Islamic doctrine to marry. As *faqirs* told me, no other act compromises spiritual practice as much as sex. One reason suggested to me was that sex physically weakened males if excessively engaged in.²⁴ However, like *roza*, a *faqir's* practice of *wazifa* (chanting) and breath control²⁵ allows him other ways to sensuously explore aspects of embodiment.

²² Bakhtin's characterisation of the modern body's orifices as being closed has some consonance with *faqirs'* understandings of their own bodies, particularly in relation to the body's orifices (1968:320).

²³ While Delaney's study focuses on Turkish villagers, her ideas on bodily containment are also relevant to Muslim social constructions of men's and women's bodies.

²⁴ This idea is reminiscent with Hindu and Taoist beliefs that excessive indulgence of sexual intercourse may disrupt the psychophysical well being of males. This is believed to be a result of male semen leaving the body. In some esoteric schools of Hindu thought, the human body contains a finite and unreplenishable amount of life force (*prana*). Loss of semen is one way in which this unrenowable life force can leave the body, hence, retarding psycho-physical processes, which can lead in the long-term to mental instability, senility and premature aging. Notwithstanding its religious dimensions, celibacy has been used by many Hindu and Taoist practitioners for retaining male semen. Alternately, both schools of thought have developed various kinds of sexual practices which have focused on conserving male semen during sexual intercourse. One such technique called *karezza* involves the tightening of the anal and pubic muscles during the onset of ejaculation, thereby, preventing semen loss. (See also Svoboda 1993).

²⁵ The term *wazifa* is used in both the singular and plural. The term not only indicates the act of chanting, but also the kind of chant.

I feel words in my body

For *faqirs*, certain words carry mystical power and are as Stoller claims, “not merely neutral instruments of reference” (1997:100). Words in the form of chants, spells, incantations, talismans, prayers, and stories, shape a *faqir's* understandings of the lifeworld and inform his interactions with the spirit world. I learnt earlier on in my fieldwork that sacred words and mystical incantations could be consumed by the body. Talismans written with the name of Allah on paper were often placed in water by *faqirs* and then given to patients to drink.²⁶ Similarly, *faqirs'* mystical written designs called *puleeta* would be burnt, after which the patient was told to inhale the fumes.²⁷ *Faqirs* would also use mystical words in combination with breathing on patients as a part of their therapy. It seemed to me that within *faqirs'* therapy and mystical practices, words created a sensual kaleidoscope. *Faqirs* pointed out that words were felt inside the body, that they moved within the body's viscera, blood, and breath. Moreover, *faqirs* believe that a person's character is carried by the breath.²⁸ So strong is this association between breath and human personality that some *faqirs* claimed that they could ascertain whether a person was “good” or “bad” simply by smelling their breath. In relation to this a *faqir* stated:

Some people have ‘good breath’, for their breath is blessed. They say good things. They have good *nafas*. People who are always saying bad things have bad *nafas*; their breath smells.²⁹

Such beliefs and practices intimate a visceral understanding of words. Words are not only spoken but also felt in the body. While Chapters Seven and Eight take up aspects of *faqirs'* use of mystical language in relation to performative genres and written healing designs (*puleeta*), I want to concentrate here on *faqirs'* practice of chanting known as

²⁶ A description of this technique with photographs is given in Chapter Eight.

²⁷ *Puleeta* are central to my discussion in Chapter Eight.

²⁸ In Islamic based languages the word for breath is called “*nafas*” and should not be confused with *nafs*.

²⁹ Hence, the breath of saints and other pious people is reputed to have a healing quality, reflecting the purity of their inner state. In contrast, a sorcerer's breath can cause physical or mental affliction. The fact that breath plays a crucial part in a *faqir's* healing repertoire emphasises the need for controlling the *nafs*, otherwise, as *faqirs* claim, the breath may actually worsen a patient's illness.

wazifa, and how it conveys sensuous awareness. Throughout my fieldwork the significance of *wazifa* was brought to my attention time and time again. *Faqirs* would invariably perform *wazifa* in secluded parts of the Nizamuddin shrine complex or elsewhere in the *basti* where there was minimal likelihood of being disturbed by people. I learnt that *wazifa* was a necessary appurtenance to prayer. My recollections of *faqirs* engaged in *wazifa* were often frustrating. On many occasions I had to sit through Shams' and other *faqirs* performing *wazifa* after each prayer session. Sometimes this took an extra twenty to thirty minutes. While discussions on *wazifa* were rare, what came across was how the practice of *wazifa* seemed to incorporate aspects of a *faqir's* sensibilities: secrecy, exclusion, monoideism, feeling and bodily awareness. I regularly observed *faqirs* while they were engaged in *wazifa*. During *wazifa*, *faqirs* seemed to have the ability to shut out the world around them and become fully absorbed in their chanting.

Wazifa is a mystical practice in which a *faqir* chants one of the Divine attributes or names of Allah, or other cryptic words over and over again. *Wazifa* is performed while a *faqir* is sitting on the ground, either in a cross-legged position or sitting on the heels. The rosary is usually manipulated between the forefinger and thumb of the right hand. The left hand is not used. If it is, it is to commit sorcery. *Wazifa* is conducted silently, with the eyes usually closed. The *faqir's* rosary (*tasbih*) is central to the practice and is used in the process of counting the number of repetitions of a specific name or mystical formulae. *Faqirs* generally took pride in their rosaries and were fond of showing them to me. This enabled me to see at first hand their rosaries and how they used them. Having gone to visit Shah Alam one day, he immediately presented me his rosary to inspect. It was huge. It was at least six feet in length, and numbered over a thousand beads. Not content with me merely gazing at it he gestured for me to smell it. It gave off the fragrance of sandalwood. It was important for *faqirs'* rosaries to smell sweet. Many *faqirs'* rosaries consisted of odoriferous sandalwood; a feature that I was told aided in their *wazifa*. Sandalwood has the effect of curtailing the *nafs*,³⁰ an aspect that is well founded in Muslim aromatherapy, and is frequently burnt in the form of incense within homes and at

³⁰ In this case it diminishes sexual desire.

saints' shrines. In another incident, I went to the *basti markuz* with Shams, in order to buy a rosary for a friend in Australia. Shams insisted that I should buy a rosary made of sandalwood. We went to one local hawker who had a few sandalwood rosaries in stock. Shams grabbed one and immediately smelled it. "This *tasbih* smells wonderful. Here, smell it. This is a good one. Take this one", he said excitedly. "This is good for doing *wazifa*. Take it", he repeated. I bought it without hesitation. What this incident as well as others indicated to me was the *faqirs'* need to incorporate the senses in experiencing the other; in this case, the rosary. Shams's sensuous encounter with the rosary brings to light Merleau-Ponty's idea that objects are there to be discovered and uncovered, offering a "certain resistance to our touch and a depth to our gaze" (Merleau-Ponty 1963:11).

Wazifa is formulaic and is characterised by its stereotypy, regularity, and redundancy (Tambiah 1968). In this way, the performance of *wazifa* adopts Austin's notion of illocutionary or performative utterance (1975), whereby the utterance itself does not "assert a proposition", but rather performs "an efficacious act" (Luhmann 1989:162). "Performative utterances", as Austin (1965) claims, are a category of speech acts that are used "to do something in the world" instead of just "saying something about it" (McCreery 1995:155).³¹ Tambiah adopts Austin's idea of illocutionary acts in relation to magical words which "by virtue of being enacted under the appropriate conditions achieve a change of state, or do something effective" (Tambiah 1973:221).³²

What then is *wazifa* supposed to do? *Wazifa* has several functions, one of which is learning to invoke and control mystical power. Firstly, *faqirs* insist that *wazifa* is a

³¹ Tambiah cited in Luhmann), suggests that "ritual words and acts" are characterised by "formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)" (1992:221). (See also Tambiah 1985). For Austin, speech acts follow these specific criteria, "(1) that the speaker is properly qualified, (2) that he correctly follows a certain procedure, and (3) that this procedure is appropriate for the situation in which he speaks them, his words automatically have their intended effect" (Austin 1965:8).

³² McCreery (1995); Skorupski (1976) and Foster (1974) have also incorporated Austin's notion of illocutionary speech acts in their analyses on 'magical' words and incantations. McCreery's article on exorcism in Taipai called *chè ngó-kiu* ("controlling/propitiating the Five Ghosts") tells the reader how 'magical' language should be interpreted — as speech act, metaphor, poetic form, or all three (McCreery 1995:144).

necessary spiritual practice for purifying the body, and for expunging the *nafs*. Another important function of *wazifa* is for invoking spiritual beings, such as *jinn*. This was made clear to me when one *faqir* retorted to my probing, saying, “Why do you think we do *wazifa*, we do it to get power to control *jinnat*”.³³ Thirdly, *faqirs* believe that the chanting of a certain Divine Attribute invokes the power contained in that particular name. Each Divine Attribute is considered a living entity of Divine manifestation and manifests countless potentialities.

Faqirs usually speak of the Divine Attributes in a language of correspondences. Each Divine Attribute, *faqirs* declare, is either *jalal* or *jamal*, or otherwise known as the Mighty Attributes (*usma-e-uzam*), and the Glorious Attributes (*usma-e-husna*).³⁴ *Faqirs* in general seem to have a highly developed understanding of each of the many Divine Attributes, which number ninety-nine in all. Not only is each Divine Attribute considered alive but its unique quality can be harnessed and embodied. Thus, invoking a Divine Attribute becomes an act of mystical mastery for controlling the sacred other as much as it is for incorporating the sacred other into oneself. However, it is in the realm of sensuous awareness that the sacred other is made known. The invocation of a specific Divine Attribute unfurls the body’s sensorium.³⁵ *Jalali wazifa* are recited in order to give power, while *jamali wazifa* are recited in order to make the *faqir* more intuitively receptive. Here, notions of power and receptiveness tend to be comprehended in medical terms of ‘heating’ (*sardi*), and ‘cooling’ (*garmi*). The choice of undertaking to chant a specific *wazifa* is a serious decision which demands a *faqir* be aware of the specific potentialities of a particular Divine Attribute, how many times it is to be recited in a period of time, and its mystical effect.

The decision to recite a certain *wazifa* often comes via a dream or vision, in which a *faqir* is guided by a saint or other sacred guide, referred to as the *pir-ghaib* (literally, “invisible

³³ This aspect of *wazifa* has been rarely commented on by other theorists

³⁴ A list of the ninety-nine Divine Attributes and their divisions is supplied in appendix IV.

teacher”). *Faqir’s* conceptions of *wazifa* as powerful invocations through which a *faqir* learns various kinds of embodied states are cognate with Stoller states:

Words, then, are seen as a kind of energy by any peoples in the world, an energy which should be apprehended in and of itself rather than only as a representation of something (1984:562).

Faqirs are especially wary of *jalali wazifa*, since incorrect recitation and callous preparation can have serious psychological ramifications. *Jalali wazifa* has an element of risk. The reason for this, as I have noted in the previous chapter is due to the ambiguous nature of *jalal* in *faqirs’* lore, which ascribes *jalal* to notions of excessiveness, ambiguity, danger, and ebullition. Like fever, which weakens the body, *jalali wazifa* can make “the mind boil”, a metaphor for becoming overtly intemperate, if done to excess, or incorrectly.³⁶ The analogy between *jalal* and heating was pointed out to me throughout my fieldwork. Shams, for instance, concerned by my impulsive nature, had given me a *jamali wazifa* to recite, so that I would ‘cool down’, as he told me. I learnt that the alleged harmonising effects of doing *jamali wazifa* counterbalanced irate tendencies. Similarly, *faqirs* would often give their patients a certain *wazifa* to recite for a particular physical or psychological complaint.

Moreover, some *wazifa* were believed to invigorate the body, while others, as I have indicated were noted for their calming effect. Other *wazifa* were believed to endow a patient with intelligence, courage, compassion, general luck, power of attraction and greater virility.

³⁵ The popular form of Muslim medical system called *Unane* (Perso-Arabic term meaning “Greek” medicine, which comprises elements of the Hippocratic humoral theory, invariably influences *faqirs’* understandings of the differences between *jalali* and *jamali wazifa*.

³⁶ While both *jalali* and *jamali wazifa* are considered as being dangerous if they are performed incorrectly, *faqirs* still emphasise extra caution when reciting *jalali wazifa*.

The caution of chanting *jalali wazifa* highlights some of the dangers in wanting to attain mystical power.³⁷ The desire to attain mystical power drives a *faqir* towards living on the boundaries of society, which are both inimical and ambiguous. As Douglas declares, “Danger lies in transitional states, simply because...it is indefinable” (1969:36). A *faqir* is a living embodiment of the fluid nature of the boundaries between the visible and invisible domains, where biological and supernatural forces come together. The inward and outward flow of physical and invisible forces and substances, including food,³⁸ must be always checked, monitored, and scrutinised, in order to attain a level of mystical mastery.

A *faqir* is not simply content in having an intellectual awareness of a Divine Attribute, but rather, seeks sensual intimacy with it. Emphasis is on feeling the Divine Attribute within the body’s viscera. All the *faqirs* I knew testified that the constant repetition of a particular Divine Attribute had an effect on the body’s viscera. Shams, like many other *faqirs*, pointed out that *wazifa* had a cleansing effect on the heart. “*Wazifa* makes the heart clean. You can feel the holy name in your body. It moves in the blood, cleansing not only the heart but also the entire body”, Shams said.³⁹ The point here is, that the through the performance of *wazifa*, a *faqir* develops a sensuous awareness of his bodily rhythms. Dewey considers rhythm as being “a universal scheme of existence (and)...an indispensable coefficient of aesthetic order” (1959:150).⁴⁰ Dewey’s notion has resonances with *faqirs’* understandings of breath control. Through the practice of synchronising one’s breath with sacred speech, a *faqir* learns how to utilise his breath during healing and

³⁷ In Chapter Five I also draw attention to the danger in invoking a spirit familiar.

³⁸ Foods such as onions, meat, garlic, and hot spices, must not be taken during this time, since these foods are believed to ‘heat’ the body. The logic here is that since *jalali wazifa* by nature are heating, ‘hot’ foods further compounds the intensity of the *wazifa* to dangerous levels.

³⁹ Sham’s comments correspond with Kapferer who notes that music both originates and is “heard in the body — as an experience constituted in the body” (Kapferer cited in Dissanayake 1992:119). (See also Kapferer 1983:188).

⁴⁰ Dewey suggests that, “Because rhythm is underlying all realization of order in change, it pervades all the arts, Literary, musical, plastic and architectural, as well as the dance” (1959:150). Sachs (1977:112) also mirrors this idea.

send his thoughts via the breath, thereby forming the basis of many healing techniques in *faqirs'* system of therapy.⁴¹

Breath control is intrinsic to the practice of *wazifa* where the breath is co-ordinated with sacred speech. This is exemplified by the practice of *fikr*, where a Divine Attribute is mentally recited during exhalation and inhalation. Recitation at such times allows *faqirs* to engage their attention to the movement of the breath within the body. With regular practice a *faqir* learns to direct his breath to any part of his body. The breath is said to move along the circulatory system, comingling with the blood itself where it purifies the blood from the *nafs*. This idea coincides with the Indian Sufi saint and philosopher, Inayat Khan, who explains that psychophysical elements of the body are “directed by the rhythm of the breath” (Khan 1990:146). Through the sensuous awareness of breathing a *faqir* may come to experience the kinaesthetic dimensions of his body’s inner landscape, its textures, rhythms, and movements; how thought is attuned with the breath and the heart beat as it moves with the blood throughout the body, and is then expelled from it.

Elaborating on Merleau-Ponty’s (1963, 1968) notion of “bodily project” (directed intention), Compton (2000:3-4) argues that the act of self-reflection, or as he terms it “*phenomenological* reflection”, allows us to reflect upon our own bodily experience. It enables us “to witness the ‘event of disclosure’ in consciousness” (Compton 2000:3). For *faqirs*, the practice of *fikr* is not only a means of disclosing the horizon of the body’s visceral domain, but also contours their understanding and involvement with the lifeworld. For instance, *faqirs* often draw connections between *fikr* and the lifeworld, stating that the way in which the body’s inner rhythms pulsate with sacred words is cognate with the everyday lifeworld and resounds with the name of Allah. As Baba Ali once pointed out to me, “If you listen carefully to the cars or when the trains pass, you will hear in their rhythms *la ilaha ilah ‘Lah* (There is no god but Allah)”. This serves as a useful entry point to introduce Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the “flesh of the world” (1968), in relation

⁴¹ For example, in the previous chapter, I mentioned the popular healing practice of blowing on a patent called “*dum*”.

to how *faqirs* participate in the Nizamuddin shrine complex and other spiritual sites, and how this is shaped and informed by their sensuous engagement with its spiritual landscape.

An enchanted landscape: sensuous awareness in sacred domains

In his classic work *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), Maurice Merleau-Ponty develops the notion of “flesh in the world” which emphasises the reciprocity between the human and non-human world. For Merleau-Ponty, the “flesh” is defined as being the connecting fabric or matrix that “binds us to the world and to one another” (Merleau-Ponty cited in Gill 1991:71). As Merleau-Ponty remarks:

The presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh, that I ‘am of the world’ and that I am not it... the flesh we are speaking of is not matter...It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body (Merleau-Ponty 1968:127,148).

Merleau-Ponty insists that the flesh is mediated by a “reciprocal commonality” (Merleau-Ponty cited in Gill 1991:72), between knower and the known, “the sentient with the sensible” (Abram 1997:66). Abram a la Merleau-Ponty suggests that it is because human beings are included in the sensible world by virtue of our sensuous participation with it that “we are organs of this world, flesh of its flesh, and that the world is perceiving itself *through* us (1997:68). This idea of the “reciprocity of perception” or what Abram poignantly refers to as “touching and being touched” (1997:68-69), shares a consonance with the way in which *faqirs* engage with the Nizamuddin shrine and other Muslim ‘holy’ places.

Even in my initial journeys with *faqirs* through the Nizamuddin shrine complex I became aware how *faqirs* viewed its spiritual landscape as being alive and endowed with sentience. This was expressed by the belief that the saint was not dead, but was alive and that his living presence was inscribed into the Nizamuddin shrine complex arena. For

example, the *Baoli*, a large well nearby the main shrine complex gates, is attributed by devotees as having been created by Nizamuddin through a miracle, colloquially referred to as “*karamat*”. Other sites such as the “tilting grave”, and the “*Maqbool Jaali*” are also sites where the saint objectifies his living presence to all who visit the Nizamuddin shrine complex.⁴² The way a *faqir* moves and interacts within the Nizamuddin shrine complex is informed by the belief that its precincts are inhabited by onlooking spirit beings. Along with Nizamuddin, a host of other spirit beings including pious *jinn*, lesser saints (some that were Nizamuddin’s disciples) and various descendants who are buried at the shrine complex, are believed to carefully watch all that enter there. *Faqirs* are especially wary of not inadvertently offending the saint; they are careful not to spit anywhere in the shrine complex and refrain from gossiping and other “bad” language. A *faqir*’s concern to avoid the displeasure of the saint and his community of spirit helpers coincides with Abram who states:

If the surroundings are experienced as sensate, attentive, and watchful, then I must take care that my actions are mindful and respectful, even when I am far from other humans, lest I offend the watchful land itself (1997:55).

Similarly, Basso points out that, “When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind” (1997:55).⁴³

A characteristic feature of *faqirs*’ peregrinations through the Nizamuddin shrine complex is their sense of intimacy with the spiritual landscape. My journey through the Nizamuddin shrine complex with the *faqir* Shams provides an interesting example of this. Like other *faqirs*, Shams possessed an extensive knowledge of the Nizamuddin shrine complex, and imparted his knowledge through many religious stories and hagiographies of Muslim saints.

⁴² All of the above places are further discussed in Chapter Four in relation to their thaumatological significance for both *faqirs* and devotees.

⁴³ Abram beautifully illustrates the notion of the sentient landscape when he says that, “our sensing bodies respond to the eloquence of certain buildings and boulders, to the articulate motions of dragonflies. We find ourselves alive in a listening, speaking world” (1997:86).

I had met up with Shams in the *basti* on a Friday morning. He was eager to go to the Nizamuddin shrine. I was also making my way there. Just before we entered the Nizamuddin shrine complex we took off our sandals and gave them to the presiding shoe collector. Having entered Shams immediately went to the *Baoli* and lit a candle and incense at a small niche alongside the *Baoli's* perimeter. He then recited a small prayer. His mood was intense. Shortly afterwards he took off his clothes and entered the *Baoli*. He placed his hands in front of him in the prayer gesture and again recited a small prayer, after which he cupped his hands and immersed them in the water. He then brought his hands to his lips and drank the sacred water. Shams then swam towards the *Baoli's* perimeter. His mood became ebullient. He began to playfully splash the water about him, and bobbing up and down while he laughed. This was the first time I had seen this kind of behaviour at the *Baoli*.⁴⁴ From my experience, devotees never engaged in any light-hearted activities. This rare display of sensuous frolic at a sacred site impelled me to take out my camera and photograph him. It was particularly humorous when I began to photograph Shams as he was putting on his clothes. Only then did he become mindful at being photographed in his semi-naked state. However, he laughed and said, "What do you think you're photographing? A strip-tease?"

Shams' episode at the *Baoli* highlighted *faqirs'* ability to immerse themselves in the sacred landscape. Every *faqir* that I knew maintained that devotional actions at the Nizamuddin shrine and other Muslim 'holy' places purified the body from the *nafs*. Even the act of reciting hagiographies was believed to "make the heart clean" and to strengthen a *faqir's* tie with the spirit world. However, a *faqir's* engagement with the spiritual landscape is not simply a method to expunge the *nafs*, but also provides a *faqir* with a reaffirmation of

⁴⁴ The majority of devotees who visit the *baoli* bathe themselves while dressed, as unclad bathing is prohibited. This restriction, however, does not apply to children. Some devotees may drink the *Baoli's* water while others may come there and fill their bottles before departing. Although there are no rigid rules governing the bathing procedure at the *Baoli*, devotees are informed by the attending shrine custodians to practice the required etiquette there at all times due to its sacrosanct nature. On this theme, a peculiar bathing ritual (*ghoosal karana*) is performed by devotees every Thursday, when the sick and infirm enter the *Baoli* with their clothes on. After emerging from the *baoli* the devotees take off their wet clothes and put on a new set of clothes. This action is believed to symbolise the transference of their affliction to their old clothes.

the rhythmic nature of the lifeworld, which reverberates with the sacred name of Allah. Wherever *faqirs* go they seem to recite prayers, mystical chants, or tell stories. Thus, a *faqir's* journeys within spiritual spaces is measured according to the cycles of sacred words and poetic narratives. In this way, a *faqir's* prayers and mystical words link the various spiritual places, such as the shrines of *Chisti* saints, located in Delhi and in parts of North India.

Following from Heidegger's notion of "dwelling" or the "practice of being in the world" (Heidegger 1967, Krell 1977b, Dreyfuss 1995), Shields speaks of the connection between spatial locations and "spatial performance" by individuals (1991:52). Thus, "habitual routines" or for Shields (1991:53), "spatial ballets" are performed by individuals at certain locales, which include ritualised gestures, mannerisms, storytelling, singing or chanting, that are concretised in the landscape.⁴⁵ Shields' idea approaches Abram's assertion of a "profound association" between ritualised acts and the landscape (Abram 1997:163). It is precisely because *faqirs* perform such ritual behaviours mainly at spiritual locales that is relevant here, and underlies their sense of *topophilia*.⁴⁶ Yet, a *faqir's* association with spiritual places is intensified by his spiritual, emotional, and even material⁴⁷ dependence (Tuan 1974: 97). For instance, a *faqir's* body attire (i.e. rosary, various trinkets, his staffs, arm bangles) are a physical repository of his mystical engagement with the saints (*hukm*).⁴⁸ Even his body, emaciated through rigorous fasting expresses his "deep association" with "moral behaviour" (Abram 1997:163), and those ever present spiritual entities within the spiritual landscape.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Shields refers to this enactment of "habitual routines" (1991:53), as does Giddens (1984), as the constitution of places where certain actions provide a *mise-en-scène* of ritual practice.

⁴⁶ Literally meaning in Greek "love of place". See Yi-fu Tuan (1974) for an in-depth discussion of this notion in relation to various kinds of human perception and experience.

⁴⁷ For instance, *faqirs* often receive the charity of devotees and patients i.e. money donations, food, at larger Muslim shrines.

⁴⁸ This aspect is discussed in Chapter Eight.

⁴⁹ As Berleant declares, "A landscape, an environment, even more, is embodied experience. As such it is our flesh, our world, our selves" (1997:109).

The relationship between sensuous awareness of the spiritual landscape and ritualised acts was conveyed to me by another journey which I had previously made with a local *faqir* called Ahmad Shah. It was a February morning in 1995. While the days were not yet hot they were still refreshingly sunny. I had arrived at the *basti* in order to meet up with the *faqir* Ahmad Shah. I had known him for a few months and found him to be a friendly and astute person. He was middle aged with dark, intense eyes, and was well spoken. Unlike other *faqirs* whom I had befriended, Ahmad Shah had grown up in the *basti* and had an extensive knowledge of the *basti* and the Nizamuddin shrine complex, as well as numerous other sacred sites in Delhi. He had a highly narrative style common to many *faqirs*, that richly blended anecdotal lore with historical verity. During our frequent meetings he provided me with various historical and topographical information on the *basti* and the Nizamuddin shrine complex.

At one meeting, Ahmad Shah was keen to show me around the *basti*. Some weeks before I had asked him whether he could show me places at the *basti* that were reputed to have *jinn*. By this time I had heard stories from *basti* locals and *faqirs* of certain 'haunted' sites around the *basti* where *jinn* and other spirits were believed to lurk. The frequency of these narratives had prompted my anthropological curiosity, and I became intent on seeing these putative "jinn" sites at first hand. Although I had no trouble in navigating around much of the *basti*'s twisting landscape, I still remained oblivious of its moral impact to *faqirs* and *basti* locals. An important point of this journey, as well as numerous others I had with *faqirs*, was the importance of story-telling as a way of conveying the moral and mystical significance of certain spiritual sites around the *basti* and Nizamuddin shrine complex. Our sojourns to these places were always informative and exposed me to their mystical and experiential styles of engagement with many spiritual sites within the Nizamuddin shrine complex. All the *faqirs* I knew had an intimate knowledge of the spiritual sites there, and conveyed their understanding of these through popular stories. For them, knowledge of spiritual places played an important part in their mystical practices. Like other ritualised acts, the retelling of stories linked to spiritual sites at the Nizamuddin shrine complex and elsewhere enabled *faqirs* to reaffirm their bond with the

saint and with those spirit beings believed to guard the shrine complex. Jackson observes that the continual telling of sacred stories offers a way of overcoming the antinomy between “human and extrahuman worlds” (1998:175). For Abram reinvokes “place” with “expressive potency and dynamism” (1997:162). Furthermore, Abram, as does Basso (1988, 1996, 1997), note that “narrated events” are anchored in a particular place and play an integral part in experiencing the landscape as a living, sentient presence. As Abram states: “The events belong, as it were, to the place, and tell the story of those events is to let the place speak through the telling” (1997:163).

My journey with Ahmad Shah to the Nizamuddin *Chilla* poignantly conveyed the inter-relationship between sacred words and the “speaking landscape”. Ahmad Shah said that he wanted to take me to the Nizamuddin *Chilla*, located opposite the famous tomb of the Moghul emperor, Humayun. We walked for about fifteen minutes before arriving at the Nizamuddin *Chilla* (Plate 3.1). We entered the Nizamuddin *Chilla* quietly. I had remembered before entering there with Shams that he spoke out aloud “*as-salam alaikum*” (peace be upon you). “I am greeting the *jinn*. It is necessary to greet them since they guard the *Chilla*”, Shams told me. He then opened the steel gate and we entered. He warned me to talk quietly so as not to disturb the *jinn* present there.⁵⁰ If we did so, we would not be welcomed there anymore. *Faqirs* who go there engage in various mystical practices, incorporating *wazifa* and special prayers. *Faqirs* develop their personal repertoire of prayers and *wazifa* which, apart from their evocative function, are highly aesthetic. On several occasions I had also accompanied Shams to the Nizamuddin *Chilla*, where he performed a series of prayers, *wazifa*, reciting Quranic passages and religious prayers in Urdu-Persian. This also included a special prayer in remembrance of the *Chisti* saints called *munajat*,⁵¹ which was sung:

⁵⁰ The famous *Chilla* itself is a small room, no more than three metres wide and long.

⁵¹ *Munajat* is recited in *Farsi* (Persian).



Plate 3.1: Top photograph shows the *Chilla* of Nizamuddin. Bottom photograph is taken inside the famous *Chilla* cell. The inscriptions on the wall state: “Ya! Allah, Ya! Muhammad, Nizamuddin Ya! mehboobi Allah.” (O! Allah, O! Muhammad, Nizamuddin, O! beloved of Allah.)

Khwaja-khwajagān Muinuddin
Asrafe aulia-e-roowe zameen
Kār farmā-e-saba saiyara.
Bar sareer-e-sapeher Qutbuddin.
Shāhe alam panāhe mulke baqa.
Banda-e-khās-e-haque Fariduddin
Khusrave tāj baksh bādshahan.
Pai nazme jahan Nizamuddin
Hadi-e-gumrahān dashte zalāl.
Dar tareeqe Khuda Nasiruddin
Sākin-e-aden madane asrar.
Rāhe moula numa-e-Fakruddin
Agar guti sarasar bād begirad
Chiraghe Chistayyan hargez namirad.

(Translation)

Muinuddin is the master of the khajegan (master).
He is the noblest saint on the earth.
His word is carried throughout the entire world.
Qutbuddin is the leader of the seven skies.
He is the refuge of the world.
Fariduddin is the king of the kingdom of eternity.
He is the chosen servant of God.
Nizamuddin is the king who gives the crown to kings.
He is the foundation of the world's order.
Nasiruddin is the guide to the wayward.
He is the way of guidance.
Fariduddin is like a mine containing secrets.
He is the way to the master.
O God! As long as the sun and moon last,
The lamp of the Chistiyyah will shine.⁵²

The ecological nuance of this prayer is characteristic of various Urdu-Persian prayers recited by faqirs, and underpins their conceptions of the saints as being spiritually present in the spiritual landscape. In this prayer the saints are likened to various parts of the landscape through which their powers are assimilated: Moinuddīn, the founder of the *Chisti* order is represented here as a universal teacher, whose message is not restricted by geographical, cultural or ideological boundaries. Qutbuddin is the leader of the seven

⁵² This part digresses from the formal laudation to the *Chisti* saints (*munajat*) at the shrine. The translation here is “if there is a wind across the world the light of the *Chistiyyah* will never die”. This contrasts with the *Chisti munajat*, which says: “*Elahi Tābuad Khurshid Mahi Chirague Chistiyan Ra Roshnai*”. (O God! As long as the sun and moon last, the light of the *Chistiyyah* will shine).

skies, while Fakruddin is like a mine containing unknown secrets; an allusion to the mystical powers attributed to Sufis in general. The *Chisti* order is associated here with the diurnal cycles of the sun and moon, as well as to a lamp, symbolising steadfastness. The kind of metaphorical correspondence between humans and the world as denoted in this prayer is reminiscent of Jackson's argument that symbolic correlations are a way of thinking through the body, and of connecting the human body with the body of the world (Jackson 1983:127).⁵³

The ritualised extollation of the saints plays a central role in *faqirs'* mystical practices, and expresses a need to constantly acknowledge the spirit world who for *faqirs* represents "unbounded powers" and potentially "inimical forces" to use Jackson's terms (Jackson 1998:62). For *faqirs*, the saints as well as *jinn* are both capricious and unpredictable, and must be continually placated through the reciting of sacred narratives, prayers, devotional gestures, or a simple greeting, such as "*as-salam alaikum*". Thus, Ahmad Shah's acknowledgement of the presiding *jinn* at the Nizamuddin *Chilla* and the directive to conduct ourselves quietly were ways of drawing both the saints and *jinn* onside; a vital element in promoting friendly relations with the spirit world from which *faqirs* actively seek guidance and assistance in their daily mystical practices. Moreover, it once again highlighted for me the ability for *faqirs* to sensuously attune themselves to the landscape, an ability which *faqirs* also cultivate in discerning the nature of certain sites at the Nizamuddin shrine complex. However, a *faqir's* attunement with its spiritual landscape is also reflected by his sensory perceptions and how they are directed towards engaging with, or even, consuming the saint's spiritual presence. *Faqirs* smell, taste, and feel the

⁵³ Michael Jackson is interested in the 'psychological aspects of metaphor' in disclosing the self to the world, and how thinking, speaking and behaving of "Being are made to correspond and coalesce" (Jackson 1983:127). Jackson's approach aligns itself to some extent with Bateson's synthesis of mind and structure, as characterised in human relationships and society (Bateson 1973:461). Elaborating on Merleau-Ponty's notion that it is through the body that provides a "setting in relation to the world" (1963:303), Jackson's notion of metaphor links the personal, social, and natural bodies (Jackson 1983:127). See also Jackson (1998), as he further discusses this concept. As I will show in later chapters, this kind of metaphorical analogy is central to various methods of *faqirs'* therapy i.e. the use of *puleeta* (see Chapter Seven), where the human body is diagrammatically portrayed as a matrix of inter-related and opposing physical, cosmic and spiritual powers.

saint's spiritual presence, the sound of their prayers and mystical words channel the saint's spiritual presence into their bodies.

It was mainly through my journeys with *faqirs* within the Nizamuddin shrine complex that I learnt a great deal about their engagement with its spiritual locales. In my journey to the *Baoli* with Shams, which I discussed in the last section, it became apparent the level of his synaesthetic involvement with its spiritual landscape. It was as if he had opened his body's sensorium "with the sensuous terrain" (Abram 1997:60), of the *Baoli*, allowing himself to consume the saint's spiritual presence and to be consumed by it. Visuality plays an important part of this sensuous gastronomy.

Vision

Faqirs seldom journey move through the Nizamuddin shrine complex in a random manner. Shams, Baba Ali and Ahmad Shah would routinely survey its spiritual sites, looking for the spiritual insignias of the saint and other spirit beings. It can be contended that this kind of visual preoccupation with its spiritual arena is partly based on the Muslim belief that the saints often reveal their spiritual presence at their shrines. As *faqirs* regularly told me "The *dargah* is full of signs through which the saint works". These signs or "*ayat*" as they are commonly known, are conveyed by all kinds of phenomena; from alleged miraculous healings at the *Baoli* to devotees immersed in ecstasy before the saint's shrine. *Ayat* may also be conveyed through the visual and dramatic displays of "*jinn* possessed" people at the Nizamuddin shrine complex. *Faqirs* explained to me that the volatile and sometimes obscene behaviours of such people reflected the spirit beings' agitation of being in close proximity to the saint's spiritual blessedness. Such visible manifestations of the saint's spiritual presence not only reinforce *faqirs'* belief in the healing nature of the Nizamuddin shrine complex, but seemingly enables them to gain a sense of intimacy with its various spiritual sites there. It is this need to gain intimacy with the spiritual landscape which shapens a *faqirs'* employment of their gaze. *Faqirs* don't just look at these spiritual sites,

their vision attempts to penetrate their physical façade.⁵⁴ Each place has its *raz* (secret), *faqirs* told me. Sometimes, a *faqir* will strategically sit nearby one of these spiritual sites and literally wait for something to happen, in the form of a healing, or perhaps, a chance glimpse of the saint's spirit wandering through the Nizamuddin shrine complex.

The kind of "excursive vision" implied by *faqirs'* exploration of the Nizamuddin shrine complex reflects Seres idea of "vision being on the move" (Seres cited in Connor 1999:9).

As Seres notes:

In general, the bearer of the look in traditional philosophy does not move...But we see things rarely in a condition of rest, our ecological niche incorporates innumerable movements (Seres 1998:45).

Visuality, then, in this understanding is not simply the physical act of looking, but visiting, of going beyond the body's corporeality where the spiritual landscape is partaken by the excursive gaze (Seres 1998:408-9).

As I have indicated earlier, the perception that certain spiritual sites at the Nizamuddin shrine complex are imbued with the saint's benevolent aspect influences *faqirs'* visual engagement there. These places also serve as visual cues of the saint's continuous and benevolent presence and is denoted by their colloquial names, including "*chasmai dil kusha*" for the *Baoli* which means "river of the heart", the "*malan darwaze*", for the northern entrance leading into the northern and southern courtyards where the shrines of Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khosrau are located, has written under its arch in Farsi, "It is not strange that a king should confer favours on a beggar". The saint's benevolent presence is further denoted by the northwestern area of the Nizamuddin shrine known as the "*Maqbool Jaali*", literally meaning "anything can happen".

⁵⁴ It can be suggested that *faqirs'* visual perception is antithetical to western forms of visualism and its predilection with externalities and "detached observation" (Classen 1993:253).

The topographical setting of the Nizmauddin shrine complex also seems to reinforce the belief of the benevolent aspect of the saint. Some twenty metres from the main southern gates (*sarwar darwaze*) one is immediately confronted by the *Baoli*. The visual impact of the *Baoli*, characterised by its large size, seems to confer a sense of awe on the saint's miracle working power. *Faqirs* regularly visit the *Baoli* either to pray there or to drink its water. Baba Ali would regularly visit the *Baoli* or stay in close proximity to it. His many years at the Nizamuddin shrine complex had given him an intimate knowledge of the *Baoli*, which was conveyed by his numerous stories of it. The *Baoli* also had a central place in Baba Ali's healing repertoire. Baba Ali would regularly instruct his patients to bathe themselves in the *Baoli* and drink from it. However, Baba Ali was not averse to the physical deterioration of the *Baoli*. During some of our visits he told me that the *Baoli* had become badly polluted over the years. He would nod his head in despair while blaming its present state to the moral lapse by *Chisti pirs* and others at the Nizamuddin shrine complex.⁵⁵

Passing the *Baoli*, devotees enter a long twisting arcade (*chatta*), where destitute people are usually found sitting and sleeping along there. Along the arcade are located a number of small cells (*hujra*) belonging to various *Chisti pirs*. Even here, the apparent benign nature of the spiritual landscape is embodied by the *Chisti pirs* who can often be seen from their cells teaching disciples on spiritual matters, entertaining guests with tea and food, or healing clients.⁵⁶ Such visual displays of cordiality are also daily depicted at the cells of various *Chisti pirs* which align the northern and southern courtyard perimeters of the Nizamuddin shrine.

⁵⁵ This aspect will be further discussed in the next chapter.

⁵⁶ Two of the busiest cells located there belong to the *Chisti pirs* Iqbal Nizami and Afzal Nizami, both of whom have a large clientele of disciples and visitors (*mehman*). I would often pass by their cells which were rarely without people. On some occasions I entered their cells for a talk with the *Chisti pirs*. I especially enjoyed my talks with Afzal Nizami whose vivacious character was combined with an astute mind and friendly manner.

Touch

The sense of touch is frequently employed by *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine complex. Among *faqirs* the act of touching is invested with high emotive and symbolic significance. When at the shrines of Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khosrau, *faqirs* engage their tactile senses in various ways. *Faqirs* prostrate themselves before the foot of the saints' tombs and place their heads beneath the shrouds covering the tombs. The onus on touching is also expressed by the sensuous surveying of *faqirs'* tactile sense along the shrines' perimeters. These may include holding, embracing and kissing parts of the saints' shrines. The act of embracing has high spiritual significance for *faqirs* as it is believed to assist in the transference of the saints' *barkat* into *faqirs'* bodies. However, such actions do not merely aim in accumulating the saints' *barkat*, but also express their sense of intimacy with the saints. Interestingly, the active, emotional involvement of *faqir's* tactile sense seems to compensate for their lack of physical intimacy with people. In my experience, *faqirs* tend to limit themselves from touching others, or being touched by them. Such boundaries convey their high regard for the penetrative power of touch. For *faqirs*, few other senses have the penetrative potency of touching. The touch can psychically heal, maim or kill. The touch can also seduce. One *faqir* told me that a woman could be allured by touching her with a perfumed handkerchief. The touch can violate the body, as in the case of touching an unrelated woman without reason. To touch impure things such as idols or carrion, or to be in a place where evil spirit beings have lived, is to render oneself impure. In contrast, to touch pure things like food offerings (*tabarruk*), or being at Muslim shrines, is to be penetrated by their purity.

While within the saints' tombs, *faqirs* sometimes pick up a peacock feather duster (*farasha*), usually located next to the tombs, and brushing themselves with it, as way of transmitting the saints' *barkat* into their bodies.⁵⁷ Shrouds covering the saints' tombs may also be reverently touched with their right hands. Many *faqirs* sit next to the tombs for

⁵⁷ See also Chapter Eight in relation to the use of the *farasha* in *faqirs'* ritual performances.

long periods where they engage themselves in prayer and *wazifa*. It can be suggested here that the different kinds of touching employed by *faqirs*, as vision does, orients a *faqir's* movements at the two shrines, as well as, at other spiritual sites at the Nizamuddin shrine complex (i.e. the *Baoli*), which provide a mnemonic tool, or in this sense, tactile cues, for recalling its various textural features (Abram 1997:175). Implicit in *faqirs'* tactile explorations of the Nizamuddin shrine complex, then, is yet another way of drawing and renewing linkages between themselves and the spirit world; and in soliciting their bodies with its spiritual sites.

Connor (1999) and Seres (1998) have paid attention to the sense of touch in relationship to consciousness. Seres notes that the skin itself is pivotal in shaping and directing our embodied consciousness, claiming that the skin “takes on consciousness” (1998:20). Anzieu (cited in Connor 1999:3), like Abram (1997) allude to the dualistic nature of the tactile sense which allows us to touch and to be touched at the same time. Touch, then, like vision, attunes the body rhythms with “the rhythms of things themselves” (Abram 1997:54). Merleau-Ponty points out this connection in the following:

In so far as my hand knows hardness and softness, and my gaze knows the moon's light, it is a certain way of linking up with the phenomenon of communicating with it. Hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness, moonlight and sunlight, present themselves in our recollection not pre-eminently as sensory contents but as certain kinds of symbioses, certain ways the outside has of invading us and certain ways we have of meeting this invasion (Merleau-Ponty 1963:315).

Taste

Taste also plays a significant part in shaping a *faqir's* sensuous awareness of the Nizamuddin shrine complex. Taste, like vision and touch, are ways of sensuously consuming its spiritual landscape. Shams would often scour the floor of Nizamuddin's tomb searching for any morsels of devotee's food offerings which would be eaten with relish. He would also grab rose petals from the saints' tombs and eat them, sometimes offering some to me which I had to eat them on the spot. "This has the saint's *barkat*, eat it. It is blessed", he entreated me. Dirt around a saints' tomb can also be eaten and is called "*khord*" (Farsi verb meaning "to eat"). These different engagements with taste are a means of accruing the saints' *barkat* into *faqirs'* bodies, so as to purify them from *nafs* and aid their mystical powers. Even parts of the Nizamuddin and Amir Khosrau shrines can be consumed. *Faqirs* and devotees sometimes immerse the door chains of main doors of Amir Khosrau's shrine into a cup of water that is immediately drunk. This practice is called "*zanzeron ki pani*".

Faqirs often liken the saint's spiritual presence to food. Just like physical food *barkat* needs to be regularly consumed. Although *barkat* is a spiritual substance its effect is believed to diminish over time and needs to be replenished.

The ongoing accent on taste is manifested in *faqirs'* predilection for foods in the form of sweets offered at the saints' tombs. *Faqirs* told me that sweet foods make people happy and remind them of Allah's and the saints' compassion.⁵⁸ As one *faqir* said:

⁵⁸ Korsmeyer argues that sweet foods incorporated in Judaic rituals express amicability and prosperity (1999:32). This is also evident in some Eastern Orthodox rituals where it is customary to give sweets. The association between taste and the spiritual landscape is reflected by the various places of food distribution to the poor located around its spiritual arena. These include the *tosha khana*, *mafil khana*, *mashal khana*, *langar khana* of *Kambal Posh*, and the *musafir khana*. Although some of these places are no longer functioning they do denote the importance of food as a metaphor of the fecund nature of the saint's spiritual presence.

How could I forget my Lord after He has given me so much. In remembrance of His Grace conferred on us human beings we give sweets as a token. Sweets are given mainly to the poor because they are usually humble. Sweets are also given to children because they are pure and closest to Allah. By giving sweets to them we ask Allah that we may be humble and pure in His sight.

Baba Ali usually instructed his patients to buy sweets and fruits and offer them to poor children at the Nizamuddin shrine. Sweets in the form of blessed food (*tabarruk*) are relished by devotees. Shams had once brought a packet of sweets to the Nizamuddin shrine and began to distribute them to devotees. Dozens of devotees gathered around him, some of them outstretching their arms and imploring him for a piece of sweet. The scene was tense. As there were not enough sweets to go around, some devotees began to push and wrangle with each other. The orderly distribution quickly turned into a chaotic free for all. Shams was forced to let go of the packet of sweets.

Smell

Faqirs seem to possess an acute sense of smell which finds its “olfactory affinity” (Classen 1993:81) at the Nizamuddin shrine complex. As *faqirs* traverse through its spiritual landscape their olfactory sense is absorbed by a variety of odours and fragrances. At any given time, the southern and northern courtyards of the two shrines are redolent with the fragrances of incense, flowers, and rose oil, which both intermingle and vie for dominance within the spatial arena. *Faqirs*’ talk about the fragrances at the shrines of as being infused with transformative power. Seres says that,

Odour is spirit, the work of transformation, or transubstantiation, which Seres prefers to read through the action of cooking rather than alchemy, therefore not as refinement or purification, but as the work of combination or alloying substance (Seres cited in Conner 1999:9).

Scents of roses and incense, for example, are said to “be like the sweet odours of paradise”. These scents are also associated with virtuous emotions i.e. love, compassion. *Faqirs* state that the act of smelling the perfumed atmosphere at the shrines makes them happy and reminds them of the fecundity of the saint’s spiritual presence.

Smelling is a highly enjoyable and reflexive act drawing attention towards the body’s viscera. *Faqirs* know fragrant odours in terms of their purifying nature. Sweet odours are said to penetrate into the body where they cleanse the body from *nafs*. In their words, to smell the saints’ sweetness is to make the heart itself sweet, an allusion to being kind natured.

Wherever *faqirs* go within the Nizamuddin shrine complex they are seemingly engaged in olfactory surveillance. *Faqirs* love to smell the various textures emanating from its various spiritual sites. *Faqirs* claim that the saints’ tombs and their surrounding area should always be fragrant. The interesting aspect of this is it seems is their need to create an aromatic environment there. As one *faqir* told me, “this is also *ibadat*” (religious duty). It is commonplace for *faqirs* to light incense at certain spiritual sites in combination with reciting prayers and mystical chants. During the act of lighting incense attention is focused on wafting the fragrant fumes which *faqirs* believe are impregnated with the saints’ *barkat*. In this way, smell is tactile by virtue of its connection with breathing. Here, *faqirs*’ engagement with smell shares the tactile properties of skin. Just as the tangible nature of the skin for Seres (1998) is constituted by its intersection between body and the world (Sung-do 2001:3), where the world is inscribed onto the body’s surfaces through a multitude of impressions, in a similar way, a *faqir*’s use of smell makes it possible to sense the body’s inner topology. In contrast to Seres who deems skin as occupying no depth, for *faqirs*, the body’s inner domain is deep with various feelings and emotions. In this osmotic interlude, the body’s interior is perfumed with the sweetness of the saints’ *barkat*, making it sweet, or in Classen’s words “through the act of smelling one fills oneself with the presence of the other” (1993:101). *Faqirs* talk about the “cooling” effect that smelling incense and rose oil – their calming like properties.

Even as *faqirs* strive to make their bodies' interiors fragrant as a way of embodying the saints' *barkat*, they are just as attentive to integrating the sacred other by perfuming their clothes with sweet smelling oils (*ittar*) such as rose, jasmine and musk. This kind of sensuous involvement with smell is described by Classen who observes that, "One's odour is also often altered through association with the supernatural in the traditions of different cultures" (1993:97). Classen further explains that the odour of the sacred Other invites the participant to be actively engaged in an "exchange of odours, of intrinsic essences" as a means of expressing "interactive harmony" (1993:101). For *faqirs*, this interactive exchange of odours is reminiscent of Jackson's claim that the relationship between self and Other is not always founded on conceptual or cognitive modes, but rather on the various sensory perceptions (1998:182).

Hearing

Earlier on, I explained how *faqirs* attribute mystical power to words during the practice of *wazifa*, *fikr*, and when reciting hagiographies at the Nizamuddin shrine complex. Words move within and outside the body in sacred speech, touching and penetrating both the body's fleshy recesses and the "sentient landscape". A *faqir's* use of words, in this sense, is similar to Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "the flesh of language is the body that speaks both aloud and silently to itself" (Merleau-ponty cited in Dillon 1988:171). Either way, words are always imprinted in sound, which are themselves rooted in the body's inner domain. Even in the practice of *fikr*, the sound of silent words is dependent on and attuned to the rhythmic resonances of breathing and the diastolic and systolic pulsations. The kind of hearing a *faqir* employs during *fikr* finds its analogue in Seres' first kind of hearing — proprioceptive hearing (Seres 1998), or the "hearing of oneself" (Connor 1999:7), the fleshy, labouring sounds of our carnal existence. As Connor states: "The gurgling of the viscera, the crackling of bones, the thudding and the pulsing of blood to which we are exposed to most of the time" (Connor 1999:7).

Furthermore, this kind of hearing which draws together thought sound with reflexive sound, that is, the involuntary organs) involves a high degree of concentration. Perhaps, this is why among *faqirs* proficiency in *wazifa* is considered one of the highest levels of mystical mastery.

Apart from this internal hearing, *faqirs* also engage in other kinds of hearing at the Nizamuddin shrine complex. Many *faqirs* like to listen to the melodic lyrics of *Qawwali* musicians who play in the southern courtyard while facing the entrance of Nizamuddin's shrine. The southern courtyard of the Nizamuddin shrine provides a religious and social arena for captivating *Qawwali* performances. *Faqirs* are drawn to this soundscape whose resonances can be heard throughout the spiritual landscape. *Faqirs* told me that listening to *Qawwali* music is a religious duty, as well as being an important mystical practice for purifying oneself from *nafs*. *Faqirs* often use olfactory and gustatory adjectives when to listening to *Qawwali* music. *Qawwali* music is thought of as being sweet, a metaphor of

the saints' munificence, as expressed by the colloquial saying, "*santo ki bani (vani) miti hoti hai*" (the words of the saints are sweet). Sometimes when listening to *Qawwalli* recitals played at saints' shrines, *faqirs* raise their arms in exultation, or cry aloud "*Ya! Ali*" (O! Ali) in order express their euphoria. Some *faqirs* assert that listening to *Qawwalli* music strengthens their *iman* (faith).

Another kind of hearing employed by *faqirs* is what I call ecological hearing, or the moral groundedness of hearing. As I have discussed earlier, a *faqir's* use of sacred speech at the Nizamuddin shrine complex is intertwined with their perceptual experience where they both speak to the saint's spiritual presence that inhabits its terrain and are infused by it. The winding tracks connecting the Nizamuddin shrine complex's various spiritual sites (the main shrine arena, the *Baoli*, tilting grave, *Khijli* mosque) and other places, serve as pathways where sacred words in the form of prayers, *wazifa* and hagiographies of the saint are spoken to those chthonic powers existing there. However, the acting out of such speech forms are also a means of preserving the spiritual quality of the soundscape. Just as no area of the Nizamuddin shrine complex should be physically polluted or damaged, its soundscape should also not suffer abuse. Speech in the form of gossip, discourteous or vulgar speech is said to displease the saints and the guardian spirit beings of the Nizamuddin shrine complex.⁵⁹ In contrast the saying of sacred words in their various poetic and liturgical genres promote an ecology of sound there. *Faqirs* point out that sacred words both protect the Nizamuddin shrine complex and adorn it in their aural perfume.

But how are such words used? *Faqirs* may pray at certain sites, choosing one or more prayers, including short verses from the Quran, the *Munajat* (acclamation to the *Chisti* saints), as discussed earlier on, *darood sharif* (acclamation to the Prophet Muhammad),⁶⁰ or reciting one of the Divine Attributes. Baba Ali was fond of reciting the *darood sharif* and the Quranic chapter "*Ya Sin*" which he believed had numerous prophylactic and

⁵⁹ I am referring here to the saints Nizamuddin Auliya, Amir Khosrau, as well as spirits of the disciples of Nizamuddin Auliya and "pious" *jinn*.

⁶⁰ Examples of this prayer are provided in Chapter Eight.



healing functions. Shams had a penchant for reciting the *Munajat* along with the Quranic chapters “*Ikhlas*” (“Purity of faith”) and “*Nas*” (“Mankind”). He would often end these sacred recitals with a boisterous acclamation of “*Ya Ali!*” (O! Ali). Shams had a strong attachment to various *Chisti* saints including Nizamuddin Auliya, Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, and Inayat Khan, and would regularly visit their shrines. For Shams, such continual visits served to reaffirm his mystical ties with them. Such was the regularity and intensity of his devotion that I would often think that Shams spoke to the saints and they spoke to him. Ahmad Shah also liked to recite the *darood sharif* and smaller Quranic chapters, which he felt were important to his healing ministry, as well as narrating sacred poetry such as *Hamd* (prayers of acclamation to the Prophet Muhammad). Ahmad Shah was deeply devoted to the Prophet and created many beautiful poems in his honour. Luckily, I was privy to some of these poems. All *faqirs* I knew liked to tell stories of the saints’ miracles when at the Nizamuddin shrine complex. It seemed that the retelling of these stories were a kind of sacred chant where the sounds of words connected the body to the spiritual landscape, and where each imbibed the presence of the other.

Faqirs regularly accompany various sacred speech forms with gestures combining other sensory perceptions: lighting incense, touching sacred objects with their hands or kissing them, prostrating and maintaining visual focus on a spiritual site. Sacred words may also be recited intermittently when walking along the meandering routes connecting spiritual places within the Nizamuddin shrine complex. Sometimes, a *faqir* will stop and recite a small prayer, and then walk to another place, and sit down and engage in a series of sacred words before moving on. *Faqirs* like Shams would usually go to multiple spiritual places within the Nizamuddin shrine complex and repeat similar patterns of sacred words, staying at each spiritual place for no more than twenty minutes before moving to another spiritual site. Baba Ali was less nomadic, choosing rather to station himself at a spiritual place, usually just outside the *Baoli* or near to the *Maqbool Jaali* where he stayed for hours, spying the visual terrain and hoping for a glimpse of his beloved saint and “*Aqa*” (master). Similarly, Nazim Baba liked to pray inside the *Khijli* mosque near to the spot where Nizamuddin gave his Friday sermon.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that an exploration of the sensuous awareness of *faqirs'* mystical practices can contribute to an understanding of *faqirs'* mystical mastery. Drawing upon Stoller's idea of the "sensuous processes" of embodied practices, and their centrality to experience (Stoller 1997:22), my initial encounter with the *faqir* Shah Alam, teased out the tie between sensuous awareness of the corporeal and mystical mastery. I contended that *faqirs'* mystical practices aim to diminish the *nafs'* control over the body. Mystical practices such as *khalwat*, fasting and *wazifa*, also promote a sensuous awareness of the body.

I also explored *faqirs'* sensuous interaction with spiritual landscape of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and how sensuous awareness of its spiritual places could be considered mystical practice. By experiencing the spiritual landscape as an "underlying and enveloping presence" (Abram 1997:162), *faqirs* are able to express their affinity with the spiritual entities and powers believed to exist there. The affiliation between *faqir* and the spiritual landscape is further conveyed through the engagement of their various sensory perceptions at the Nizamuddin shrine complex.

As I will later show, a *faqir's* need to form close ties with various spirit beings is crucial for him to achieve mystical mastery. However, it is because parts of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* are a source of ambivalent spiritual forces that has prompted *faqirs* and *basti* locals to employ ways for "existential retrieval" (Jackson 1998) as a consequence of social changes to their domains.

CHAPTER FOUR

JOURNEYS INTO IMAGINING: MYSTERIOUS BEINGS AND AMBIGUOUS WORLDS

*To Allah belongeth the Mystery of the heavens and the earth.
The Quran (XIV:77)*

*Space reveals itself by its disturbances.
The author*

Introduction

In this chapter I continue my examination of places by exploring the ways in which *faqirs* and *basti* locals invest the geography of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* with religious meaning in relation to spirit beings, and how *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' conceptions of spirit beings inform their movements at the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti*. In Muslim thought, spirit beings refer to those supernatural agencies or powers such as saints, *jinn*, ghosts, and angels. Among *faqirs* and *basti* locals, spirit beings underline the tension between good and evil, such as between Allah and *shaytan* (Satan), which influences their *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' perceptions of their lifeworld. *Faqirs* and *basti* locals stress that spirit beings have power to effect place through various spiritual phenomena (i.e. spirit possession and other spiritual afflictions and miracles). While *faqirs* and *basti* locals share a belief in the generic power of spirit beings, their conceptions of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* are inconsistent, and evoke various responses such as mystery, awe and fear. Such responses draw our attention to Jackson's notion of "intersubjective ambiguity". "Intersubjective ambiguity" refers to the nature of human conception and perception, which is characterised as being uncertain and paradoxical (Jackson 1998:8-9). According to Jackson, peoples' understandings of the lifeworld are continually being shaped and reshaped by "habitual, taken-for-granted dispositions", and are often paradoxical, indistinct, and mysterious (1998:9).

My interest in exploring *faqirs'* and *basti* locals conceptions of spirit beings and their influence on their lifeworld, led me to question Durkheimian divisions of space (1976) as

delineating sacred and profane space.¹ Alternately, my own understanding supports Jackson's claim that "lines of distinction inevitably entail questions as to how one negotiates, controls, and crosses them" (Jackson 1998:167). For Jackson, these lines of distinction demarcate and separate, "only to heighten anxiety and increase interest in the possibility of annulling or suspending the line between opposed categories" (1998:167). My aim is not only to examine how *faqirs* and *basti* locals apprehend their lifeworld as a "geographical microcosm of the moral universe" (Eade & Sallnow 1991:8), but also how such constructions are developed in relation to spirit beings.

As a way of teasing out *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' conceptions of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* as a moral arena for competing spirit beings, I explore the nature of spirit beings; how they are constructed among *faqirs* and *basti* locals, and how their understandings of spirit beings convey intersubjective ambiguity. In the first section, I take the reader through a descriptive analysis of the different kinds of spirit beings and show how they are tied to themes of power, control, loss of control, and moral order.

In the second section, the *basti* arena is examined in relation to the construction of a Hindu cremation ground there in 1991 called the *Samshat Ghat*, and the subsequent social impact its construction had for *faqirs* and *basti* locals. Although the construction of the *Samshat Ghat* was considered by *faqirs* and *basti* locals as threatening the spiritual integrity of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti*, I examine how the *Samshat Ghat* was symbolically appropriated, into the local cosmology by *faqirs*, and in so doing, enabled them to retrieve a sense of personal empowerment that had been temporarily taken away from them (Jackson 1998:23). A major theme of this section, therefore, is in considering existential retrieval as mystical mastery. The controversial construction of the *Samshat Ghat* provides a framework for analysing some of the tensions between Hindus and Muslims which have taken place after partition in 1947. During this period, there was an exchange of Muslim and Hindu populations primarily from Punjab region of North-West India, as a consequence of the formation of Pakistan. This period also had a

¹ Durkheim's view is also upheld by Douglas (1969). My analysis challenges Durkheim's and Douglas' models of space in relation to "their emphasis on structure and coherence" (Besnier 1996:76).

dramatic impact on the geographical area around the Nizamuddin shrine complex, which led to the formation of the present day *basti*. Since 1947, the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* have undergone rapid social change. By exploring the processes of social transformation at the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti*, I draw out some of the ways in which *faqirs* and *basti* locals have incorporated in offsetting the negative spiritual impact of social change. In so doing I expose the impact that social change has had in informing *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' perceptions of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* as a moral universe for competing spirit beings.

Types of spirit beings: the saints

Although there exist various kinds of spirit beings, saints (*auliya, wali*) and *jinn* seem to predominate in *faqirs'* cosmology, and manifest the existing tensions in the visible and spirit worlds. According to *faqirs*, the saints seek to protect human beings against evil *jinn* and other evil spirit beings. The saints' role is also to guide human beings to Allah by leading righteous lives through the observance of the Qur'an and the Islamic traditions (*sunna*). *Faqirs* explain that the saints are the helpers of Allah and fight against the forces of Satan (*Shaytan, Iblis*) over the souls of human beings. While *faqirs* assert that the saints as primarily benefic beings, they can on occasions cause harm, destroy, kill, and make people go mad if they are made angry.² Similarly, various kinds of *jinn* and other spirit beings have the power to mimic, to lie, and to deceive.

Apart from the saints, the heavenly angels (*Malaika, Farishta*),³ in particular the four archangels *Jibrail, Mikail, Israfil, and Azrail*, are considered to be the chief mediators of Divine power. Although these holy beings have the power to act autonomously they are always under the authority of Allah. While the role of the angels and saints is to maintain order in creation, and to keep the devil and his armies of evil spirit beings at bay, it is the saints who have been consigned to the affairs of humankind. A concomitant feature of the saints' protective function is their role as benefactors to the faithful, where they function as messengers and spiritual guides to certain persons. Although the saints are

² The dual nature of the saints is discussed later on.

³ These two terms may be used for the term "angel". "*Malaika*" is the Arabic rendition of this term, while "*Farishta*" is its Persian derivation.

believed to have the power to materialise themselves at any time or place, they most often appear to *faqirs* and devotees in dreams. Such dreams are called *basharat*. *Faqirs* repeatedly impressed to me the importance of *basharat*. I was told that certain saints may initiate *faqirs* in dreams and act as spiritual guides (*pir –ghaib*).

The saints are highly revered by *faqirs* and many *basti* locals. The veneration of the saints is usually justified on the grounds that they have been given privileged rank by Allah, as denoted by their title as “friends of Allah” (*wali Allah*). The saints have been given authority to act in Allah’s name. I was repeatedly told by *faqirs* that Nizamuddin and other saints were all-knowing and all-seeing (*nazar*), and had been endowed by Allah with spiritual bodies after their death. When I had asked Baba Ali how it was possible for Nizamuddin to hear the requests and petitions of thousands of devotees at his shrine, he replied, “Why not? He is a spiritual man. He is not bound to a body. He is spirit”. Baba Ali also told me that Nizamuddin was not a “man like you and me, but he is a spiritual man”.

Perhaps with the exception of the Sufi saint Abdul Qadir Jilani who is called by Muslims “*Ghosal Azam*”, the *Chisti* saints are particularly revered.⁴ This is not surprising since Nizamuddin is one of the pivotal saints of the *Chisti* order. Of the *Chisti* saints, five are given particular recognition, and are historically referred to as the “big five of the *Chistis*” (Begg 1972). These saints, beginning with their founder, are Moinuddin Chisti, Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Fariduddin Baba Ganj Shakar, Nizamuddin Auliya, and Nasiruddin Chiragh Delhi.⁵ These five saints are considered to epitomise the Sufi ideals of faith, charity and compassion to others, and are reputed to have had miraculous powers during their lives. Their popularity is mediated by numerous stories which invariably focus on their miraculous powers, in relation to combating sinister rulers and evil spirit beings. Sometimes these stories underscore the ideological antipathy between Islam and Hinduism, and attempt to propagate the “moral superiority” of Islam. In one popular

⁴ Abdul Qadir Jilani — (1077-1166) founder and central saint of the *Qadiri* Sufi order in Baghdad, Iraq. He is reputed to have performed several miracles. Along with the *Chisti* order, the *Qadiri* order enjoys popularity in North India and Pakistan.

⁵ As stated the shrine of Moinuddin Chisti is located in Ajmer; the tomb of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki is located in New Delhi, as are the shrines of Nizamuddin Auliya, and Nasiruddin Chiragh Delhi. The shrine of Fariduddin Baba Ganj Shakar is located at Pakpattan, in Pakistan.

legend, a famous Hindu magician called Ajaipal was ordered by the Prithi Raj, the ruler of Ajmer, to kill Moinuddin Chisti with sorcery.⁶ Having learnt of Ajaipal's intentions, Moinuddin Chisti is said to have made a circle around himself and his disciples and instructed them not to leave it. Ajaipal's powers were unable to penetrate the circle and he finally begged the saint's forgiveness and embraced Islam (Chisti 1987:13-14).

The apotheosis of the "big five" is further evident at the Nizamuddin shrine where they are ritually extolled during the evening lighting ceremony (*roshni*).⁷ While such liturgies arrange the saints according to hierarchies of dominance, this level of abstraction is not reflected in *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' conceptions of the saints.⁸ However, some *faqirs* and *basti* locals tend to distinguish Nizamuddin among the other *Chisti* saints, sometimes ranking him in greater importance than Moinuddin Chisti, the founder of the *Chisti* order. Interestingly, some narratives draw on the intimate relationship between the shrines of Nizamuddin Auliya and Moinuddin Chisti, since many devotees perform pilgrimage at their shrines.

Moreover, the five saints are believed to adjudicate over the daily affairs of human beings, and acting as mediators on their behalf before Allah. As one *faqir* stated :

Gharib nawaz (Moinuddin Chisti)⁹ is the *Hindar wazi* (ruler), and Nizamuddin is a *mehboob ilahi* (beloved of Allah).¹⁰ All the saints meet and give their reports. These are then taken by Moinuddin Chisti and Nizamuddin to Allah. However, Nizamuddin has more power because he is a son of Allah. He has the key to the heavenly treasures. He gives this key to *Gharib nawaz* as he bestows these treasures to the poor and the righteous. Every night the two meet. They are like husband and wife. They make an assessment of the day's proceedings and then take this to Allah.

Faqirs' conceptions of the saints as arbitrary reconcilers of justice as well as embodiments of wrath is conveyed in one famous folk narrative relating to Nizamuddin

⁶ A city which is located in the Indian state of Rajasthan, and is the site of the shrine of Moinuddin Chisti.

⁷ I am referring here to the *munajat* — a special prayer of laudation to the five major Chisti saints, which is recited by the presiding *Chisti pir* during *roshni*. A Persian and English translation of the *munajat* has been provided in chapter three.

⁸ For a discussion on the hierarchical rulership of the saints in Sufi thought see Shah (1973:77-78).

⁹ Title given to Moinuddin Chisti, meaning "helper of the poor".

¹⁰ Title given to Nizamuddin Auliya, meaning "beloved of Allah".

Auliya and Sultan Ghyasuddin Tughlaq, who ruled over Delhi.¹¹ Being jealous of the saint's popularity among the local population, Tughlaq served a decree of exile upon the saint. According to folk belief, Nizamuddin Auliya is said to have remarked "*hanoz Dilli dur hast*" (Delhi is still far). Nizamuddin Auliya was embarking towards Delhi, which took him through the village of Afghanpur, where Tughlaq had made camp. As the saint approached the village, the makeshift palladium which Tughlaq had constructed collapsed, killing him.

While a major theme of this narrative and many others like it conveys the saints' wrathful (*jalali*) nature, nowhere is this sense of furore more expressed than in another famous Chisti saint, Ali Ahmad Sabir.¹² According to legend, Ali Ahmad Sabir had great supernatural power which manifested in his ability to destroy. Ali Ahmad Shah's power was such that he was forced to live as a recluse in the wilderness of Kaliyar, North India. The involuntary nature of Ali Ahmad Sabir's power is depicted in the following folk narrative:¹³

One day the three year old son of Baba Ganj Shakar,¹⁴ Naimuddin, peeped through a hole of Ali Ahmad's cell where the saint was meditating. Consequently, the child immediately began to vomit blood and died shortly after. Some weeks later the second small son of Baba Ganj by chance urinated in front of Ali Ahmad Sabir's cell. A scorpion immediately stung him. Blood began to pour out profusely from every pore of his body, and the boy died within the hour. Forlorn over the loss of his two sons, Baba Ganj offered the following warning to all servants and *murids* (disciples): "You people do not know that Hazrat Ali Ahmad is a naked sword: whoever would go near him, would be destroyed. Now take care, whenever he comes out of his hujra (cell), nobody should go before him". Eleven days after the

¹¹ In 1343 AD. Ghyasuddin Tughlaq overthrew the despotic ruler Khusru Khan, and set up the Tughlaq dynasty. At the beginning of his rule, Ghyasuddin Tughlaq showed due deference to Nizamuddin Auliya. According to Nadwi, Tughlaq was influenced by his trusted councillor, Hosamuddin Farjam, who along with the Deputy Chief of State, Qazi Jalaluddin, were hostile towards the Sufi orders (1977:193-194). For instance, both of them demanded that Tughlaq prohibit "musical rhapsodies", (*sama*) which were enjoyed by Nizamuddin Auliya, claiming that it contravened Islamic canon (*shariah*).

¹² Ali Ahmad Sabir (1199-1297) was a famous disciple and nephew of Fakruddin Baba Ganj Shakar. He was later sent to the North Indian city of Kaliyar, after having been given spiritual authority (*caliphate*) by his teacher. He remained there for the rest of his life preaching on Islam. His shrine is located at Kaliyar. The *Sabiriyyah* branch of the *Chistiyyah* Sufi order still exists today.

¹³ This narrative has been taken from Begg (1972:113). Begg has transcribed various folk narratives of the *Chisti* saints, which are still highly popular amongst both Muslim and Hindu devotees.

¹⁴ Baba Ganj Shakar was the spiritual teacher of both Ali Ahmad Sabir and Nizamuddin Auliya.

last tragic death, a third son of Baba Ganj named Azizuddin, was distributing *langar* (food to the poor) without Ali Ahmad's permission, in spite of frequent warnings from the servants and others. Mindful of not incurring Ali Ahmad's displeasure a servant named Bhandari Abul Qasim saved some *langar*. However, when Azizuddin had found this out he also distributed the remaining *langar*. He then went to his mother, Bibi Najib-un-din, and informed her of what he had done. She became terrified of the consequences her son's actions, especially after hearing the news of tragic deaths of Baba Ganj's sons. When Ali Ahmad had come out of his cell in order to distribute the *langar* he was told that Azizuddin had already disbursed it. "Nothing was left", Bhandari Abul Qasim told the saint, who replied: "But how is it that he (Azizuddin) is left and is still among us". At that moment Azizuddin who was with his mother fell dead to the ground.¹⁵

Such stories are regularly told by *faqirs* and devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine and reinforce the wrathful and unpredictable nature of the saints. The belief in the saints' wrath was illustrated to me in the following incident. One day when I went to the Nizamuddin shrine I saw one of the *Chisti Nizami* standing in the middle of the northern courtyard gazing at the shrine entrance, engaged in a verbose dialogue with the saint. His melodramatic actions were characterised by repetitive bowing and lowering of his head, as well as asking for the saint's forgiveness. While many onlookers were bemused by him others paid no attention. I saw Shams sitting nearby and asked him what had happened to the man. Shams replied with a smile, "Nizamuddin has made him mad because he has been sleeping with another woman who was not his wife". Shams lack of concern over the man's dilemma reflected his belief that the saint's justice had been correctly meted out. As one *Chisti Nizami* told me, "When others do wrong, the saint is displeased but merciful, but if a *Chisti Nizami* does a forbidden thing he punishes him because we carry his name".

¹⁵ Hagiographies claim that even after Ahmad Ali Sabir's death, his *jalal* power was believed to have emanated from his tomb in the likeness of a "wrathful sword" or "*Saif Allah*" (the sword of Allah's wrath). People were prevented from entering within a twelve-kilometre boundary around his tomb for two hundred years in fear of being hacked to death. During this time a red haze is said to have emanated around the tomb, which was guarded by ninety-nine *jinn*. The two hundred year danger restriction is said to have ended with the entrance of Abdul Quddus, (a Sufi of Ali Ahmad's order known as *Chisti Sabiriyyah*) to the saint's tomb. In 1537 the Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi ordered a mausoleum (*Roza Mubarik*) to be built over the saint's tomb (Begg 1972:125-127).

Aside from the saints, the *jinn* constitute another important category of spirit beings which play an integral part in informing *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' understandings of their lifeworld. Like the saints, the *jinn* embody ambiguous dimensions.

The *jinn*

Whereas in much of the English speaking world various emotions and instinctual drives are attributed to the confluence of psycho-physical states, Muslims tend to project these human states in the form of supernatural beings — the *jinn*.¹⁶ According to Phillips, the term '*jinn*' derives from the Arabic verb, "*janna*", meaning "to hide" (1989:1). Shureef suggests that the term *jinn* alludes to the condition of being hidden, or internal (1991:215).

For *faqirs*, the term *jinn* was a generic term to describe various kinds of spirit beings. It is difficult to elucidate the imaginative hold which the *jinn* have on the minds of the *faqirs* and other Muslims. The *jinn* constitute a broad and miscellaneous range of spirit beings, and may be argued as highlighting *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' concerns with addressing the inconsistencies and anxieties they face in their daily lives. What is important here is the level of ambiguity conveyed by *faqirs'* conceptions of the *jinn*; their discourses are often fraught with contradictions as to the nature of *jinn*. The *jinn* are both terrifying and ambiguous, powerful and capricious, intimidating and protecting, or as Jackson puts it, as "nefarious forces" belonging "to the wild", and "volatile" (1998:50-51). *Faqirs'* conceptions of the *jinn* correspond with traditional Islamic ideas of them as autonomous beings which are invisible to the naked eye. The Quran mentions the *jinn* as being a race of supernatural beings having been created "from the fire of a scorching wind" (Quran 15:27), by Allah prior to the creation of human beings. Although invisible the *jinn* are believed to resemble human beings. Crapanzano considers the *jinn* as being "intelligent creatures, resembling human beings, but they have no bodies and are usually

¹⁶ In one statement attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, narrated by his wife, Aa'eshah: "The angels were created from light and the *jinn* from a fiery wind" (Siddiqi. Sahih Muslim [English Trans.] vol. 4, p. 1540, no. 7134). Shureef (1991:216) has noted, that Satan was originally a *jinn*, and was given the title "*Iblis*" (literally, who despairs of Allah's mercy) owing to his disobedience for refusing to prostrate himself before Adam (Quran 2:34). The Quran makes regular mention of the *jinn*, claiming that Muhammad was commanded to reveal its holy words to both humanity and the *jinn* (Quran 46:29-32; 72:1-5).

imperceptible to man's ordinary senses" (1981:138). Jackson's notion that people are intimidated by the strange and ambiguously exotic imbuing them "with superior attributes", approximates with *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' conceptions of the *jinn* (Jackson 1998:118). The *jinn* are said to live for hundreds of years and can change themselves into various terrestrial creatures (i.e. snake, dog, cat, ant, owl, rat, scorpion).¹⁷ On this note, while *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' conceptions of the *jinn* concur with Jackson's claim that they are crucial in delineating between the "wild" and domestic spheres of the lifeworld, and are subsumed in "relationships between self and other, insider and outsider, human and extrahuman, and moral and amoral worlds", the lines demarcating this opposition between human beings and *jinn* is sometimes blurred or temporarily annulled (Jackson 1998:50).

Faqirs' concern with "humanising" the *jinn* is evident in the belief that *jinn* possess families like humans, and live in towns and cities similar to human ones. Moreover, *jinn* social organisation seemingly reflects Muslim society with male *jinn* being dominant over female *jinn*. Like human females, *jinn* females are believed to be responsible for the domestic sphere, while male *jinn* rule over their society.¹⁸ This aspect of boundary-crossing is also evinced by the belief that human beings and *jinn* can form conjugal ties and even rear children. I was told that the offspring of such liaisons possessed the positive qualities of both parents (i.e. the great strength of the *jinn* and the intelligence of human beings).

Jinn are often categorised as both Muslim and non-Muslim. *Faqirs* claim that Muslim *jinn* are always pious (*pak*, literally meaning "clean") and like to assist human beings. Muslim *jinn* don't usually possess human beings and like to engage themselves in prayer. In contrast, non-Muslim *jinn* are invariably evil (*nāpak*, literally meaning "unclean"), and

¹⁷ It is not surprising that the majority of these animals are categorised as being *mowzeean* (noxious things). These also include the black bee (*bhown-ra*) and the kite (*jile*) (Shureef 1991:200).

¹⁸ This attempt to endow *jinn* with human characteristics is also evident in the Muslim belief that the first parents of *jinn* were Jan and Marij. Similarly, these correspondences between *jinn* and humans have been followed up by Shureef who claims, "as Adam's name was Abool-Bushur, so Satan's was Abool-Murra"...As the name of the wife of Adam was Hu-wa (Eve), so Satan's wife's name was Aw-wa...As Adam had three sons, viz. Hebeel (Abel), Kabeel (Cain), and Shees (Seth); so Satan had nine" (Shureef 1991:216).

are referred to as *Shaytan*. *Nāpak jinn* are often confused with other malefic spirits, such as ghosts of suicides, murderers, prostitutes, apostates, those who have died through violence, and the souls of Hindu deceased. Such conceptions reflect the degree of ambiguity in *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' conceptions of *jinn*. *Nāpak jinn* are sometimes viewed as servants employed in *Shaytan's* service where they lead humankind into perdition. A significant aspect of the category *nāpak* spirits or evil spirit beings are the souls of deceased Hindus, an aspect which I contend also reflects the antipathy in which *faqirs* and *basti* locals have for Hindu religious beliefs and practices. This opposition is symbolically embodied in the intriguing brother/sister relationship between the *jinn Khwaja Khijr Hayat* and *Mahakali*. *Faqirs* consider *Khwaja Khijr Hayat* as the epitome of Muslim *jinn*, regal and stalwart, riding a white horse and commanding legions of *jinn*. In contrast, his sister, *Mahakali* (the same deity of the Hindu pantheon) is hideous and the embodiment of evil. Similarly, Muslim *jinn* are handsome in appearance, while *nāpak jinn* are considered to be grotesque, with hairy, dark bodies, possessing claws and fangs, and burning eyes. *Nāpak jinn* are believed to cause human suffering and like to possess people, living in their victims' bowels and eating human excreta.

Since both categories of *jinn* have the capacity to invade the domestic sphere, *faqirs* and *basti* locals deploy various strategies for dealing with the "uncontrolled crossing" of spatial and bodily boundaries, as I discuss later on (Jackson 1998:50). Nowhere is this sense of fear of boundary crossing more apparent than at the physiological level, in sex. Sexual impurity remains a constant fear among *basti* locals, and reflects Muslim concern with moral pollution as it is seen as a principle cause of physical and mental affliction. The high level of preoccupation with sexual and physical purity is reflected by the various kinds of *jinn* and other spirit beings which delineate the boundaries between licit and illicit behaviours. As Jackson notes:

Relations with djinn are like sexual relations in which desire and intense emotion may undermine conjugal relations, parental responsibility, and social order (Jackson 1998:51).

These interrelating themes of sexual desire, loss of personal control, and social order were vividly expressed in the following case study of a twenty-five year old Hindu woman at the *basti*, which was told to me by Baba Ali.¹⁹ The woman had two children, a boy and girl, and was living with her husband's parents. The woman's husband and mother-in-law had approached Baba Ali for advice. Baba Ali was told that for over a year the woman had been cooking rice and *dhal* (lentils) every night after midnight and could be heard talking to herself. Each morning the woman's husband and mother-in-law found her sleeping near the cooked food. The husband and mother-in-law expressed concern over the woman's "strange" behaviour and asked Baba Ali whether he thought that she was possessed by a *jinn*. Baba Ali remained reticent on this question, but asked if he could see the woman in private. The woman came in. Baba Ali asked her how she had been feeling emotionally over the past year. The woman answered that she had been verbally abused by her husband and mother-in-law over this period and had continually been called a "good for nothing". Consequently, she had become very despondent. Baba Ali thought that the woman had become possessed by a *nāpak jinn* and decided to perform an exorcism. The exorcism was performed nearby the *basti* at a Muslim graveyard. According to Baba Ali, during one stage of the exorcism the woman entered into a trance. Baba Ali asked the *jinn* why it had been harassing the woman. The woman then began to say "I was at Rotuk (a place) and I spied on her body from a *Waid* tree. She was by herself and was beautiful. I loved her".

An important aspect of this episode underscores Muslim and Hindu fears of *jinn*s' ability to penetrate into the body's domain, or more specifically the woman's body. In a society where women's movements are largely controlled by men via segregation (*pardah*), limited public associations with male relatives, and through the concealing of their feminine features (wearing of long robes called a *burkha*, and head coverings), the ability for *jinn* to possess women undermines male authority and control of women's bodies which are considered repositories of male honour. For many Muslims women's sexuality is not only viewed as threatening the moral fabric of society, but also as being beyond

¹⁹ From my experience many Hindus have also appropriated the *jinn* in their world-view and are believers in their existence. Kakar's findings also support this view (1982).

their power to control.²⁰ Such conceptions have historically been socially reinforced by sayings allegedly attributed to the Prophet, such as “when you see a woman approaching you it is really the devil approaching”, or “most of the inhabitants of hell are women”, and “there is no greater threat to the Islamic community than women”.²¹ For *faqirs* and *basti* males, women’s “moral impropriety” is also indicative of their mental inferiority since women are believed to have faulty powers of reason and an excess of emotion.²² While women tend to be discriminated against by reason of their inherent lewdness, not all women are discriminated against equally. Older women who are considered as being passed the age of sexual attractiveness are not considered as sexually threatening as younger women.

Generally speaking, *basti* men, like other Muslim males, tend to avoid outward displays of emotion, since heated pathos suggests loss of bodily control. Male concern with bodily control is concomitant with other Muslim values which instruct males to extol personal strength, virility, and intelligence. Even outbursts of laughter are viewed by some Muslim males (i.e. Islamic fundamentalists) as devaluing their sense of bodily propriety. Alternately, women are considered unable to consciously control their emotions. On this note, it is interesting to compare women’s emotionality with the alleged uncontrolled and capricious passion of *jinn* in general; the intimation being that women’s behavioural repertoire resembles the *jinn*. Although a male version of lascivious *nāpak jinn* exists (i.e. *chinal*), males consider themselves as being more able to resist the temptation of female *nāpak jinn*, either due to males’ “superior” intelligence, or simply out of fear of the *nāpak jinn*’s grotesque appearance. The latter point is highlighted in the following story which was narrated to me by Ahmad Shah.

²⁰ See (Salman (1987); Mernissi (1975, 1991) and Jeffery (1979) on Islamic perceptions of women.

²¹ The concern with women’s sexual purity is vigorously applied to females by their families at the *basti*. From an early age, girls are consigned to domestic chores and looking after their younger siblings: functions which prelude their future roles as wives and mothers. By the age of six most Muslim girls cover their heads in the same way as adult women.

²² Arguably, *jinn* possession among Muslims is a phenomenon affecting far more women than men. While it is not my intention to elucidate this claim in my thesis, Kakar draws from psycho-analytical approaches to explain this phenomenon in the Indian context (1982,1990). See also Obeyeskere (1981); Mernissi (1975, 1991); Salman (1987) and Jeffery (1979).

One night, I was speaking to one of my friends who was a Hindu man. We were chatting outside the *Kali* mosque. As it was approaching midnight my friend decided to walk back to his house. As he was returning to his house he went by a young woman wearing a *burkha* (long black woman's robe). She called him back. She then told him to buy her some *pan* and *supari*.²³ He said that he was unable to do that since all the shops were closed. She angrily replied, "What!" He then asked who she was. She retorted, "You want to know who I am mother-fucker". She then lifted her *burkha*, revealing her face. It was darkest black with large fangs and her tongue hanging out. After this, he ran quickly to his house. He was so frightened that he was unable to speak for three days and was wracked with fever. My friend's mother brought a *pir* to see him, who performed *dum*,²⁴ and gave him a *tawiz* (talisman). After a couple of hours he began to speak. The *pir* had told him that he was lucky to have escaped with his life from the *Chinal*.

Some *nāpak jinn* such as *chalawa* are believed to have the power to incite illicit sexual desire in people, and to fornicate with their hapless victims in their dreams. Interestingly, the concupiscent qualities attributed to many kinds of *jinn* appear to parallel Muslim perceptions of women as threatening the sexual mores of Muslim society, since their nature is believed to be inherently given to lewdness, as I indicated earlier. Unsurprisingly, many of these carnal *jinn* are female and enjoy having illicit coitus with men. Interestingly, the lascivious qualities embodied by female *nāpak jinn* are antithetical to the high degree of bodily protocol exhibited by Muslim women.²⁵

Faqirs believe that Muslim *jinn* live in Muslim holy places such as Muslim shrines, mosques and sometimes in Muslim graveyards (*kabrastan*) where they guard against evil spirit beings. In contrast, *nāpak jinn* and other evil spirit beings are said to prefer to live in peripheral regions, for example, isolated places such as caves, forests, rivers, wells, abandoned buildings, and Hindu cremation grounds). *Faqirs* assert that evil spirit beings seek to desecrate the sanctity of holy places by influencing people to behave immorally.²⁶ I was told that *nāpak jinn* roam the world after sunset where they search for people to possess and terrify. As dawn approaches these evil spirit beings return to their dark and

²³ *Pan* and *supari* is rolled up betel leaf comprising various fragrant Indian spices placed on leaves, which are then rolled up and chewed.

²⁴ A popular healing method used by *faqirs*, based on breathing onto another individual. This can also be done with water.

²⁵ Steward's study of Greek women similarly concludes that "nereids exhibit a licentiousness that exactly opposes the reserve and decorum that young maidens should ideally display" (1991:176).

²⁶ This can be actualised by *jinn* possession, or by influencing their minds to committing immoral acts.

isolated habitations awaiting to attack any unsuspecting person who crosses their path. These evil spirit beings are attracted to places which seethe in immorality and are physically dirty. Although evil spirit beings are a source of fear and concern among *faqirs* and other Muslims and non-Muslims in general, all spirit beings are treated with some degree of apprehension.

During my field-work it became apparent to me that spirit beings were not only integral to the way in which *faqirs* and *basti* locals idealised the domains of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* and shrine, but also served as a means of understanding processes of social change operating in these social arenas. Since the early 1990's, the processes of social change have been regularly couched by *faqirs* and *basti* locals within the idiom of Muslim-Hindu relations. Consequently, the moral ambiguities which have emerged due to social change have led *faqirs* and *basti* locals to reinvent the moral geography of their lifeworld.

Power and prejudice: appropriation of Hindu symbols in the moral universe of the Nizamuddin *basti*

One of the most serious perceived supernatural threats to the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* arose as a consequence of the construction of a Hindu cremation ground called the *Samshat Ghat* on the southern periphery of the *basti*, facing Lajlat Pat road (Plate 4.1). The *Samshat Ghat* was established on the 17th March 1991. During this time violent conflicts erupted between *basti* locals and Hindus over its construction. The major reason for the Muslim/Hindu riots was due to the *Samshat Ghat* having been built next to the *basti* Muslim graveyard called the *Panc Biran Kabrastan* (Plate 4.2).²⁷ *Faqirs* and *Chisti Nizamis* told me that the erection of the *Samshat Ghat* was a political subterfuge, instigated by Hindu politicians as a way of challenging the "Muslimness" of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti*, and to disrupt their domains. Whether true or not, such allegations were given credence in the light of events leading up to the *Samshat Ghat's* construction.

²⁷ This graveyard has been in existence for approximately one hundred years.



Plate 4.1: *Samshat Ghat*



Plate 4.2: *Panc Biran Kabrastan*

A *Chisti Nizami* had informed me that the land where the *Samshat Ghat* had been built had previously been a plant nursery called the *Manzar* nursery.²⁸ He also stated that the nursery had been deliberately torched by some Hindu men. These men had then rung up the fire brigade. Upon arriving there, the fire brigade officers had allegedly made little attempt to extinguish the fire. Instead, some of the fire brigade officers in conjunction with the felons and passers by began to build a makeshift wall separating the *Panc Biran Kabrastan* and the nursery (Plate 4.3). With the inauguration of the *Samshat Ghat*, violent riots between *basti* locals and Hindus broke out, killing two people and injuring many others. Muslims from other parts of Delhi also participated in the riots. Consequently, police ordered the *basti's* shops to close down and blocked the main entrance ports into the *basti*. A curfew of the *basti* had also been ordered. The *basti* riots received media coverage on March 18th. A formal protest by *basti* locals as well as other Muslims from Delhi occurred on the 5th December 1992, outside India Gate. During this protest a memorandum was handed to the then Indian Prime minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, citing the illegal nature of the *Samshat Ghat's* construction and civil rights abuses. Despite this, no official action was undertaken to investigate these allegations.

I contend that the controversial construction of the *Samshat Ghat*, and the ensuing riots between Muslims and Hindus can be understood in the light of growing social and religious tensions between these two religious groups during the last twenty to thirty years in India, which has subsequently increased apprehensions among the *basti* populace. Such apprehensions have been realised by the escalation of Hindu nationalism and Hindu fundamentalism, mainly as a consequence of India's conflict with Pakistan over Jammu-Kashmir.

Furthermore, since the popular Islamic fundamentalist movement called the *Tabliki Jama'at* operates from the *basti*, this has given the Indian government reason to treat some *basti* inhabitants with suspicion. Informants told me that the *Tabliki Jama'at* had been funded by both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and had pro-Pakistani sentiments.

²⁸ The *Chisti Nizami* who was a close informant had been politically involved in the process of alerting the Indian government to the events which had occurred at the *basti* during this time.



Plate 4.3: Wall separating *Samshat Ghat* and *Panc Biran Kabrastan*

Consequently, the Indian government ordered police and soldiers to be placed at the entrances of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and other places around the *basti* which it considered to be potential meeting points for Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists. During my fieldwork, police and soldiers stood outside these areas during the anniversary of the destruction of the *Barbri* mosque and on selected Islamic religious celebrations. From my experience *faqirs* and *basti* locals resented the police and army presence in the *basti* and considered them to be another kind of Hindu provocation of Muslims.

The *Barbri* mosque was located at Ayodha in Uttar Pradesh, and had been built in the sixteenth century. Hindu fundamentalists, led by supporters of the nationalist BJP party, had demolished the historic mosque in December 1992. BJP supporters had justified the mosque's destruction on the grounds that it had been built on a sacred Hindu site which was connected to the god Rama. They also voiced that a Hindu temple be built there. While there was public outrage and condemnation by both Muslims and Hindus at the destruction of the *Barbri* mosque, its destruction did indicate the high level of anti-Muslim sentiment of many Hindus. Moreover, a spate of bombings and other terrorist activities in Delhi in 1994-1995, which had been attributed to pro-Pakistani loyalists, further increased anti-Muslim feeling of Hindus. Once again, the *basti* had been targeted by police as a potential hive for pro-Pakistani sentiments.

The high level of tension between Muslims and Hindus during this period in Delhi is reflected in a personal account. I was walking back to my apartment from the *basti* late one evening. Two young police officers stopped me. They tried to extort me for alcohol, cigarettes and money. I said that I didn't possess any of them. They asked me whether I was Pakistani. I replied in Hindi that I was an Australian visiting scholar. They immediately let me go and left.

Notwithstanding the construction of the *Samshat Ghat*, the process of Hindu encroachment of the *basti* landscape had already been evident there from the mid 1970's. During this period, some schedule caste itinerants (*katra*) had settled in the *basti*. These itinerants had erected a small temple on the eastern periphery of the *basti*, next to the

major basti rubbish tip. Although the Indian government had forcibly removed these itinerants between 1975-1977, no action was taken to remove the temple. In 1980 the impressive *Shiv Mandir* (temple) was built on the site where the itinerants had built their previous temple (Plate 4.4). Again, I was told that riots between *basti* locals and Hindus had followed the building of the *Shiv Mandir*. *Faqirs* and *basti* locals resented its construction.

The hostile reception by *basti* locals at the construction of the *Samshat Ghat* and the *Shiv Mandir* may also be explained in relation to the belief that the *basti* falls within the spiritual jurisdiction of Nizamuddin, an aspect that is discussed later. For *faqirs* and other Muslims, the overt polytheism of Hinduism is starkly opposed to the monotheism of Islam. In my experience, Hindu beliefs and religious practices are either misunderstood or demonised by *faqirs* and other Muslims. As mentioned earlier, the inclusion of the Hindu deity *Mahakali* as the evil sister of the Muslim king of *jinn*, *Khwaja Khijr Hayat*, reflects the degree of Muslim antipathy for Hinduism. Such conceptions hold true in relation to the Hindu religious practice of cremating their dead, a custom abhorred and condemned by Muslims. Various *faqirs* had told me that a major reason for Muslim condemnation of cremation was due to its association with fire, an element strongly linked to pan Muslim conceptions of hell (*jahanam*).²⁹ As Shams pointed out me, “Our dead are sleeping in their graves but Hindu spirits are condemned in fire”. *Faqirs* indicated to me that through the act of cremating a person’s body their spirit was condemned to exist in a perpetual state of limbo on earth as evil ghosts (*bhut*) which tormented the living, especially Muslims. *Faqirs* and *basti* locals considered the construction of the *Samshat Ghat* as not only compromising the “spiritual” peace of the Muslim dead, but also believed that the local populace would be threatened by Hindu ghosts. It was also expressed to me that Hindu ghosts originating from the *Samshat Ghat* prowled the *basti* after sunset in search of Muslim locals to possess or to torment. Such fears came to be realised in the mid 1990’s with the first alleged reports of *basti* locals being possessed by Hindu spirits from *Samshat Ghat*. Ahmad Shah told me that in May

²⁹ In the Quran, hell is often mentioned as a place of fire and relentless pain.



Plate 4.4: *Shiv Mandir*

1995 he had cured two young brothers of possession, as illustrated in the following narrative:

The brothers had been living in the *basti* near to the cremation ground. One night, the younger brother who was fifteen years of age awoke at midnight and began to cry out. He soon became incoherent. The next morning his parents took him to the doctor where he had x-rays and other tests. However he was found to be normal. The boy's parents came to see me. I told them that his condition was caused from the effects of a spirit from the cremation ground. I healed the boy. Seventeen days later, the older brother was afflicted with the same condition. The parents once again came to me and told me of their son's ailment. The boy received healing from me for three continuous days before he was healed.

Ahmad Shah's narrative is interesting from the viewpoint of attributing the brothers' affliction to Hindu ghosts from the *Samshat Ghat*. Furthermore, it is suggestive of the appropriation of the *Samshat Ghat* within the moral universe of the *basti*, which allowed Ahmad Shah a way of recovering a sense of existential mastery over the Hindu "other" which had encroached on his lifeworld and through the guise of Hindu ghosts sought to

further disempower the *basti's* populace. We find in Ahmad Shah's narrative a correspondence with Jackson's idea of "striking a balance between the countervailing needs of self and other"; to be given a voice in the face of personal failure and loss of control (Jackson 1998:19). According to Jackson, loss of personal control by circumstances and forces beyond our control arouses our need for its recovery.

It is our ability to countermand and transform those forces of otherness that makes it possible to outline a domain of action and understanding in which people expect to be able to grasp, manipulate, and master their own fate (Jackson 1998:19).

By viewing the *Samshat Ghat* as representing the "evil" other, we can examine how *faqirs* and *basti* locals have re-appropriated aspects of social change into the their moral universe. Their concern about potential boundary crossing by evil spirit beings as evinced by the recent construction of the *Samshat Ghat*, should be seen in the light of

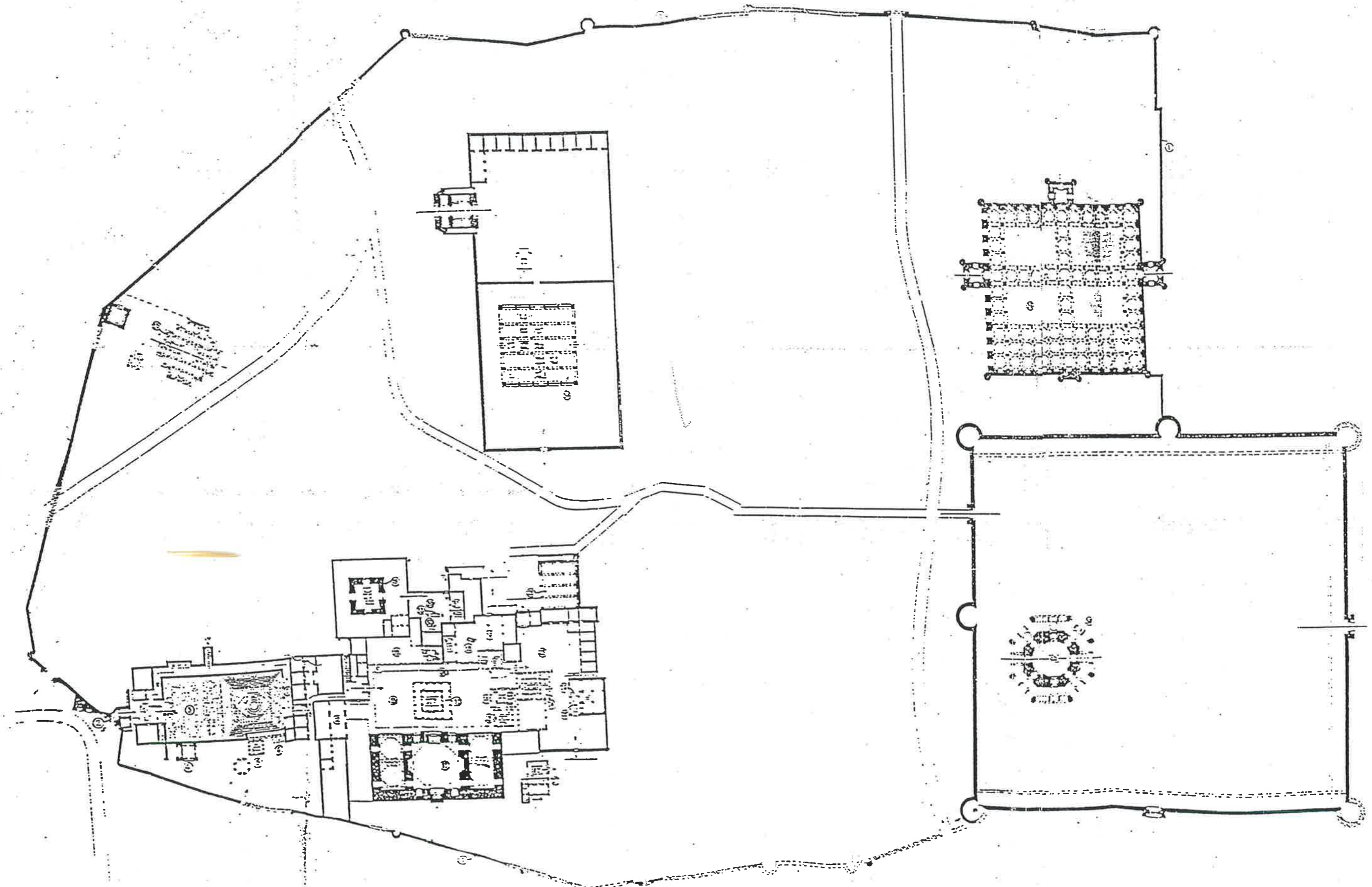
unprecedented social changes which have taken place in the *basti* and the Nizamuddin shrine complex from post-partition (1947) onwards. The transformation of the *basti's* geography has been largely viewed as spiritually violating its landscape which has for centuries functioned as a graveyard surrounding the Nizamuddin shrine complex. This process of infraction has been viewed by *faqirs* and *basti* locals as increasing the threat of boundary crossing by evil spirit beings.

Contesting the spirits: social change, fear, and re-negotiating the *basti* life-world

In order to disclose the nature of social change occurring at the *basti* since 1947, an overview of its geographical and historical aspects dimensions is necessary. As described in chapter one, the present day *basti* is an aggregation of recently established housing along with mosques, *bazaars*, medieval structures, and graves. Prior to 1947, most of the *basti* region had been forested with few residents living there. These were manily *Chisti Nizamis*. The area consisted of hundreds of graves as well as several historic buildings such as the *Kali* mosque, *Lal Chabra* and the tomb of *Kokaltash*, which were connected by three major paths (Map 4.1). During post-partition these paths became the major arterial routes of the *basti* from which were derived the intricate network of smaller routes and paths evident today (see Map 1.3). After partition hundreds of Muslim refugees from the Punjab and Muradabad regions chose to settle at the *basti* due mainly to the Nizamuddin's shrine's fame. In the process of establishing housing at the *basti*, the refugees demolished many graves and other historic sites. Within a few decades the largely uninhabited landscape was transformed into a bustling village. I was told that the last vestiges of the *basti* forests disappeared in the early 1970's.

Faqirs and *basti* locals are aware of the state of physical transformation that the *basti* has undergone during post-partition. According to my informants, this process of social change has been generally viewed as having had a negative impact over the entire *basti*. They explain that the *basti's* landscape has been profaned due mainly to the corrupt practices of certain individuals belonging to the *Chisti Nizamis* and the Indian

Map 4.1: Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* circa 1920's



SURVEY PLAN OF THE VILLAGE OF NIZĀMU-D DĪN, DELHI, SHEWING IMPORTANT MONUMENTS.

FEET 50 25 0 50 100 150 200 250 FEET

— SCALE 50 FEET = 1 INCH. —

NO.	DEFERENCES	NO.	DEFERENCES
1	VILLAGE WALLS OF NIZĀMU-D DĪN	20	INSCRIPTION ON THE SOUTH DOORWAY OF THE COVRT
2	MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE SHRINE OF NIZĀMU-D DĪN	21	GRAVE OF MIRZĀ MUẒĪM
3	BĀDUJ	22	GRAVE OF ABUL FACĪL
4	CHĪNĪ-KĀ-BUDJ	23	ENCLOSURE OF AMĪR KHUSRAW
5	TOMB OF BĀI KOKALDĪ	24	TOMB OF AMĪR KHUSRAW
6	LĀL CHAWBĀRA	25	DĀLĀN OF MIDDHĀ IKRĀM
7	ARCADED PASSAGE	26	GRAVE OF ZĪYĀ-U-DĪN BĀRĪ
8	INSCRIPTION OF MUHAMMAD MĀDĪF	27	KHĀN DAVRĀN KHĀLĪ MOSQUE
9	ENCLOSURE OF NIZĀMU-D DĪN	28	LATGAR KHĀTA
10	TOMB OF NIZĀMU-D DĪN	29	TOMB OF ATGĀH KHĀLĪ
11	JAMĀĀT KHĀTA MOSQUE	30	KHĀLĪQĀH OF BĀHRĀM SHĀH
12	MAJLĪS KHĀTA	31	GRAVE OF BĀHRĀM SHĀH
13	TOMB OF JĀHĀNGĪRĀ	32	GRAVE OF THE WIFE OF BĀHRĀM SHĀH
14	TOMB OF MUHAMMAD SHĀH	33	GRAVE OF KHĀJĪ
15	TOMB OF MIRZĀ JĀHĀNGĪR	34	CHĀNDĪSĀTH KHĀMBĀH
16	HOUSE OF MIRZĀ JĀHĀNGĪR	35	LĀL MAHALL
17	GRAVE OF MIRZĀ BĀSĀR	36	UNSCRIBED MĀRZE OF KHĀN JĀHĀN
18	GRAVE OF KHĀLĪM 'ABDU RAHMĀN	37	KOT
19	AN OPEN COVRT	38	TOMB OF KHĀN JĀHĀN TILĀNGĀNĪ

government.³⁰ One *faqir* attributed the despoiling of the *basti*'s landscape as a major reason for the increase of supernatural afflictions to *basti* locals. For example, I was informed that prior to the 1970's, eight wells existed at the *basti* and were considered to have curing powers. The first well (*kuan*) was located near the tomb of Inayat Khan, west of the Nizamuddin shrine complex. The second well was called *Ahiraan kuan*, and was located opposite *Zameen Nagar*, which is now the main rubbish tip, and was located west of the Nizamuddin shrine complex. The third well was located approximately one hundred yards south of the former well, and was called *Zameen kuan*. The fourth well called *Sakina kuan* was next to the *Sakina* mosque, and was located north-east of the Nizamuddin shrine complex. The fifth well was called *Nulwali masjid kuan*, and was located east of the Nizamuddin shrine complex. The sixth well was called *Sharma Burj kuan*, and was located west of the Nizamuddin shrine complex. The seventh well was *Phool kuan*, and was located south of the Nizamuddin shrine complex, and outside the *basti*. The eighth well was *Masjid Quraish kuan*, and was located east of the Nizamuddin shrine complex. Ahmad Shah told me that *faqirs* would sometimes ask their patients to collect water from each of these wells as a part of their healing process. Patients are now asked to obtain water from the *Baoli* (see chapter three). However, none of these wells now exist, and stopped functioning in the 1970's. The destruction of the wells was attributed to the construction of illegal housing in the *basti*. Furthermore, during this period the Indian government had installed public water services in the *basti*, making these wells redundant. I was told that with their demise the *basti* became more prone to *nāpak jinn*.

Although the *basti* is physically separated from the Nizamuddin shrine complex, *basti* locals consider the *basti* as falling within the spiritual jurisdiction (*azab*) of the saint. *Faqirs* narrate stories attesting to the saint's spiritual presence at the *basti*. Such stories also assist in reaffirming to *faqirs* and *basti* locals conceptions of the *basti* as a moral universe for contesting spirit beings. For example, in early February 1995 I was involved

³⁰ This alludes to the large scale construction of illegal housing built at the *basti* from which some leading *Chisti Nizamis* receive tenant payments.

in a strange and distressing incident which allowed me to explore how certain events at the *basti* were considered to be tied to the actions of supernatural forces.

It was approaching evening. During this time I was busy writing up my field notes at the shrine of Inayat Khan. The peaceful ambience of the shrine was temporarily interrupted by some *basti* women who had entered there. They were talking loudly. I recognised one of the women. She was the wife of the shrine custodian. The women quickly approached me. They were clearly distressed. "There's a drug addict in the middle of the path outside the shrine", one of the women shouted. They told me that they had seen him being dumped from a car that had driven off. The women exhorted me to take him elsewhere. I went outside the shrine compound and noticed him sitting in the middle of the path. He was a young man who looked to be in his twenties. His shirt and pants had been torn and he was barefoot. I approached him cautiously, and asked, "What is the matter with you baba?" He appeared to take no notice of me. I repeated the question. He then turned towards me and looked at me said "God is love" and then started to talk to himself. It sounded like gibberish. By this time the shrine custodian and another man came there. We agreed that the man had to be removed from the path. It was getting dark and I was concerned that the *basti's* dogs that congregated at the nearby dump opposite the shrine might savage him. We picked the man up and carried him to the shrine's entrance. I asked the custodian if he could bring a blanket and a shirt for the man. I began to take off the man's shirt. To my surprise I saw that his arms and parts of his torso were badly burnt. They were third degree burns. His legs were also badly burnt. "Who has done this to you?" I enquired. He remained silent. I asked him several times before he answered that he had fallen on an engine. I didn't believe him. The custodian and I took off the man's shirt, put a clean one on him, and covered him with a blanket. After this, I again asked the man how he had received his burns. I told him that he needed to go to the hospital immediately. He became apprehensive and made disapproving gestures with his head. Reluctantly he told me that his name was Muhammad and that he was Nepalese, and had studied to be an accountant. However, he refused to go to a hospital. I hurried to the doctor's clinic that was nearby and told him about the man's condition. We returned quickly. The doctor gave him some pain-killing

and anti-biotic tablets. The doctor stated that the man needed to go to hospital. The man again refused. Due to the man's protests, the doctor said to me that he thought that the man was probably in India illegally. During this time, a local female Sufi called Shahida had come up to us. I told her what had happened. We all agreed that it was unsafe to leave the man there so we placed him on the blanket and carried him. The man's head moved erratically. We took him to an old room next to the shrine, beside the graves of former local *Qawwalli* musicians. A large tamarind tree covered the entire site. As the room had no lighting, we lit a few candles. There was a large chest in the room. The man became fearful at seeing the chest. "Open it! Open it!" he shouted. He feared that there were evil spirit beings in it. The chest was empty. The custodian tilted the chest on its side to show him. We tried to console the man. After this, Shahida and I left the room. Shahida told me that she had felt 'bad air' in the room, which denoted that there was an evil presence there. Shahida also pointed out to me that she believed that the "bad air" was emanating from the tamarind tree that some *basti* locals believed had *asar* (bad effect). "You know, in the old days people used to come and light up candles at this tree. I remember hitting my head when I was near this tree." Shahida remarked. As we talked one of the wild dogs from the rubbish dump began barking at us. It was black and had a habit of intimidating people at night. The dog's aggression further compounded Shahida's apprehension. "That's a *jinn* dog. It's bad". She exclaimed. She then nervously said, "the stranger is possessed. He has such bad burns to his body and yet he did not show any pain while you carried him to the room". For Shahida the collusion of events were highly inauspicious. She soon left the scene and I returned to the room. The doctor and the custodian were still there. The man said that he was afraid to be left alone. A few spare candles were given to him to light before we departed. The following morning I saw the man on the southern end of the *basti*. He was sitting on the ground, unable to walk and dragging himself. I was concerned that no-one was helping the man, considering that there were social workers at the shrine of Inayat Khan who assisted the *basti* locals. A few days later I saw Shahida and told her of the man's state. She replied, "It was the saint's *raz*³¹ that had brought the man to the shrine³² at night, where he

³¹ This refers to the saint's mysterious influence over events which is considered as being *karamat*.

³² Shahida was referring here to Nizamuddin's shrine.

received help from us. However, it was also Hazrat Nizamuddin who had made the social workers absent the following morning so that no-one could help him". I had gone to see Baba Ali and told him about the man. Baba Ali said that he would see him. After he had seen the man I asked Baba Ali whether he had thought that the man was possessed. He didn't know. He told me that he the man was probably an illegal Nepalese migrant who was doing pilgrimage to the shrines of *Chisti* saints in order to be healed. He also stated that someone had intentionally burned him as a means of learning whether the man had been possessed by spirit beings.

Themes of fear, mystery and intersubjective ambiguity are interwoven in this vignette, illustrated by the man's fear of the chest and Shahida's apprehensions that the man was possessed and that the room had been affected with "bad air". Intersubjective ambiguity is also revealed in Shahida's remarks that the saint had not only led the man to the *basti*, but had also prevented him from receiving any assistance from social workers. Suggestive in Shahida's comments is the notion that the *basti* falls under the spiritual purview (*azab*) of the saint, and is furnished by the *basti's* historic role as a graveyard. For centuries, Muslims have been buried near to the Nizamuddin shrine. According to Muslim belief, those persons who are fortunate enough to be buried near to a saint's tomb are believed to be beneficiaries of the saint's protection, who will intercede on their behalf before Allah on Judgement day. Although the *basti's* historic role as a graveyard has been transformed after partition to the present day sprawl of tenements, the memory of its historical role still persists in the minds of many *basti* locals, and was an important factor in the resultant riots over construction of the *Samshat Ghat* and *Shiv Mandir*.

The relationship between the *basti* and the Nizamuddin shrine complex is further expressed in the spiritual life of the *basti* which plays host to several religious ceremonies.³³ For example, in an important ceremony called "*ghast kirat*" (night of

³³ These include the *Qawwali* ensembles who play at the *Urs Mahal* (located North-East of the Nizamuddin shrine complex) during the death ceremony (*urs*) of Nizamuddin Auliya. This event was inaugurated in 1955 by Safdar Ali Nizami, who was a leading *Chisti pir*.

martyrdom), held on the ninth of *Muharram*, at 11 pm,³⁴ the three *Chisti Nizami* lineages and devotees visit the shrines of Nizamuddin and Amir Khosrau where they offer special prayers, before congregating at the *Imam Bara*, located in the western area of the *basti*.³⁵ The large congregation follow several *Chisti Nizamis* who carry a large *Muharram* banner (*tazia*) around the *basti* until they arrive at the main shrine entrance. Throughout this procession *Qawwalli* singers sing sorrowful odes (*marsiya*) in honour of Imam Hussain. The congregation then sits in a circular formation outside the Nizamuddin shrine entrance and are offered tea, rice and lentils (*khichiree*). Just before dawn prayer the congregation returns to the *Imam Bara*. Perhaps it is not surprising, given the inclusion of the *basti* arena to the ritual life of the Nizamuddin shrine, that it is considered by *basti* locals and other Muslims as falling under saint's spiritual sphere of duty. Although it is difficult to gauge the extent to which social change at the *basti* has influenced *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' perceptions, it became apparent to me that for them the physical despoiling of the *basti*, as well as the construction of the *Samshat Ghat* and the *Shiv Mandir* had imbued the *basti* with moral ambivalence.

While the entire *basti* has undergone rapid social change since 1947, it is mainly along the *basti's* peripheries that the moral consequences of its transformation are played out in the minds of its inhabitants. *Basti* locals are generally uneasy of the *basti's* peripheral regions and consider them as harbouring various kinds of spirit beings. Many sites located there concur with Douglas' (1969) and Kapferer's notion of spatial peripheries as places where "existence is threatened and most vulnerable" (Kapferer 1997:239). In my experience, *basti* locals and some *faqirs* tend to avoid places where spirit beings are believed to exist. The existence of these places assists in delineating between the social and peripheral zones of the *basti*. This is not to suggest that any one of the alleged sites for spirit beings is marked by a total absence of people. Rather, such places provide a means of delineating directionality for people's activities. In my understanding these sites express the idea of "remoteness" in relation to human concerns; they are essentially

³⁴ This ceremony is held in commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, (son of Ali ibn Talib, son-in-law and cousin to the Prophet Muhammad), at the battle of Karbala (south-east from Baghdad, Iraq) in 683.

³⁵ The *Imam Bara* is located nearby the shrine of Inayat Khan.

empty places; their peripheral nature derives from their exclusion from the everydayness of human activities. When I had asked *faqirs* why the *jinn* chose to exist in a specific place, I was told it was because that place is empty. For both *faqirs* and other Muslims empty places are vacuums of ambivalence that obviate the “predictable” quality of the lifeworld. At the same time, several *basti* sites have been directly affected by human encroachment since 1947 consequently exacerbating notions of their moral ambivalence.

As a way of explaining this process of moral ambivalence, I draw upon Heidegger’s concept of “*dasein*”, insofar, as “*dasein* places things” in approximation to human activities.³⁶ For Heidegger, spatiality is determined by our “concerned involvement” with the environment, which “decides as to the closeness or farness” of a specific place (cited in Pickles 1985:166).³⁷ In other words, places are not merely defined by their “location in geometric space”, but are conceptually delineated by the degree of human involvement (Pickles 1985:161). Jackson’s notion of the moral ambiguity assigned to ghosts in tribal societies³⁸ is relevant here since ghosts, like certain places, can encapsulate the “miniatory world of otherness” that eludes control (Jackson 1998:162). It is not surprising, therefore, that in Muslim society certain kinds of spirit beings, for example, *jinn* and ghosts, are often associated with places that have in a sense become ‘de-severed’ from the domain of human concern.

Among Muslims the salient fear that is connected to “empty places”, to use Weiner’s term,³⁹ must be understood in relation to control and sociality. A feature of *basti* society is its emphasis in maintaining social ties. On any given day, the *basti* is a hive of activity where people are constantly engaged in conversation. The spatial organisation of the *basti* benefits the flow of communication by regulating people’s movements towards its social spaces, as manifested by peoples’ activities at the *basti*’s many *bazaars* which

³⁶ Heidegger’s idea of space has been taken up by several thinkers, i.e. Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of “body space and anthropological space” (1963), Bachelard’s “poetic spaces” (1969), and the “hyberbolic spaces” of Van den Berg’s landscapes (1961) (Pickles 1985:170).

³⁷ See also Kockelmans (1972:48) and Vycinas (1961:40).

³⁸ I would also include here various non-tribal cultures, for example, Muslim and southern European societies.

³⁹ I am referring here to James Weiner’s book, *The Empty Place: Poetry, Space, and Being, Among the Foi of Papua New Guinea* (1991).

function as economic, social, and religious centres,⁴⁰ intersecting the *basti's* arterial and smaller routes. The high value placed on social relations also reflects the concern to monitor others' movements. *Basti* locals are disturbed by secretive actions since they avoid public scrutiny. If communal places enable people to maintain social relations, then empty or abandoned places constitute the occlusion of social ties. Similarly certain *basti* sites are characterised by levels of openness and closure where spatial boundaries are regularly being re-defined according to the movements of humans and spirit beings.⁴¹

The process of 'de-severance' from human spatiality and the redefining of spatial boundaries is clearly depicted in the *Jinn Wali*⁴² and *Kali* mosques, as well as in the shrine of Sayyed Muhammad Nur Baduni.⁴³ For instance, the *Jinn Wali* mosque's well, located within the mosque, was used as a dumping place for flowers that had adorned the tombs of Nizmauddin and Amir Khosrau (Plate 4.5). When this practice ceased after 1947, the mosque became redundant.⁴⁴ I once went to the *Jinn Wali* during the day along with Shams. I entered there alone. Shams had refused to enter. After a few minutes Shams shouted for us to leave immediately. He said that *jinn* lived there and that I was playing with fate.

Similarly, the shrine of Sayyed Muhammad Nur Baduni (Plate 4.6), which is located at the South-Eastern perimeter of the *basti*, had been the locus of devotional practices by devotees (i.e. playing of *Qawwalli* concerts and food distribution to the poor). Such practices no longer occur there. Apart from its caretaker, the shrine has been annulled from its principle function as a place of veneration. As Ahmad Shah said, "No-one comes here anymore except the *jinn*".

⁴⁰ Many of the *basti's* mosques are located at, or in proximity of its *bazaars*.

⁴¹ I am influenced here by Jackson's theme of self-closure as a strategy for re-establishing the moral adhesive of family and social groups (Jackson 1998:160).

⁴² The term "*Jinn Wali*" literally means "friend of the *jinn*", since *faqirs* and locals believe that *jinn* live there.

⁴³ The open air shrine consists of several graves and is approximately twenty metres in length by twenty metres wide. It is enclosed by a white brick fence. His grave dates back to 1375 A.D. Sayyed Muhammad Nur Baduni was a companion of Gurash Shah, who had been a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya.

⁴⁴ The mosque is small and has a whitish interior. A deep hole is located alongside its eastern wall. The mosque is approximately twenty feet wide and ten feet in length, and contains several tombs on its southern end.



Plate 4.5: *Jinn Wali Mosque*



Plate 4.6: Shrine of Sayyed Muhammad Nur Baduni

Alternately, the *Kali* mosque is a poignant example of the attempt to re-negotiate the symbolic boundaries between humans and *jinn* (Plate 4.7).⁴⁵ Ahmad Shah had stated that up until partition this mosque had been derelict. A principal reason he gave for its non-use was due to its isolation from the Nizamuddin shrine complex which had dissuaded people from praying there. After partition, squatters allegedly took up residence in the mosque and practised their trades there.⁴⁶ The mosque also housed the squatters' animals, which included donkeys, horses, and even pigs.⁴⁷ Although by 1960 the *Kali* mosque had been cleared of its squatters and restored to its principal function it has remained ambiguous in the minds of many *faqirs* and *basti* locals.⁴⁸ To this day, few people pray there. *Faqirs* know several stories regarding the *Kali* mosque being a site for *jinn*. Ahmad Shah related to me the following story which ties together notions of moral ambiguity and the need for human beings to negotiate with the spiritual "other".

It was during the winter months in 1985. A woman saw four small children bathing at a tap which was nearby her house. It was around midnight. Her house was in the vicinity of the *Kali* mosque. The woman was angry that the children were bathing so late, and began shouting at them. The children quickly left and were not seen again. The next morning, the woman was taken down with fever, and was bed bound. Her fever persisted for a week. Although several doctors were called in to help her, the woman remained ill. Imam Harun of the *Kali* mosque came to the woman's house. The woman informed him about the incident with the children and how she had shouted at them. The Imam explained that the children belonged to two *jinn* families which were residing in the mosque, and who had informed him of her bad actions against the children. The Imam told her that she would get well if she promised not to abuse the children again. The Imam also pointed out that the children were his students and that they had once saved his son, Aslam, from drowning in the mosque's tank.

⁴⁵ The *Jami Firoz Shah* mosque, popularly known as the *Kali* mosque, due to its dark colour, is one of the oldest of Delhi's mosques that is still being used for prayer. It was built around 1384, by Junan Shah Khan Jahan, the prime minister of Firoz Tughlaq, according to the dimensions of the Prophet's mosque in Medina. Its structure is impressive, having a prayer area for at least one thousand worshippers. The mosque has three entrances, and is supported by seventy-two pillars, and contains several courtyards. Previously, it contained as many as thirty tombs, of which nine tombs now remain.

⁴⁶ These included menial workers like potters, washer people (*dhobi*), and sweepers.

⁴⁷ The inclusion of pigs suggests that these itinerants were non-Muslims. In any case, such practices would have been highly profaning to the local Muslim populace.

⁴⁸ The mosque's clean up was done under the auspices of Haji Hafiz Abdul Ghafoor, who was also consigned by the Archaeological Survey in Delhi to oversee twenty-two historic mosques.

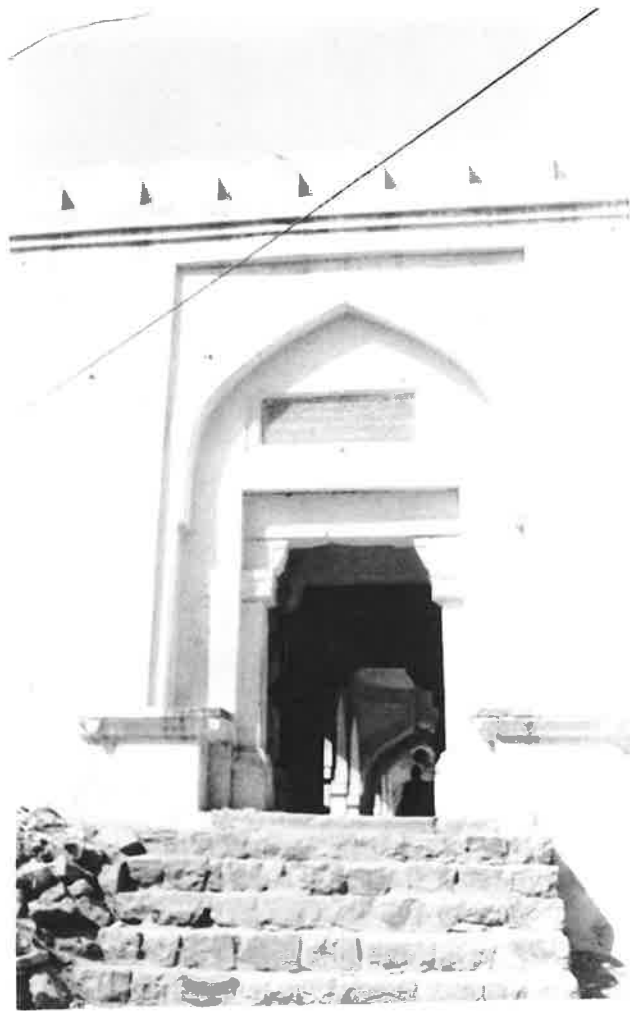


Plate 4.7: *Kali mosque*

In this story, the imam's ability to negotiate with the spirit world, as conveyed by his rapprochement with the *jinn*, ties in with Jackson's notion of striking up a balance with the other, that not only curtails the threat of harm, but can turn "a potential threat to one's life and livelihood into an actual boon" (Jackson 1998:45).⁴⁹ In contrast, the woman is punished since she failed to negotiate with the *jinn*. Among *faqirs*, the maintenance of friendly relations with the *jinn* is fundamental in resolving anxieties as a consequence of *jinn* encroachment in the *basti* lifeworld. It also highlights the perennial problem of boundary crossing by spirit beings into the human domain, and how people must re-define and negotiate their social space with the spirit intruders. And yet, inimical conceptions of the *jinn* sometimes gave way to their benign aspects, in relation to the restoration of the *Kali* mosque.⁵⁰ As Ahmad Shah put it, "only pious *jinn* go there at night, where they pray, fast, and read Quran".

In a similar vein, the *Chausath Khamba* (sixty-four pillars), located in the North-Eastern region of the *basti* provides another telling example of the consequences of the vitiation of *basti* space by human activities (Plate 4.8).⁵¹ According to several *faqirs*, squatters had settled there and allegedly used the site for illicit sexual activities. *Basti* locals were afraid of approaching this place as it was believed to have had "bad air".⁵² *Faqirs* stated that "bad air" remained at those places where proscribed behaviours had been committed. As Ahmad Shah said, "bad air makes people do *haram* (sinful) things. I know whether a place has "bad air" or not by looking at the way people behave there".

Ahmad Shah's understanding of "bad air" mirrors Muslim notions of the tie between place and memory. Places are believed to be imbued with the "vestigial memories"

⁴⁹ Jackson's notion of the "other" includes human and spirit beings.

⁵⁰ The need for *faqirs* and other Muslims to humanise *jinn*, as stated earlier on, could possibly be understood as a ploy to diminish the sense of 'otherness' which the *jinn* invoke.

⁵¹ This impressive structure is the tomb of Mirza Aziz Kokaltash (died 1623-24). The marble edifice also houses eight other graves of family members. The *Chausath Khamba* is divided into twenty-five bays that are covered with domes. The four sides are further divided into five bays where double columns stand. The spaces between the columns consist of lattice-work. This edifice lies opposite to the famous *Lal Mahal* that consists of an open area and stage for *Qawwali* concerts during the death celebration of Nizamuddin.

⁵² In Muslim cosmology, "bad air" pervades places where proscribed actions (usually associated with sexual lewdness) have been committed, and is one of several indications of the presence of *nāpak jinn*.

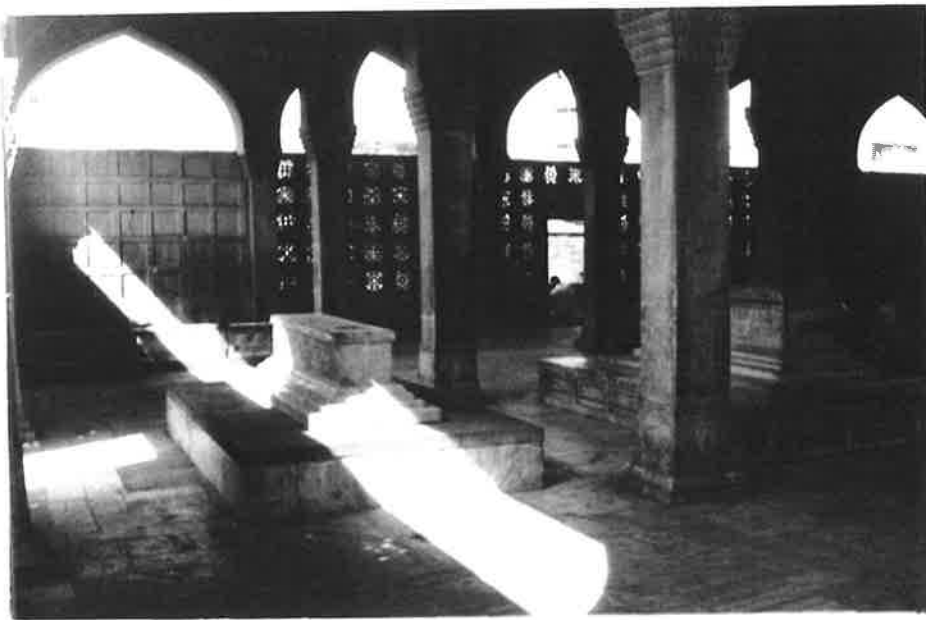


Plate 4.8: *Chausath Khamba*

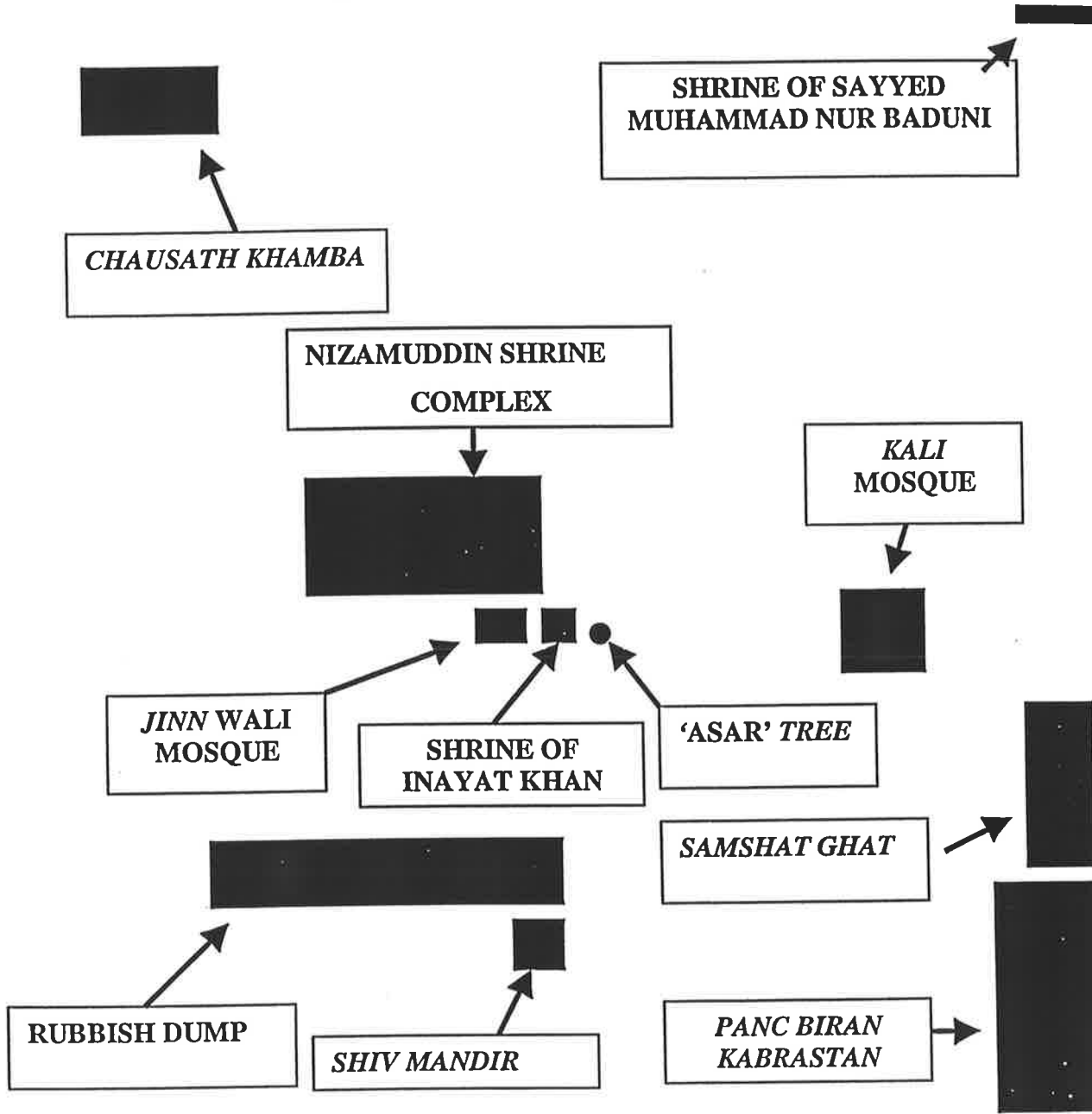
(Jackson 1998:162), of spirit beings after they have passed through there. This is usually understood as a residual emanation containing the core traits of the spirit being's nature. Only with the passing of time does its power to effect people diminish. I remember how Ahmad Shah remained unperturbed as he took me through the *Chausath Khamba's* shadowy interior. "There is no longer bad air here", he told me, smiling. Even in Ahmad Shah's assurances I could not help but think how this place and others around the *basti* had come to express *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' need to replenish the landscape with those very forces which they often held in dread. (See Figure 4.1).

I thought of how even in "rationalistic" based western societies, individuals also eagerly engage in a similar process of 'spiritualising' our lifeworld; how we assign ghosts to derelict places, and maintain their presence through stories long after those places have become inhabitable.

Even for the sceptical such places attract a certain curiosity — they achieve novelty status. I was told by various people that most *jinn* had left the human lifeworld, including the *basti* arena, due to the encroachment of people there. Their sentiments conveyed a sense of loss of a time when the *basti* was replete with forests and where the dead slept in peace within the harbour of the saint's spiritual gaze (*nazar*).

And yet, such attitudes are increasingly paradoxical in light of the fear which *basti* locals have of the *basti's* peripheral sites. Possibly this ambiguity reflects the dilemma which many *basti* locals face in making sense of the *basti's* unprecedented transformation, while attempting to maintain a link with the past. However, as stated earlier, the "irreverent" nature of many changes which have taken place at the *basti* has given rise to the "demonisation" of its landscape. The despoiling of the *basti* arena has further intensified due to the settlement of new waves of squatters there in recent times, who became incorporated into the cosmology of the *faqirs* and *basti* locals. This is related to the arrival of Bangladeshi refugees to the *basti* in the early 1970's. After 1971, hundreds of Bangladeshi refugees settled at the *basti* during the aftermath of Bangladesh's independence. Their settlements further led to the ruination of historic sites there.

Figure 4.1
Map of sites where alleged spirit beings exist within the *basti*



Unable to make a means of subsistence refugees turned to beggary. The presence of these refugees placed a burden on the *basti*'s already overstretched resources. In 1995 the Indian government began to remove these refugees from the *basti* and India. In order to ease the process of forced expulsion, some refugees were allowed to sell their homes to the Indian government.⁵³

Moreover, the establishment of an illegal *jhuggi* (slum dwellers) slum colony along the western periphery of the *basti* further exacerbated this problem. *Faqirs* and *basti* locals considered these squatters to be physically and morally unclean (*ganda*), and maintained that their presence compromised the moral integrity of the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*. Allegations that *jhuggis* were involved in various illicit activities such as prostitution and theft, provoked local apprehensions that the area was a refuge for "bad air". In 1993 the Delhi police undertook stringent measures to 'clean out' the *basti* of its *jhuggi* colony. Forceful expulsions followed. This process was ensured after a large fire gutted their slum dwellings.⁵⁴

The threat of invasion by evil spirit beings is important for some *faqirs* as it indicates the high level of despoiling of the *basti*. Many parts of the present-day *basti* are covered by human faeces and rubbish (Plates 4.9a & 4.9b). For *faqirs* like Ahmad Shah, the *basti* provides a veritable smorgasboard for evil spirit beings which are believed to be attracted to human excreta. *Faqirs* also noted that evil spirit beings were attracted to the *basti* by the bloody and putrid refuse dumped by the *basti*'s *halal* shops.

While apparently minimal effort is shown by many *basti* locals to "clean up" their public space, some of them deploy various strategies for controlling bodily boundaries. *Faqirs* and *basti* locals may wear talismans (*tawiz*) in the form of special Quranic prayers and

⁵³ According to Ahmad Shah, many Bangladeshi refugees had been initially urged by certain *Chisti Nizamis* to migrate to the *basti*. Upon arriving there, the refugees were asked to give donations (*nazara*) to leading *Chisti Nizamis*. They were also asked to write to relatives in Bangladesh for money for the maintenance of the shrine.

⁵⁴ Ahmad Shah claimed that the police had deliberately started the fire.



Plate 4.9a: Scenes of the *basti* . Top photograph depicts buffalo eating along the outskirts of the *basti*. An open sewer canal passes through the middle. Bottom photograph shows *basti* children placing rubbish in sacks.

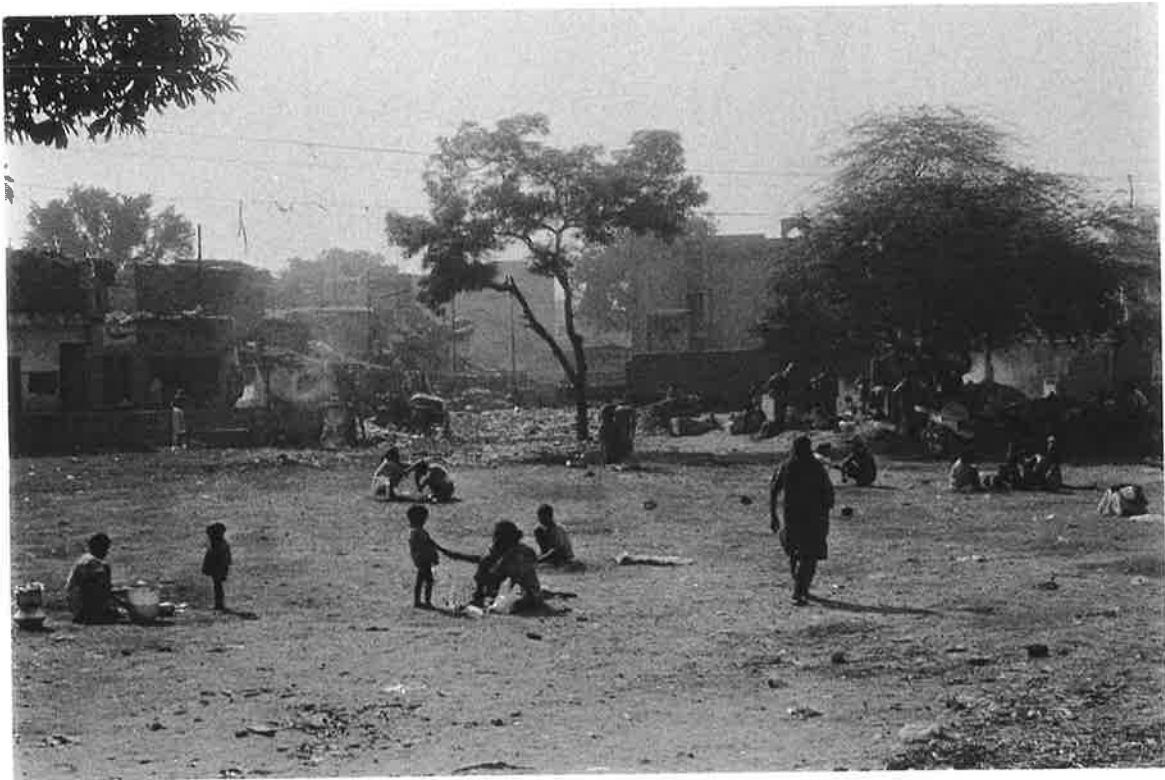


Plate 4.9b: More scenes of squalor of the *basti*. Top photograph shows the main *basti* rubbish dump. The *Khijli* mosque can be seen in the background. Bottom photograph is the open area next to the *Shiv Mandir*. This area was where the *jhuggi* colony was located prior to its destruction in 1993.

rings made of agate (*haqiq*).⁵⁵ Quranic prayers may also be found above the doorways of houses. Household toilets and bathing areas are kept clean.

With the onset of evening *faqirs* and locals initiate various prophylactic measures. Among Muslims in general, night encapsulates the “wild” powers, which abjure the injunctions of human sociality. The darkness of night is an allusion to those hidden and often “nefarious forces” connected to *jinn*, witches, ghosts, *shaytan*, monsters, and sorcery (Jackson 1998:50).

It is impossible to overemphasise the level of anxiety that night evokes for Muslims in general. At the onset of pre-evening prayer (*maghrib*), *basti* locals gravitate towards the inner boundaries of their households and mosques. Alleged sites for spirit beings are especially avoided. Domestic animals are quickly corralled in stables or tied next to human dwellings. The concerted movement towards the inner regions of domestic space is also attributed to the lack of sufficient lighting in the *basti*, making walking hazardous by night, while providing an ideal landscape for prowling spirit beings. During this time many *basti* sites (including the Nizamuddin shrine complex), are fumigated with incense to ward off evil spirit beings. Every evening, a long haired *faqir* would walk through the *basti* carrying a peculiar incense holder (*isfandi*) in which chunks of solid *luban* (a type of incense) were burnt. Billows of fragrant smoke issued from it, permeating the often foul smelling air with its perfume. The necessity of keeping spirit beings at bay is further conveyed by the continual burning of oil lamps in households.⁵⁶ Leftover food is also covered, especially sweet and spicy foods which *jinn* are believed to have a fondness for.

Faqirs' and *basti* locals' ambivalence toward the *basti* is also reflected by their conceptions of the Nizamuddin shrine complex. Notwithstanding the sacrosanct nature of the Nizamuddin shrine complex, some of its places remain morally ambiguous.

⁵⁵ Agate is widely used by Muslim men, and is believed to have prophylactic powers.

⁵⁶As suggested earlier, *jinn* and other spirits avoid lighted areas.

The shrine as moral universe: ambiguous spirits and sacred domains

The Nizamuddin shrine complex is persistently viewed as a sacred arena, and is referred to as “*Yaran Chabutra*” (“platform of friends”), an allusion to the saint’s compassionate nature. *Faqirs* and devotees believe that the saint is continually manifesting his spiritual presence there through various kinds of phenomena which are attributed to his miraculous powers (*karamat*). Certain places there are believed to attest to the saint’s *karamat*. These places may be described as “epiphanic manifestations”, and are given special attention by *faqirs* and devotees.

A favourite area of devotion called the *Maqbool Jaali*, meaning “everything is granted”, is located on the north-western corner of the shrine (Plate 4.10). According to *faqirs* and devotees, prayers given at the *Maqbool Jaali* have a greater chance of being heard by the saint. This belief is related to the tilted position of the saint’s head which parallels the *Maqbool Jaali*. Due to the popularity of the *Maqbool Jaali*, devotees are allowed to pray there for short periods only. Baba Ali said that people were dissuaded from overstaying there since it obstructed the saint’s view of the holy *Ka’ba* in Mecca.

Apart from the saint’s shrine, several other places within the complex are given special attention. Each one of these places has thaumatological significance and is a visible reminder of the saint’s spiritual presence. The most famous and important of these sites is the *Baoli*, as mentioned in chapter three, which is a large well approximately thirty-seven metres in length and sixteen metres wide (Plate 4.11). The *Baoli* is located north of the shrine near the main entrance gates of the Nizamuddin shrine complex, and is enclosed by walls on its northern, eastern, and western sides, with a maximum depth of eighteen metres.⁵⁷ Historically, the *Baoli* has been referred to “*Chasmai Dilkusha*” (“river of the heart”) due to its many alleged miracles.

⁵⁷ Previously, these walls had large hollows called “*taaqa*” where as many as 5 people could sit. Buildings have been erected around the *Baoli*’s perimeter. A system of square staircases descend below the *Baoli*’s surface. On one of the initial staircases is a large rock called the “*musalla*” from where prayers were offered. This rock is now submerged. Water flows into the *Baoli* from underground streams that are high in sulphur. The initial construction of the *Baoli* is believed to have been undertaken by King Alauddin Khijli in 1321. Shahzada Khizar Khan who succeeded him was also a follower of Nizamuddin. Another story relates the *Baoli* as having been constructed during the reign of King Ghayasuddin Tughlaq.



Plate 4.10: *Maqbool Jaali.*



Plate 4.11: The *Baoli*

The story of the *Baoli's* miraculous creation is well known and frequently narrated by *faqirs* and *Chisti pirs* to visitors. According to a famous narrative, Nizamuddin Auliya was in the process of building a well at the same time as Delhi's tyrannous ruler Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq was engaged in the construction of a new city called Tughlaqabad. Tensions between the two men arose as the king wanted all the workmen to build his city. Consequently, all workers were prohibited from working at the well site. A number of men who were faithful to the saint contravened the royal injunction and worked there by night. When Tughlaq learned of this he stopped the sale of oil to Nizamuddin Auliya that was used for lighting the workers' oil lamps during the night. However, the king's edict did not halt the building of the well as it is believed that the saint made the oil lamps burn using the *Baoli's* water. The saint then blessed the *Baoli* and its water has been used ever since to dispel evil spirit beings and cure various illnesses.

A third major thaumatological site is the grave of Khwaja Abdul Rehman, who was a disciple of the saint, which is located some thirty to forty metres south-east of the Nizamuddin shrine (Plate 4.12).⁵⁸ The peculiar feature of this grave is its slanted position, hence it is known as the "tilting grave". Visitors are told that the head of the grave over time had tilted towards the saint's shrine as a sign of Khwaja Abdul Rehman's deference to his spiritual teacher (Nizamuddin Auliya). In contrast, all other graves remain parallel to the shrine.

A fourth miracle attributed to the saint are two large golden cups that hang inside the *Khijli* mosque below the major dome. Although the origins of the cups are enshrouded in mystery, I was told by *Chisti Nizamis* and *faqirs* that the cups were a gift from the saint, and a sign of his *karamat*.⁵⁹ I was also informed that any attempt to bring the cups down would incur the saint's wrath.

Each of these alleged miraculous places attempts to invoke in the devotee a sense of the spiritual other, reaffirmed by his/her journeys there and by their continual prayers and

⁵⁸ According to tradition, Khwaja Abdul Rehman also served as the saint's cook.

⁵⁹ Pinto cites a story told to him by people at the shrine, that one of the gold cups fell nearby a praying woman. "Seeing the gold bowl as a gift from the saint to pay her daughter's dowry, she took it away" (1992:120).



Plate 4.12: The tilting grave of Khwaja Abdul Rehman

supplications.⁶⁰ These places constitute a series of inter-connecting points on the spiritual landscape that links them to the saint's shrine.

However, to consider the Nizamuddin shrine complex simply as an insular arena would be misleading as such a view precludes the significance of the multiplicity of available discourses arising from interpretation of its separate sites. *Faqirs'* and devotees' responses sometimes expressed the possibility of various spirit beings crossing into the Nizamuddin shrine complex. Many of these spirit beings are believed to live along its peripheral regions. Over time, it became apparent that *faqirs'* and devotees' conceptions of the shrine complex seemingly mirrored those incorporated in the *basti* landscape. For example, space at the Nizamuddin shrine complex becomes increasingly ambiguous as an individual moves away from the saints' shrines. Hence, those places located on the peripheries of the Nizamuddin shrine complex not only represent the greatest threat of boundary crossing by spirit beings, but also challenge the idea of its sacredness.

Whereas the saints' shrines and their surrounding areas are the loci of human activity, the peripheral areas of the Nizamuddin shrine complex are lonely places. Many people express fear of these places and refuse to venture near them, believing that they are haunted by *jinn*. One such site is the tomb of Ategha Khan, located approximately fifty metres south-east of the shrine (Plate 4.13).⁶¹ This once splendid tomb is now in a state of disrepair. Its forlorn appearance embodies the qualities of isolation and indifference to human concerns, ideal attributes for *jinn* to inhabit. Similarly, a small graveyard located on the south-east periphery of the shrine complex, behind the series of ablution taps (*wuzu khana*), is reputed as having "bad spirits" lurking there. Ahmad Shah said that as a child he had ventured to the tomb of Ategha Khan. As he spied its precincts an invisible hand grabbed him. The hand released him and he ran away. Afterwards, one of the *Chisti Nizamis* warned him not to go there as it was a refuge for *jinn*.

⁶⁰ I am referring here to Eliade's notion of sacred places as constituting a break from everyday reality, and its adherence to material laws of time and space (Eliade 1957; Moltmann 1985:142-143).

⁶¹ Ategha Khan was the husband of Akbar's wet nurse, Ji Ji Anagha. He became the chancellor of the Moghul empire under Akbar. He was assassinated in 1562. His present shrine was built in 1566-67. The tomb is constructed of red sandstone and consists of a large chamber covered by a dome.

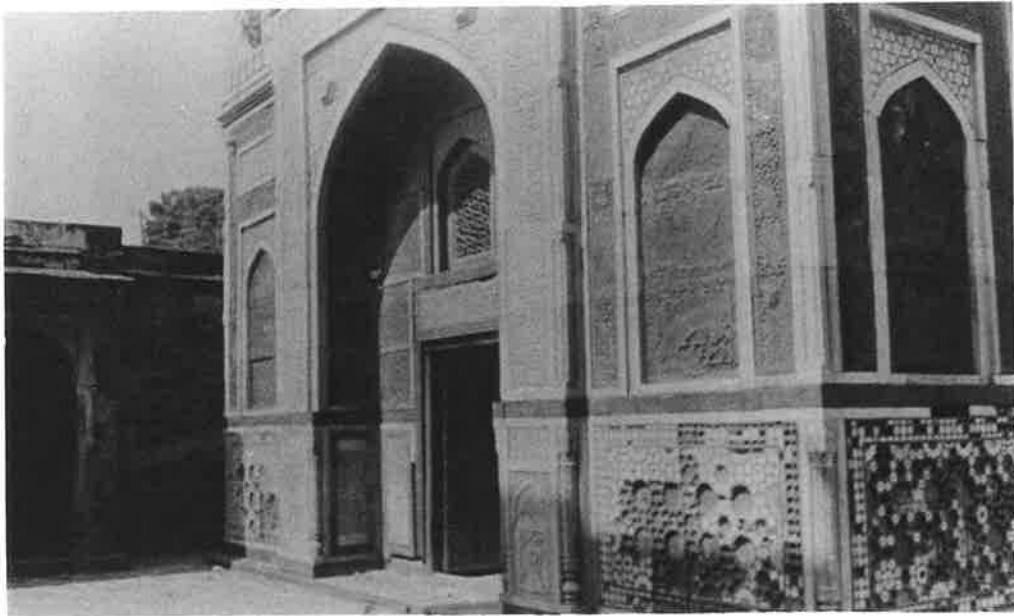
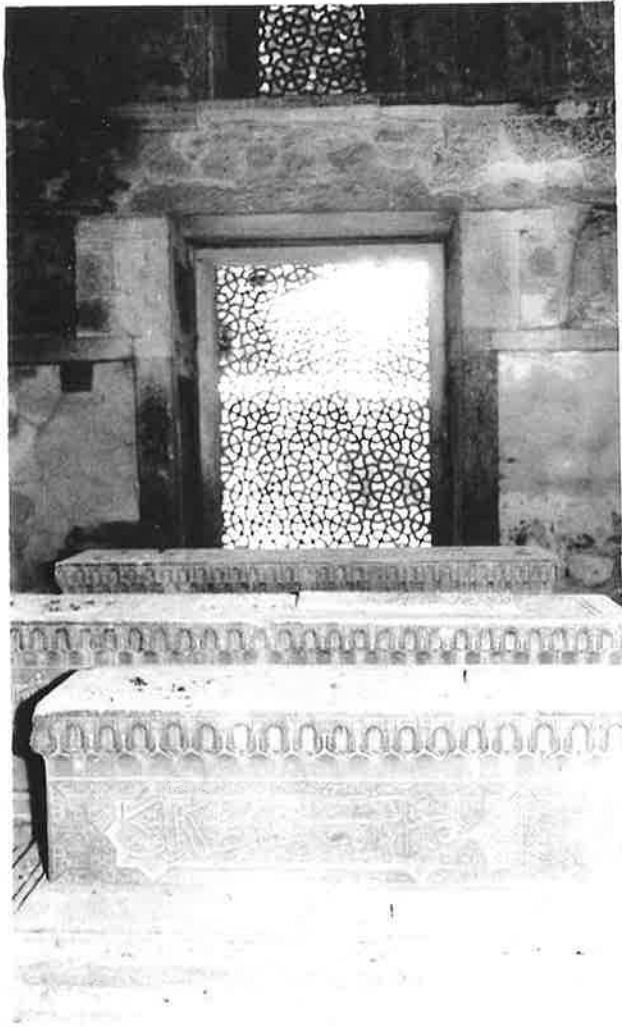


Plate 4.13: Tomb of Ategha Khan.

Probably nowhere are the ominous consequences of boundary crossing of the Nizamuddin shrine complex more apparent than at the *Baoli*. Contrary to *faqirs*' and *basti* locals' belief of the *Baoli* as a thaumatological site, Baba Ali had asserted that people bathing in its water could become possessed by *nāpak jinn*, as these spirit beings remained in the *Baoli* after having been expelled from their victims. While the peripheral location of the *Baoli* lends itself to this level of ideation, it also denotes how both *faqirs* and *basti* locals view space as indeterminate. Places are liminal and evoke various levels of meaning simultaneously. No-one really knows how the saint's miraculous powers will manifest at the Nizamuddin shrine complex, or to whom. A concomitant factor is the recognition by *faqirs* and *basti* locals that the shrine complex is not impervious to evil spirit beings, as evinced by the regular visitations of "jinn possessed" people there. While it could be argued that the ability for evil spirit beings to enter the Nizamuddin shrine complex implies an abating of the saint's spiritual presence, it also fulfils a crucial purpose in allowing people to witness contesting spirit beings (in this case the saint and *Shaytan*) which define the cosmological and moral order of Muslim society.

For some *faqirs* the commercial practices occurring at the Nizamuddin shrine complex have contributed to its spiritual despoiling (Plate 4.14). Flower shops are located in the Nizamuddin shrine complexes. Advertising boards displaying the names of *Chisti pirs* align the perimeters of the shrine courtyards. Travel boards are even posted next to the *Baoli* gates. Although such practices are generally tolerated by devotees, their legacy has in effect compromised the Nizamuddin shrine's sacred character, or as McKevitt (1991:91) puts it, "the purely sacred" is brought closer to the proclivities of the secular world. For some *faqirs*, the materialism of the *Chisti pirs* may have ominous consequences.⁶² As Baba Ali pointed out:

It will create a disturbance. Nizamuddin may even go from there. Whatever Allah desires. Anything is possible. He may even make the *masjid*

⁶² A friend related to me an unusual story in relation to how the saint had expelled the *Chisti Nizamis* from the shrine due to his outrage at their avarice. Only after having pleaded for the saint's forgiveness at length were they given permission to return to the shrine. This event is alleged to have occurred during the 1980's.

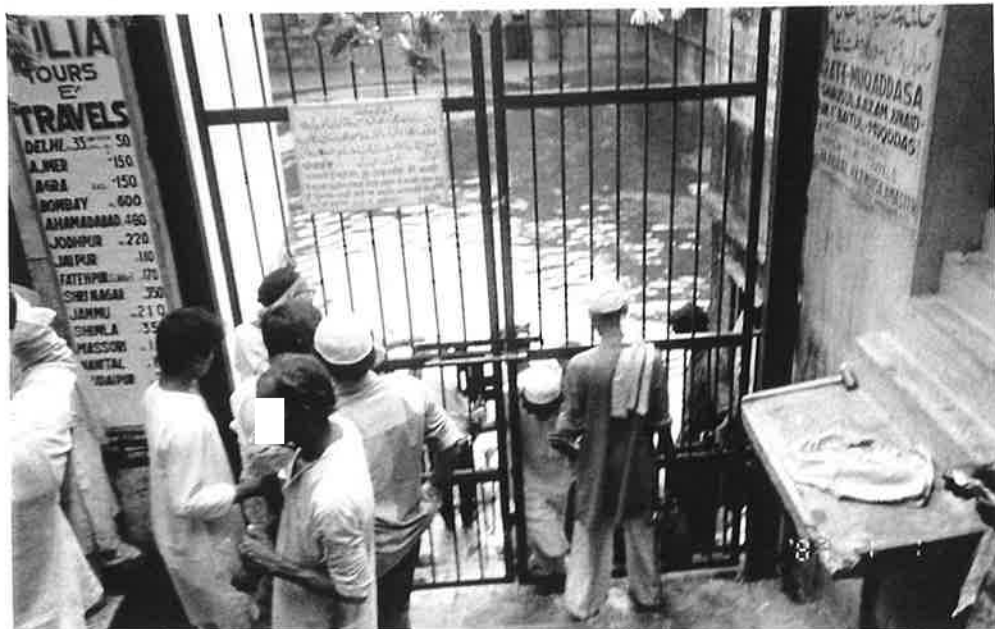


Plate 4.14: Commercial practices at the Nizamuddin shrine complex. Top photograph shows flower shop near the southern courtyard. Next to this is a three hundred years old *Kirni* tree. Bottom photograph shows travel billboard outside the *Baoli*.

(mosque) collapse on the people, or may ask only certain people to visit his tomb.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how *faqirs* and *basti* locals invest the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* with religious meaning, and the central role that spirit beings play in the the construction of their lifeworlds as a moral universe. I have shown how conceptions of spirit beings assist in delineating the boundaries between social and non-social space and its moral consequences in the everyday lives of *faqirs* and *basti* locals. Throughout my analysis, I have contended that *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' conceptions of their lifeworld often conveys ambiguity and paradox, or what I have referred to as "intersubjective ambiguity" (Jackson 1998).

I have examined how *faqirs* and *basti* locals have addressed social change in their lifeworld, and how this may affect people by re-appropriating adverse social change into their moral cosmology, in order to regain a sense of existential control. For example, I argue, that Ahmad Shah's belief that the two brothers had been affected by Hindu spirits that had originated from the *Samshat Ghat* was a way of reconstruing his lifeworld as a consequence of Hindu encroachment in the *basti*. Similarly, I have argued that the Muslim penchant for rendering non-social spaces (spaces which have become morally ambiguous as a consequence of their abeyance from the sphere of human concerns) as an inversion of the moral order, may also be a strategy of re-inventing the lifeworld. Jackson (1998) indicates that space is not merely confined to metaphoric discourse or to the constraints of intellectual conjecture, but shapes and is shaped by peoples' sensibilities. Similarly for *faqirs*, *basti* locals and devotees, places around the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* invoke fear, awe and mystery. Although some social changes to the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* have been negatively perceived by *faqirs* and *basti* locals in general, their responses have also highlighted the need to impose a moral order to what they consider as the spiritual vitiation of their lifeworld.

Everyday understandings of spirit beings encompass various connotations: loss of power, fear, anxiety, sickness, mystery, awe, faith, ambivalence, and belief in miracles. In emphasising the ambivalent characteristics of spirit beings and their apparent ability for violating the “lines of distinction” (between social and non-social space), I have shown how such conceptions inform *faqirs*’ and *basti* locals’ movements and attitudes of their lifeworld. For instance, my frequent journeys with *faqirs* through the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* made me aware of their intimate knowledge of their lifeworld. A *faqir*’s knowledge of places, as told through stories, personal accounts, as well as by his alleged ability for exposing the “moral” nature of places, constitutes ways of expressing mystical mastery over his lifeworld. In the next chapter I turn my theoretical attention to *faqirs*’ relationship with their spirit familiars. The spirit familiar constitutes a means for *faqirs* to express notions of personal autonomy and power. A *faqir*’s relationship with his spirit familiar stems, in part, from his efforts in incorporating strategies of negotiation.

CHAPTER FIVE
TALES OF MASTERY: MUWAKIL IN FAQIRS' RELIGIOUS
IMAGINATION

*When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter should
not a people enquire of their God..
Isaiah viii, 19. Isaiah viii, 19.*

Introduction

This chapter continues the exploration of *faqirs'* conceptions of spirit beings through an examination of the relationship between *faqirs* and their spirit familiars called *muwakil*. I am particularly interested in exploring how *faqirs* come to experience *muwakil* as real, and how *faqirs'* beliefs in *muwakil* underpin the realisation of their personal autonomy and mystical mastery. My analysis draws from various *faqirs'* conceptions of *muwakil*; what *muwakil* are, and how they are constituted in the lives of *faqirs*. I contend that *faqirs'* accounts of *muwakil* provide an invaluable insight into the ways in which the “spiritual other” is experienced and constructed. I also provide biographical details of two *faqirs* in relation to their initial experiences of their mystical powers. My aim here is to explore how *faqirs* construct their mystical powers and mystical accountability by selecting certain extraordinary events which had allegedly occurred in their early lives, and which were considered as precursors of mystical powers.

Enquiries into religious beliefs in the last three decades have resulted in considerable interest in spirit familiars and their importance in shamanism (Eliade 1964; Chagnon 1968, 1971; Blacker 1975; Fortune 1963; Goetz 1969; Biocca 1971). Recent studies (Herdt 1977, 1989; Stephen 1987, 1989a, 1989b) have incorporated a psychoanalytical slant to exploring this concept in regard to the self and the religious imagination.¹ For instance, in his essay, “The Self and Culture” (1989) Gilbert Herdt draws attention to

¹ Herdt's and Stephen's informed studies of the religious imagination of New Guinea tribal groups stress the need for further examination “into the role of imagination outside consciousness from which we still have a great deal to learn” (Stephen 1989:234).

Sambia conceptions of spirit familiars and their relationship to Sambia shamans. For Herdt, the spirit familiar provides an imaginative language through which the Sambia shaman's inner experiences are allied to conscious awareness. In this way, the spirit familiar resembles a "personalised cultural image", an iconic representation of the shaman's talent that "is felt to emanate from some powerful Other" (Stephen 1989:220).

My own approach incorporates Jackson's notion of the paradoxical nature of "all power" as being hypothetically obtainable, while at the same time being arduous to access (Jackson 1998:47). In Jackson's thesis, existential autonomy is tied to an individual's ability to assimilate into him/herself the foreign "Other" as a way of diminishing its potential threat. Jackson further suggests that this "occluded other" is invariably constructed in various societies as ambiguous and inimical, but at the same time as a means of restoring "lost personal autonomy and integrity" (Jackson 1998:48). By drawing upon the power of this "Other" "its power objectifies" the recipient's power (Jackson 1998:49); "That which was alien now stands to augment rather than diminish me" (Jackson 1998:49). While I have alluded to this aspect in chapter two in relation to *faqirs'* incorporation of female attire, here I draw attention to how the "Other" (in this case the *muwakil*) is both constructed and experienced as a means of reaffirming a *faqir's* awareness of his personal empowerment. However, it is to *faqirs'* conceptions of *muwakil* that I first turn.

Muwakil

Faqirs' consider *muwakil* as a type of *jinn*. The term *muwakil* is probably related to the Arabic terms "*muttakil*" and "*muwali*" meaning "to be near", which is used in the context of having a special relationship with a *jinn* (Crapanzano 1981:238). The term *muwakil* is an ambiguous word and is used to refer to one or more spirit familiars. *Faqirs* believe that *muwakil*, like other *jinn* are autonomous spirit beings possessing great longevity and are imperceptible. *Faqirs* categorise *muwakil* as being either male or female. *Faqirs* also claim that there are two types of *muwakil*: *sifli* (dark group), and *ulvi* (clear group). In the first instance, *sifli muwakil* are inherently evil and are dangerous to invoke since they have the capacity to kill the *faqir* during the act of invoking them. The belief that *sifli*

muwakil and other kinds of spirit beings can kill the invoker during the act of invocation is common among *faqirs*. In contrast, *ulvi muwakil* are benign and are reluctant to engage in destructive acts. As one *faqir* said, “they do not like to do bad deeds and try to dissuade a invoker from using them to harm others”. According to one *faqir*, a *muwakil* is attracted to a *faqir* which corresponds his own nature.

While *ulvi muwakil* are used mainly for healing and during exorcism rituals, *sifli muwakil* are used for sorcery, or for enacting personal retribution. However, a *faqir* may employ both *ulvi* and *sifli muwakil* where he sees fit.

Faqirs emphasise their ability to both invoke and capture *muwakil*. To capture and command *muwakil* is considered to significantly benefit their healing role.² According to Baba Ali, his *muwakil* would come to him whenever he summoned it in his psyche. Baba Ali told me that he would use his *muwakil* primarily for healing and during exorcist rituals, but also sometimes to admonish others. “If I want to know how a patient is faring I call my *muwakil* to go to them. It then returns to me and tells me the patient’s symptoms”, Baba Ali stated. During an exorcist ritual, Baba Ali would often grab the back of the patient’s head (the hair in the case of a woman) and violently shake it. This was a common power ploy. Baba Ali claimed that head shaking was employed in order to induce fear in the host spirit being and bring it to submission. He would later tell me that during this time he would also summon one of his *muwakil* to enter the patient and combat the *jinn*. In contrast, for *faqirs* such as Ahmad Shah his *muwakil* would apparently make itself present during altered states of consciousness, as I will discuss later on.

A *faqir*’s relationship with his *muwakil* is usually governed by a degree of secrecy. *Faqirs* state that each *muwakil* has its own name, identity and character which is known only to the *faqir*. Apart from the *faqir* which the *muwakil* serves, no other person must invoke its name. The maintenance of secrecy of a *muwakil*’s identity underscores *faqirs*’

² This corresponds with Lewis’ claim that for both the Tungus and Venda shamans, mastery over their personal spirits is important in their roles as healers (Lewis 1971:93).

belief that *muwakil* are intensely jealous by nature and possess child like emotions which must be kept in check by the *faqir*. I would also contend that the onus on secrecy may also psychologically reaffirm to the *faqir* the exclusive nature of the bond between him and his *muwakil*.

Although *muwakil* choose to live alone in uninhabitable regions, they are not averse to human beings. However, no *faqir* could actually tell me why *muwakil* choose to avoid human beings and other *jinn*. *Faqirs'* conceptions of *muwakil* tend to emphasise their unusual power, and their wild and untamed nature. Some *faqirs* told me that *muwakil* wait to be summoned by the person who is able command it. Being formidable, *muwakil* can only be controlled by one of greater strength of will. "It is power that binds a *muwakil* to oneself and keeps him at bay", as Baba Ali once stated. What is interesting in this context is that a *muwakil* is only attracted to the person whom it respects. *Muwakil* are also distinguishable from other *jinn* by their absence of families. Moreover, human beings are not assigned a *muwakil*, for it must be invoked and captured.

The process of invoking *muwakil* is considered both a perilous and a highly rewarding undertaking. One popular method usually entails a *faqir* going to those places where alleged *muwakil* are believed to stay. From there, the *faqir* begins to invoke a *muwakil* by chanting one of the Divine Attributes several thousand times over a period of days. Secret formulaic language including repetitions of spells may also be recited. While some *faqirs* may choose this kind of method for invoking *muwakil*, it does not preclude other invocation methods, as I will shortly discuss in relation to Baba Ali's capture of a *muwakil* in Ahmadabad. Regardless of the method attempted, the key element during invocation is that the *faqir* must not be afraid. As Baba Ali once said. "The *muwakil* must know that you are the boss or else it will get you". On this theme, Jackson (1998:48) writes:

This vital power that lies outside one's grasp and must be sought by journeying from where one is most secure is always regarded with ambivalence

Jackson goes on to write that a Kuranko neophyte is required to journey into the wilderness and face dangerous forces in order to attain adult status (1998:49). For Jackson, the neophyte is akin to a hero who seeks to control those powerful and ambiguous forces that his community depend on for their collective survival (1998:49). In a similar way, the capturing of a *muwakil* often involves a *faqir* journeying to uninhabitable places considered by others to be life threatening. There, he must confront the *muwakil* alone, and capture it by his skill and fearless resolve. However, even for the most adroit of *faqirs* such an enterprise may have dire consequences. According to Shams, a leading *faqir* at the Nizamuddin shrine had recently died as a result of having tried to capture a powerful female *jinn*, possibly to be his *muwakil*.

This theme of human mastery over wild and inimical powers which exist on the periphery of the social world is popularised in various hagiographies of Muslim saints living with wild animals (Digby 1994). In one popular story, Maulana Fakruddin Zaradi, a former disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, is portrayed as having lived in the North Indian wilderness near numerous lions (Bright 1994:85). In another narrative this sense of mastery over the unbridled other is dramatically presented in the story of the Sufi saint Syed Tajuddin Shersawar, who when passing through a jungle catches a lion and begins to ride it to town, using a snake for a whip. Upon reaching his master, the latter says to him: “the animal you are riding is a living one. If you order even a wall to walk, it will” (Bright 1994:86).

While a *faqir's* journey to those “forbidden” zones where spirit beings are believed to dwell is said to be dangerous, it is also a source of regenerative power. As Jackson reminds us, that “vitality always exists beyond. At the edge” (1998:46). One day, I had met up with *Shams* at the *basti*. I had not seen him for several weeks. He told me that he had gone to a remote place on a spiritual retreat in order to capture a *muwakil*. His smile and confident manner seemed to indicate that his sojourn had been successful.

Once a *muwakil* has been invoked and captured it must be regularly placated by the *faqir* by performing numerous tasks for him. However, if the *muwakil's* demanding nature

proves to be excessive, a *faqir* may resort to various cunning ploys. Baba Ali told me the following ruse:

A *faqir* must be crafty. If he grows tired of the *muwakil*'s demands he can tell it to "catch the wind" and not return until it has performed this task. Having failed its mission, the *muwakil* cannot return to the *faqir*.³

Similarly, Ahmad Shah stated that he always kept his *muwakil* so busy that it had hardly any time to return to him. While such gambits are generally known by *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine, they underscore a *faqir*'s awareness of a *muwakil*'s ambiguous nature and the need to manage its "unbridled power" (Jackson 1998:48). Yet here lies the paradox of *muwakil*; while *faqirs* seek to harness their power, *muwakil* must be constantly checked. As a consequence, a *muwakil* a source of both personal power and apprehension.

Despite this twist, some *faqirs* claim to command several *muwakil*. Baba Ali had told me that he had three *muwakil* under his control. One *muwakil* had been captured in Rai Piram, Madras, in 1941. Another *muwakil* had been caught during a spiritual retreat in a well in Ahmadabad, Gujarat. He gave no reference to his third *muwakil*. The following narrative is based on Baba Ali's second encounter with a *muwakil*.

In Ahmadabad it was difficult to get a *muwakil*. I had to go into a well (*boobta*) which was said by the locals to have a *jinn*. I did my prayers beforehand. There was a Quran and rosary in the well. I left my shoes at the entrance and went in there. I was careful to be quiet so not to annoy him. I greeted him with "*as-salam alaikum*". He then asked me to sit down. He asked what my name was and if I belonged to any *silsilla* (Sufi brotherhood). Of course he already knew all this, but he wanted to see if I had nerves to talk to him. You see, the *muwakil* doesn't like it if a person is scared of him. He asked about Nizamuddin's shrine. After we chatted, I asked him if he would help me. He replied that he would be with me.

³ I was told that upon a *faqir*'s death his tie with his *muwakil* was terminated. The *muwakil* was then free to serve another *faqir*.

Notions of personal power and negotiation with the *muwakil* are indicated in this narrative. Like other *faqirs*, Baba Ali often told me about his confrontations with *jinn* and *muwakil*. His stories usually played up his sense of fearlessness in the face of “dangerous” spiritual forces. This is conveyed in the following story.

There was a certain well which was believed to have been haunted by *jinn*. Only the owner was allowed to take water from there without being harmed. Anyone else who dared get water from the well died. One day, I felt very thirsty so I drank water from the well. Nothing had happened to me. The villagers were amazed. When I was asked how I had escaped the *jinn*'s wrath I replied that I had special prayers that could control *jinn*.

This story encapsulates a *faqir*'s concern with being able to control *jinn*. All *faqirs* I knew believed that the ability to control *muwakil* was a mark of mystical prowess. At the Nizamuddin shrine older *faqirs* were believed to have several *muwakil* under their control. Sometimes I was told by other people at the Nizamuddin shrine that “so and so” had several *muwakil*. A sense of awe usually surrounded these *faqirs* in the minds of devotees and *basti* locals. While the ability to control *muwakil* is a source of personal and social prestige, *muwakil* are also referred to in stories in relation to competing interests between *faqirs*. Although stories of contesting *faqirs* and their *muwakil* are uncommon, such stories denote some of the ways in which *muwakil* are imagined as mediating a *faqir*'s mystical powers. One such story was recounted to me by Ahmad Shah who stated that this event had actually taken place in 1993.

A *faqir* was performing his duties to tackle the *jinn* who had possessed a man. From morning till night the *faqir* tried to rid him of the *jinn* but it proved to be very difficult. Another *faqir* who was sitting nearby offered to assist this *faqir*. The parents of the “possessed” person agreed to this. No sooner did this second *faqir* begin to tackle the *jinn* with the help of his *muwakil*. His *muwakil* were very powerful and he was able to capture the offending *jinn* and put it in a box. The first *faqir* became jealous and prevented the second *faqir* from taking the box outside. The second *faqir* inquired why he had done this, but the latter made no reply. The second *faqir* became highly suspicious about the first *faqir* and wanted to leave. The parents of the possessed person who were obligated to the second *faqir*, requested that he stay at their residence over night. Reluctantly, he

agreed, but was aware that he could be attacked by the *muwakil* of the other *faqir*. He, therefore, invoked his own *muwakil* to guard over him during the night. During the night, four *muwakil* belonging to the first *faqir* appeared in the room where the second *faqir* was sleeping. The *muwakil* of the second *faqir* fought them and drowned three of them in a nearby well. The fourth *muwakil* managed to escape. The next morning the first *faqir* presented himself to the second *faqir* and begged the latter's forgiveness, and pleaded with him to spare the life of his remaining *muwakil*. The second *faqir* conceded to the first *faqir's* request and warned him not to act badly in the future, otherwise, his only *muwakil* would be taken away from him. Having experienced at first hand how powerful the second *faqir's* *muwakil* were, the first *faqir* did not dare to stray from his promise.

This story outlines the twin themes of a *faqir's* need to reveal his mystical power to himself and others, as well as the fear of loss of *auctoritas*, and its consequences. During my fieldwork I became aware of how *faqirs* tended to construct stories about themselves relating to issues of personal power and how *muwakil* were allegedly used in regaining mastery over their lifeworld. Baba Ali who was nearly one hundred years of age was mindful of the loss of his physical power and the depressing circumstances which he had found himself in. He lived in a small room near the main gates of the Nizamuddin shrine complex. A few young Bengali workers who used it as their work place also shared the room. These workers' sewing machines had impacted on the already limited space of the room. The sewing machines would usually run for hours at a time, even while Baba Ali was trying to sleep during the day. To make matters worse, a small music shop was located next to Baba Ali's room where *Qawwali* and Hindi music bellowed day and night. I often found Baba Ali angry and exhausted due to lack of rest. He complained to me about the noise. His protests were exacerbated by his poor physical state of health which compelled him to stay in his room for much of the time. Cataracts had diminished Baba Ali's capacity to see, while he walked slowly with the support of his walking stick. Sometimes, he asked me to help him cross Mathura road where there was a small, secluded park, and we could talk in peace. However, this welcomed respite was only temporary.

It could be suggested that the encroachment of the Bengali workers and their machines in Baba Ali's living space, in conjunction with his physical deterioration had an unsettling impact on Baba Ali. Although Baba Ali's complaints could be construed as a way of expressing his state of disquiet to me, he apparently refused to resign himself to his present circumstances. By voicing one's existential crisis, Jackson observes, "the person seeks to restore to themselves some provisional certainty, some sense of being in control" (1998:108). To voice one's difficulties is a way of resolving them and of finding respite. What Jackson calls the "disempowering deadlock" of existential crisis is experienced at a person's inability to reimagine him/herself as an instigator of their world rather than as a victim (1998 106-108). Mastery entails a shift in the "field of consciousness" towards managing with personal crisis through redressive action (Jackson 1998:108, 130).

This sense of existential mastery was illustrated on one occasion when I visited Baba Ali. He was sitting in the corner of his room. The machines had been switched off and the workers were not present. It was strangely quiet. Baba Ali said,

The other day these people here irritated me and I told one of the workers that I would make him cry. I told the *muwakil* to stop the machines and they did. I wanted to teach them a lesson.

This incident recalls Jackson's idea that storytelling is often used as a means of "recovering a sense of self" from those circumstances which "entail a crisis of control" (Jackson 1998:23). But stories are also a means of re-imagining the self as they can represent a desirable picture of oneself to oneself and to others. In this sense, stories are world making: they are the material through which the self is continually created and recreated. To put it another way, stories are the fabric through which the self is woven into the tapestry of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. For Jackson, stories tell truths that allow individuals to come to terms with the past in the present, and they are a means of

remastering experience rather than presenting exact accounts of it (1998:24).⁴ Bruner also notes that the “imaginative application” of narratives preclude them from being accurate accounts (1986:13). Stories also privilege the need for human beings to create private worlds which are often the antithesis of the circumstances of their daily lives.

Like Ricoeur (1983) who speaks of the narrative as posited on the existential concern for understanding the human condition, Bruner points out that narrative deals with the changing fortunes of human life (1986:16). Unlike any other *faqir* I knew Baba Ali placed a high degree of importance on physical strength. He had told me that as a young man he had been an avid body builder. He once pulled out of his dilapidated luggage bag an old photograph of himself in his youth doing a muscle pose. His robust and thickly muscled body reaffirmed what he had told me. As a way of showing me that his physical strength was still intact, he once placed a metal bottle top between his fingers and with a shout of “*Ya! Allah*” (O God!), bent it in half. It was an impressive feat of strength. When I also tried to perform this feat the bottle top didn’t even bend. I suspected that Baba Ali’s concern to show off his physical prowess was a way of suggesting to me that he was still mystically proficient to have and control *muwakil*.

Faqirs consider that the act of invoking and capturing *muwakil* takes a special kind of mystical power which exists outside the range of normal human ability. In the next section I explore how the *faqirs* Baba Ali and Ahmad Shah construct and legitimate their identities as powerful beings through their narratives in relation to me, by tracing certain aspects from their early lives. My aim here is to show that their reconstructions of alleged incidents in their early lives informed their engagement with *muwakil* and other *jinn*.

⁴ I am aware of the profuse amount of literature dealing with storytelling and the various kinds of existential and historical issues which they pose (Attwood & Magowan 2001; Bruner 1986; Jackson 1998, 1982; Ricoeur 1983; Campbell 1949; Mills 1976; Rosaldo 1984; Goodman 1978).

Biography of Baba Ali

Baba Ali was born on October 20th, 1895 at Lonaula, located approximately seventy miles from Bombay. He was born into a wealthy Parsi family.⁵ His parents had migrated from Iran. According to Baba Ali, he was a serious and reflective child. Even as a child he had an inclination towards mysticism. He was given a high education and became an engineer. He married as a young man and had three children. He served as an officer in the British engineering corps in India during World War Two. Up to his sixties he worked as an engineer. By this time, his children had grown up and had families themselves. Baba Ali decided to renounce his former life and devote himself to Nizamuddin Auliya, and became a *faqir* when he was in his sixties.

Baba Ali was a tall, lean man with dark, piercing eyes. His presence was all the more remarkable since he was approaching one hundred years of age in 1995. He was also a veritable chain smoker. When asked why he smoked so much, he replied that cigarettes were his tonic.

Baba Ali told me that he had entered into a spiritual crisis when he was in his early twenties. Although a religious man, he said that he had been spiritually unsatisfied. It was at this time that he became interested in Islam. He would talk to local Muslims about Islam for hours on end. Even so, Baba Ali told me that it took many years before he decided to convert to Islam. He was also aware of the ensuing consequences for converting to Islam from the Zoroastrian religion, in relation to his family and Parsi community. The following is Baba Ali's interpretation of the extraordinary events that were claimed to have occurred during this crisis period.

One day I was praying in the mosque for guidance. Suddenly, an old man appeared to me. I had not heard or seen him approach. It was as if he had materialised from the air. He was a stranger. The old man looked at me with intense eyes and said, "If anyone hits you in the future utter at that moment the name "*Allahu*"." The old man then left as suddenly as he had appeared. I never saw him again. I thought how strange the old man was and how mysterious his advice he had given me. Some years had

⁵ Parsis are followers of the Zoroastrian religion.

passed after this incident. One day I thought that enough was enough. I couldn't hide any longer as it was making me despondent. I decided that I would tell my father that evening of my intention to become a Muslim. Naturally, I was scared. I had never gone against my father's wishes. I quickly returned home and told my father my decision to convert to Islam. He became enraged with me. He picked up a stick near to him and belted me on my left arm. As he was going to hit me again I suddenly remembered the old man's words from years before. I shouted "Allahu". My father immediately fell onto the ground in surprise. I didn't know whose astonishment was greater, mine or his. Such was the power of the holy name.

The following narrative conveys several issues which are significant to the way in which Baba Ali constructs his engagement with *muwakil*. Firstly, there is the mysterious stranger who appeared to Baba Ali. While not stated openly, the stranger seems to convey the qualities of a spirit being in the way he mysteriously appears and leaves Baba Ali, and the advice that the stranger imparts to him. Secondly, there is the use of the Islamic name of God — "Allahu", and how, according to Baba Ali, it unleashes an extraordinary force. As I had discussed in chapter three, *faqirs* believe that sacred words in the form of chanting and spells have various mystical properties; power to heal or to maim or kill, to transform the body, to embody the saints' blessedness, or as suggested earlier on, to invoke *muwakil*. Moreover, sacred words enable *faqirs* to thwart evil spirit beings, to negotiate with the spirit world via extolling Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, and the saints (i.e. *munajat*, see chapter three), or to strengthen their mystical bond with the saints.⁶ Thirdly, the dramatic way in which Baba Ali dealt with his father in this narrative was indicative of his concern to exercise control, both in his personal life and in his dealings with patients. Baba Ali prioritised control. Control was probably the quintessential factor that contoured his worldview and actions. For Baba Ali, control meant the raw exuberance of force; the ability to make people and spirit beings compliant to his will. Incorporated in this meaning of control was the cultivation of a certain appearance and style, as well as captivating others with his apparent mystical powers.

⁶ I am referring here to *nara* which are expletives uttered by *faqirs* to communicate with the saints when in a euphoric state. *Nara* are examined in Chapter Eight.

Although Baba Ali possessed an arsenal of subtle, intricate, and wily controlling strategies for dealing with spirit beings (see chapter eight) and enthralling his patients, control was sometimes expressed through aggressive acts, meant to instil a sense of fear and awe about his prowess. Exorcism rituals were the medium *par excellence* where this soiree of violence was meted out. Pulling patients' hair, shouting at them, intimidation, and even bringing burning candles near their faces, were part of his belligerent repertoire, and were meant to bring both patient and spirit being into submission.

Baba Ali made a point of exercising control when engaging with *muwakil*. He often told me, as did other *faqirs*, that it was crucial to exert one's authority over the *muwakil*, and to be fearless of it, if it was to remain obedient. Just as Baba Ali's assault on his father apparently expressed issues of personal autonomy, his conceptions of *muwakil* were usually tied to his ability to tame the other.

Baba Ali claimed that after this event his mystical powers developed rapidly. His confidence and belief in the spiritual superiority of Islam were reaffirmed when he began to see visions of Nizamuddin.⁷ According to Baba Ali, he had a proclivity for learning about *jinn*, and immersed himself in the science of exorcism (*dawud*) and conjuring (*amal*). He recalled that he had a natural aptitude for conjuring the *jinn* and was unafraid of them. One event that Baba Ali said had occurred in North India during the Second World War, depicts his mastery over fear that was to be significant in his later life as a *faqir*.

One night my unit was assigned to a specific spot that had a *kabrastan* (Muslim cemetery) located nearby. During the night I heard a voice laughing loudly from the cemetery, so I approached it. When I came there I saw a large creature with fangs. I knew that it was a *shaytan* (devil). I began to recite the *darud sharif* that scared it away.⁸ I then returned to my unit. There was a certain soldier in my unit who took his

⁷ Baba Ali also narrated to me two specific visions of Nizamuddin which are of a highly personal nature. I have, therefore, decided to omit them.

⁸ The *darood sharif* is a prayer in praise of the Prophet Muhammad and is frequently recited by Muslims. It is considered as a potent prophylactic against evil supernatural forces. The *darood sharif* is discussed in Chapter Seven.

Muslim practices lightly. I wanted teach him a lesson. I ordered him to stand guard next to the cemetery. It wasn't long after this that the fellow came running back in a fearful state crying "Allahu". He reported that he had seen an evil *jinn*. Consequently, this incident made him become serious about his religion.

Speaking with *muwakil*

Perhaps it is useful to begin our biographical journey of Ahmad Shah via a trance session involving Ahmad Shah and myself, which occurred on a Monday evening, October 16th 1995. The inclusion of this trance session here will provide a poignant backdrop for exploring how Ahmad Shah constructs his engagement with *muwakil*, and its implications for mystical mastery.

I had known Ahmad Shah for approximately a year, and he had been friendly towards me. However, he was sometimes inclined to explosive bouts of anger, a quality which was characteristic of most *faqirs* I had befriended. What was to unfold took me by complete surprise, and admittedly, frightened me. A major reason for this is that I had never been personally involved with the alleged manifestation of a *faqir's muwakil*.

I arrived at Ahmad Shah's room, which was located on the eastern outskirts of the *basti*. It was small with white washed walls and noticeably clean. I greeted him and then sat down. Ahmad Shah told me that he had lived in the *basti* all of his life. His keen knowledge of the topographical, historic, and social aspects of the region proved invaluable to my research. From the onset of this meeting I sensed that something was troubling him. His mood was sombre. I began to ask him about the mosque where he regularly attended prayer. Soon after posing this question he started crying. He then began a verbal assault on the *Chisti Nizami*, blaming them for the corruption and rampant materialism at the Nizamuddin shrine. I then tried asking Ahmad Shah about his father. Ahmad Shah often extolled his father. According to Ahmad Shah his father had been a practising Sufi who had taught him the rudiments of Sufism. On this occasion, however, I failed. He seemed indifferent to my questions. He told me that he had been pressured by some of his peers at his local mosque to break all ties with me. I supposed that some *basti* locals may have resented my "foreign" presence, or may have had suspected me to

be a spy. Such suspicions were not without due cause. Both *faqirs* and *basti* locals had told me that spies were often sent by the Indian government to observe the Nizamuddin shrine and the *basti*. Such sentiments had been fuelled by the socio-historic context of the *basti* and the Nizamuddin shrine complex, which I examined in chapter four. The *basti* had been known by the Indian Government to be a haven for numerous Pakistani sympathisers during the on-going conflict between India and Pakistan in Jammu-Kashmir that had been raging for several years. The fact that the fundamentalist movement, the *Tabliki Jama'at*, had operated from the *basti markuz* (social and economic centre of the *basti*), and was allegedly affiliated to Pakistani and Saudi Arab Islamic groups, made the *Nizamuddin* shrine and *basti* targets for government attention.

I told Ahmad Shah that I would confront his peers and inform them about what I was actually doing at the *basti*, and explain that I was not spying on them. This gesture proved futile. Suddenly, Ahmad got a handkerchief from out of his pocket and tied it on top of his head. He then grabbed hold of his prayer mat (*musalla*) that was nearby and sat on it in the position of *Do-zano-bythna*.⁹ I thought that it was time for his '*Ishā*' prayer.¹⁰ However, instead, he began to draw an imaginary circle (*hissar*) around himself, as he usually did when he conducted healing and exorcism rituals. He grabbed hold of my right hand and attempted to pull me down to his side. Although I resisted at first, I quickly acquiesced. I was alarmed. My agitation was further provoked when he secured the door of the room with a brick. Still holding my hand, Ahmad Shah then started to tightly squeeze my hand to the point that I was in pain. After this, he turned his attention to my fingers, applying force to them separately. His robust hand enveloped them in its mace-like grip. While still applying tension to my fingers, he said, "Ask a question? Ask a question?" I replied "I have no questions to ask you". He repeated, "Ask a question? I am here. I am here. Ask whichever question you want?" I said, "Am I protected?" "Yes!" he replied. Again I asked, "Will Ahmad Shah help me?" Though still open, his eyes seemed glazed. Moreover, his voice had become deeper and

⁹ This is one of the positions incorporated in Islamic formal prayer (*namaz*), and is characterised by the participant seated on their knees with their hands placed on the thighs.

¹⁰ '*Ishā*' or night prayer, is the last of the five Islamic formal prayers.

his speech slowed down. The change in his voice and speech seemed to suggest that he was acting as a conduit for something other.¹¹ “Yes! Ahmad Shah will help you”, he responded. This was followed by, “What is your name?” I said, “My name is Shahkhan”.¹² “No!” he retorted, “What is your real name?” “My real name is Arthur”, I replied. He then repeated, “You are unclean. You are not Muslim. You are unclean. You are not Muslim. You are unclean. You are not Muslim”. However, he ended with, “But Ahmad will help you”. Out of curiosity I asked “Will Ahmad help me in *Tasawwuf*?”¹³ “Ahmad will help you in *Tasawwuf*”, he retorted.

After this, Ahmad Shah stood up and took off the handkerchief from his head, and casually rolled up his prayer mat and put it away. Still puzzled by the whole incident, I asked him, “What happened to you?” “What do you mean? I don’t know what you are talking about. What did I do?” he replied. “Don’t you remember putting the handkerchief on your head and sitting on the mat and asking me questions?” I inquired. He paused for a moment and looked at me with confusion. His attitude turned to surprise. “O my goodness, it was my *muwakil*. My *muwakil* came”, he said in a surprised voice. “What kind of questions did it ask you?” he added. I told him that the *muwakil* said that it would help me, and that I would be protected. Ahmad Shah smiled

¹¹ Josephine Hilgard turns her attention to the melodramatic element of hypnotic states (Price-Williams 1992:258). Hilgard asserts that hypnotically prone individuals “are sensitive to situations and people, they react emotionally to the mood that is created, and they re-enact situations with felt emotion, even though they modify the details” (Hilgard 1979:64; Price-Williams 1992:258). For Price-Williams the unconscious to a large degree is expressed in an oracular manner (1992:257). Similarly Jung points out that “archetypes speak the language of high rhetoric, even of bombast” (Jung 1965:178). Whether or not hypnotic or somnambulistic states are characterised by a distinct language that is qualitatively differentiated from everyday speech is examined in Chapter Eight in relation to *faqirs*’ expletives called *nara*. Studies conducted by Price-Williams (1992); Von Franz (1975); Peters and Price-Williams (1980); Metraux (1957); Hilgard (1979); Brown (1992) and Csordas (1990, 1994a, 1994b, 1997) seem to indicate the possibility for this.

¹² Muslims as well as some Hindus at the *basti* called me by this name.

¹³ *Tasawwuf* is the Arabic word for Islamic mysticism, or what in English is referred to as ‘Sufism’.

after I had said this. “You have been blessed. The *muwakil* has come and talked with you. What language did it speak in?” he inquired. “In English”, I answered. Ahmad Shah gasped in disbelief.¹⁴

The next day when I saw Ahmad Shah he apologised for the incident the night before. He told me that he couldn't remember anything that had transpired.¹⁵ Ahmad Shah explained that his *muwakil* had admonished him for having invoked it without the appropriate ritual ablution and prayer. He also explained to me that during the night he had a dream where his *muwakil* had approached him and confirmed to Ahmad Shah everything that I had told him.

Biography of Ahmad Shah

Ahmad Shah was born on June 6th, 1950. Soon after he was born his parents had presented him before the Nizamuddin shrine in order to receive the saint's blessing and protection.¹⁶ Ahmad Shah's mother was a devotee of Nizamuddin Auliya. His father was called Syed Mushtaq and was a well-respected Sufi healer (*ruhani khitmatgar*).¹⁷ According to Ahmad Shah, at the age of eighteen his father had become a disciple of the Sufi master, Taj Ali Shah Qalandari Jalali Jilani. After he had received the right to have disciples (*caliphate*) from his teacher, the young Syed Mushtaq left his native place of Amroha district, Moradabad, in Uttar Pradesh, along with his grandfather and settled in the Nizamuddin *basti*, New Delhi.¹⁸ The grandfather had a number of disciples who, upon his death, were placed under the tutelage of Syed Mushtaq.

¹⁴ From Ahmad Shah's response I gathered that his *muwakil* did not usually speak in English.

¹⁵ There is some resemblance here to Leonard's account (1973) of features of Palau spirit possession in Brazil. One characteristic of spirit possession was amnesia, or the participant's inability to recollect anything that had occurred during possession (Leonard 1973:143). Hypnotic amnesia has been also discussed by a number of psychoanalysts (Cooper 1966, 1979; Coe 1976, 1978; Barber 1969; Sarbin & Coe 1972, Peters & Price-Williams 1980). Hilgard and Cooper (1965) listed six types of amnesia within the hypnotic state (see also Cooper 1979:309). The last two types, being 'symbolic amnesia' and 'amnesia of integration,' offer further anthropological inquiry.

¹⁶ This is a common practice still observed today.

¹⁷ According to Ahmad Shah, his father was born on August 13th, 1900, and died on August 13th, 1990.

¹⁸ Uttar Pradesh is the most populace Indian state located in North India, next to Haryana state.

From the age of six Ahmad Shah told me that he began to learn the rudiments of healing from his father. Next to his house, Syed Mushtaq had a small medicinal shop where he performed his healing services for several decades. When Ahmad Shah was sixteen he asked his father for permission to become his disciple. His father refused, telling him that he should wait for a month. After a month had passed Ahmad Shah's family was visited by the *Chisti pir*, Ali Mohammad Khan Chisti Nizami Faqiri,¹⁹ who had come from Pakpattan sharif in Pakistan.²⁰ He was also known as Mian sahib. Ahmad Shah told me that shortly after Mian sahib's visit he was allowed to become his disciple. After he had become Mian sahib's disciple, Ahmad Shah inquired as to why his father had allowed him to do this. His father replied that it would be advantageous to him when he became older.

According to Ahmad Shah, he had a proclivity towards altered states from an early age, as indicated in the following narrative:

When I was a boy I went with my father to the *chilla* of Hazrat Nizamuddin. I remember hearing a voice coming from inside the *Chilla* saying, "*La ilaha illah 'Lah*". ("There is no god but Allah"). I was curious so I peeked in the cell and saw a *faqir* doing *wazifa*. I could also hear another sound coming from there. I immediately began to feel faint and feverish. My shoulders started to become heavy and sore also. My father knew what had happened. The *faqir* quickly came out of the cell and looked at me. He said that I had been affected as a consequence of peering inside the cell. The *faqir* said that he had been invoking a *jinn* during that time. He confirmed my father's prognosis that I was feeling the effect of *jinn* possession. The *faqir* then slapped me on both cheeks and recited a small prayer. After that I became well.

Ahmad Shah explained that this incident was the first time that he had physically experienced a spirit being. A noteworthy feature of this narrative is how both his father and the *faqir* explained to him the nature of and reason for his physical malaise. His narrative also has an interesting parallel with Baba Ali's narrative in relation to using sacred names. In this case, the sacred verse is used in conjunction with invoking the *jinn*.

¹⁹ Ahmad Shah's claimed that Ali Mohammad Khan Chisti Nizami Faqiri had died on February 2nd, 1971.

²⁰ The tomb of the famous *Chisti* saint, Fakruddin Baba Ganj Shakar (see Chapter Four) is located here.

Like Baba Ali, Ahmad Shah was seemingly taken by surprise by the consequences of his actions. However, as this story denotes, even from an early age Ahmad Shah was able to externalise culturally constructed symptoms of *jinn* possession (i.e. sore and heavy shoulders). Perhaps, it is also reasonable here to suggest that Ahmad Shah may have seen cases of *jinn* possession from his father's patients. The similarities between Ahmad Shah and Baba Ali are also apparent in their interest in the *jinn* and in the study of controlling and conjuring of *jinn*, known as *amaliyat*. In the next narrative, Ahmad Shah gives an account of his initial study of *amaliyat*.

When my father was alive I used to go to his shop and watch him heal people. I was very curious lad, so one day I began to read some of my father's books on healing. My father had taught me to recite the Qur'an and special prayers. As he became old and weak he told my brothers and sisters that I would take over his healing work after he expired. After my father's death I continued studying secret works on healing and controlling the *jinn*. The biggest help came from my cousin, whom I called brother and who was a powerful healer.

Ahmad Shah asserted that it was his cousin who told him that he was destined to heal others. He said that his cousin had direct communion with a Sufi saint. One day, his cousin went into *hal* — an altered state of awareness,²¹ through which the saint spoke to Ahmad Shah. "The saint said that I should discontinue all bad habits in order to follow the Sufi path", Ahmad Shah claimed. Like other *faqirs* whom I knew, Ahmad Shah was particularly meticulous in his personal cleanliness as manifested in his frequent performance of ritual ablution (*wuzu*) before formal prayer, healing and chanting. Ritual ablution was for *faqirs* a prophylactic *par excellence* against evil powers, as well as a way of denoting their state of physical and spiritual purity. From an existential level, ritual ablution serves in restoring a *faqir's* ontological security from those inimical powers which threaten to diminish it.²² Ritual ablution, then, mediates the corporeal and spiritual elements of a *faqir's* being from vulnerability to empowerment. Given its existential possibilities for maintaining self mastery, ritual ablution may be included in

²¹ *Hal* is discussed in Chapter Eight.

²² This idea has been influenced by Jackson (1998:81).

Jackson's definition as "an expression of the vital identification or bond" with the other (Jackson 1998:81). If one closely examines Jackson's statement in relation to Ahmad Shah's trance episode, he/she may present the case that a possible cause for his alleged *muwakil's* chagrin lay in his failure to reconcile with it while being outside the state of ritual purity — the state of empowerment, which undermined his capacity to properly negotiate with his *muwakil* (Jackson 1998:81).

As denoted in the trance episode, Ahmad Shah prioritised his ability to negotiate with his *muwakil* and the consequences for failing to do so. The following story by Ahmad Shah concerning his encounter with *jinn* highlights this negotiative aspect.

One day, a man who was around his mid-thirties was accompanied by his relatives to my father's shop. Immediately, my father told the man's relatives that two *jinn* had possessed the man. One of the relatives told my father that the man had been in hospital and that nothing could be done for him. My father asked them to bring the man again to him on Thursday afternoon. On Thursday, the relatives brought the man to my father, who then placed him in front of a *chiragh* (lamp), and put a few drops of mustard oil in each ear. My father started to recite some prayers while pressing his hands against the man's ears. The man cried out, "Save me! Save me!" One of the *jinn* burnt inside the man's body. The man then slept. As my father removed his hands from the man's ears, the other remaining *jinn* came out of the man and tackled my father. My father fell to the ground and became unconscious. Everyone gathered around my father, and were frightened and puzzled. Fortunately, I was aware of what had happened, so I began to recite some prayers in one of my father's ears. Before I could put some mustard oil in his ear the *jinn* left my father. The *jinn* told me that it did not want to suffer the ordeal of the mustard oil. It said that it had originated from a pious family and that it would always extend its respect to my father in the future. My father slowly regained consciousness. After this incident people began to recognise my abilities in tackling *jinn*.

Interestingly, in this story Ahmad Shah's alleged victory over the *jinn* has some similarities with Baba Ali's story of his encounter with his *muwakil* in Ahmadabad. In both stories we see the conjoining themes of mystical mastery and negotiation, and that negotiation can be construed as a form of mystical mastery over the spiritual other. Both *faqirs'* reconstructions point to what Jackson refers to as "the trappings of transcendence", which finds expression in their "reimagining their relationship" with

muwakil (1998:108). Jackson suggests that “this transcendence may assume the form of an ethos on the idea of the ‘new man’” (1998:108-109). For both *faqirs* this transcendence is denoted by exercising personal autonomy in relation to their fathers. In either case each *faqir’s* relationship with his father reflects the manner of his encounters with *muwakil* and *jinn*. For Baba Ali it is the expression of *auctoritas* which informs his relationship with *muwakil* and other *jinn*. In contrast, Ahmad Shah’s accounts of *jinn* and his apparent ability to enter into altered states of awareness when engaging with his *muwakil* assume a more conciliatory approach.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that *faqirs’* conceptions of *muwakil*, as expressed by their personal accounts, provide a means for both negating the potential threat of the other, while also restoring their need for existential control. I began by identifying *faqirs’* conceptions of *muwakil* as both a source of danger and power. I highlighted the significance of invoking *muwakil* along social margins in the constitution of self mastery and personal autonomy. Of the *faqirs* I knew, such an undertaking was crucial in measuring the level of their mystical attainment. The invocation of *muwakil* along social peripheries reflected the secretive nature of a *faqir’s* relationship with *muwakil*. Although *faqirs* expressed this bond in desirable terms, they were also aware of its potential threat, as reflected by their concern to constantly pacify their *muwakil* with tasks. Some *faqirs* told me that their *muwakil* were appeased by having been told them to perform certain tasks which were impossible for them to accomplish.

In the second section I explored two *faqirs’* life histories in relation to their alleged experiences with *muwakil* and other *jinn*. I argued that each *faqir’s* personal account was a way of imparting an understanding of their mystical mastery in relation to me. In the narratives of each *faqir*, their personal circumstances led to the eliciting of unusual powers which they interpreted as their special faculty for invoking *muwakil* and contesting *jinn*.

While in the previous chapters I have examined the ways in which *faqirs* develop mystical mastery, in the next chapter I turn my attention to how mystical mastery is expressed within divination practices. Thus, I move to the intersubjective domain of *faqirs'* therapy, and how divination practices provide an existential and symbolic arena for negotiating mystical mastery between *faqir* and patient.

CHAPTER SIX

MAINTAINING THE MYSTIQUE: THE UNVEILING OF STRANGE ORACLES

*God's secrets of the veiled are not revealed.
Sufi saying*

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the inter-subjective dimensions of mystical mastery within the sphere of divination. I demonstrate how divination provides a medium through which *faqirs* converge their mystique and interpretive powers. I examine core aspects of *faqirs'* divination, and their role in reaffirming to Muslims and non-Muslims that *faqirs* possess mystical insight or extraordinary perception (*kashf*), outside of normal human awareness. Peek notes a characteristic of divination systems found in many cultures is that they are “marked off from other means of decision making by the nature of the diviner” (1991:203).¹ Diviners are usually distinguished from other cultural members by their “dress, behaviour or cultural attributes...and by the occult communication invoked” (Peek 1991:203). As I have demonstrated in Chapter Two, *faqirs* differ from other Muslims at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* by their body image and comportment. *Faqirs* are also set apart from other Muslims by their intense engagement with the spirit world, conveyed by their spiritual relationships with various spirit beings (i.e. saints and spirit familiars).

While a *faqir's* mystique is conveyed to *basti* locals and devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* by his body image and comportment, it is divination (as well as his ritual behaviour and his therapeutic practices) through which people experience his alleged mystical powers at first hand. This experience reconciles Muslim belief in the sacred

¹ Although Peek focuses on African divination systems, his analysis also acknowledges non-African divination systems, as shown in the text.

other's participation in present day human affairs through the investing of special powers to unique individuals such as prophets, saints and *faqirs*. As Peek writes:

It is through divination that a harmonious balance can be maintained in which a culture's most cherished values are adopted to the real world of continual flux (1991:195).

Another reason for the popularity of divination among Muslims may also lie in it providing "a system of knowledge in action" (Peek 1991:3). Peek reminds us that divination systems throughout the world do not simply reflect various cultural values and beliefs, but "are a means of knowing which underpin all else"(1991:2). However, the idea that divination provides a mode of thinking about the world, and is a method of expressing and enacting "cultural truths" has been rigorously critiqued by positivist western systems of knowledge as being purile, non-verifiable, and erroneous (Peek 1991:2). Evans-Pritchard noted that the tendency towards "verifiable observations" (Peek 1991:5), dissuaded American anthropologists from examining divination systems because these systems were considered as being mainly concerned with affective states (Evans-Pritchard 1965:39; Peek 1991:6). However, anthropologists such as Fernandez have attempted to retrieve some theoretical rigor towards the study of divination systems by drawing attention to what he calls their "cryptic potency" (1991:217). In other words, it is in the performative elements of divination, and not only in its "logical truth properties", that is carried a power to "transform social realities" (Fernandez 1991:217).

In the first section I discuss some of the general characteristics of *faqirs'* divination, and how they provide an experiential and symbolic arena for expressing a *faqir's* alleged mystical insight. In the second section I examine dream divination and how it facilitates a *faqir's* mystique. I explore the theme of dream divination through dream sharing experiences between *faqirs* and their patients. The third section examines the divination approaches of two highly reputed *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine. My analysis focuses on the cryptic potency of their divination approaches, drawing on their performative elements and their attempts to instigate a transformation in patients' circumstances.

Strange oracles

Divination plays an important part in most *faqirs'* mystical complex. Apart from their healing role, *faqirs* are often called upon by both Muslims and non-Muslims to act as diviners. Most devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine regard *faqirs* as possessing mystical insight that is referred to as *kashf*.² Although *faqirs* regard *kashf* as a gift of Divine grace — a sign of their close engagement with the spirit world — other Muslims are not usually considered to possess *kashf*. I remember how Baba Ali would sometimes claim how he was privy to knowledge of the unseen.

A *faqir's* mystical insight is also constituted by his reputed ability to interpret dreams, descry natural phenomena, and reveal where sorcery or other misfortunes of supernatural origin have occurred. A *faqir's* mystical insight is also believed by both *basti* locals and devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine to extend to reading people's minds and to know whether or not a person has spoken the truth.

An example of a *faqir's* mystical insight was illustrated to me when I was accompanying some friends at the Nizamuddin shrine. I had introduced Shams to a Greek friend of mine who had been living in Delhi. At the time, my friend was with his wife. We all chatted in the *basti* over some tea. Shams whispered that he wished to speak with me in private. He said, "You know your Greek friend is seeing another woman, but his wife doesn't know it. Anyway, their marriage has problems". "But how do you know all this?" I replied with surprise. Shams insisted, "Its true! Its true! He is seeing another woman. I don't trust him". Shams then told me to arrange a meeting with my friend's wife so that he could give her a ring which would protect her.

This sense of mystical mastery through insight is also reflected by the various techniques or methods which *faqirs* may employ during divination. *Faqirs* usually have their personal repertoire of divination methods, ranging from "intuitive-synthetical" and "logical analytical" modes of thinking (Jackson 1989; Peek 1991:3). Such modes of thought

² *Kashf* is an umbrella term for a wide range of paranormal powers including prognostication, telepathy and clairvoyance.

correspond with Douglas' idea of "internal and external aspects" in which human actions are linked with spiritual powers. According to Douglas the "internal aspect" of divination is posited on "gifts of vision or prophecy", and has a strong persuasive element (1969:98). Alternatively, the "external aspect" divination requires the diviner to consciously employ various soothsaying methods (Douglas 1969:98), by which spiritual powers are appropriated through human action via external symbols.³ Similarly, Devisch (1985:51-54), and Crawford (1967:179-181) propose that African-based divination systems incorporate a tripartite methodology involving "interpretive," "mediumistic" and "oracular-interpretive" methods (Peek 1991:12). However, as Peek asserts (despite a diviner's knowledge of various divination methods) the divination session is not randomly enacted. Rather divination is informed by a diviner's "careful choices" (1991:12). From my experience, a *faqir* may employ either of these divination methods, or combine them during a divination session. While *faqirs* do not employ hallucinogens or "psychoactive substances" (Field 1969:7) during divination, some *faqirs* may enter into alternate states of awareness or work in conjunction with their spirit familiars.⁴

Although many *faqirs* are believed to have the ability to divine, some *faqirs* are considered to be more proficient in divination than others. Older *faqirs* are usually sought by patients over younger *faqirs*, since it is commonly viewed that they have greater powers of mystical insight and more experience in dealing with a broader range of human circumstances and problems. The tendency by many patients to consult older *faqirs* reflects the high respect given to older members in Indian societies in general, who are considered as being bearers of cultural knowledge and wisdom. The reverence conferred by *basti* locals and devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine onto older *faqirs* such as Baba Ali and Nazim Baba was indicative of this. Both *faqirs* were renowned for their mystical

³ These may range from creating spells, incantations, charms, curses, spells, and magical formulas Douglas (1969:98); casting pebbles (Jackson 1978,1989); the use of *mesa* (Sharon 1978,1993), divining with mirrors (Devisch 1991:120); divining by the movements or entrails of animals (Evans-Pritchard 1972); divining with gourds (Whyte 1991); divining by numbers and with cards (tarot) (Sephariel 1969, 1994; Cheiro 1987; Gonzales-Wippler 1993); and divining with sticks or inscribed stones (Eliot 1959; Riseman 1990; Reifler 1979; Chai & Chai 1978).

insight and wise counsel. The reader may recall Peek's notion that divination systems are not simply "closed ideologies founded on religious beliefs" but, rather, "dynamic systems of knowledge" and action (Peek 1991:2) which map out domains of experience within both diviner and patient that "remain hidden from conscious view" (Desjarlais 1994:179). For instance, among the Yolmo of Nepal, the *bombo* (shaman) through his "active interpretation" transforms a patient's "unnamed suffering" into a meaningful language of "sorrow and pain", or as Desjarlais metaphorically puts it, the *bombo* fills the visceral regions of his patients with meaning as much as a Yolmo artist colours his canvas with deities and icons (Desjarlais 1994:179). In a similar way, a *faqir* gives audience to his patients' distress and aims at replenishing their sense of loss of personal autonomy from the storehouse of his mystical knowledge and experience. This aspect I will later examine in the divination approaches of Baba Ali and Nazim Baba.

Patients consult a *faqir* for various reasons. These include whether a woman will find a suitable marriage partner, will give birth to healthy children, or if she suspects her husband of being unfaithful. Apart from these domestic queries, patients may also consult a *faqir* where there have been disruptive circumstances in their lives: serious illness or injury, fear of sorcery, loss of work, misfortune, and recurring nightmares and dreams, or inexplicable events. Younger and older males and females consult *faqirs* and come from various socio-economic backgrounds and walks of life, from poor itinerants and squatters living in the *basti*, to 'well to do' middle class Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs.

In accordance with the cultural respect conferred on him, a *faqir's* divination is rarely challenged during a consultation. Not only are such actions deemed to be highly disrespectful, more importantly they threaten to disrupt the process of divination. Divination requires intense concentration by the *faqir*, and is reflected in the minimal amount of discussion between a *faqir* and patient during the divination process. Similar to diviners from other cultures, such as Zande witchdoctors whose "revelations and

⁴ In the next chapter, I will elucidate more on this matter in relation to Ahmad Shah's trance divination. Bourguignon (1968), Beattie & Middleton (1969), and Parkin (1991) have provided in-depth analyses to the study of spirit mediumship and divination in African societies.

prophecies are based on a knowledge of local scandal” (Evans-Pritchard 1972:170), or the Ndembu or Shona diviners who employ their “Knowledge of the divisions,” and “recent quarrels” between individuals in order to arrive at an appropriate diagnosis (Turner 1975:47-48; Gelford 1967:105-106; Sanders 1995:56; Jackson 1978:129), a *faqir* may, however, enquire whether a patient has been involved in recent disputes with other people, especially where sorcery is suspected.⁵

Probably, nowhere is a *faqir's* mystical insight dramatised more during divination than through his oracular discourse. A *faqir* will often employ oracular statements during divination in conjunction with interpretive or logical-analytical methods. Oracular discourse is employed in two ways: in the first instance, in the form of general statements highlighting a patient's general character. For example, a *faqir* may state that a patient is facing a certain dilemma because of an impetuous nature which needs to be curtailed. In the second instance, oracular discourse may take the form of ambiguous remarks or obfuscate speech, which is open to various interpretations. This kind of oracular discourse was often employed by the *faqir* Nazim Baba during his healing and divination sessions. The use of oracular discourse is sometimes referred to by *faqirs* as *tarsiniyah*, a word denoting the ‘act of making show’. In relation to this, one *faqir* explained to me that he used oracular discourse in order to convince a patient of his mystical powers. This was essential in alleviating a patient's anxiety and aided in the process of consultation. *Faqirs* often employ oracular discourse at the start of a divination as way of asserting their mystical insight to patients. *Faqirs* told me that they were aware that some patients expected them to perform their mystical insight. While my material can neither confirm nor deny this, it does suggest that some *faqirs* feel compelled to perform prophetic feats.⁶

Widespread belief in *faqirs'* mystical insight finds its homologue in the stories of Muslim saints. As I had indicated in the previous chapter, the *Chisti* saints Nizamuddin Auliya and Ali Ahmad Sabir were believed to have been endowed with mystical insight, which they

⁵ See also Gluckman's essay on “Witchcraft and Gossip” (1992) and the role gossip plays in asserting group values in relation to identifying witchcraft.

⁶ Oracular discourse will be examined in detail in the divination approaches of Baba Ali and Nazim Baba.

performed on various occasions. Other Muslim saints such as Fakruddin Baba Ganj Shakar and Sarmad were also believed to have had mystical insight. One popular story relating to the 17th century saint Sarmad, who was executed under the orders of the Moghul emperor Aurangzeb (circa 1690), describes how the saint had dismayed Aurangzeb by showing him the mutilated bodies of the emperor's family which Aurangzeb had murdered (Das 1990:562).

Along with the use of oracular discourse, a *faqir* may also employ "external" or "interpretive" methods (Douglas 1969:98. Peek 1991:12). Peek notes that,

all divination methods "involve a non-normal state of inquiry then requires a "rational" interpretation of the revealed information by the client if not by the diviner (1991:12).

One such divination method told to me by Ahmad Shah uses a woman's head shawl (*dupatta*). In this method the diviner takes the patient's shawl and measures it from the patient's mouth to the bottom of her sternum. While doing this, the diviner recites an incantation (*azimut*). The belief is that during this process the shawl shortens. The type of affliction can then be ascertained according to the amount that the shawl has decreased at the end of the divination. Another interpretive divination method consists of writing numerical squares onto a piece of paper. This method is usually employed in order to verify the suitability of an intended spouse, or in establishing the time when it is efficacious for both parties to meet. In this method, squares are written in a quadrangular matrix. Numbers are written in every part of this matrix which are numerical correspondences of both the patient's and mother's name, and their intended spouse. The time of the consultation is also transcribed into its respective quadrants.⁷

From my experience, it was difficult to ascertain whether patients generally had any knowledge of the symbolic meanings of this kind of numerical divination method. This leads me to an important point. If we may assume that most patients are not aware of

many of the symbolic meanings of *faqirs'* divination methods, then why do patients consult a *faqir*. One important reason may be in the proposition that *faqirs'* divination provides a means for alleviating anxiety and uncertainty (Jackson 1989:60). Jackson notes, for instance, that among Kuranko diviners emphasis is given on “anticipatory knowledge which facilitates activity” (Jackson 1989:61). Thus in following a diviner’s instructions, a process of abreaction is initiated where fear and anxiety are annulled and symbolically transferred to the past “which is the source of knowledge and the domain of certitude” (Jackson 1989:60). In a similar way, a *faqirs'* divination engages in the abreaction of patients’ anxieties, enabling patients to resolve their problem situation.⁸

Here, I reiterate Peek’s assertion that divination systems express and enact cultural beliefs and values which are often taken for granted (1991:2). Most patients are apparently not interested in verifying a *faqir's* divining methods since he is presumed to be endowed with mystical insight; a circumstance consistent with cultural assumptions of his mystique.

However, it is to dream interpretation that I now turn since it draws attention to the “cosmological and ontological assumptions” (Kapferer 1997:19), of *faqirs'* divination, that are mainly informed by the “dialogical interaction” (Tedlock 1991:4) between *faqir* and patient.

Interpreting hidden domains

From the onset of my fieldwork I realised how important dream experiences and their interpretation were for many *faqirs*. I would often sit with *faqirs* and discuss the significance of dreams in influencing human affairs. As in many other cultures (Basso 1992; Tedlock 1991, 1992; Desjarlais 1994; Roseman 1990; Stephen 1989, 1995; Herdt 1989; Mannheim 1992) dreams are closely tied to religious cosmologies and traditions, and are a means of gaining “valuable insights” into the inner selves of dreamers (Doniger & Bulkeley: 1993:1).

⁷ This method will be discussed in Baba Ali’s divination approach later in this chapter.

⁸ This aspect will be examined later in this chapter.

Faqirs are apparently able to distinguish between various certain kinds of dreams for their patients.⁹ One type of dream is called *Basharat* where the dreamer is visited by a sacred figure such as the Prophet Muhammad, other Biblical or Quranic prophets, Muslim saints, angels, or by any other 'holy' person. *Basharat* also serves in giving spiritual instruction to the dreamer, or initiating the dreamer into higher spiritual states (*Maqamat*). This process of instruction is guided by the *Pir-Ghaib*, a term literally meaning "invisible or hidden teacher" since the *Pir-Ghaib* only reveals himself/herself to the dreamer during sleep. A person who is alleged to have a *Pir-Ghaib* is considered to have no need for a physical spiritual teacher. Another type of dream is called *Ruhi* and foretells a coming event. *Ruhi* does not usually require further interpretation as its symbolic meanings are considered by *faqirs* to be self-evident.

Faqirs view many dreams as relating to a person's spiritual struggle against his/her *nafs*, and may provide a way for correcting patients' behaviours. *Faqirs* also consider many dreams to be highly cryptic that demand mystical insight in interpreting their symbolic meanings. Dream interpretation sessions are rarely confined to symbolic exegesis, and often involve a *faqir* giving the patient spiritual guidance and practical wisdom for resolving personal problems. These sessions portray the *faqir* as the quintessential doyen, invoking mystical 'know how' and psychological analysis. The patient is told the meanings of his/her dream(s) and how it reflects his/her inner state. Thus, dream interpretation provides a *faqir* with a certain degree of authority to interpret dreams and their symbolic meanings. Generally speaking, a *faqir's* knowledge of many dreams is

⁹ Oneiromancy is especially developed throughout the Muslim world and is constantly referred to "throughout the history of Islamic literature" (Matar 1990:65). According to Muslim tradition, no-one after "the Prophet Muhammad received *ilhām* (individual revelation), but that dreams have been given in place of it" (Donaldson 1938:174). The significance of dreams is attested by their inclusion in the Quran (sura Yusuf 12:4, 12:36) as well as by the profuse amount of secondary sources related to dream interpretation ((Matar 1990:167). These include treatises from such distinguished Islamic scholars as Ibn-al-Farabi and Ibn-Sina. In India, dream interpretation is popular amongst Muslims and Hindus alike as asserted by the numerous volumes of books on oneiromancy. For further discussion on dream interpretation and the theory of dreams in the Muslim tradition see Matar (1990); Ur-Rahman (1936); Kinberg (1993); Azam (1992); Kister (1990); Westermarck (1926); Donaldson (1938) and Hosain (1932).

drawn from both Sufi and Muslim folk lore. Some of these dreams and their symbolism are explained below:

1. Seeing a lion symbolises Ali.
2. Carrying one's shoes symbolises that the dreamer's nafs is strong, and needs to be controlled.
3. Being barefoot signifies humility.
4. Wielding a sword signifies strength, Divine protection, protection from Ali.
5. Wearing green clothes or seeing the colour green is emblematic of Islam.
6. To see a black dog denotes an evil spirit being wanting to control the dreamer.
7. Praying in a mosque denotes strength of faith.
8. To see a white dove symbolises that one is blessed by Allah.
9. Performing sexual intercourse during a dream denotes an overpowering nafs.
10. A green robed man in a dream symbolises Khidr, the patron saint of Sufis.

My examination of *faqirs'* dream analysis was greatly enhanced by my dream sharing sessions with some *faqirs*. It wasn't long after going into the field that *faqirs* began to inquire about my dreams. Due to their interest in my dreams, I began to write them down on a regular basis. On this note, Nadar (1970) states, during her research on the Zapotec Indians in Mexico, that her ability to remember her dreams markedly increased (Nadar cited in Tedlock 1991:4).

Tedlock also indicates that being attentive to dreams during fieldwork an anthropologist is able to derive a sense of "personal continuity" in new and, sometimes, ambiguous situations (1991:4). I also began to share my dreams with certain *faqirs* like Shams and Baba Ali who showed an interest in them. At the same time I strengthened my ties of friendship with them. As George Foster (1973) explains in his essay entitled, "Dream Character, and Cognitive Orientation in Tzintzuntzan," by "volunteering his own dreams, as a gesture" of goodwill and openness, he was rewarded with "personal disclosures from his informants" (Foster cited in Tedlock 1991:8). Moreover, Foster endorses the merits

of this technique to other researchers in eliciting invaluable information on dream research. However, unlike Foster, the decision to divulge my dreams to *faqirs* was not motivated by aspirations to obtain data from them. On the contrary, any disclosure of information on their part, as I would like to believe, was a gesture of friendship.

In one dream which I told Baba Ali, my arms were held down in the jaws of two large, black dogs. There was an old man standing next to me who stared at me. The old man had a sombre expression on his face. Apart from that I could not describe his appearance. Baba Ali interpreted the dream as symbolising my present lack of spiritual development. The two dogs, Baba Ali claimed, symbolised my *nafs* which was preventing me to grow spiritually. He also pointed out that he was the old man in the dream and had purposely entered my dream the night before. He reassured me of his guidance.¹⁰ In another dream I saw lions around me. Although I was scared, the lions did not harm me. When I told Shams this dream he said that it was auspicious. What seemed to emerge from my dream sharing sessions with *faqirs* was their ability to conciliate me. The reassuring aspect of dream sharing apparently plays an important part in assisting patients redress their problem situations. Dream sharing was as much a therapeutic tool as it was a manifestation of a *faqir's* mystical insight.

Another important point to emerge from these dream sharing sessions was the strong persuasive of *faqirs*. Their particular symbolic interpretations and tales of intra-psychic prowess, such as Baba Ali's alleged entering my dream, provided them with a medium for expressing their mystical mastery to me. In the next section I shall further explore specific case studies to show how mystical mastery and mystique are expressed within Baba Ali's and Nazim Baba's divination approaches. My choice to compare the divination approaches of these two *faqirs* is based on their extensive knowledge of divination lore and practice.

¹⁰ For many Muslims, black dogs are inauspicious animals and are considered to be evil spirit beings. See also Chapter Four.

Divination as mystical mastery: divination approaches of two *faqirs*

Baba Ali's divination approach

Baba Ali usually conveys an air of authority to his patients. A charismatic and serious man, Baba Ali maintains a formal presence with all who approach him. In my close association with Baba Ali he rarely laughed or smiled and was always mindful in performing public service through his mystical powers. Despite his stern demeanour he also had compassionate nature. He once told me that he became a healer because he had experienced the pain of the poor and the weak. He wanted to do something about relieving their misery.

Baba Ali is a master in various aspects of *faqirs'* therapeutic craft. His extensive knowledge is manifested by a repertoire of curative techniques, ranging from the making of various talismans and amulets, faith healing and herbal lore. He was convinced that a *faqir* should be a 'jack of all trades' since he had to have knowledge of a broad range of ailments.

Baba Ali adopts a pragmatic approach to divination. For him, getting the job done has primacy over espousing well sounding philosophies. His concern with practical issues is relayed by his terse manner when conversing with patients. Although his divination approach is styled upon a pragmatic resolve, he is often given to making prophetic pronouncements.

Many people are drawn to Baba Ali due to his reputation as a diviner. People who know Baba Ali generally speak of him in terms of reverence usually reserved for a grandfather. This is not only due to his advanced age but also because of his pious nature. He is also respected by other *faqirs* who attribute him with strong mystical insight and healing powers. Peoples' respect for him is also tinged with a degree of fear and awe. However, Baba Ali's interaction with patients is always polite but authoritative.

A feature of Baba Ali's divination approach is his employment of oracular and interpretive methods. Baba Ali allows the patient to discuss their personal details with him. This is important for Baba Ali as he is interested in knowing something of the patient's personal history. The divination session may conclude with Baba Ali giving the patient a specific talisman or amulet, and specific directions on how they should wear or use it. As we shall see in the case study of Neema, Baba Ali's concern with creating mystical objects is integral to his divination approach. Another aspect of his approach is chanting prayers over mystical objects.

It is reasonable to suggest that Baba Ali's incorporation of numerical divination methods probably stems from his expertise in mathematics, a skill which he used throughout his working life as an engineer. Baba Ali told me that he had always been in a position of authority, whether in his work or home environments. Even in his advanced age Baba Ali commands a domineering presence to those who consult him.

The following two case studies poignantly convey the bi-partite aspects of Baba Ali's divination approach and provide an understanding of the relationship between cryptic potency and mystical maintenance. Another reason for choosing these case studies is that they express important pan-Indian issues of marriage and belief in spiritual affliction.

Neema

Neema is 28 years old, and is an attractive North Indian Sikh woman. She is well educated and has been working as a primary school teacher outside Delhi for most of her adult life. She is single and has never married. As Neema entered Baba Ali's room she covered her head with her head shawl as a mark of respect. Baba Ali told her to sit down. She asked Baba Ali if he could assist her in finding a husband. Having put forward this request Baba Ali immediately said to her, "You have missed your chance. There was a fellow but you missed him". Neema didn't reply. "It's true isn't it? You can't hide anything from me," he exclaimed. Neema paused. She then admitted that there had been

a young man whom she liked but that he had married someone else. Baba Ali closed his eyes for a few seconds. He usually did this when engaged in deep concentration. He then remarked, "He has now got three children". "I don't know," she replied. "He has!" Baba Ali retorted with a raised voice. He then lowered his voice and said, "To my humble capacity I will try to help you my daughter". Baba Ali asked Neema to tell him the man's name whom she had in mind and also his mother's name. She was told to fetch earth from the four corners of his house as well as from her own place where she was living. Baba Ali also requested Neema to bring one kilo of sweets. These were to include *peda*, *bundi*, *chilevi*, and *vafi*. Baba Ali said, "I will pray over these sweets in the name of my *akha*¹¹ and I will then distribute them amongst the poor children so that they will be happy and that you will remain happy for the rest of your life".

After Neema had left, Baba Ali confided to me that he foresaw that she would have stomach problems. He confidently stated that she had been experiencing sore shoulders for approximately one hour after rising from bed every morning. Later on in private, I asked Neema whether she had been experiencing sore shoulders. She replied that she had. She attributed this to *jādu* (sorcery) caused by her male cousin's girlfriend. Neema returned to Baba Ali a couple of days later and gave him the earth and sweets as he had requested.¹² She told Baba Ali the man she had in mind and also told him the man's mother's name.

From here I will discuss the divination method. The following divination method is used by Baba Ali for ascertaining various problems or enquiries. These may include the duration of time for finding a desired partner, length of illness, retrieval of lost items, or for finding missing persons. This divination method begins by Baba Ali asking the patient his/her first name, and his/her mother's first name. The time when the patient had arrived must also be ascertained. If the time is not known then the approximate time is written down. It should be noted that the names which are given in the following diagrammatic

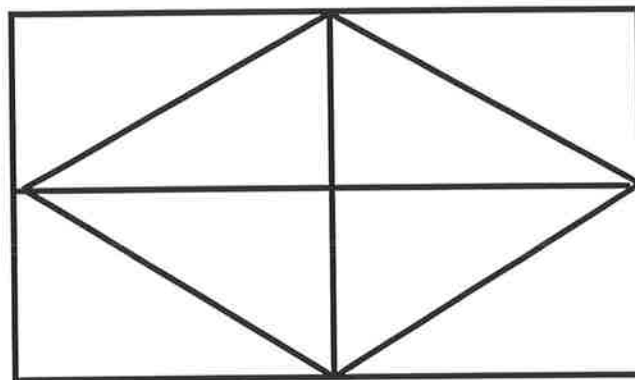
¹¹ This is in reference to Nizamuddin Auliya. Baba Ali had told me that he received his orders (*hukm*) directly from the saint. Also see Chapter Eight on *faqirs'* mystical ties with the saints.

¹² Baba Ali used the earth in a secret ritual which he performed by himself.

layouts are hypothetical examples. Although I did not have access to Neema's mother's name, the following numerical divination method which I will describe here is identical to the one which Baba Ali had performed for Neema and other patients. This numerical process was taught to me by Baba Ali.

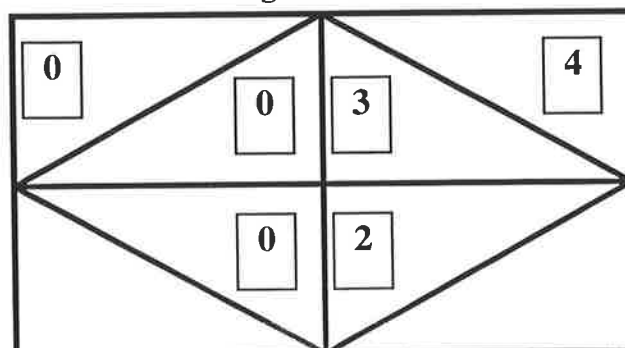
Once these three aspects are known, Baba Ali begins to draw a rectangular square on a piece of paper, using a pen or pencil. The rectangular square is then subdivided in eight smaller sections, as illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1



In this hypothetical example, let's say a patient called Muhammad consults Baba Ali in order to find out how long it will be before he will find a marital partner, then the number of the letters contained in his name are added, which in Perso-Urdu equals four letters. These letters are *mim*, *ha*, *mim* and *dal*. Thus, the number 4 is then written in the top right side of the square. The rest of the squares are then filled in with the following lower numbers which precede the number 4, that is the numbers 3, 2, 1, and 0. This is shown in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2

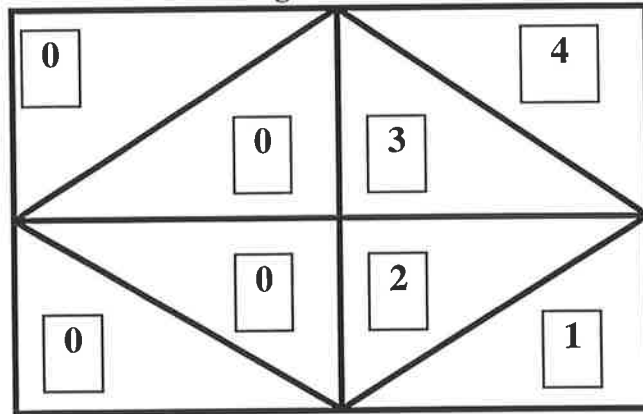


0

1

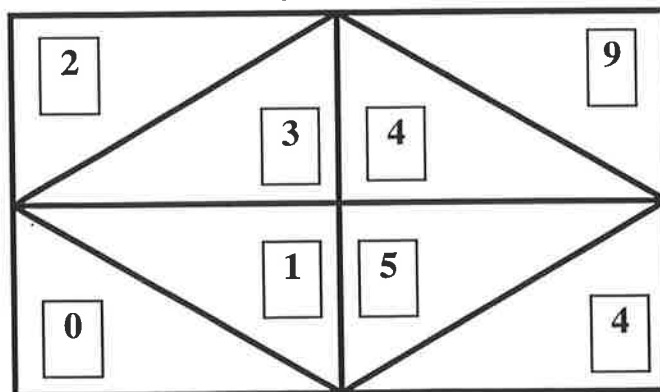
Next, Baba Ali follows the exact process for the mother's name. If the mother's name is not known this is replaced by the name *Hawa*. In this example, I will use the pseudonym Yasmine for the mother's name. In this case, the name Yasmine in Urdu has four letters. These letters are: *ya, sin, mim, nun*. The number 4 is then written in the top right corner of the square with the remaining squares being filled in with the following lower numbers which precede the number 4, that is the numbers 3, 2, 1, and 0, as illustrated in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3



In the third step, another rectangular square is drawn and the time is written down. In this example, if the time is 9.45 a.m. or p.m. it is written in the following manner as indicated in Figure 6.4.

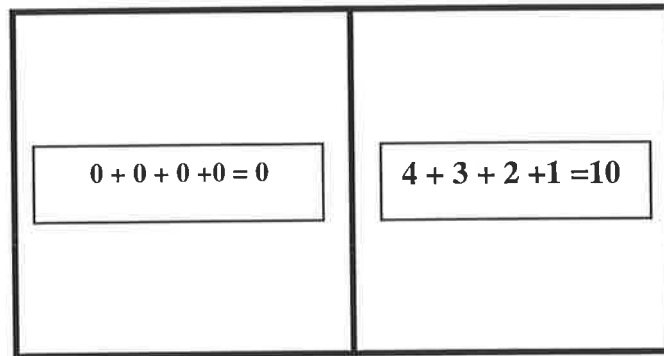
Figure 6.4



In writing down the time, the third square on the right side where the numeral 5 appears must always be one more than the number in the lowest right square.

In the next step the numerals on the left and right sides of the rectangular square are added up. Thus, for the name Muhammad, this is diagrammatically depicted in Figure 6.5 as follows:

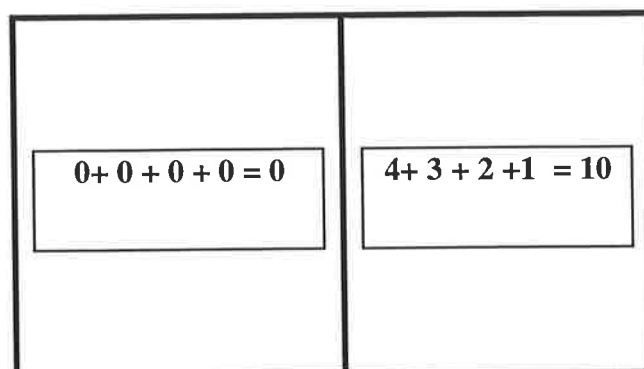
Figure 6.5



The total sum number of the left side is then subtracted from the total sum from the right side: Thus, $10 - 0 = 10$.

This procedure is emulated for the mother's name, Yasmine, and is diagrammatically depicted in Figure 6.6 as follows

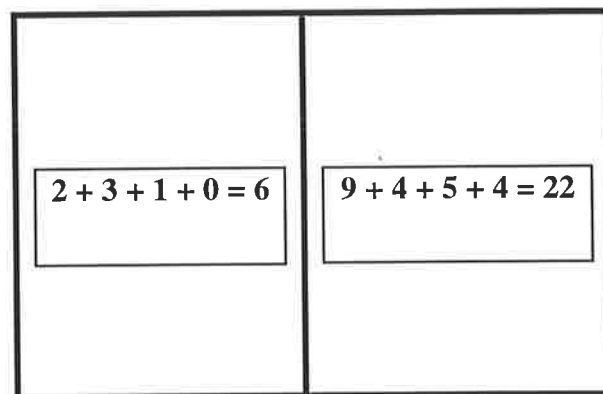
Figure 6.6



The total sum number of the left side is then subtracted from the total sum from the right side: Thus, $10 - 0 = 10$.

This procedure is also employed for the time, as illustrated in figure 18, where the numerical total of the right side of the rectangular square is subtracted from the numerical total of the left side of the rectangular square. Thus $22 - 6 = 16$. This is diagrammatically shown in Figure 6.7:

Figure 6.7



In the final procedure, the totals for both the name Muhammad and the mother's name, Yasmine, are each subtracted from the total number of the time. Thus, for the name Muhammad, this is expressed in the following: $16 - 10 = 6$.

Thus, for the name Yasmine, this is expressed in the following: $16 - 10 = 6$.

Therefore, it can be ascertained from this divination method that there are no future marital prospects for Muhammad, since the total of Yasmine's name when subtracted against the total of Muhammad's does not have a remainder, since $6 - 6 = 0$. On other occasions where there is a remainder left over, then this number indicates the amount of time when a certain event, outcome, or conclusion will come to pass. For instance, if

there is a remainder of 4, then the period is calculated as being 4 months; if the remainder is 6, then six months, and so on. However, in this case no time duration is augured.¹³

This entire procedure usually took a few minutes. At no time during this procedure had Neema been allowed to view the making of these squares. In Neema's case, Baba Ali foresaw that she would find a suitable partner in three to four months. He told her not to worry and that she would eventually get married. Neema remained quiet throughout his homily. Shortly afterwards she left.

Neema's second visit

A few weeks later Neema again visited Baba Ali. She told Baba Ali that she had been living with her male cousin for a while. Her cousin had become involved with a woman who was allegedly practising 'black magic' (*jadu*). According to Neema, her cousin's girlfriend had hated her and demanded that she leave the residence and find board elsewhere. Neema refused to leave. Neema said that as she was leaving the house on morning, she saw some carefully arranged beetle leaves (*pan*) lying in front of the entrance gate. The leaves were sprinkled with vermilion, cloves and sweets (*ladu*). Having noticed the leaves, she kicked them, and in so doing she fell over, sustaining a broken jaw and eardrum. Consequently, she was unable to continue working as a teacher. It took some months to recuperate from her injuries. Neema believed that the beetle leaves were an act of sorcery initiated by her cousin's girlfriend, as a means of ridding her from the house. She believed that she was still bewitched by the woman. Baba Ali listened carefully to Neema's story. His interpretation of the event confirmed Neema's suspicions. He advised Neema to buy some meat and to cut it up in small pieces. He said that she should put the meat under her pillow and keep it there for one night. In the morning she was to throw the meat outside on the roof for the crows to eat, so that any evil would be removed from the house. According to Baba Ali, his instructions for Neema to cut up meat and place it under her pillow during the night were to allow the sorcery that had afflicted her to transfer itself to the meat. For *faqirs* and other Muslims, the crow is considered one of

¹³ Unfortunately, I was not able to ascertain what would be the outcome if the total of the mother's name was less than the patient's name, making subtraction impossible.

the noxious creatures (*mowzeean*) and is associated with evil. In this way, the act of feeding crows with the meat was to enable evil to return to a mutual surrogate.

Baba Ali asked Neema whether she had eaten any food prepared by the woman. She replied that she had not. He then told her to write the two Quranic chapters, the “Dawn” (*Falaque*) and “Mankind” (*Nas*), on a piece of paper and to do the following:¹⁴

After writing these chapters put them in a pot and take it to a river and put river water in it. Make sure that the paper ink is washed off. Then drink some of the water and wash your face with the rest of it. Be careful not to spill any water. Perform this on Saturday only and perform it for three consecutive Saturdays. The sorcery which has affected you will vanish.¹⁵

Neema’s second visit exhibits the common belief in sorcery amongst Muslim and non-Muslim Indians. In this case the colourful arrangement of the beetle leaves is borrowed from both Muslim and Hindu folkloric sources. Many spells are structured according to visual and aural symbols which follow the principles of sympathetic magic (Sokolova 1992:114). The pan-Indian fear in sorcery is a complex phenomenon and in Kapferer’s words “addresses the problematics of existence as the paramount reality...in worlds that human beings make and unmake” (Kapferer 1997:20,298). According to Kapferer, sorcery’s potency greatly derives from its labile and transgressive power, a power which in psychoanalytic terms leads to the disarming and abjection of self (1997:20). Sorcery constitutes an effacement of the private and inter-subjective worlds of security humans strive to maintain in their daily lives. Kapferer further claims that fear of sorcery transcends comprehension; it seethes into the “sensing and knowing body and the process of reflection are engaged in mutual destruction” (1997:226-227). Indeed, sorcery inscribes its presence onto a person’s psycho-physical domains, becoming the source of

¹⁴ The 113th and 114th chapters of the Quran are regularly used by Muslims in cases of suspected witchcraft or sorcery.

¹⁵ Although I do not know whether Neema was aware of the symbolic meanings tied to these objects and actions, what is important here is Neema’s resolve to follow Baba Ali’s instructions. As I had pointed out earlier, patients rarely challenge a *faqir*’s diagnosis, since he is generally believed to possess mystical insight.

“reflective acts” (Kapferer 1997:227). This dissolution of a person’s psycho-physical being, and therefore, of their *anschauung* (world-view), characterises Neema’s crisis. Not only had the apparent sorcery incapacitated her physically and economically (by sustaining a broken jaw and ruptured eardrum and the consequential disruption to her working life), but had also affected her worldly outlook. Neema told me that ever since her fall she was constantly afraid and could not enjoy life with the knowledge that she had been bewitched.

Muslim man

A Muslim man in his late thirties to early forties had come to see Baba Ali.¹⁶ The man told Baba Ali that he had been possessed by an evil spirit. Baba Ali gave the man a small stick and told him to recite a prayer in Arabic.¹⁷ The man took the stick and began to recite a prayer. After the man had recited the prayer, Baba Ali asked him for his name as well as his mother’s name. He also asked the man for the time. These were then written down in the numerical divination system as described in Neema’s first visit. After Baba Ali had completed the divination he told the man that he had not been possessed by an evil spirit being, but rather had been suffering from a psychological malaise. Baba Ali attributed the man’s present state to his lapse in observance to Islam.

This particular case offers some interesting insights to the moral implications of *faqirs’* divination. Giving patients certain objects (in this case a stick) is believed to sometimes assist in a *faqir’s* prognosis of his/her condition. The logic here was that if the man had been possessed that he would have begun to beat himself with the stick at the commencement of the prayer.¹⁸ Baba Ali’s comments that the man had succumbed to illness due to his lapse in faith corresponds to both Ewing (1980) and Kakar (1982:30), who suggest that a Muslim can protect himself/herself against many forms of spiritual and physical maladies by being pious and by constant observance of Islam. Like other *faqirs*,

¹⁶ Unfortunately, I could not acquire personal details of this man.

¹⁷ This was possibly the *darood sharif*, which is a popular prayer amongst Muslims, and is recited in praise to the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims believe that this prayer is a prophylactic against evil spirit beings and the evil eye. Chapter Seven provides a few examples of the *darood sharif* in relation to *faqirs’* systems of therapy.

Baba Ali regularly proclaimed the moral soundness and spiritual potency of Islam over other religions, especially Hinduism,¹⁹ and believed that any moral relapse from Islam brought on the Muslim all kinds of personal misfortune. Kakar notes that Muslims' fear of disembodied spirits called *bhuta* (also known as *bhut*, which are believed to be the spirits of deceased Hindus) expresses their "primary fear" in "relapsing from the faith (Islam) and becoming reabsorbed by the insidious Hindu society surrounding him" (1982:30).

Moreover, this case expresses the redemptive aspect of divination and manifests the moral authority invested in *faqirs* by both Muslims and non-Muslims. As in Neema's case, Baba Ali's divination (as in other *faqirs*' divination approaches) approach is not simply restricted to making sense of the aleatory, but addresses personal issues of his patients' lives. As Baba Ali once told me, he was not in the business of placating his patients but in guiding them out of their problem situation. This sometimes meant admonishing his patients where he saw fit. Either way, Baba Ali saw this as his religious duty.

Nazim Baba 's divination approach

No-one really knows much about Nazim Baba's past. His life was tinged with mystery. One account suggests that he became a *faqir* later in life. He was an unusual figure, even by the standards of other *faqirs*. Nazim Baba was known for his uncouth and erratic behaviour, which was attributed by *basti* locals and devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine to his deep engagement with the spirit world. He often spoke in a highly metaphorical manner, with a penchant for reciting Sufi poetry as a teaching tool. He was a veritable 'man of shadows' entering and leaving the *basti* covertly. Every evening he would seek shelter outside the *basti*; no-one knew where he went. In an environment where people were concerned with monitoring the movements of others, this was a peculiar phenomenon which undoubtedly heightened the sense of awe that people in general had

¹⁸ *Faqirs* believe that evil spirit beings become fearful when hearing prayers or passages from the Quran. See also Chapter Seven.

¹⁹ This theme was discussed in Chapter Four.

for Nazim Baba.²⁰ He was renowned to have mystical insight and to command several spirit familiars.

Like other *faqirs*, Nazim Baba desired solitude, but was not averse to assisting others who often sought him for healing and spiritual counsel. It was in the first weeks of fieldwork that I became acquainted with him. His mystical persona was conveyed at our first meeting. One night, while Shams and I were sitting in an Afghan bakery in the *basti*, an old man of slight build entered the shop. I guessed him to be in his sixties. He wore a thin white cotton cloth (*loongi*), while his torso was covered by a piece of white cloth in a style similar to that worn by Mahatma Ghandi. Shams introduced him to me, and then prepared some tea for us. The old man gazed intently in my eyes. He said, "Be careful whom you open your heart to". I didn't understand what he meant by this. This was the first of many mystical comments that Nazim Baba would say to me.

Nazim Baba usually conducted his healing and divination sessions inside the *Khijli* mosque, located opposite the shrine, where he also spent most of his time engaged in solitary prayer and meditation. The inner environment of this mosque was conducive to contemplative states. Although situated next to the main shrine it seemed to be always suffused in silence. Moreover, the heavy structure of the mosque, with its dark painted walls, prevented much light from entering its inner precincts. Consequently, its interior was hemmed in darkness even during daytime. The mosque was linked to Nizamuddin's life. According to tradition, the saint led his daily prayers there and conducted the Friday sermon (*khutba*). Nazim Baba would sometimes sit near by to the marble pulpit from where Nizamuddin conducted his Friday sermon. As I stated in Chapter Two, Nazim Baba would also sometimes be found sitting in the women's prayer section of the mosque.

Nazim Baba's divination approach relied mainly on oracular statements. Since he was foremost a soothsayer, he was apt to comment on past or present aspects of a patient's life and advise them how to overcome personal problems. This usually took the form of

²⁰ Nazim Baba died in 1997. This section is in tribute to him. I am grateful for his kindness during my fieldwork.

reciting certain prayers or performing penitential acts at holy places. However, unlike Baba Ali, Nazim Baba did not incorporate any complex inductive divination methods. Probably one reason for this was his failing eyesight. Another reason could be contributed to his lack of numeracy skills, but I could not confirm this.

The following divining consultation was performed on September 2nd, 1995 inside the *Khijli* mosque. I have chosen this case as it demonstrates Nazim Baba's divination approach in a multi-person context.

Five people

I had told some Greek friends who were living in Delhi about the *faqirs*, and were interested to meet them. It was a Tuesday evening. My Greek friend Mikalis and his wife Zoe brought three other Greek friends, a married couple and a woman, to the Nizamuddin shrine. The names of the couple were Elias and Anna. The Greek woman was called Irini. The ages of the five people ranged between their early forties to their early fifties. All of them came from upper middle class backgrounds. Mikalis and Zoe had an adolescent daughter. Elias and Anna had no children and were both professional people. Elias was a business man and Anna was a school teacher. Zoe was a housewife and a talented painter. Mikalis was a diplomat. Irini was an importer of Indian wares which she sold mainly in Europe. Shams was also in attendance. They sat around Nazim Baba. After the formal introductions were completed Nazim Baba looked intently at Elias and said:²¹

N: You are very *jalali* in your character. You have been having some financial problems of late and have stressed yourself quite a lot. This has been happening over the last two months. Things will get better for you, so don't worry. (Nazim Baba then looked at Anna.) Is this your wife? (pointing to her) What's her name?

E: My wife's name is Anna.

N: (Nazim Baba then looked at Anna) What is your religion?

²¹ In this dialogue I am using the initials of each person's first names. N = Nazim Baba ; E = Elias; A = Anna; Z= Zoe; S = Shams.

A: We are Christians.

N: You should go to a church on Friday and light up two chiraghs (candles) in the morning.

A: Why?

N: To make your marriage good. So that there will be love in your marriage.

A: Isn't there love in our marriage now?

N: Just light up two candles on Friday morning.

(He then looked into his old bag next to him and pulls out two small white agate (*haqiq*) stones and gave them to Elias and Anna).²² Take these and make rings from them and wear them on the little finger of your right hand. This will bring love in your marriage and cool down your jalal. Don't worry. Everything will be fine. (After this, Nazim Baba turned to Zoe). You have been having some emotional difficulties lately which have affected your health.

Z: It's true that I have had health problems recently due to the heat. My daughter also has been having problems at school with some of the other female students.

N: Yes, but you are worrying too much. It's not good. (He then took a ring off his finger and gave it to Zoe. He told her to put it on her right forefinger. The ring had an agate stone).

S: You are very lucky today. This is karamat. The ring will bring you success and good health. Nazim Baba has seen something in you and has given you this ring. The ring is very powerful. You will see its power.²³

N: Do not take the ring off your finger. Make sure you keep the ring on your right forefinger. The stone has special power. If it ever cracks in half, it is a sign that something will happen.

Having left Nazim Baba the five people went to the house of Mikalis and Zoe. From their discussion it seemed that Nazim Baba's divination had made a greater impact on the women. The men tended to be more sceptical about the whole affair. I was interested in pursuing whether Elias and Anna had followed up Nazim Baba's wishes. A few days after Zoe told me that Elias had failed to make rings as Nazim Baba had asked him. She

²² Agate is a popular stone, chiefly worn by both Muslim and Hindu men. Agate rings are worn less by women. Agate is widely reputed to have various benefits to the wearer including protection against psychic attack, maintenance of health and well being and general success.

also said that Elias had mysteriously lost his wallet. Interestingly, she wondered whether Elias had lost his wallet because of his oversight. I had also learnt from Zoe on the following Friday, news that Elias' father had been taken seriously ill and was admitted to hospital. Anna had told Zoe that Elias declined from going to church and light two candles as Nazim Baba advised. Anna had also informed Zoe that Elias thought that Nazim Baba was mad. The two women made a connection between Elias' failure to follow Nazim Baba's advice and the inauspicious events that followed. Zoe's attitude was one of astonishment. She suggested to me that the events of the last few days had somehow been foreseen by Nazim Baba.

Analysis of Baba Ali's and Nazim Baba 's divination approaches

The divination approaches of Baba Ali and Nazim Baba exhibit comparable and contrastive styles. Moreover, their divination approaches highlight their particular area of knowledge and proficiency in divination. Baba Ali's divination approach combines oracular and interpretive elements, enabling him to address different issues/areas of patients' problems/concerns. In Neema's first visit, Baba Ali's use of oracular statements indicated his mystical prowess to Neema, and is consistent with Muslim and non-Muslim conceptions of *faqirs* as possessing mystical insight. Baba Ali's divination approach may also be suggested to consist of two parts: the first part of his divination approach is revelatory and reaffirms his mystical *auctoritas*; whereas the second part of his divination approach is interactive, denoting what Jackson calls a "negotiated synthesis...or the legitimising or certifying functions of divination" (Jackson 1989:60). This process is facilitated through the act of gift offerings of sweets as outlined by Baba Ali. On this note the act of making gift offerings or blessed food (*tabarruk*) is an established practice at Muslim shrines as a way of accessing the saints' blessedness. Jackson claims that the "gift creates life. It opens up a path between persons or categories of persons and bestows a state of blessedness (*baraka*) upon them" (Jackson 1998:72).²⁴ For Muslims food can be

²³ Shams had a high regard of Nazim Baba and often informed others of Nazim Baba's mystical powers. Shams' reassurances to Zoe may also be viewed as aiding to the mystique of Nazim Baba 's divination.

²⁴ This is reminiscent of Mauss who states that "All gifts are symbols of inner states" (Mauss cited in Evans-Pritchard 1956:279).

used as a surrogate for achieving desirable states or circumstances. According to *faqirs*, offerings of sweets to children are believed to be more propitious than giving them to adults, as children are deemed to embody purity. Purity, in this sense, denotes a state of being unaltered by other human beings in which physical and spiritual integrity is maintained.²⁵ In this instance, Baba Ali's advice that Neema should offer sweets to children at the Nizamuddin shrine was intended to accomplish a symbolic transference of their happy state to her, in order to propitiate wish fulfilment. In Neema's second visit, Baba Ali's mystical mastery is conveyed by his ability to manoeuvre Neema towards restoring her sense of existential loss by counteracting the effects of sorcery. In both visits, therefore, we can observe how Baba Ali attempts to instigate a "transition from inertia to activity" (Jackson 1989:60). Whereas in Neema's first visit she is instructed to respond in a confirmatory manner, thereby assisting in "the realization of an auspicious forecast," in her second visit Neema is guided towards redressing her psycho-physical imbalance. Baba Ali's divination methods offer an abreaction from Neema's existential loss and a way of redressive action.

Moreover, an implicit feature of Baba Ali's divination repertoire is his concern to assert *auctoritas*. For example, Baba Ali's recourse to numerical divination emphasises his belief that numbers serve as a means of establishing order and creating certitude. Von Franz's ideas on numerical divining methods are particularly informative here. Von Franz draws a connection between the calculus of probability and numerical divination methods, in which a diviner attempts to "establish order by means of a matrix" (1969:51). Von Franz further argues that such methods may also be an attempt to "explore psychological probability" (Von Franz 1969:52). Hence, a *faqir's* transcribing of the time of the consultation within the quadrangular matrix underpins Von Franz's notion of the uniqueness of divination. Von Franz argues that the uniqueness of divination derives from it being performed once only, from which a diviner extrapolates both the present and future "psychological situation" (1969:52). In accordance with Von Franz, I contend that *faqirs'* numerical

²⁵ *Faqirs'* association of purity with children are similar to Gray's analysis of gift offerings during *hom* sacrifices among the Nepalese. These include uncooked food, non-peeled fruit and unbroken rice, and non-virgin girls, all of which have not been tampered from their "natural state" (Gray 1984:89).

divination methods are a means of exercising a measure of control over the apparent randomness of life. Thus, the act of writing numbers may be construed as a stratagem for redressing our “ontological insecurity” (Jackson 1998:199) from the inexplicable forces of fate, destiny, chance, and circumstance that shape human lives. A *faqir* attempts to bring this insecurity under the influence of human action.

An implicit feature of Baba Ali’s use of numerical divination method, which space does not allow me to discuss here, relates to the body’s ontological and physical position to the lifeworld. Firstly, the patient’s name, a crucial marker of personal and social identity is subtracted according to the number of letters in his/her name and the time of the visit. Secondly, for Baba Ali, the use of the mother’s name denotes the principle of creation: the person’s place of origin and birth. This is reflected by the use of the term “*Hawa*” the Arabic version of Eve, the mother of humanity. Thirdly, time is measured according to bodily kinesis, in relation to the time the patient has consulted Baba Ali. Therefore, all three schemata share a synchronicity based on the causal relationship between body, space, and time. On this note, Parkin like Jung (1968: xxiv), views the “synchronicity of events” in time and space as not consigned to chance, but as showing “a special interdependence both with each other, and through our psyches, with us as observers” (1991:173).

Nazim Baba ’s divination approach is comparable with Baba Ali’s in its use of oracular discourse and interactive elements. It may be argued from the previous case studies of both *faqirs* that the cryptic potency of their divination approaches lies in their provocative elements. By this I mean that their divination approaches provoke a re-examination of patients’ worldviews (Burton1991; Fernandez 1991:217). Thus, a patient listening to a *faqir’s* divination may either accept, dismiss, or think over his prognosis. However, a significant feature of a *faqir’s* divination lies in its potential for “world creation” (Fernandez 1991:219), in that he asserts a possibility for a patient to transform their present state of affairs. Certainly, Neema’s case conveys this kind of “imaginative assertiveness” by Baba Ali’s use of various cryptic symbols and metaphors (Fernandez

1991:219). Similarly, Nazim Baba's advice to Elias and Anna to light two candles on Friday morning also conveys this aspect. On this note, Fernandez (1991:219), citing Levin (1977) writes that:

the putting of a metaphor is always the imaginative assertion of a different possible world than the one in which we literally live(Levin cited in Fernandez 1991:219).

And yet, this reauthoring aspect of *faqirs'* divination, as evinced by a *faqir's* oracular discourse, is characterised by a kind of "creative ambiguity".²⁶ The oracular speech of Baba Ali and Nazim Baba comprises both articulate and ambiguous speech.

For instance, the ambiguous element of oracular speech is characterised by Baba Ali's assertion that Neema's ex-partner had married and reared three children. Moreover, Nazim Baba's warning to Zoe to beware of a cracked stone in her ring is equally cryptic. Although Turner and Evans-Pritchard warn us that it is the imprecise and convoluted element of oracular speech that makes it difficult to challenge, it is nonetheless, its obscurant quality that places the onus of interpretation on the patient (Turner (1975:50) and Evans-Pritchard (1972:175) cited in Jackson 1978:131). Thus, Elias' failure to follow Nazim Baba's instructions was interpreted by Anna and Zoe as having led to the unfortunate events that had occurred shortly after their meeting with Nazim Baba. In this instance, both Anna's and Zoe's interpretations of Nazim Baba's oracular speech was instrumental in reaffirming his mystique. An important aspect conveyed in this particular case study is how patients come to interpret *faqirs'* mystical insight. For some patients the *faqir* is a figure of mystical authority. However, as I have shown, people who come to consult a *faqir* are not obligated to follow his advice. The two major case studies also show how *faqirs* are often consulted by non-Muslims, and reflects the tolerant nature of the Nizamuddin shrine towards non-Muslims.

²⁶ Palmer and Jankowiak (1996:236) remind us that verbal and gestural speech are open to various interpretations such as "creative ambiguity", "distraction", and "deliberate misdirection".

An alternative view to the ambiguous nature of oracular discourse is expressed by Herdt who attests that ambiguous ways of speaking may serve an important protective function in hiding an oracle's "intentions from others and conflicts from self" (1989:38). The following example of the ancient Delphic oracle highlights this ambiguous feature.

Theoretically, the *zygastron* at Delphi would have made it possible to test the truth of the oracles, provided of course that it did not contain answers invented by the priests for the purposes of propaganda; and there is not evidence that the Delphic priesthood ever committed forgery. But even in the case of an authentic oracle it is not to be supposed that the answer was always clear and precise. It was not for nothing that Apollo was nicknamed *Loxias*, The Ambiguous One. Often enough the answers were completely enigmatic, and it required all the skill of the official interpreters, the *exegetes*, to make sense of them; and the same oracle might well be interpreted in different and even contradictory ways. The Greeks always delighted in such mental gymnastics (Flaceliere 1965:53).

However, like the Delphic oracle, the significance of Baba Ali's and Nazim Baba's divination approaches may lie in their creative ambiguity, as characterised by their revealing and "withholding"²⁷ aspects, between disclosing new possibilities to patients while being infused with unknown potentialities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined *faqirs'* mystical mastery through exploring key features of their divination practices and how they convey and reaffirm a *faqir's* mystique. I explained how *faqirs* express and enact their interpretive and prophetic powers to patients and others at the Nizamuddin shrine. Thus, divination assists in legitimating a *faqir's* mystical and moral authority, thereby, reasserting social constructions of him as possessing special insight and knowledge of the unseen. I explored the divination approaches of two noted *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine; how they are constituted, noting the kinds of techniques employed by them, and how these serve to redress patients' personal problems.

²⁷ My use of the term *withholding*, has been borrowed from Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* (being), which I had explained in Chapter Two, in which objects disclose both manifest and concealed dimensions, or what Heidegger, as cited in Collins & Selina (1998:120), call "concealment in unconcealment". Abram further

An important feature of a *faqir's* divination derives from his ability to tie a patient's past to their present situation, enabling a *faqir* to orient the patient through some kind of expiatory act as a way of retrieving a sense of self empowerment. I also argued how dream sharing may be used by *faqirs* to legitimate to others their mystique and interpretive skill. Dream interpretation allows a *faqir* a method for resolving a patient's life issues and provides a conciliatory response to a patient's anxiety.

Faqirs' divination challenges our understandings of prophetic and other mystical abilities, and allows us to consider alternate ways of knowing. As I have demonstrated, *faqirs'* divination systems are predicated on the notion that there exists a way of knowing that lies outside the range of human perception. Although a *faqir's* divination session may employ idiosyncratic methods of divining, the divination session is also a symbolic arena for the expression of "cultural truths" and assumptions of a *faqir's* mystical insight (Peek 1991:2).

In the next chapter I continue my analysis of *faqirs'* systems of therapy through an exploration of *faqirs'* mystical designs and how they express mystical mastery. A *faqir's* mystical design is a symbolic arena through which the *faqir* attempts to spiritually transfer its symbolic qualities into a patient.

describes *Dasein* as being poised in a continual tension between "withholding presence, and the other refusing presence" (1997:214).

CHAPTER SEVEN
PULEETA: ICONIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE INNER AND OUTER
COSMOS

*I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to see My-Self; I therefore created the World of forms
and lives beyond all count, that I may realise My-Self therein.*
Hadith Qudsi

Introduction

In this chapter, I further examine the theme of mystical mastery through a symbolic examination of the *puleeta*, (charm-wick) otherwise known as *falita*, which is central to the *faqirs'* mystical complex.¹ In so doing I expose elements of *faqirs'* creative use of symbols, and how they constitute a means of achieving mastery over the spirit world. *Puleeta* are visual diagrams incorporating a configuration of numbers, phrases, words, letters, talismans, squares, circles and various idiosyncratic symbols, and are primarily employed during exorcism rituals (*dawut*), for controlling and expelling spirit beings. *Puleeta* are usually written on paper with either a pen or pencil, after which they are rolled up to form a wick, and placed at the end of an oil lamp (*dia*). I am primarily directed towards a symbolic analysis of the *puleeta* and their meaning in order to demonstrate how *faqirs'* notions of mystical power are construed by the *puleeta*, and how its various symbolisms enable a spiritual transference from *faqir* to patient. Thus, a *puleeta* is believed by *faqirs* to assist in the efficacy of the exorcist ritual where it is employed. I will show in this analysis that *puleeta* operate on two levels: Firstly, a *puleeta's* various symbolisms attempt to diminish the spirit being's power and control over the patient; a *puleeta* presents a tactical field for the *faqir* to assert his psychic presence over the offending spirit being; and secondly, it aims towards effecting a psycho-physical recovery in the patient.

To my knowledge, this is the first analysis of its type of *puleeta*, and provides significant information on them. My experience with *puleeta* came early during my fieldwork via the *faqir*, Baba Ali, who was considered by many *basti* locals and devotees at the

¹ The word "*puleeta*" is used in Hindustani in both singular and plural forms.

Nizamuddin shrine as a master exorcist, and who was creator of numerous *puleeta*.² From his small room located in the *basti*, Baba Ali guided me through the various levels of symbolism and meaning of *puleeta*. Baba Ali taught me to view *puleeta* as combining tactical strategies for combating various spirit beings i.e. *jinn*, and ghosts, commonly referred to by Muslims as “*bhut*”. Moreover, I was instructed that *puleeta* are more than mystical designs but invested with a *faqir*’s mystical power, endowed with sentience and problem solving capacities — a kind of miniaturised *sui generis*.

Apart from Baba Ali, I was also informed of *puleetas*’ symbolism by another local *faqir*. This enabled me to measure the reliability of the information given and increased my understanding on *puleeta*. It also assisted me to challenge any questions arising from supposed limitations of my single-informant approach. My reliance on Baba Ali’s knowledge of *puleeta*, however, is largely based on having established a rapport with him, as well as due to his expertise in this area of *faqirs*’ mystical craft. My own interest and method in exploring this area of *faqirs*’ therapy is reminiscent of Sharon’s work on Peruvian folk healing (*curandisimo*) (1978:19). According to Sharon (1978:xi), his reliance on “certain unique individuals” was crucial to his understanding of Peruvian folk healing without which his knowledge of this healing model would have been compromised (Sharon 1978:xi). Furthermore, Sharon’s claim that the “researcher is not going very far unless he or she focuses on the specialist who knows the profession best”, is certainly relevant in this examination of *puleeta* (Sharon 1978:xi). Sharon (1978:xi) rightly asserts that the single-informant method has been successfully employed in various ethnographies including Furst (1965, 1967, 1972); Griaule (1965); Furst and Myerhoff (1966); Myerhoff (1968, 1970, 1974); Wilbert (1972b) and Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971). Eliade also justifies the use of individuals in attaining religious knowledge from other cultures (1958:5-6).

The *puleeta* presented in this chapter were created by Baba Ali.³ In this chapter, the original *puleeta* will be followed by its English translation. Of course, the metaphoric nature of the language found in *puleeta* prevents exact translations, except where the

² My private collection of Baba Ali’s *puleeta* are more than thirty. The *puleeta* presented in this analysis are contained in Baba Ali’s published work called *Amaliyat Aseb Ma Taskhir Jinnat*.

³ Unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity nor the good fortune to explore the stylistic similarities and differences between *puleeta* created by different *faqirs*.

names of people, and other spirit beings, are used. Some of the *puleeta's* language is highly cryptic, and is understood by Baba Ali alone, highlighting the idiosyncratic nature of *puleeta*. While this may be the case, it has not detracted from my symbolic analysis of *puleeta* and their metaphoric construction.⁴

Jackson's idea of the metaphorical correspondences between different bodily domains is pertinent to this analysis since he argues that they aver the "possibility that action in any one domain will have repercussions in the other" (Jackson 1998:174, 1989).⁵ Jackson goes on to say that this, possibility is realised whenever rituals are carried out in one accessible or disturbed domain that is considered analogically linked to it (Jackson 1998:174). As I will show, a *puleeta's* various levels of symbolism attempt a spiritual transference from *faqir* to patient. This is posited on "exploiting the metaphorical links" between the *puleeta's* symbolic domain and the patient, thus assisting in bringing psychological control back to the patient where it has been either diminished or lost (Jackson 1998:174).

This symbolic analysis of *puleeta* consists of six sections. The first section provides an overview of *faqirs'* therapeutic lore in relation to natural and spiritual afflictions, their aetiology and treatment. This sets the trajectory for examining spirit possession and the role of *puleeta*. I also introduce background knowledge of the process of creating *puleeta* and their ideology. In the second section, I examine the way in which *puleeta* invoke the authority of sacred other, via the names of saints and other spirit beings. The third section analyses the significance of the centre in *puleeta* and how its symbolism intimates on notions of balance and psychic equilibrium. The fourth section explores the importance of numerals in *puleeta*, especially through their use in magical squares. As a way of revealing the significance of numerals in *puleeta*, I detail their social manifestations, and how they frame Muslim conceptions of the sacred. In the fifth section, I discuss the notions of the air and wind in relation to their symbolic representations in *puleeta*, and how they relate to a *faqir's* psychic presence. The sixth

⁴ While I have endeavoured to give a credible analysis of the various levels of symbolism of *puleeta*, my attempts have only touched the surface. It is my hope that more research into these intricate and complex mystical designs will be conducted in the future.

⁵ Kirmayer views metaphor as "the basic process of creative thought invention" (Kirmayer 1993:172). Kirmayer further reminds us that metaphors not "need be expressed in words, they can arise from the juxtaposition of images, "by using one thing as though it is another" (Kirmayer 1993:172; Gardner & Winner 1979).

section examines how the themes of evil and time are represented in *puleeta*, and how their symbolic motifs attempt a retrieval of a patient's psychic state.

In examining the symbolic and cosmological features of *puleeta*, I also reveal some of their cultural resonances in relation to Muslim beliefs of the nature of spirit possession and its treatment. In Muslim thought, spirit possession is commonly viewed to be a spiritual illness. Because of this, an analysis of the cause and treatment of spiritual illnesses is necessary in relation to *faqirs'* system of therapy.

Natural and supernatural afflictions: Theory of illness and cure

Generally speaking, Muslims categorise illness in two broad categories: natural and spiritual or supernatural. Illnesses in the first category are often viewed as caused by humans, such as drinking polluted water or food, or due to various kinds of parasites. For example, intestinal illnesses are a frequent occurrence among many *basti* locals, particularly during the hot and prolonged summer season when the likelihood of water contamination in the *basti* increases. The *basti's* squalid living conditions characterised by its high infestation of refuse, human excreta and a large rat population, increases the spread of water and air borne diseases. These include dysentery, meningitis, and tuberculosis. During Delhi's monsoonal season, beginning in August, many of the *basti's* alley ways and dirt paths are covered in foul smelling water which has mixed with human refuse, further increasing the possibility of contamination of the *basti's* strained water supplies. Unsurprisingly, many *basti* locals suffer from intestinal problems during this period. The usual remedial response for intestinal afflictions is using different kinds of herbs or spices, in their powdered form, including tumeric and charcoal. *Faqirs* are often consulted by *basti* locals and devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine to treat a variety of chronic and acute physical complaints. Older *faqirs* tend to have knowledge of herbal lore and combine it with other kinds of treatment.⁶ This often includes giving patients specific kinds of talisman or gemstones (usually agate) which is believed to maintain good health and protect against certain kinds of supernatural afflictions, for example, "evil eye" (*nazare bud*). *Faqirs* like Baba Ali, gave patients a peculiar kind of rock called a "Baba Ganj stone", named after Nizamuddin Auliya's spiritual teacher, which when rubbed with water produces a paste which is applied to sore body areas. In some

cases, a *faqir* may also perform a healing technique called “*dum*”. *Dum* consists in the *faqir* breathing three or more times on the patient or blowing on water which the patient is then asked to drink. *Dum* is linked to Muslim conceptions of breath as a carrier of the Divine spirit or life-force called *ruh*, which was discussed in Chapter Three. In my symbolic analysis of *puleeta*, I show how the notion of *ruh* is represented as the wind (*hawa*), as a means of evoking the Divine presence.

Faqirs’ explanations of physical or “natural” illnesses incorporate notions of Aryurvedic and Indo-Islamic medical models, referred to as “*hakimi*” and “*unane*” (Greek medicine). For instance, *faqirs* often point out that the cause of many physical ailments is due to an imbalance or excess in a person’s life. Too much food, sex or sleep is believed to weaken the body, making it vulnerable to disease. Too much intake of spicy foods (*garmi*) is believed to lead to excessive displays of anger and passionate emotions. Similarly, people with fiery dispositions may be told by *faqirs* to eat “cooling foods” (*sardi*) which have a calming effect on the mind, that is milk, yoghurt, fruit, lentils (*dhal*) and vegetables, while moderating their intake of “heating foods”, for example, spicy foods, meat, eggs, onions and garlic. Lack of personal hygiene is another important that can lead to various physical ailments. On this note, *faqirs* extol the practice of performing ablution (*wuzu*) five times a day as an obligatory part of formal prayer (*namaz*), since they believe it leads to both spiritual and bodily purity. The maintenance of bodily cleanliness is a crucial factor in offsetting psychic attack from evil spirit beings. For both *faqirs* and other Muslims, lack of bodily hygiene is a major cause of spirit possession. Most forms of bodily exudations such as human faeces, urine, menstrual blood, and semen are viewed as inciting evil spirit beings.

A *faqir* may employ two or more techniques during healing, a feature which is also a characteristic of many *puleeta* where they incorporate various symbolisms for combating and diminishing the spirit’s power over the patient, and effecting psycho-physical harmony in him/her. The use of various healing methods is depicted in Plates 7.1a - 7.1c which show the *faqir* Nazim Baba healing a female patient in the *Khijli* mosque at the Nizamuddin shrine. The patient in question was an Afghan woman in her thirties who had been afflicted with a serious head complaint for many years. Plate 7.1a shows Nazim

⁶ Appndix VI provides a list of herbal remedies for various physical complaints which were recited to me

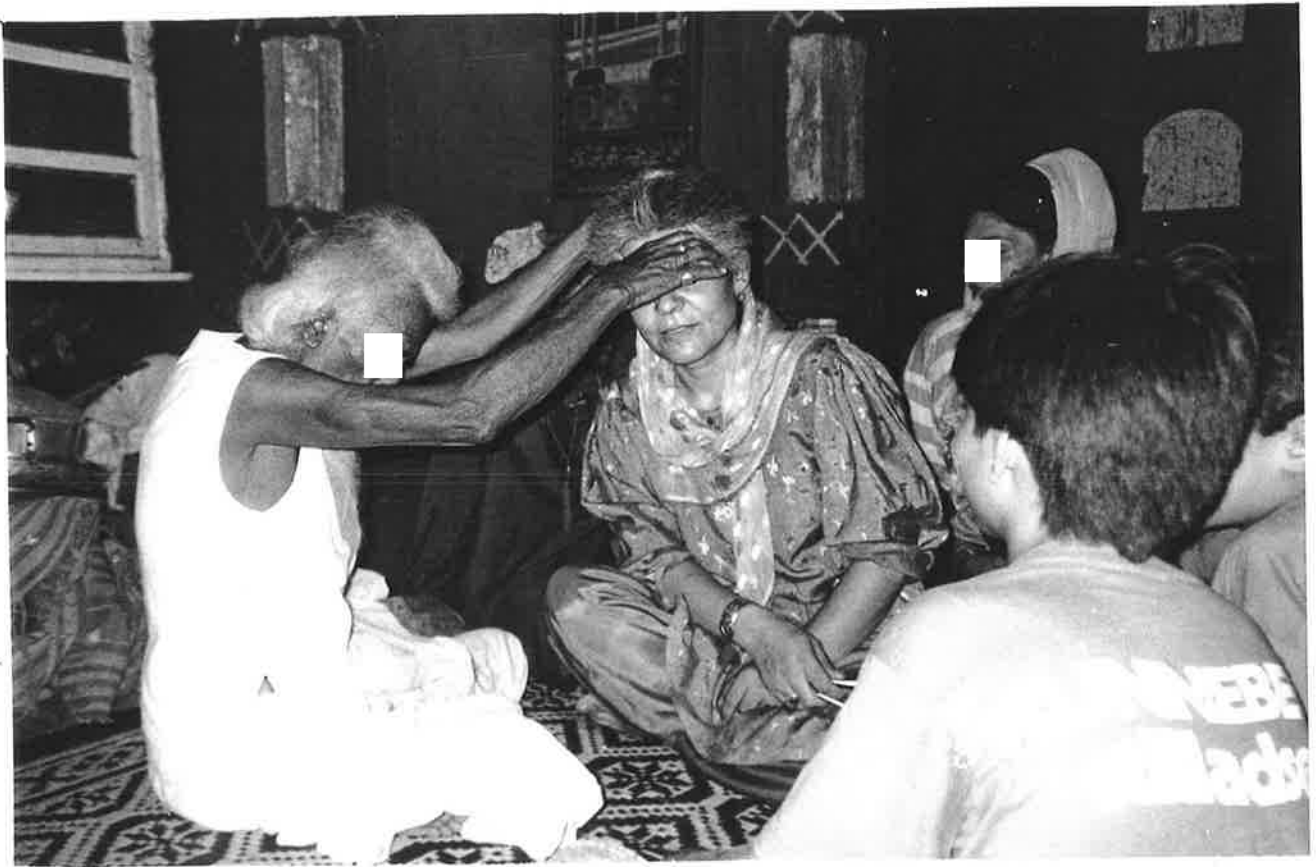


Plate 7.1a: Nazim Baba laying his hands on female patient.

Baba laying his hands on the woman's head while immersed in deep prayer. On this note, the laying of hands on a patient's affected body part is a popular healing technique by *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine. *Faqirs* explain that the laying of hands facilitates in the transmission of their mystical healing powers into the patient. This is invariably combined with the reciting of Quranic prayers. *Faqirs* frequently recite other prayers such as the *darood sharif* (praises to the Prophet Muhammad) in conjunction with Quranic verse in order to invoke Divine assistance. *Faqirs* recite both long and shortened versions of this prayer. One version of this prayer goes:

Allahuma sali a'le Muhammadin wa ala a'le Muhammadin kama salaita ala Ibrahima wa ala a'le Ibrahima inaka hamidun majid. Allahuma barik a'le Muhammadin was ala a'le Muhammadan barakata ala Ibrahima wasala a'le Ibrahima inaka hamidun majid.

(translation)

O Allah! Bestow Thy special blessing on Muhammad and upon the family of Muhammad, as Thou blessed Abraham and the family of Abraham, for Thou art the Most Gracious, The Almighty. O Allah! Send Thy grace on Muhammad and upon the family of Muhammad, as Thou graced Abraham and the family of Abraham, for Thou art the Most Gracious, The Almighty.

Faqirs claimed that reciting the *darood sharif* was efficacious in the healing of natural and spiritual illnesses and providing psychic protection. Baba Ali asserted, "If you say the *darood sharif* one hundred times it has incredible power for guarding against all evil. This is because it has been given by Allah".⁷ Baba Ali related to me an interesting story in relation to the spiritual power of the *darood sharif*:

I remember during the war (world war two), I was assigned with other soldiers in an isolated part of the country. There was a *kabrastan* (cemetery) nearby. During the night I heard strange noises coming from there. They sounded like laughter. I went to see. As I approached there I saw a large being whose face was hideous — fangs, horns and all. It had a terrible laugh, which made me shudder. I was frightened. As it approached me I began to recite the *darood sharif* and it suddenly vanished.

Two important points are intimated in this narrative: The first relates to Baba Ali's mastery over his fear in diminishing the spirit being's power; and secondly, the

by Baba Ali.

⁷ Another *faqir* ascribed the spiritual power of the *darood sharif* to it having been brought down from heaven by angels. For this reason, he told me, it is recited after formal prayer.

invocation of Divine assistance. Both these elements are crucial to the *puleeta*'s curative efficacy, as I discuss later on.

Plate 7.1b shows Nazim Baba placing a small paper talisman in a bottle of water. In this instance, Nazim Baba had written a simple talisman consisting of the name of God in Arabic — “Allah”. This is a pertinent example of *faqirs*' use of talismans for healing at the Nizamuddin shrine. Here, the use of the Divine name, a commonly employed in *puleeta* in general, plays a pivotal part in many *faqirs*' curative repertoire. From there, the woman is told to drink from the bottle while the talisman is still in it (Plate 7.1c). This particular use of talismans in combination with water is referred to as “*dada deyado*”, and is a popular healing technique among *faqirs*.

Apart from “natural” illnesses, *faqirs* recognise a variety of illnesses that are attributed to evil spirit beings, which I have referred to as spiritual illnesses. Spiritual illnesses are based on the premise that spirit beings have the ability to harm human beings, either through physical and mental afflictions. Many of these illnesses can be divided into two categories: striking or possessing. *Faqirs* understand illnesses of the first type by the umbrella term “*aseb*”, literally meaning “bad air” (*hawa*). *Aseb* is believed to be caused by either an evil spirit being breathing on a person. The breath of evil spirit beings is considered highly noxious and can quickly effect humans. *Aseb* can also effect a person during sleep. *Faqirs* explain sleep as being akin to death since the soul is believed to leave the body while dreaming. Evil spirit beings can attack the body during this time. In this way, *aseb* is cognate with striking rather than possession. Symptoms include giddiness, fever, and nausea, which are brought on suddenly. It is the suddenness of these symptoms by which a *faqir* is usually able to diagnose that the victim has been afflicted by *aseb*. While the physical symptoms of *aseb* are acute, it is not regarded as being serious. The symptoms of *aseb* are believed to last only a couple of days, after which the victim fully recovers. *Aseb* may also be caused by looking at an evil *jinn* (*nāpak jinn*) or ghost (*bhut*) since their hideous appearance can cause extreme shock.

Another major kind of supernatural illness which *faqirs* are regularly called on to treat at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* is known as “*asar*”, (plural “*asrat*”) meaning “effect”. A major cause of *asar* is being in close proximity to evil spirit beings, or places where

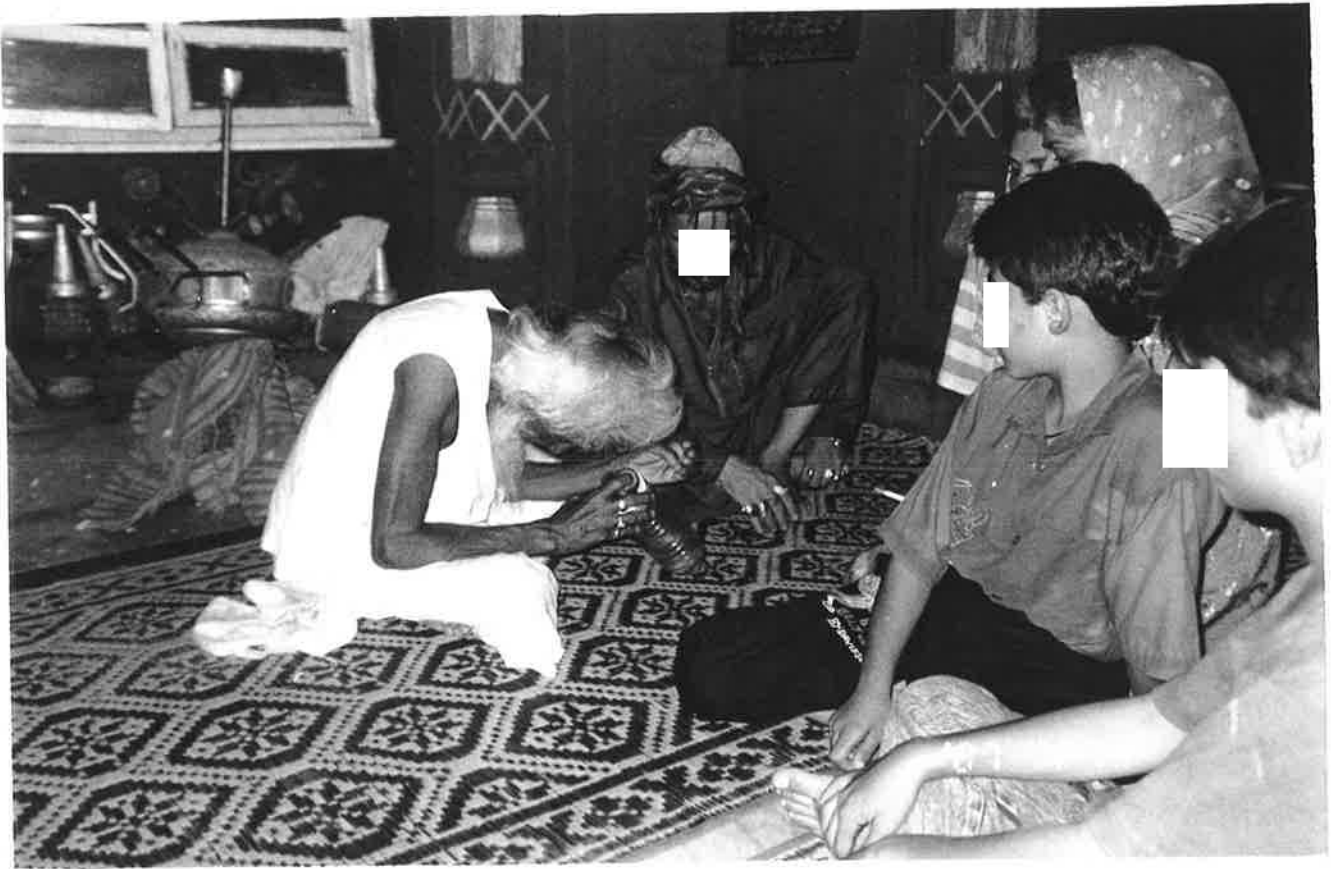


Plate 7.1b: Nazim Baba placing paper talisman in bottle.

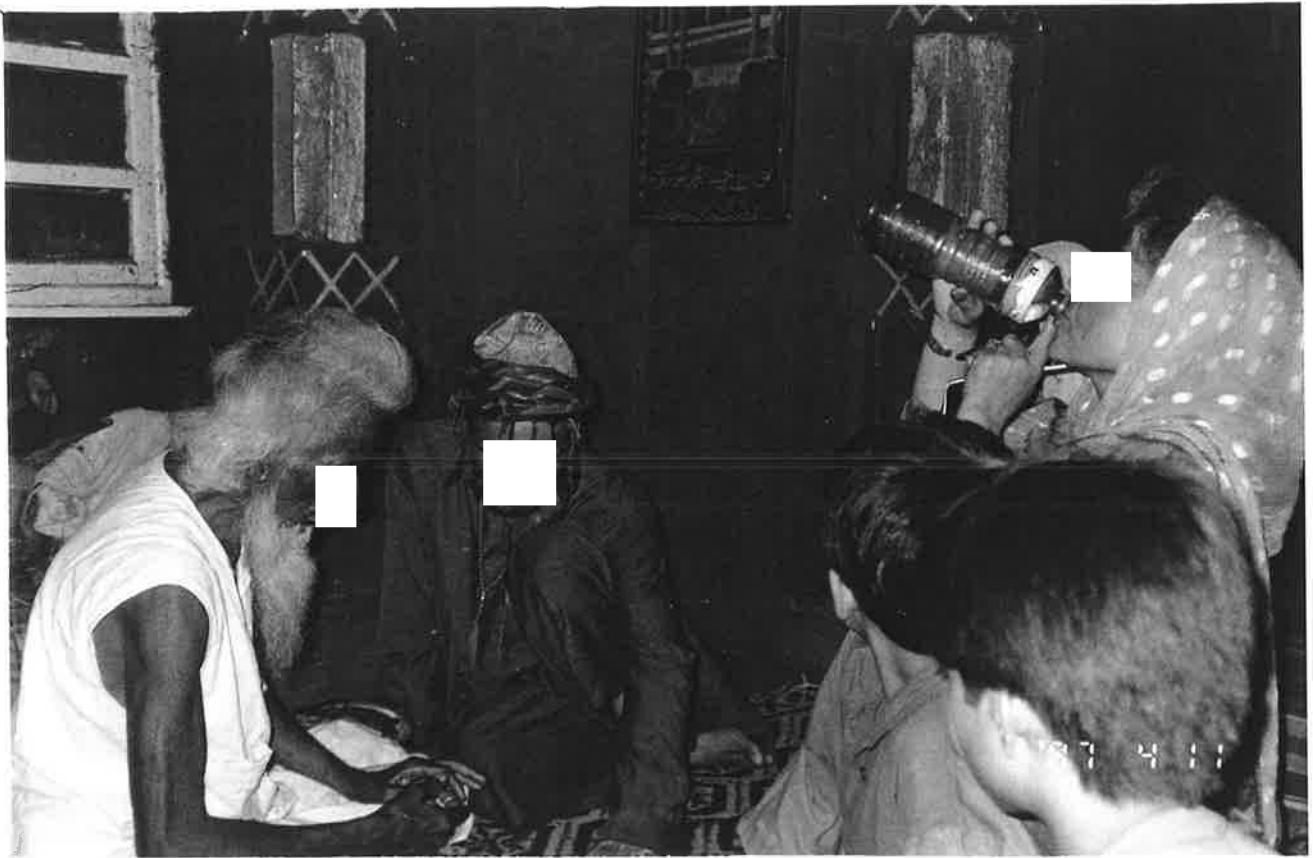


Plate 7.1c: Patient drinking from bottle.

evil spirit beings have inhabited. As I discussed in Chapter Four, *faqirs* and other Muslims believe that places where evil spirit beings have lived contain “bad air”, that is a kind of spiritual residue of the evil spirit being that lingers long after it has departed from a place. A person staying at such places may become afflicted with *asar*. *Asar* may manifest in various ways: from a person being afflicted by personal misfortunes, to accidents and committing lewd acts.

A popular form of *asar* attributed to human beings is the “evil eye”. Belief in the evil eye is a pervasive feature in Indian society, and highlights the relationship between passionate emotions and their disruptive aspect.⁸ Woodburne states that the evil eye is acknowledged in the sacred texts of Islam and Hinduism (1992:56). The evil eye also exacerbates Muslim fears of boundary crossing and its “destructive possibilities” both to the victim and his/her family and friends (Kapferer 1997:44). In both Muslim and Hindu thought, certain individuals are believed to be able to cause harm or misfortune to another person merely by looking at them.⁹ Symptoms of the evil eye may include lethargy, fever, vomiting, headache, dizziness and paralysis of limbs. The effects of the evil eye are known to be sudden but of temporary duration. Medicine is believed to be ineffective in offsetting the evil eye. The evil eye can be transferred intentionally or unintentionally.¹⁰ The evil eye seethes into cultural notions of the eyes as disclosing one’s inner nature. Much of Muslim concern with the eyes probably derives from their ambiguous dimensions; both as repositories of unmitigated emotion and objects of beauty.¹¹ Such beliefs concerning the power of the eye are mirrored in various folklore stories concerning the wrathful power of the eyes of various Muslim saints: Ali Ahmad Sabir (1199-1297) the famous disciple Fakruddin Baba Ganj Shakar (the spiritual teacher

⁸ This aspect is discussed in Chapter Eight.

⁹ See “*The Evil Eye: A Casebook*” (1992), edited by Alan Dundes, which contains several anthropological studies of the evil eye in various cultures.

¹⁰ See also Stein (1992); Hardie (1992); Donaldson (1992) and Dundes (1992) on the evil eye.

¹¹ According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet was a believer of the evil eye. In one of the traditions, Asma’ bint ‘Uwais said, “O Prophet, the family of Ja’far are affected by the baneful influences of an evil eye. May I use spells for them or not? The Prophet said, “Yes, for if there were anything in the world which would overcome fate, it would be an evil eye” (Hughes 1988:112). *Faqirs* construct various talismans against the evil eye. A common amulet used by people to prevent the effects of the evil eye is the hand of Fatima, known as the “*panch biran*”. For a detailed discussion of the evil eye throughout the world see Gonzales-Whippler (1993).

of Nizamuddin Auliya), and Shah Mardari.¹² For instance, the eyes of Shah Madari were reputed to be so powerful that they were always veiled. Similarly, no person could look directly at the eyes of Ali Ahmad Sabir without dying.¹³ Some kinds of evil spirit beings are also believed to have the power to strike down a person by merely looking at them.

Jhapta is another kind of *asar* that relates to the psychic contamination of food by evil spirit beings. Muslim tradition emphasises the sharing of food with others. The concern with commensality is not only stipulated in the Prophetic traditions (*sunna*), but is also reinforced by the popular Muslim and Hindu practice of giving food to the poor (*langar*) observed at major Muslim shrines and temples. Many *faqirs* like to break from their long vigils of prayer and chanting by eating in company. This sense of commensality is further reinforced by the Muslim practice of eating food from the same bowl. Notwithstanding its commensal aspect, the practice of eating with others also has a prophylactic function, since *faqirs* believe that it prevents evil spirit beings from targeting a single person. *Faqirs* also point out that evil spirit beings are attracted to some foods more than others. Both good and evil spirit beings are primarily attracted to “*masaledar khana*” (spicy food). The reason given to me for spirit beings’ attraction to spicy food was that they are unable to ingest it. The ability for human beings to eat those foods which spirit beings relish may be cause for spirit beings to harm them. Consequently, *faqirs* and other Muslims may be mindful of eating spicy food in the company of others, never alone. I am reminded here of Jackson’s notion of ghosts in Australian Aboriginal society as hounding the living due to their “isolation and ostracism” from the lifeworld (Jackson 1998:161). Similarly, this sense of exclusion from the human sphere is intimated in such beliefs. Such beliefs also highlight the ambiguous nature of spirit beings as spirit beings are attracted to foods that are inedible or edible to human beings. Among the types of spicy food that can be effected are:

- 1) *Aam ka asar*
- 2) *Biryani ka asar*

¹² A well known Muslim saint whose shrine is located at Makanpur, India. Shah Madar had travelled to Makanpur via Ajmer and Kanpur in 1485. According to one legend, Shah Madar was instructed by the spirits of the Prophet Muhammad and Ali in the esoteric and exoteric knowledge contained in the following twelve heavenly books: *Torah, Zabur, Injil, Furqan, Dashari, Bakhuri, Jaburi, Waliyan, Mir'at, A'iu'rab, Sirr-I-Majir*, and the *Mazhar-I-Alif* (Rastogi 1982:49-51).

¹³ The wrathful power of Ali Ahmad Sabir has already been discussed in Chapter Four.

- 3) *Zarde ka asar*
- 4) *Khir ka asar*
- 5) *Burfi ka asar*

Faqirs claim that white or yellow sweet foods are also susceptible to *jhapta* since they are more conspicuous during the night than visually darker foods. As night approaches *basti* locals cover food that shall be consumed the next day. Food that has been left out in the open may also be affected with *asar*. These foods include:

- 1) *yellow or light coloured fruits i.e. mango*
- 2) *White khir — white rice and milk mixed with dried fruits.*
- 3) *Zarda — yellow rice mixed with dried fruits and sugar.*
- 4) *White burfi — white sweet made from milk and sugar.*

Faqirs claim that both good and evil spirit beings are attracted to sweet foods. I remember in one exorcism ritual which I attended the exorcist (*amal*) had an array of sweet foods, that is, mangoes, bananas, melons, grapes and sweets displayed before the patient. Sweet offerings are often employed by *faqirs* during exorcism rituals as a means of appeasing the spirit beings.¹⁴ The use of fruit and sweets here is indicative of the various types of ploys which *faqirs* employ during exorcist rituals in order to entice the host spirit being out of the patient. As I will explain later, a *faqir's* use of subterfuge is also symbolically depicted in *puleeta*. Alternately, meat should be *halal* (lawful food); the animal's carcass must be completely drained of any traces of flowing blood, which *faqirs* refer to as "bad blood" as it can attract the attentions of evil spirit beings. *Faqirs* and other Muslims believe that evil spirit beings can inhabit unlawful meat and can enter the bodies of those who ingest it. While evil spirit beings' fondness for blood highlights their state "otherness" such conceptions also denote *faqirs'* ambiguity of spirit beings. For instance, I was told by *faqirs* that both good and evil *jinn* ate animal bones and other animal wastes which were not allowed to be consumed by people. This blurring between different food categories encapsulates the tensions in humanising spirit beings while at the same time highlighting their state of "otherness" from human beings.

While the various types of *aseb* and *asrat* are central to *faqirs'* understandings of spiritual illnesses and their cause, it is spirit possession which poses the greatest fear. In Muslim lore, spirit possession is referred to as either "*asre jinn*" or "*sawar hona*" (literally, "riding the person"). The second term is linked to notions of the victim's loss of personal autonomy and the spirit's authority. As I have discussed at some length in Chapter Four, *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' concern over the potential of boundary crossing by various spirit beings is socially conveyed via various prophylactic measures: These include the wearing of talismans, either on one's person or located in houses (See figure 7.1), regular prayer and ablution which is believed to maintain a state of physical and spiritual purity, and keeping the household clean, especially toilets and bathing areas where dirt and human excrement can accumulate. *Faqirs* claim that evil spirit beings are especially partial to any kind of human by-products, particularly faeces, urine and menstrual blood, and is probably be linked to their belief that the *nafs* (animal self, satanic aspect in humans) resides in the bowel and uro-genital regions of the human body. This notion is also reaffirmed by the belief that evil spirit beings can enter the human body via the anus.¹⁵ Other ways of controlling the threat of boundary crossing by evil spirit beings is by burning incense in the form of *luban* which is believed to cleanse the air from "bad air"; keeping away from places which are potential sites for evil spirit beings, these include dark or uninhabited sites and cemeteries; refraining from going outside after sunset; or by keeping oil lamps alight inside the home during the night.

Spirit possession is not only striking due to its prevalence in Muslim society, but also because of its highly histrionic quality in victims which fascinates and fills observers with fear and awe. My own encounters with victims of spirit possession at the Nizamuddin shrine no less impressed me for their experiential furore of movement and speech that vehemently expressed their internal crisis. My experiences here find their homologue in Lewis's claim that many anthropologists on spirit possession "have been equally fascinated by its richly dramatic elements" (1971:26), a view supported by Crapanzano who suggests that the fascination of spirit possession for westerners derives from either "a revival of repressed infantile complexes"... "a reconfirmation of primitive beliefs", or

¹⁴ See also Lambek (1981:37) on Mayotte conceptions of *patros* spirits and their liking for sugar.

¹⁵ One *faqir* told me that evil *jinn* could be caught by reciting a certain chant while defecating. This technique was to continue for forty days.

Figure 7.1

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ط ا ا ه ه # ا ا ا ا ا ا ا ا ا ا
 وَإِن يَّكَارِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَيُزْلِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَارِهِمْ لَمَّا سَأَلَهُمُ الْبُزْجُ وَالذِّكْرُ
 وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُ لَمَجْنُونٌ ط وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ ط شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ
 لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقَدِيمُ الْقَائِمُ بِالْقِسْطِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ
 الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ط إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ ط أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ
 هَمَزَاتِ الشَّيَاطِينِ وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ رَبِّ أَنْ يَحْضُرُونِ ط أَعُوذُ بِكَلِمَاتِ
 اللَّهِ التَّامَّاتِ مِنْ شَرِّ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ وَهَامَّةٍ وَمِنْ شَرِّ كُلِّ عَيْنٍ لَأُتَمِّتَهُ
 تَعَصَّتْ بِحَصْنِ الْفِ الْفِ وَالْحَوْلُ وَالْقُوَّةُ الْإِلَهِيَّةُ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ ط
 بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَا يَضُرُّعُ اسْمُهُ شَيْئًا فِي الْأَرْضِ
 وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ط
 قَالَ اللَّهُ خَيْرٌ حَافِظًا وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ ط

٦	١	٨
٤	٥	٣
٢	٩	٢

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ط

هَذَا كِتَابٌ مِنْ مُحَمَّدٍ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ إِلَى مَنْ طَرَفَ
 الدَّارِ مِنَ الْعِمَارِ وَالزَّوَارِ وَالسَّائِحِينَ الْأَطَارِقِ يَطْرُقُ بِخَيْرِ أَرْحَمِ
 مَا بَعْدَ فَإِنَّ لَنَا وَلَكُمْ فِي الْحَقِّ سَعَةٌ فَإِنْ تَكُ عَاشِقًا مَوْلِعًا أَوْ
 فَاجِرًا مُقْتَبًا أَوْ رَاعِيًا حَقًّا مَبْطَلًا هَذَا كِتَابُ اللَّهِ يَنْطِقُ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَيْكُمْ
 بِالْحَقِّ أَنَا كُنَّا نَسْمَعُ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ط أتركوا صاحب كتابي هذا
 وَأَنْظِلِقُوا إِلَى عِبْدِهِ الْأَوْثَانِ وَالْأَصْنَامِ وَإِلَى مَنْ يَزْعُمُ أَنَّ مَعَ اللَّهِ
 إِلَهًا آخَرَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ط كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ ط لَهُ الْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ
 تُرْجَعُونَ ط يَقْلِبُونَ ط حَمَلًا لَا تُنْصَرُونَ ط حَمَلَسَقُ تَفَرَّقُ

٨	٦	٣	٢
٢	٣	٦	٨
٦	٨	٢	٣
٢	٢	٨	٦

أَعْدَاءُ اللَّهِ وَبَلَغَتْ حُجَّةُ
 اللَّهِ ط لَاحَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ
 الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ ط فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ
 اللَّهُ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ط

as the allure of Satanic influences (1977:4).¹⁶ Notwithstanding the psychoanalytical import of Crapanzano's speculations, *faqirs'* understandings of spirit possession cannot be constrained to this kind of western reductionism. *Faqirs'* conceptions about spirit possession are seemingly posited on countervailing those spiritual forces that diminish existential control. Apart from creating mental and physical disturbances to victims, evil spirit beings are tied to notions of illicit and uncontrolled sexuality and lewdness.¹⁷ Evil spirit beings include *chalawa* and *chinal*. Many spirit beings belonging this genre are female, an aspect, which to some degree is in consonance with Muslim perceptions of women as threatening the moral order.

While spirit possession can affect anyone it is usually women who are afflicted. *Faqirs* attribute this phenomenon to the "inherent" moral impurity of women and their physical and emotional weakness. Such conceptions are often rationalised in terms of the spirit attracting qualities of women's menstrual blood, an aspect which not only makes women more susceptible to spirit attack, but also causes some degree of ambiguity on the part of *faqirs* who do not know when women are menstruating. *Faqirs* may even avoid treating women during their menses as women are considered "dirty" during this time and will compromise healing. A woman's state of impurity is compounded by her exclusion from the sacred sphere. A menstruating woman is forbidden from reading the Quran, or from entering a mosque or a Muslim shrine. She is, thus, temporarily barred from the protective properties assigned to both sacred scripture and Muslim sacred space.

Lewis (1971) gives a functionalist explanation for the tendency of more women succumbing to spirit possession than men, by explaining that it largely reflects women's marginal positions in societies where " 'possession cults' are 'peripheral' to the 'central morality system' " (Lambek 1981:60).¹⁸ While Lewis' analysis is pertinent to the Muslim context, since Muslim women in general are manifestly "peripheral" to men in many areas of religious and social life, I would also argue along with Lambek who says

¹⁶ Western interest in spirit possession is reflected in the large body of work done in this area by anthropologists during the last four decades: Jeanmaire (1951); Belo (1960); Sargant 1964, 1974; Oesterreich 1966; Firth 1967; Lewis 1966, 1971; Bourguignon 1967, 1973, 1976; Pressel 1974; Obeyeskere 1970 1981 and Kapferer 1979, 1983, 1997.

¹⁷ A taxonomy of various spirit beings is provided in Appendix V.

that spirit possession in women from Muslim societies may serve “to counter feelings and experiences of deprivation” (1981:60).

I remember in one case study, a young woman was brought by her husband and mother-in-law to Baba Ali. They told him that the woman had been behaving strangely for at a year, and claimed that she was possessed by a *jinn*. They also stated that around midnight every evening she would cook food, and was found sleeping next to it each morning. When the woman presented her side of the story to Baba Ali, a history of abuse by her husband and mother-in-law was revealed. She claimed that both parties had continually berated her over a long period, creating in her feelings of despair and isolation. She was at a loss over her predicament. In my interpretation her case highlighted feelings of personal loss of self worth, dignity, and identity. While Lambek criticises Lewis for viewing spirit possession “in terms of calculations of individual advantage” (Lambek 1981:60), it is simplistic to focus on an analysis of spirit possession as simply being fakery or as Prince notes as permitting “a degree of elbow room for those encased in cultural straitjackets” (1977 XII). Such notions tend to ignore spirit possession as a means of restoring an individual’s sense of existential control. For as Jackson argues, “disease is never simply a loss or impairment of function” (1998:17). Sacks also observes that disease is “always a reaction, on the part of the affected organism or individual, to restore, to compensate for and to preserve its identity” (1986:4). The need to recover one’s sense of personal integrity and re-empowerment is illustrated by a certain “possessed” woman who lived in the *basti*. She usually roamed around the *basti* bare top, sometimes lifting her skirt and exposing her vagina to passersby. Some *basti* locals believed that the old woman had a host spirit being inside her which gave her prophetic powers. People would gather around her, asking her questions ranging from potential spouses to winning lottery tickets. In this way, it may be suggested that the woman’s apparent spiritual affliction served as a means of existential recovery.

Interestingly, Muslim perceptions of womanhood share a consonance with the *jinn*. Both are understood as being inherently carnal and inferior to men in relation to their reasoning

¹⁸ “*Jinn* possessed” people at the Nizamuddin shrine often engage in behaviours that contravene socially accepted mores. Therefore, from a functionalist perspective, *jinn* possession may serve an important social

capacities. Like the *jinn*, a woman's "irrationality" is attributed to her emotional nature. The supposed discrepant nature of women and *jinn* is a source of ambivalence for Muslims males in general. This analogy is further expressed in the manner in which women and *jinn* are subjected to the spatial peripheries of social life, reaffirming their opposition to the social world, for example, the maintenance of segregation (*pardah*), prohibition of women from entering the inner chambers of many Muslim shrines.¹⁹ The notion of women's inherent carnality is especially expressed during spirit possession. A common feature of many female victims of spirit possession at the Nizamuddin shrine is their highly provocative actions, which are interpreted by *faqirs* as being indicative of their subordination to a host spirit being. These include hip thrusting, uncovering their head and other areas of the body, disheveling their hair, screaming, singing, shouting of obscene expletives, laughing, and heavy breathing.

One poignant example of this phenomenon occurred outside the shrine of Amir Khosrau on a Thursday evening. A middle-aged woman was sitting next to her thirteen year old daughter. The woman's family lived nearby the Jama mosque, in old Delhi, along with her two other daughters. The woman told me that her daughter had been possessed by two ghosts (*bhut*). Consequently, the girl was unable to attend school. The woman also stated that her husband's father had married a second wife, and that she had committed sorcery on the girl. The girl's behaviour was unstable, at times sitting silently while staring at people, while at other times lying down. Similarly, she fluctuated between covering and uncovering her hair. At one stage, the mother attempted to take the girl's head shawl (*dupatta*). The girl immediately began to shout at her mother. When the mother refused to give back the girl's head shawl, the girl shouted "You sister fucker! Fuck! Give it back to me". She repeated this. A person who was inside the shrine could be heard asking another person who the girl was. The girl who overheard this exclaimed, "It is me!" Her voice then became hoarse and looked inside at the person, yelling "I'm going to finish all of you, do you hear me. I'll cut you all up". After this the girl was quiet.

function in delineating the boundaries between permissible and proscribed behaviours (Douglas 1970:xxvi-xxx).

¹⁹ This includes the majority of the famous *Chisti* shrines such as the shrines of Nizamuddin Auliya, Amir Khosrau, Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Nasiruddin Chiragh Delhi, and many others.

The shifting nature of this performance, as well as other “spirit possessed women” at the Nizamuddin shrine, comes close to expressing what Jackson calls ‘*mutatis mutandis*’ — the defining of inter-subjective boundaries through the act of transgressing them (Jackson 1998:18). Jackson goes on to suggest that “any such transgression precipitates a crisis of control” (1998:18).²⁰ In his book *Paths Toward a Clearing* (1989), Michael Jackson notes that personal crisis invariably immerses the individual in a “double bind” — “an unbearable conflict between two ideas”, or “being pulled or tugged in two directions” (Jackson 1989:149). If we relate this notion of the “double bind” to Muslim spirit possession, it may be suggested that this is expressed between the victim’s personal struggle to assume control over “his or her particular world and the world considered not-self or other” (Jackson 1998:18).

I have so far discussed the nature of spirit possession as a spiritual affliction, and some of its moral resonances for *faqirs* and *basti* locals. However, it is through the process of diagnosis that spirit possession is either established or not. It is at this stage that a *faqir*’s curative craft is tested. Diagnosis of spiritually illnesses can be awkward since types of *aseb* and *asrat* share one or more similar symptoms. These include dizziness, sore shoulders, vomiting, and lethargy. I do not intend discuss the symptomatology of these various spiritual malaise any further here since I want to focus on spirit possession.

When a patient is brought to a *faqir* who is presumed to be “possessed” by one or more spirit beings, he examines the patient for specific symptoms which confirm the prognosis. On this note, victims of spirit possession are usually brought to a *faqir* by a family member. In the case where the victim is a woman, she is always accompanied by a male family member. As one *faqir* told me, this is to prevent the potential of gossip. Although *faqirs* are generally respected by *basti* locals and devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine, they are not precluded from people’s inquisitiveness or hearsay. As in other types of spiritual illness *faqirs* believe that spirit possession discloses an array of visible symptoms in the patient. Although each *faqir* possesses his own diagnostic repertoire for examining spirit possession, I found points of similarity in their approaches. These include looking for

²⁰ Wagner (1972), claims that the manifestation of behaviours among victims of spirit possession are metaphorical. As Crapanzano states, “In projection, the other is the vehicle for the qualities, feelings, and desires — the tenor of the metaphor, in I. A. Richard’s terms (1936) — that are within the self” (1977:12).

incoherent behaviour such as volatile mood swings, snarling and baring teeth, loud laughter and obscene language.

Attention is also given to the movement of the patient's eyes. For instance, I was told that rolling eyes often indicated spirit possession. Complaints of sore shoulders or the feeling of pressure along the upper back and shoulder regions, in combination with the afore-mentioned symptoms, also pointed to spirit possession. The process of questioning also seeks to discover whether the patient had passed by a cemetery, forest, river or an uninhabited building after sunset, or was wearing perfume (in the case of a female patient) when passing these places.

Note here the “metaphorical instrumentality” of *faqirs'* therapy — “the instrumental possibilities of metaphor” in the establishment of causation (Jackson 1989:149).²¹ Jackson's notion is pertinent here to *faqirs'* understandings of spiritual illness due to the way which metaphors correlate with “patterns of body use and interaction” (Jackson 1989:145). Among Muslims, for example, perfume is used as a body adornment. *Faqirs* may also use perfume on behalf of a patient when making a spell of attraction. In other words, perfume is used to promote an amorous response in the targeted person.

Once spirit possession has been confirmed a *faqir* will quickly arrange for an exorcism ritual (*dawut*) to be performed on the patient. Exorcism rituals may either be performed at Muslim shrines such as the Nizamuddin shrine, which is a popular site for exorcist rituals, or in the private spaces of people's homes. *Faqirs* are often flexible in this matter and are not dependent upon performing exorcism rituals in spiritual places. In the event of spirit possession a *faqir* may create a *puleeta*. *Faqirs* believe that the use of *puleeta* for specific patients assists in the efficacy of the exorcism ritual. I must stress here that *puleeta* are not a mandatory part of exorcism rituals but are one of several techniques that may be employed by *faqirs* in treating their patients. The decision to create and use a *puleeta* depends on whether the *faqir* believes it to be necessary for the patient.

In constructing a *puleeta* a *faqir* engages in a period of isolation and prayer. The act of making *puleeta* is a religious act and requires the *faqir* to observe ritual purity — the state

²¹ For Jackson, “metaphors are means of doing things and not merely ways of saying things” (1989:149).

of *wuzu* (ritual ablution) throughout its construction. *Puleeta* are usually written on a piece of paper with pencil while the *faqir* is sitting on the ground.²²

Puleeta are visible testaments of a *faqir's* religious imagination, drawing from pan Islamic and Muslim cosmologies, as well as from his own conceptions of the spirit world. Luhrmann's analysis of the way in which western magicians use symbols (1989) is relevant to the symbolic analysis of *puleeta*, since she argues that symbolic use provides a way towards drawing connections between various religious and mystical symbologies and personal experience. According to Luhrmann, magicians' strive towards gaining personal mastery over mystical symbols as a means of becoming efficacious in their "magical" craft (1989:236).²³ Similarly, *faqirs'* use of symbols in *puleeta* are about unleashing their mystical potencies, and drawing "interconnections between them" in order to enhance the process of spiritual transference from *faqir* to patient, an aspect which is given further analysis later on.²⁴ It suffices to state here that a *puleeta's* symbolic configurations reify a *faqir's* creative involvement with symbols. Each *puleeta* discloses a mytho-poetic landscape consisting of various spirit beings, numbers, cryptic symbols, and sacred script, which come close to expressing Luhrmann's notion of "phenomenological immediacy" (Luhrmann 1989:238). In other words, the symbolic organisation of *puleeta* expresses the idea of a mystical language that demarcates from ordinary language. For instance, while *puleeta* usually employ a combination of Farsi (Persian), and Arabic languages, they often contain idiosyncratic language, understood only to the *faqir*, thereby, reinforcing their cryptic nature. Moreover, the symbolic organisation of *puleeta* indicate a high degree of knowledge of religious and mystical symbols, their meanings, and their various potentialities, or what Jackson would call an "existential sense of empowerment"; a concern to negotiate with or to control those forces or powers that exist beyond the self, and which are perceived to threaten human

²² Unfortunately, because the creation of *puleeta* demand that a *faqir* be in a state of seclusion, I was unable to examine the manner in which *puleeta* are constructed, and the period of time a *puleeta* takes to be produced.

²³ Luhrmann and Fortune note that the symbol system of western magicians is a kind of algebra that enables the participant to unlock the mysteries of their hidden powers (Luhrmann 189:236; Fortune 1935:15).

²⁴ This theme of self mastery via an individual's creative involvement with symbols is emulated by Eliade who declares that religious symbols allow an individual to explore those cosmic processes which form "an integral part of the World", such as life, death, and regeneration, in terms of their own existence (1965:204). Tillich also notes that the power of religious symbols may be attributed to their ability to "open up levels of reality which otherwise are closed, and to open up levels of the human mind" (1955:109).

existence (Jackson 1998:19). Implicit in a *puleeta's* various symbolisms is a *faqir's* concern to stamp his authority over the host spirit being.

While most *puleeta* convey similarities in visual motifs, for example, use of Quranic script, names of Allah and saints, talismans, cryptic letters, and numbers, the stylistic representations of these motifs show some variation between *faqirs*. A *puleeta* is replete with all kinds of symbolic imagery connecting one or several levels of symbolism. *Faqirs* become proficient in re-ordering and inter-connecting the various levels of meaning, sometimes creating new meanings from these symbolisms, which reflect their own conception of the spirit world.²⁵ The variation of motifs is also evident in different *puleeta* created by a *faqir*. Even here, no *puleeta* are alike. The originality of *puleeta* underscores the distinct nature of spirit possession. While spirit possession is considered by *faqirs* and other Muslims as a pervasive phenomenon, the manner of a patient's spirit possession is identified as being unique. *Faqir's* are aware that each patient's spirit possession encompasses an inimitable set of circumstances and life events which have led to its cause.

Similarly, differences between patients' behavioural patterns during spirit possession are attributed as reflecting the nature of the host spirit being. Like people, spirit beings are considered by *faqirs* as possessing individual personalities and proclivities, making the construction of *puleeta* a difficult exercise.

The ideology of *puleeta* is based on the premise that certain mystical actions can influence and effect subjective and inter-subjective domains of life, in consonance with Jackson's notion of "metaphorical correspondences" (Jackson 1998:174), and accurately reflects the extent to which parallelisms shape a *faqir's* mystical complex. Seemingly, the rudiments of a *faqir's* entire mystical and curative crafts are appropriated to a greater or lesser extent via metaphoric correspondences. From the use of talismans to avert danger or to promote a certain effect or desire, to the use of specific spells and prayers in order to capture spirit beings, to divination methods, all are rooted in metaphoric understandings. Even *faqirs'* conceptions and employment of the Divine Attributes

²⁵ Generally speaking, a *puleeta's* visual variations concur with Layton's argument that artists in small scale societies are allowed a greater freedom to "indulge in free variations...from within a range of motifs;" from a "common stock repertoire of cultural characteristics" (Layton 1991:201).

(*asmā-ul-husna*) (see Chapter Three) during therapy underscores this analogic resolve. A patient with poor sight may be given the Divine Attribute *Al-Basir* (The All-Seeing), to recite a specific number of times, or *Ar-Razzaq* (The Provider) where the patient is in physical want, and so on.

The belief that the recitation of a specific Divine Attribute has a corresponding effect on an individual's psycho-physical dimensions and life circumstances encapsulates the Muslim notion that certain words embody sacred power, and are believed by *faqirs* as "animate and living" mysteries (Abram 1997:245).²⁶ The incarnate quality of speech is ostensibly transferred to the written word and other symbols, which attempt to evoke the assistance of various sacred beings, that is, Allah, the prophets, the angels, the saints, and pious *jinn*.

The fundamental aims of a *puleeta's* symbolic motifs are in consolidating a *faqir's* control over the host spirit being, and the restoration of a patient's psycho-physical state. Notwithstanding their symbolic complexity, most *puleeta* do not exceed twenty centimetres (eight inches) in length, by twenty centimetres in width.²⁷ With the completion of a *puleeta*, a *faqir* begins to prepare for the exorcism ritual. From my experience, the performative aspects of exorcism rituals show a marked variation between *faqirs*. Some *faqirs* may use various items such as fruits, sweets and incense, fragrant oils and rose water, which are used to entice the host spirit being out of the patient. A *faqir* will usually order the patient's relative to buy the desired items to be used in the exorcist ritual. Other *faqirs* limit or avoid the use of such items, preferring to tackle the presiding spirit with their own devices. Such contrasts in styles are also evident in relation to their treatment of the patient. While some *faqirs* avoid physically touching their patients during the exorcism ritual, other *faqirs* are known for their more truculent repertoire including grabbing their patients by the hair, and threatening them with fire.

²⁶ This notion was discussed in detail in Chapter Three in relation to *faqirs'* practice of mystical chanting (*wazifa*).

²⁷ Levi-Strauss notes that this tendency to miniaturise is motivated by a desire to make an object less formidable, therefore, making it easier to bring under control (Levi-Strauss 1976:23; Jackson 1998:31). As Levi-Strauss states, "Reduction in scale reverses this situation...By being quantitatively diminished, it seems to us qualitatively simplified (1976:23). Although I was unable to ascertain whether a *puleeta's* exiguous dimensions corresponds with Levi-Strauss's concept, it is a fascinating thought which deserves analysis.

During exorcism rituals *faqirs* usually employ one or more methods, also found in *puleeta*, for engaging with the host spirit being. These include elements of subterfuge, trickery, threat, confusion, use of spells, burning of incense, recitations sacred prayers and invoking Allah, angels and the saints. In this way, a *faqir's* methods employed in exorcism rituals share a consonance with a *puleeta's* symbolic motifs. *Puleeta* are usually employed at the start of an exorcism ritual. This entails the *puleeta* being rolled up and placed at the end of lamp, where it is then set alight. The patient is then asked by the *faqir* to breathe in the smoke. *Faqirs* consider the burning of the *puleeta* as being a vital part in the *puleeta's* spiritual transference from *faqir* to patient. After the patient has breathed in the smoke the *faqir* begins his exorcism ritual. As earlier stated, the stylistic manner of exorcist rituals vary between *faqirs* since there are no stipulated rules a *faqir* must follow. This degree of stylistic variation may also be evident in exorcist rituals performed by the same *faqir* on different patients. Again, such differences in a *faqir's* rendition of exorcist rituals between patients is largely influenced by his sensibilities — in his “inner feelings”, whether this entails the employment of a *puleeta* or not, or the use of any one or more techniques from his mystical arsenal in a particular sequence or manner. In some ways, exorcism rituals may be considered as incorporating elements of “diagnostic procedures” which require a *faqir's* expertise about the nature of spiritual afflictions and their concomitant symptoms. Although there are stylistic dissimilarities between *faqirs'* exorcism rituals, all exorcism rituals which I had attended integrated, to a greater or lesser degree, some of the methods noted earlier, such as invocation of Allah and the saints, use of sacred prayers or spells, gestures of authority, subterfuge, confusion, and threat. Exorcism rituals may last several hours, or may take several days. The duration of time for an exorcism ritual to be completed depends on whether a *faqir* thinks that he has made an initial breakthrough into the patient's affliction, which will result in their cure, whether complete or partial. A successful recovery may be indicated by a patient claiming to feel a sense of lightness around their shoulders. A patient may also claim to have a greater sense of well-being.

Before I begin my symbolic analysis of *puleeta*, I would like to discuss two exorcism rituals performed by different exorcists (*amal*). I had attended the first exorcism ritual. The second exorcism ritual is a transcription of Baba Ali's account of an exorcism ritual

which he allegedly performed. I have included it here since it provides an invaluable insight into Baba Ali's exorcism methods. Both exorcism rituals reveal various symbolic themes and elements found in *puleeta*, that is, subterfuge, confusion, invoking sacred authority, and intimidation are contextualised in the ritual domain. At the same time, I want to alert the reader to the different ways these themes are ritually incorporated and performed by different exorcists in exorcism rituals. I contend that the following exorcism rituals operate on two levels; firstly, the exorcist uses various techniques in his mystical repertoire in order to diminish the host spirit being's psycho-physical control over the patient, while at the same time endeavouring towards effecting a spiritual breakthrough in the patient's malaise. These exorcism rituals will also set the trajectory for exploring the various symbolic themes of *puleeta*. While *puleeta* are usually employed at the beginning of exorcism rituals, their use is not a mandatory part of these rituals. Its deployment is dependent on whether the *faqir* feels the need to employ one for a specific patient

Exorcism ritual one

The first exorcism ritual discussed here occurred on April 18th, 1995, and was performed in a cell within the Nizamuddin shrine complex, nearby to the Nizamuddin shrine. The exorcist who performed the exorcism ritual was in his forties. The ritual was being conducted at his cell (*hujra*). A young Muslim woman was sitting in front of a burning oil lamp, and staring at its flame.²⁸ Her head was covered. Her father who was also in attendance, sat a few metres behind her. Various kinds of fruit, for example, melon, oranges, grapes, bananas, and sweets, were placed between her and the oil lamp. The exorcist was sitting on her right side. He started to chant, after which he blew on her. He then began to wave his right forefinger in the air seven times in an anti-clockwise direction. After this, he waved his fore-finger at her in an admonishing gesture several times. The exorcist then began to chant the following line, repeatedly: "*Bahaq Sulayman, Bahaq Dawud, Bahaq Maryam*". ("In the name of Solomon, In the name of David, In the name of Mary".) He then recited *Hazrat Shuria* (a saint's name) seven times, and promptly asked the woman if she could see anything in the flame. She said that she could not see anything. The exorcist kept quiet for some time while the woman stared at the

flame. After a while, the whole ritual process was repeated. At the end of the cycle the exorcist sprinkled some “blessed water” onto the flame and on the woman. Throughout the exorcism ritual the woman appeared to be conscious.

The exorcist then placed his right fore-finger at the bottom of the woman’s spine and moved it slowly upwards along her back. This was performed three times. This was the only time during the exorcism ritual where physical contact was made between the exorcist and the woman. Afterwards, it was pointed out to me, that this action assisted in “raising” the *jinn* out of the woman. After this, the woman continued staring at the flame for approximately ten to fifteen minutes. She was asked by the exorcist whether she felt unusual in any way. “No!” she replied. The exorcist began another ritual cycle, beginning with sprinkling water over the flame and the woman. After several more cycles the woman started to speak. She said that an unknown woman had sent a *jinn* to possess her. The exorcist then told the host spirit being to leave the woman and not return. There was a brief period of silence, after which the exorcist again repeated, “*Hazrat Shuria*”. The woman then said, “I will go if you give me a price”. The exorcist replied, “If I give you what you want, will you leave?” The woman agreed. He answered, “What do you want?” but she remained silent. The exorcist repeated the question, but she still did not reply. The exorcist told the woman that the host spirit being would leave soon because it was confused and didn’t know what to do, as denoted by its refusal to answer. He then turned towards the woman’s father and told him to take her to the perform *ziarat* (circumambulation of the Nizamuddin shrine), and to offer sweets to the poor there. The exorcist also instructed the father to bring his daughter back to see him the next day. He then told the woman that upon returning to her house she should bathe and recite the Quranic Chapter *Yasin* followed by the *darood sharif* over some water and sprinkle some of it on her forehead

Exorcism ritual two

A Muslim man came to see me one day. He was deeply concerned over his daughter’s welfare. He said that his daughter’s name was Yasmine and she was twenty-one years of age. He believed that she was possessed by a *jinn*. He said that the *jinn* would come to

²⁸ Unfortunately, I had missed the beginning of this exorcism ritual, so I could not ascertain whether a *puleeta* had been initiated. However, as the young woman was staring at the lamp’s flame, I assume that a

her room after every sunset and possess her. "When the *jinn* comes she closes the doors inside the house and begins to shout," he told me. He was also concerned that his neighbours who had heard his daughter's shouting would find out about her malady. He didn't want them to know. He implored me to help his daughter. That night, I went to his house. The girl had been locked up in her bedroom. The father immediately took me to the girl's room. The door had been locked from the inside. The girl was shouting "Tell him to go away, he will burn me. He will burn me. Go away!" I told the girl that if she did not unlock the door that he would break it down. Soon after the door was unlocked. I then entered. She was tallish, of slender build. Her long dishevelled hair covered her face. She was naked. I told the mother to cover the girl. The mother got a shawl and covered her body with it. The girl went to the corner of the room and huddled herself there. Although frightened, she did not become hysterical. Her parents were standing behind me. I told the mother to light up some incense in the room in order to assist in driving the *jinn* out of the girl. I approached her and took out a small knife from my shirt pocket and cut a circle on the floor around myself. This is called "*hissar*".²⁹ Without leaving the circle, I placed my right hand on her head. Keeping it there I recited aloud the *darood sharif*. The parents looked on. I quietly prayed. The girl was still sitting in the corner and seemed calm. After I had repeated reciting the *darood sharif*, her body began to shake intermittently. She then fell to the ground. Her parents responded with a loud cry. I admonished them to be quiet and that I had everything under control. I continued praying over her. After a couple of minutes she sat up. I then instructed the mother to give the girl a bath since she was physically unclean.

After several minutes the mother returned with the girl. She was wearing clean clothes. She was made to sit in front of me. I looked at her intensely. After finishing the second round of chanting I drew three vertical lines with my right hand over her accompanied by three horizontal lines.³⁰ I then clenched my right hand into a fist and placed it under my right foot. I then blew on her several times.³¹ After doing this I started to chant "*Allahu*" (God) out aloud. I chanted this for nearly half an hour. After this, I started to pray the *darood sharif* for a third time, along with other prayers. I continued praying for a long

puleeta had been employed. My assumption was further reaffirmed by the exorcist's attentiveness to the flame, for example, the sprinkling of blessed water on the flame.

²⁹ This parallels the magic circle of western magicians. In this instance, it was employed as a field of protection against the host spirit being.

³⁰ I am unable to give the meaning of these actions here since it is secret knowledge.

time, for more than an hour, it may have been two hours. It was a long time. The girl began to shake. I grabbed her by the hair with both hands. She shouted, "Leave me! He will burn me!" She again was quiet. I was becoming tired. I instructed the mother to bring the girl's old clothes to me. I showed the clothes to the girl saying, "I'm going to take these old clothes and throw them in the river since they may be affected by the *jinnat*". I then took out a small bottle from my waist-coat and said to her that the *jinn* had been captured in it. "Would you like to keep the bottled *jinn*", I asked her. "No! Take it away", she responded fearfully. Her parents gave me some tea and biscuits and thanked me. I told them that the girl would be fine from now onwards. I then left, and headed towards the Jamuna river.³² When I reached there I threw the girl's clothes and the bottle in the river, and shouted to the *jinn*, "Now go away and don't trouble people anymore".

These exorcism rituals enable the reader to gain an insight into the relationship between symbolic actions and mystical mastery. In each case the exorcist's actions provide the vital connection for exploiting the "metaphorical links" (Jackson 1998:174) between self and other. An implicit element in both exorcism rituals is the interminable struggle between self and other — between the "contending and converging intentionalities" which assist in defining the human condition (Jackson 1998:192). As Jackson claims, this struggle "consists in unending dialogue, negotiation, exchange and bargain" (1998:192). We see this kind of negotiative dialogue, in the first exorcism ritual, where the exorcist advises the woman to perform circumambulation and offer sweets to the poor. In the second exorcism ritual this kind of negotiative dialogue is conveyed when Baba Ali claims to the girl that he had captured the *jinn* in the bottle. In both instances, the strategies employed by the exorcists constituted ways for their patients to retrieve some sense of ontological security.

A common feature to both exorcism rituals is the reciting of saints' names as a means of invoking their authority in establishing control over the host spirit being. In the next section, I will examine how this sense of symbolic mastery and authority is conveyed by *puleetas*' symbolic motifs that invoke the power and authority of the sacred other.

³¹ This action implies the holding and controlling of spiritual power.

³² The Jamuna river separates from the Ganges river to the north of India, and passes through Delhi.

Symbolism of *puleeta*: Invoking the sacred

Many *puleeta* are anthropomorphic in their design, mirroring the human form, in full or in part, and follow a tri-partite division of head, torso, and legs.³³ According to *faqirs*, the anthropomorphic design of *puleeta* is believed to be a representation of the patient and is invested with those ideas and qualities which a *faqir* intends to spiritually transfer to the patient. In *faqirs'* therapeutic system, the human body is conceived as a membranous structure for the flow of various psycho-physical forces. The Muslim penchant for incorporating various kinds of prophylactic amulets on the body and in the domestic domain reflects this notion that the body's boundaries are susceptible to psychic attack. *Faqirs'* explain that the human body conveys theomorphic dimensions, corresponding with traditional Sufi ideas that view the human body as a microcosm — a plenum composed of spirit and matter, or otherwise, a threshold (*barzakh*), conjoining the material (mineral, vegetable, animal) and celestial kingdoms.³⁴

Two principle ideas represented in the *puleeta* are sacred authority and power. These two principles are intrinsic to a majority of *puleeta*, and are depicted by a *puleeta's* various names and other symbolic motifs which are intended by the *faqir* to invoke the power of sacred beings as a means of contesting the host spirit being.³⁵ Central to all *puleeta* is the use of the Quran, whether in the form of sacred verses, names of prophets, angels, evil spirit beings, and other individuals, or numerals in the form of magical squares, which are the numerical correspondences of Quranic passages or names of Allah. The importance

³³ It can be suggested here that the exoteric form of the *puleeta* has probably been influenced to some extent by the Hindu concept of *purusa*, as it “incorporates both an anthropocentric microcosm (a world conceived in terms of a human body) and a cosmo-morphic man (the universe within the human body)” (Barkan 1975). For example, the spatial organisation of symbols within a stylised human shape is the basis of the Hindu temple (*mandir*) and talisman (*yantra*). *Faqirs* are apparently not averse to the inclusion of non-Muslim religious symbols in their mystical repertoire, a point that Khizer makes in his observance of some of the core practices of many Indian Sufi orders (1991:110). The fact that *puleeta* are seemingly indigenous to the Indian sub-continent, and are not found elsewhere in the Islamic world, supports my premise of their Indian underpinnings. I also argue, that, in contrary to the Islamic prohibition of visual images depicting the human form, Muslims have been influenced by the anthropomorphic elements of Hinduism. For example, at the *basti*, posters can be obtained of such entities as the *buraq*, a creature having a horse's body and a woman's head, that is believed by Muslims to have carried the Prophet Muhammad on the mystical journey — the *miraj*. In this poster, the image of the *buraq* is smiling at the onlooker in a similar manner as Hindu posters depicting smiling gods. Moreover, the stylised posters of famous *Chisti* shrines (Nizamuddin shrine, shrine of Baba Ganj Shakkar) seemingly parallel with “image customization” of Hindu based posters showing an assortment of Hindu deities (Pinney 1998:41).

³⁴ Nasr gives an erudite treatise on the Islamic concept of “Man is a symbol of Universal existence” (*al-insān ramz al-wujūd*) (1964:96).

³⁵ My definition of sacred beings includes Allah, the angels, the prophets, and the saints, either mentioned in the Quran, or a part of *faqirs'* and Muslim folklore.

of the Quran to the spiritual efficacy of *puleeta* cannot be over-emphasised. *Faqirs* believe that the Quran possesses Divine power and is central to their therapeutic model. The use of the Divine names, prayers, divination (*fāl*), “cutting the Quran” (*istikhāra*),³⁶ and writing out of talismans, all originate from the Quran.

Indeed, it is this configuration of Quranic symbols within *puleeta* which transmits the *faqir's* resolve, imbuing it with the authority of the Divine presence. The various symbolic methods in which *faqirs* attempt to evoke the sacred other in *puleeta* is a testament to the richness of their religious imagination and their capacity for creative expression. *Puleetas'* various linguistic borrowings and elaborations of verses and names drawn from the Quran, accompanied with idiosyncratic words and spells (*afsoon*), enable *faqirs* to create their own representation of sacred others. *Faqirs'* conceptions of sacred others are drawn from their religious imagination and mystical experiences with the spirit world. In this way, *puleeta* are idiosyncratic representations which are only limited by the imaginative power of the *faqir*. Each *puleeta* discloses a symbolic domain fecund with numerous linguistic possibilities. Luhrmann shows that,

Linguistic transformations grant an imaginative richness because they allow one to respond to words not for their factual content but for the imaginative possibilities that they offer. They are remarkable transformations, because they recreate a vivid let's pretend world which is neither purely fiction nor confused with a tables-and-chairs reality (Luhrmann 1989:220).

The invocation of sacred beings plays a vital part in a *puleeta's* spiritual efficacy, and informs us of the importance of sacred authority and assistance within the performance of exorcism rituals and represented by *puleetas'* symbolic motifs. As we saw in the previous exorcism rituals, the act of invoking the saints, either through the reciting of prayers or their names, featured in both of them. But why this concern with sacred authority and its inherent power. This can probably be understood in relation to *faqirs'* belief that sacred beings embody high spiritual authority and power over the material and spiritual domains. Moreover, such conceptions also derive from the belief of evil spirit beings pose a formidable threat and are difficult to control.

³⁶ This is where the Quran is used to “determine whether it is expedient to do a thing” (Donaldson 1937: 256).

Faqirs consider the nature of spirit possession to be a particularly insidious affliction resulting in the complete or partial dissolution of the patient's psyche. Having entered the patient the host spirit being's control over the patient increases over time. *Faqirs* point out while endowed with unusual power, evil spirit beings are apprehensive of all sacred beings. A *faqir's* concern with entreating the aid of sacred beings, is thus, a response to the intractable nature of the host spirit being. Exorcism rituals are difficult affairs often taxing the *faqir* both mentally and physically. A *faqir's* recourse in invoking the assistance of Allah, the angels, or the saints, both within a *puleeta's* symbolic domain, and during an exorcism ritual, is as much due to the exigent circumstances of spirit possession as it is to his acknowledgement of his mystical dependency on sacred others.

The invocation of spiritual authority and power is expressed in figure 7.2, by the line, "*Sulayman bin Dawud. Alaikum salam*" (Solomon, son of David. Upon both be peace), located at the head region of the *puleeta*.³⁷ The inclusion of *Sulayman* (Solomon) is found in most *puleeta*, and is crucial to the *puleeta's* spiritual efficacy. The frequent use of *Sulayman* in *puleeta* attests to his esteemed position of authority, an aspect regularly cited in the Quran. The Quran (xxxvii: 15-45) mentions *Sulayman* as having been bestowed with various mystical gifts by Allah, including the gift of prophecy and knowing the language of birds. The Qur'an (xxxiv:11-13), also indicates that *Sulayman* commanded the armies of *jinn* who performed various services for him, during his life and after death.³⁸

According to *faqirs*, *Sulayman* symbolises power, wisdom, and spiritual authority. *Faqirs* possess various stories of *Sulayman's* mystical powers. In one story recited to me by a local *faqir*, *Sulayman* was the commander and chief of the "*jinn ummat*" (community of *jinn*). Before *Sulayman*, power over the *jinn* collective was bestowed on other prophets such as Moses. After the death of *Sulayman* the various tribes of *jinn* separated and scattered across the earth where they have lived to this day.

³⁷ In some *puleeta*, the names of angels or Muslim saints are also written alongside *Sulayman*.

³⁸ According to the authors al-Jalālān and al Baizāwi (cited in Hughes (1988:604), *Sulayman* employed the *jinn* to build the temple of Jerusalem in order to house the ark of the covenant. These authors also claim that upon realising that he was to die soon, *Sulayman* implored Allah to conceal his death from the *jinn* so that the temple could be completed. *Sulayman's* wish was accepted.

Figure 7.2

سليمان
بن داؤد
عليهما السلام

الحق يا بَدْ ح

يا دافع يا حوا اس هو

م	ى	س	م
م	و	د	ح
ى	ح	م	د
ا	م	ح	ى

يا جبرئيل يا ميكائيل
يا عزرائيل يا اسرافيل

انبيس بليس قارون امان سيمسو

داؤد صفا صفا صفا صفا

هو العلى هو دو لوسا له ح

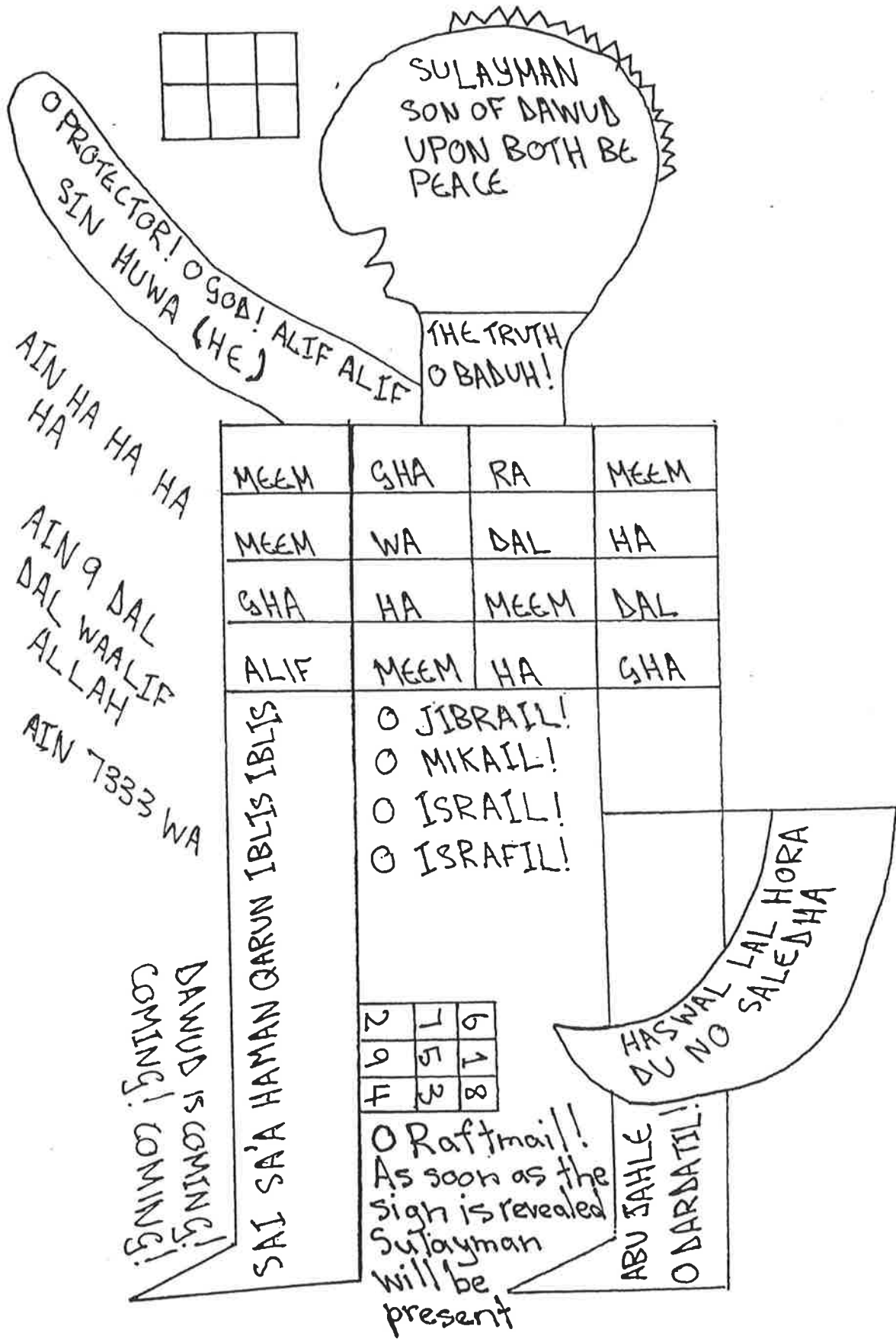
ايو نهلى يا دوا نهلى

يارفتمائيل
بمجرد روشن شدن اين
علامت سليمان بن

۲	۷	۲
۶	۵	۱
۹	۴	۸

Figure 7.2

Figure 7. 2



SULAYMAN
SON OF DAWUD
UPON BOTH BE
PEACE

O PROTECTOR! O GOD! ALIF ALIF
SIN HUWA (HE)

THE TRUTH
O BADUH!

MEEM	SHA	RA	MEEM
MEEM	WA	DAL	HA
SHA	HA	MEEM	DAL
ALIF	MEEM	HA	SHA

SAI SA'A HAMAN GARUN IBLIS IBLIS

O JIBRAIL!
O MIKAIL!
O ISRAIL!
O ISRAFIL!

2	7	9
6	5	1
F	W	8

O RAFTMAIL!
As soon as the
sign is revealed
Sulayman
will be
present

HASWAL LAL HORA
DU NO SALEHA

ABU SAHLE
O DARDATIL!

AIN HA HA HA
HA

AIN 9 DAL
DAL WAALIF
ALLAH

AIN 7333 WA

DAWUD IS COMING!
COMING!
COMING!

The inclusion of *Sulayman's* father *Dawud* (David) is in accordance with Quranic edict which often mentions *Sulayman* as the son of *Dawud*. For *faqirs*, the inclusion of *Dawud* further reinforces *Sulayman's* authority and spiritual pedigree, as belonging to the line of holy prophets stemming from Adam, the first human being.

Another interesting feature of this motif is its location at the head region, which ties into Muslim understandings of the head. According to Muslim thought, *jinn* and other spirit beings gain access into the human body mainly through the facial orifices, particularly the ears. Having entered there, the spirit being often inhabits the head, the domain of mind (*aql*). Thus, *faqirs* often use the metaphor “*sawar hona*” (“riding the person”) to explain spirit possession. This metaphor alludes to the patient’s loss of personal autonomy by the host spirit being.

In this instance, the location of the *Sulayman* motif seeks to diminish the power of the host spirit being by “exploiting the metaphorical links” between the *puleeta's* symbolic domain and the patient (Jackson 1998:174). But why is the head vulnerable to spiritual attack? Probably, this arises from the various “conceptual and bodily” activities (Jackson 1989:148) among Muslims which associate the head as a domain of moral struggle. For example, the Muslim practice of whispering the *shahadah* (proclamation of faith), into the new born child’s right ear denotes a concern to impress the various sensory perceptions with the Divine presence. The significance of the head as a site of contestation between the forces of good and evil is represented in the stories of Muslim saints who are usually depicted as having handsome faces which represent their wisdom and humanity. In contrast, idioms of animality are used to describe people undergoing spirit possession. Spirit possessed people are said to have distorted faces with the whites of their eyes showing. As I discussed earlier, a *faqir's* may examine a patient’s eyes in order to ascertain whether they are suffering from spirit possession. Attention is also given to whether the patient’s roll, or if they are unable to focus; both being indications of spirit possession. Such people may also extend their tongues and baring their teeth during bouts of snarling.

From an early age, concern is given to cover one’s head at most times of the day, especially at holy places. While most women’s heads are covered with either the traditional *burkha* (Style of long robe) or head shawl, men don Muslim skull caps (*topi*).

The association of wisdom to the head region is reflected in the saying “*Ankhe aur kan kolke challo*” (“open your eyes and ears to wisdom”). When giving their blessing, older people place their right hands on the recipient’s head. Similarly, as a mark of respect, devotees perform the postures *Chaddar bosi* and *Qudum bosi* at the foot of saints’ tombs.³⁹ Disciples of *Chisti pirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine may also greet their spiritual teachers by prostrating themselves before their teachers feet, or otherwise by placing their right hand on their teacher’s feet and then raising it to their head.

To touch another’s head, even in jest, is highly offensive. The pre-occupation with the head is further conveyed at the Nizamuddin shrine by the special attention given to the *Maqbool Jaali* by devotees, as it is parallel with the head of the saint’s tomb. According to Muslim etiquette (*adab*), one’s head and face should be displayed in a dignified fashion at all times.⁴⁰ Emphasis on body cleanliness also involves the washing of the facial orifices before formal prayer. A clean head is crucial since it forms the central part of the Divine name, “Allah”, when the hands are placed to the sides of the head so that the thumbs are aligned to and touching the earlobes whilst reciting the *takbir* (expression), “*Allahu Akbar*” (“God is Great”). The head is also conferred with spiritual significance due to it being positioned at the highest point of the body.⁴¹ In contrast, for *faqirs* and other Muslims, the uro-genital areas, due to their low positioning on the human body, are associated with the *nafs*.

The invocation of sacred authority at the head region in *puleeta* can show several variations, both among Baba Ali’s *puleeta* and *puleeta* belonging to other *faqirs*. This is shown in Figure 7.3 by the line directly below the head, which states in Persian “*Bahaqe taujul-mulk il sal najeena*” (“In the name of the kingdom”). In this line, the Divine kingdom, representing the collective of angels and saints is beseeched, denoted by the word “*najeena*”, meaning “to save us”. To the opposite left of this line, is another line

³⁹ See Chapter Eight.

⁴⁰ As a rule, men at the *basti* usually have their hair short, while women should have their hair covered at all times. With the exception of *faqirs*, unkempt hair is deemed unsightly and alludes to animality. Talking aloud and laughing, actions allowing the inside of one’s mouth to be seen by others, is considered impolite. Listening is considered as being more virtuous than talking (*Sunna bolne se accha hai*). A quiet mind (*aram*) should be aimed for at all times.

⁴¹ This notion is pivotal to traditional Islamic lore. As Nasr poignantly notes: “This vertical position symbolizes an ontological and metaphysical ascent and the yearning of man to reach toward the spiritual world” (1964:97).

stating in Persian “*Haqeme Sulayman bahaqe Shah Yektanoos*” (“*Sulayman in the name of Yektanoos*”). This line denotes the invoking of *Yektanoos*, along with *Sulayman*, the former being one of the kings of the Muslim *jinn*.⁴² The use of *Yektanoos* illustrates Muslim belief in the protective qualities of Muslim *jinn* who safeguard Muslim holy places, for example, mosques and Muslim shrines. In contrast, non-Muslim *jinn* are considered to be evil and aspire to the spiritual destruction of all Muslims, as was discussed in Chapter Four. Here also, the inclusion of *Yektanoos* is employed as a means of invoking his assistance, and reflects the *faqirs*’ practice in seeking the aid of various spirit beings during exorcism rituals. For instance, as indicated in the first exorcism ritual, the *amal* invoked the assistance of sacred beings noted in the Qur’an (i.e. *Sulayman*, *Dawud*, and *Maryam* (Mary mother of Jesus)), as well as a Sufi saint *Hazrat Shuria*. Another example, of the use of various combinations of sacred beings is shown in figure 7.2.

Below the central magical square are the names of the four archangels *Jibrail*, *Mikail*, *Israil*, and *Israfil*, as well as the name of the guardian angel *Dardatil*,⁴³ located at the bottom of the *puleeta*’s left leg.⁴⁴ This name possibly refers to the guardian angel, *Dardail*, which is associated to the Divine Attribute *Al-Dayyān* (The Reckoner) as it corresponds to the letter *dal* in the Arabic alphabet, whose quality is enmity (Hughes 1988:73). *Jibrail*, who corresponds to the biblical Gabriel, is the messenger of Allah, and the angel of revelation. According to Islam, it was *Jibrail* who imparted the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad. *Mikail* (the archangel Michael) is “the patron of the Israelites” (Hughes 1988:15). *Israil*, otherwise known as *Azrail*, is the angel of death. *Israfil* is the angel who will sound the trumpet on Judgement day (Hughes 1988:15).

Among *faqirs*, the four archangels are believed to refer to the four cardinal points and are protectors of the world. Baba Ali told me that their inclusion in this *puleeta* was to

⁴² According to Shurreef, “Kings of Moosulman-genii have their names terminating in *noos*; as Tarnoos, Hooleeanoos, Dukheanoos” (1991:217). In one *puleeta* which I saw dating to the nineteenth century, the names of these three *jinn* kings, with the inclusion of *Buktanoos* are employed at the head region of the *puleeta*

⁴³ This could possibly also be the guardian angel, *Dardail*, which is linked to the Divine name *Al-Dayyān* (The Reckoner); which corresponds to the letter *dal* in the Arabic alphabet, whose quality is enmity (Hughes 1988:73).

⁴⁴ Names of other angels may also be included in *Puleeta*.

invoke their assistance as messengers on his behalf.⁴⁵ Baba Ali told me that their inclusion in this *puleeta* was to invoke their assistance as messengers on his behalf. Another example can be seen in the line “*Ya Raftamail! Bemujarade roshan shudane in alamat Sulayman nebene*”. (“O Raftamail! As soon as the sign is revealed Sulayman will be present”), which is located at the bottom of figure 7.2.

The theme of invoking the sacred is further conveyed by the line “*Dawud, hazir, hazir, shawad*” (“David is coming, coming”) located on the lower outside of the right leg in figure 7.2. In *Farsi*, the word “*hazir*” is the verb meaning “to exist”, and derives from the word, “*huzur*” meaning “lord”. When used in the speaking context, *hazir* acknowledges a person’s presence, and is always used in conjunction with their name. The verbal construction of *hazir* also denotes the person’s importance from the speaker’s point of view. In figure 7.2, *hazir* has an emphatic function, reaffirming the importance of *Dawud*’s spiritual authority, as the father of *Sulayman*.

Another invocational style represented in figure 7.2 can be seen by the three idiosyncratic lines on the central right of the *puleeta* which convey the characteristic abbreviated letters and numbers featured in most *puleeta*. *Puleeta* are replete with idiosyncratic symbols. The use of highly distinctive symbols provides a medium for organising ideas that transcend ordinary language, ideas alluding to personal understandings of the spirit world and mystical power, that, are therefore, “inexpressible in words” (Luhmann 1989:238).⁴⁶ For *faqirs*, such personalised symbols contain their concentrated psychic force, assisting in the *puleeta*’s spiritual impact. The central line writes: “*a’in, 9, dal, dal, Allah*”. According to Baba Ali, this line is an invocation of Allah. These letters, found in the *Quran*, are believed to contain its power in abbreviated form.⁴⁷ Below this line is the line “*a’in, 7, 3, 3, wa*”. Here again, this line is a combination of letters and odd numerals, which are endowed with cryptic meaning. In both lines, the employment of the letter,

⁴⁵ Unfortunately, I was unable to ascertain the nature of the archangels’ messenger role. Baba Ali also stated that the archangels assisted him as did his spirit familiar (*muwakil*) during exorcist rituals. Moreover, he informed me that his spirit familiar acted to frighten the presiding spirit in the patient.

⁴⁶ Luhmann’s ideas on western magical symbols are also instructive here, since she claims that there is a “phenomenological immediacy to the mental image of a symbol which is not part of our ordinary language understanding of the use of words” (1989:238). Similar ideas dealing with the irrationality and emotional content of symbols have also been discussed by Sperber 1975; Barth 1975; Turner 1969 and Lewis 1980.

⁴⁷ Aside from their spiritual meaning, Baba Ali once told me, that the use of letter and numeral combinations also had a pragmatic function, in that they represented certain Quranic passages, which would otherwise be impossible to write down within the *puleeta*.

ain, is significant, since it represents Baba Ali, and is a projection of his psychic presence in the *puleeta*. Notice, how the stylistic rendition of the letter, *a'in*, underlines the entire symbolic semblance, emphasising Baba Ali's act of invoking Divine assistance. In these examples, the action of speech is implicit. This is stylistically conveyed by the lines seemingly moving away from the *puleeta*. This apparent action of "speaking out" is also disclosed by the top of the line "*a'in, ha, ha, ha*" (right side of central talisman). This line incorporates the gesture of Baba Ali engaged in the act of laughing, as indicated by the repetition of the letter, "*ha*". Baba Ali explained to me that the purpose of this laughing sequence was to inform the spirit being that he was unafraid of it.⁴⁸ It is in this sense of experiential transference of gesture to the symbolic domain that Krolick proposes that in speech, "as in gesturing, the subject is concerned not with the process of signification but rather with what is meant, pointed out, or intended by the significative act" (1987:12).

As it is illustrated by the redundant sequence of the letter "*ha*", a *puleeta* may also incorporate experiential elements, and is created with a view that these qualities will become animated, once it has alchemised in the patient.⁴⁹ An underlying feature of a *puleeta's* mystical symbolism, as highlighted by its idiosyncratic use of language and numerals, is the ineffable nature of the sacred, which can never be made fully explicit (Krolick 1987:68). As Ricoeur (1976) reminds us, that even language cannot completely disclose the sacred, for it must always remain beyond threshold of human experience and categorisation. As *faqirs* explained to me that a *puleeta's* power is "*raz*", (mystery).

We are warned from the beginning that we are here crossing the threshold of an experience that does not allow itself to be completely inscribed within the categories of logos... the numinous element (namely, Power) is not first a question of language, if it ever really becomes one, for to speak of power is to speak of something other than speech even if it implies the power of speaking. This power and efficacy *par excellence* is what does not pass over completely into the articulation of meaning (Ricoeur 1976:60-61).

⁴⁸ This is a poignant example of onomatopoeia.

⁴⁹ Although *puleeta* are comparable in some features with a *mandala*, "a spontaneous symbolic projection used to focus consciousness", the latter do not seem to embody the experiential element of *puleeta* (Sharon 1978:141). As I have shown, a *puleeta* may also encompass the gestural domain of speech and non-verbal action.

At the top right corner, next to the mouth of figure 7.2, we find the phrase “*Ya Dafah! Ya Huwa!, aliph aliph, sim, hu*”, (O protector! O God! Allah, Allah, *sin*, He”). Here again, this phrase encapsulates a certain gestural quality of spoken speech. In this context, wind refers to “bad air” (*hawa bud*), which is a type of *aseb*, as I explained earlier on, and is transmitted through the act of a *jinn* breathing on an individual, thereby afflicting them with illness. Suggestive in this phrase is Baba Ali’s act of expelling the effects of “bad air” from the patient. This intention is also reinforced by the cryptic line “*haswal lal hora du no saledha*” (“By the grace of God, whatever is in the air, destroy it”), located on the lower left side of figure 7.2. The use of the word *dafah* is an important feature here since it denotes the act of pushing away. The use of the letter *aliph*, either by itself or in a redundancy motif, symbolises Allah, since it is the first letter of all Islamic alphabets, that is Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Kurdish and Dari. It is an abbreviated form of Allah, in the same vein that the Hebrew letters “YH” when found in certain Jewish magical squares are a shortened version of the word “*Yahweh*”, being one of the names of God in the Torah and the Old Testament. On this note, *faqirs* often employ abbreviated forms of sacred names, or permutating them in their letter or numerical forms when producing *puleeta* or magical squares. One reason for this as I was told by *faqirs* was due to its time saving. In this way, *faqirs* can transcribe the numerical correspondences of whole passages from the Quran in a few seconds in the form of magical squares. In this case, the *aliph* sequence is primarily used to invoke Divine assistance, as a means of diminishing the spirit’s control over the patient. The term “*Hu*” meaning “He” is often chanted by *faqirs* during their practice of group or individual chanting called *dhikr*. The use of the mystical letter *sin* is usually accompanied by other mystical letters or Divine names, as illustrated here, and is again intended to invoke Divine assistance.

When I asked Baba Ali why he incorporated so many motifs of mystical letters, numerals, Divine names, as well as the names of saints, archangels, guardian angels, and other spirit beings in *puleeta*, he replied that the power of many was greater than the power of one. In other words, the use of various names, motifs, and other symbols of mystical significance are believed to have an incremental power, increasing a *puleeta*’s spiritual efficacy. This notion of the accumulative effect of sacred power is emulated in the Muslim practice of visiting Muslim shrines. *Faqirs* and other Muslims believe that by visiting various Muslim they are endowed with the blessedness of each saint.

The phrase “*Al-Haqq*,⁵⁰ *Ya Baduh*” (The Truth, O *Baduh!*), located above the central talisman of figure 7.2 also features Divine invocation.⁵¹ Amongst Muslims, the expression “*Ya Bāduh!*” (O *Baduh!*), is analogous to the English expression “go away!” and is often accompanied by a hand gesture indicating avoidance. In this way, it can be argued that the phrase “*Al-Haqq Ya Baduh!*” discloses the relationship, between sacred power and its “vocalizations, between intentionality and its dimensionally compact expression” (Krolick 1987:66). The word “*ya baduh*” is a common motif found in several *puleeta* and is used in conjunction with phrases and other names.

In accordance with other motifs deriving from the Qur’an, many *puleeta* also feature Qur’anic script. Apart from its sacred nature, the use of Qur’anic script is often a focussing device for reaffirming the authority of one of the prophets. A relevant example of this is illustrated in figure 7.4. This is indicated by the Qur’anic verse, which is located to the left of the verse, “*Sulayman, son of Dawud. Upon both be peace*”, which states: “And they followed whatever they were told by *Shaytan* in *Sulayman’s* kingdom. But *Shaytan* denied and the people know regarding magic”. (“*Wattabouma tatlush shayatino ala mulkis Sulaymani woma kafara Sulaymano inala kinnash shayatina kafaru yoalle moonannasas sahar*”).⁵²

While this section has focused on the various ways in which sacred authority is invoked and spiritually transferred via a *puleeta’s* symbolisms, I now turn my analysis to an examination of a *puleeta’s* centre, since it coalesces several elements, which I shall argue seek to diminish a host spirit being’s control over the patient while attempting towards a psychic retrieval of a patient’s psycho-physical state. These elements include mediation, protection, and balance.

Symbolism of the centre

The majority of *puleeta* are circumscribed according to a central axis, usually represented by a tetragonal talisman bearing numerical and letter configurations, sometimes in combination, that are placed at a *puleeta’s* centre. In this way, a *puleeta’s* symbolic space is defined around a stationary centre and is typified as a “centralised enclosed

⁵⁰ *Al-Haqq* is one of the Divine Attributes.

⁵¹ This is found in many *puleeta*, and is often cited along the *puleeta’s* perimeter.

⁵² The complementary use of Quranic script in this *puleeta* is also found among many Muslim talisman.

Figure 7. 4

Alwaha Alwaha Alwaha Bilqis you know whatever exists in their hearts

Bolikam, talikan, Khalikan, Makhluqun, Kafiwam, Shafe Irtaza (Refers to God's creativity)

As soon as this sign is lighted they must be present immediately.

Sulayman
son
of
Dawud
Upon
whom be peace

8	11	14	1
13	2	7	14
13	12	9	6
10	15	4	15

And they followed whatever they were told by Shaytan in Sulayman's kingdom. But Shaytan denied and people know regarding that magic

Arham, Arham, Arham, Lamham, Tarham, It's due, Who is in a rush, Due time

0	7	2
1	5	9
8	2	4

leave

Ain	13	15	130
9	7	6	120
5	11	10	8

In the name of Allah		

Ain Ha

Quickly leave Ain Ha

If there is any problem or hearten.

In the name of Bilqis and whoever exists in the world.

Ain Ha

Ain Ha

space” (Akkach 1995:9). One of the principle qualities which a *faqir* seeks to spiritually transfer to the patient via the *puleeta*'s centre is the restoration of psycho-physical balance. A *faqir*'s concern with re-establishing psycho-physical balance in the patient is based on the conception that spirit possession causes a partial or complete psychic disruption in him/her. Unlike the different kinds of *asrat* which cause various physical symptoms of a temporary nature, the effects of spirit possession are particularly insidious since they threaten the patient's spiritual and moral makeup, as well as disrupting social relations.⁵³ As I explained earlier, female victims of spirit possession often act in a lewd and provocative fashion in either public or private places. In other words, some outward symptoms of spirit possession apparently convey a non-compliance to moral dictum which regulate Muslim sexual and hygiene behaviour; those very aspects which pose the greatest threat of spiritual invasion. Furthermore, unlike *asrat*, the effects of spirit possession may prolong over an indefinite period, lasting weeks, months or years.⁵⁴

The significance of a *puleeta*'s centre derives from its various symbolic associations as the site of the heart, the seat of spiritual cognition and knowledge of the Divine mysteries. *Faqirs*' understandings of the heart as an allegory of the sacred *Ka'ba* in Mecca, mirroring traditional Sufi lore.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the idea of the heart as the inward human

⁵³ This aspect will be discussed in the last section.

⁵⁴ An example of this was indicated earlier on, in relation to the young woman who had been cooking by herself late at night, a phenomenon which had lasted for approximately one year.

⁵⁵ The *ka'ba* at Mecca is a prime example of Eliade's notion of 'the sacred centre'. The idea of the centre is ubiquitous in Muslim societies and is symbolised by the holy *ka'ba* located at Mecca, being the most sacred shrine in Islam. For Muslims, the *ka'ba* is considered as the "omphalos of the world, the navel of the earth" the sacral point of the world's beginning, and the nexus between heaven and earth (Akkach 1995:93). Eliade's notion of the pilgrimage shrine as an archetype of the sacred centre that constitutes a break from the "profane space surrounding it", has exerted a strong influence on the study of pilgrimage. Eliade discusses the way in which archetypal imagery is linked to sacred centres. These locations are believed by worshippers as the place where creation came into existence — at the symbolic centre of the universe, where the divine emanates itself into the world (Eliade 1957:37). Eliade points out that, "The centre is first and foremost, the point of 'absolute beginning where the latent energies of the sacred first broke through; where the supernatural beings of myth, or the gods or God of religion, first created man and the world. Ultimately all creation takes place at this point" (1957:37). This idea is further illustrated by the 'rock of Jerusalem' in Israel, or Wirrikuta for the Huichol Indians of south-west United States (see Myerhoff 1974). Eliade's concept of the centre has been further elaborated by other theorists including Victor Turner who has considered the pilgrimage shrine as the point of intersection between sacred and profane time (Turner 1974: 213-214). Wensinck (1978) and Hjärpe (1979) have given detailed analyses of the symbolism of the *ka'ba*. Al-Kisāi, cited in Wensinck (1978:36), states the following: "Know that the centre of the earth, according to a tradition on the authority of the Prophet, is the *ka'ba*; it has the significance of the navel of the earth, because of its rising above the level of the earth". Wensinck (1978:36) and Akkach (1995:93) also cite that the *ka'ba* was the first thing created, some two thousand years before the creation of the earth which was spread around it. Akkach states that "Muslims believe that the *Ka'ba* stands on the exact spot where Adam built the first temple, whose foundations were laid deep in the seventh earth, by the angels" (1995:93).

centre can be understood in relation to the pan-Islamic ideal of *tawhid* (Divine unity). In this respect, *tawhid* refers to the idea of the balanced unity between an individual's inward character (*bātin*) and public personae (*zāhir*), which is disrupted during spirit possession.⁵⁶ Spirit possession undermines this unity in the patient, as he/she is often averse to prayer or listening to the Quran.⁵⁷ In this way, spirit possession prevents a patient from participating in religious devotion, and therefore, effecting in them a state of spiritual rebellion (*kufṛ*) against Allah and His creation.⁵⁸

The concept of the sacred centre, whether it alludes to the inward human centre, or to sacred places, is deeply ingrained in the Muslim worldview. Muslim shrines, such as the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya, are viewed by devotees as sacred centres where the saints' blessedness emanates from their tombs. It is not coincidental that *faqirs* often perform exorcism rituals near the Nizamuddin shrine, since they believe that they will be assisted by the saint and his entourage of "pious" *jinn* which guard the shrine. However, the Nizamuddin shrine complex should not be viewed as being invulnerable to evil spirit beings as "*jinn* possessed" people often go there. Rather, *faqirs* and devotees believe that evil spirit beings are unable to withstand the saint's blessedness for a prolonged period and will eventually leave the patient. This may take several visits to the shrine in combination with exorcism rituals before a patient is cured.

After the performance of the exorcism ritual, patients are often told by *faqirs* to perform devotions (*ziarat*) at the saint's tomb, consisting in giving offerings of flowers and sweets and prayer. Such actions are meant to infuse in the patient a sense of spiritual renewal — an ontological *apokatastasis* (restoration).

Within the *puleeta*, this concern towards ontological equilibrium in the patient is attempted either by the use of magical squares (*tawiz*), consisting of numerical

⁵⁶ These two aspects are discussed in Chapter Eight.

⁵⁷ Baba Ali would sometimes read from the Quran to a patient as a means of ascertaining whether the patient was possessed. This was based on his and other *faqirs'* belief that possessed patients had an aversion from hearing religious scripture which manifested the 'evil' nature of the presiding spirit.

⁵⁸ Bennett (states that *tawhid* is considered by Muslims as being the "natural" state of creation and all human beings (1994:88). In contrast, any thought or action which contravenes *tawhid* is considered as being 'unnatural' and an anathema to *tawhid*. On an aside, I am reminded here of Christopher Marlowe's tragedy of "Faust". In the final scene of the play, Faust seeks Christ's redemption through the act of prayer. However, Faust is prevented from doing so, as Lucifer and his messenger Mephistopheles restrain Faust's arms from engaging in prayer.

configurations, or Arabic letters whose meanings are cryptic. An example of the latter is illustrated in figure 7.2. This example depicts a sixteen squared magical square known as *robaee tawiz*. Within each of the sixteen squares is an Arabic letter. These consist of seven letters *meem, ra, ghayn, hā, aliph, waw, dal*. The way in which these letters are employed here resembles the use of mystical letters found at the beginning of certain Quranic chapters. In the Quran, specific letters are arranged in several series. For example, the Chapter *A'rāf* begins with the letters *alif, lām, mim, sād*, which according to some Islamic theorists may symbolise the following:

A, = “*Ana*”(I)

L = “*Allah*” (God)

M = “*Rahman*” (The Compassionate)

S= “*Samad*” (The Eternal)

The Chapter *Maryam* commences with the letters *kāf, hā, yā, a'in, sād* which Ibn Abbās, cited in Hughes (1988:517), says symbolises the following:⁵⁹

K= “*Karim*” (The Generous, Gracious)

H= “*Hadi*” (The Guide)

Y= “*Hakim*” (The Wise)

A= “*Alim*” (The All-Knowing)

S= “*Sadiq*” (The Righteous)

Several of these letters such as *hā, mim, and alif* also appear in the magical square. What is implicit here is not only that the inner meanings of visual symbols remain hidden to all except the *faqir* who has written them, but that they are believed by the *faqir* to invoke sacred power. In accordance with Sufi lore, *faqirs* assign each letter of the Arabic

⁵⁹ The emphasis on the written word as the medium of Divine manifestation is central to Islam. Islamic scholars through the centuries have been unable to come to a consensus regarding the spiritual and cryptic meanings of these letters. As Ali states: “Opinions are divided as to the exact meaning of each particular letter or combination of letters, but it is agreed that they have a mystic meaning” (1976:118).

alphabet a specific numerical value, referred to as *ilm-i-abjad*⁶⁰ (Figure 7.5). Each letter is perceived as a visual archetype of Divine manifestation in the cosmos, a living entity, which when written in specific singular or collective sequences, has a profound effect on the human psyche.⁶¹ Traditionally, the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet (*hoorooof-e-tuhujee*) are divided into seven groupings of four letters. These are assigned to a particular sign of the zodiac and element (Shurreef 1991:204). According to Chisti by assigning the cosmic values of certain Qur'anic words and phrases unseen cosmic energies in the phenomenal and spiritual realms are activated (1991:152). For example, the numerical value of the word "Allah" is 66, since it is the sum total of the letters *Aliph*, *Lam*, *Lam*, and *Hā*. In this scheme *Aliph* = 1, *Lam* = 30, *Lam* = 30, *Hā* = 5.

The use of letters within magical squares may also symbolise the Divine Names.⁶² An interesting feature of this magical square is that it follows some of the principles accorded to numerical magical square, that is, the notion of balance. This is established by adding the numerals of all the vertical and horizontal lines. The totals in each equal 489. This numeral corresponds with the Divine name of "*Fattah*" (The Opener) which denotes opening, success, and "*miftah*" (key) (Siddiqi 1990:49), and is used in magical squares in order to overcome obstacles and difficulties, and for gaining victory over physical or spiritual adversaries.

⁶⁰ This system of numerical correspondences also appear in Jewish mystical system of *Kabbalah*, and Greek esoteric traditions which they called *gematria*. Each letter was consigned with a numerical value that assisted in establishing a connection between one word or phrase and another. As Michell (1973) indicates, this system of numerical formulae was pivotal to the sacred canon of many ancient societies, and was at the basis of many sacred buildings, monuments, and churches, for example, Stonehenge in the United kingdom, the Egyptian pyramids, Glastonbury Abbey, Chartres cathedral in France. See also Bond & Lea (1977), for a discussion of *gematria* in relation to the Kabbalah and the New Testament.

⁶¹ In relation to Islamic science of letters Bakhiyar states: "The concept that the nature and secret of a letter is alive when it is compounded to form words, while words are correspondingly alive within created things, is the basic principle of the science of letters" (1991: 174). This belief of alphabetical letters as "sensible concretions of the very powers of creation" has probably influenced by the Jewish *kabbalah* (Abram 1997:245). For Abram and others, the *kabbalists* consider the "*aleph-beth* to be a highly concentrated and divine form of magic" (1997:247). In both systems, the cosmos is "a composite of cosmic forces" of intelligible design that reach their zenith in the human being as the microcosm (Sephariel 1994:7). See Appendix VIII for the numerical values of the Arabic alphabet.

Figure 7.5

40	10	200	40
40	6	4	8
10	8	40	4
1	40	8	10

Another feature intimated by this magical square, which is also indicated in other symbolic motifs of this *puleeta*, as well as in others, is the importance of numerals in *puleetas*' spiritual efficacy. Whether in the form of magical squares, or conjoined with letters, numbers predominantly figure in *puleetas*' symbolic domain. As with other *faqirs*, Baba Ali's interest with numbers was a means of renewing and maintaining contact with the spirit world, and of actively participating in the world according to the cycles of numbers, and their inherent meanings which is one of the themes in the next section. However, in order to disclose the symbolic and spiritual significance of numerals in *puleeta*, I explore how numerals inform Muslims' understandings and perceptions of Allah and the spirit world, and how they are interwoven in the life-world of the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*. Only an overview suffices here to elucidate some of these themes.

⁶² In India, Sufi mystical practices in relation to exorcism rituals have been influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the notable work, *Jawāhiru 'I-Khamsah*, written by Shaikh Abu 'I-Muwayyid of Gujerat in the sixteenth century. In this work, each Divine name is consigned with a specific number, element, meaning, zodiacal sign, guardian angel, genii, perfume, class of the name, quality of the name, and planet (Hughes 1988:73-78).

The cosmic unfolding of numerals

It is probably no exaggeration to suggest that numerals, and their social representations, associations, and mystical meanings, pervade into almost every aspect of Muslim life. However, it is in matters of religious life in which numerals are particularly significant. From an early age, Muslims are taught that the Divine can be represented and accessed via various kinds of media and practices. Possibly, the most salient expression of this is through formal prayer (*namaz*). Indeed, prayer is governed according to the correct repetitions of movements and reciting of sacred verses and names from the Quran.

Moreover, each of the five required prayers is allotted a specific number of sections or divisions called *rak'ha* (from the Arabic *ruku'* meaning "to bow or prostrate oneself") (Hughes 1988:533). Implicit to the structure of Islamic prayer is a concern with uniformity and symmetry as manifested in the rhythmical movements between the standing postures (*takbir-i-tahrimah, qiyam, tasmi'*) and the semi and full prostration postures (*takbir-i-jalsah, takbiru'-sijdah, tasbih-i-sijdah, munajat*). The fluent actions between one posture to another is integrative with notions of balance and emotional control that Muslims should strive towards in their daily lives. These cultural ideals are also symbolised by the symmetrical numerations of the Muslim rosary, divided according to three divisions of thirty-three beads from which an Muslim repeats three different cycles of devotional praise.

Many *basti* households usually feature a visual magical square installed at the top of the main door that serves as a general prophylactic. Although these images do not constitute a central position in Muslim homes as do the small shrines in Hindu households their visual presence expresses the fundamental belief in the sacrosanct nature of the divine word. The desire to be in close proximity with the Divine word is also represented in the use of personal talismans that can be carried on the person. Many Muslims carry these in small metal vials that are tied around the neck, waist or arm. While talismans are worn for certain physical and psychological complaints, they are also worn in order to access Divine protection. This "consumption of images"⁶³ by Muslims can be understood in the context of how Islamic symbols are visually depicted. At the *basti* and Nizamuddin

shrine there is a visual profusion of Islamic sacred symbols, ranging from the beautiful and intricate designs painted along the walls of the major and minor tombs of the Nizamuddin complex, to the *basti* hawkers outlaying their various talismans for sale. The need to see the Divine word may also take the form of posters depicting Quranic script in an array of naturalistic designs, for example, birds and roses. These images are sometimes associated with artistic renditions of shrines of *Chisti* saints and the Prophet Muhammad's tomb in Medina. Such images supposedly remind the individual of the "Muslimness" of Indian Sufi saints.⁶⁴

Certain numerals are given more spiritual significance than others. In my experience, India is a country that is fascinated by the mystical power of numerals. This concern is given salient expression amongst Muslims and Hindus alike. Popular numbers such as 786, a highly auspicious numeral, as it is the numerical equivalent for the word "Allah" in Arabic, is often seen displayed on everything to the entrances of households to the dashboards of three wheeled scooters. Among some Hindu scooter "wallahs"⁶⁵ this numeral is combined with an array of other holy images of Hindu deities and saints that transform the vehicle into a moving temple.

Within this social milieu the *faqir* is distinguished for his mystical involvement with numerals. According to *faqirs*, numerals are considered to be secret formulae linking the visible and invisible worlds. In my experience, intuition more than rationality governs a *faqir's* understanding and application of numerals. *Faqirs* claim that numerals are about identifying one's inner feelings which cannot be conveyed through the spoken word.⁶⁶ Sometimes a *faqir* may apply a certain number to a *puleeta* that for him represents a certain quality or feeling. This involvement with numerals may also be linked to non-ordinary states of awareness. For instance, a specific numeral may figure in a *faqir's*

⁶³ This idea has been borrowed by Christopher Pinney (1998:40) in his essay entitled *Indian Magical Realism or the Scopie Regimes of Indian Modernity*, which was given in an Anthropological seminar in 1998 at the University of Adelaide.

⁶⁴ This practice parallels with the "image customization" of Hindu based posters showing an assortment of Hindu deities (Pinney 1998:41).

⁶⁵ The term "wallah" is often employed by Hindi and Hindustani speakers after nouns denoting the kind of work a person does, and is usually restricted to manual labourers.

⁶⁶ This is reminiscent of Levi-Strauss's view of mathematics "as a kind of spiritual liberation that rational mind makes possible for humanity", an aspect supported by Mimica (1988) in his analysis of counting among the Iqwaye people of New Guinea (Mimica 1988:156; Levi-Strauss 1981:647). Furthermore, Mimica (1988:147) rightly critiques Hallpike (1979) and Piaget (1972) for underplaying the mythopoeic importance that numerals have in many non-western societies.

dream or during an ecstatic state that mediates his understandings. The “close acquaintance” of numerals with different kinds of awareness is implied here (Abram 1997:245). In this way, numerals have a “felt immediacy”. For *faqirs*, numerals are powerful as they contain the quintessential power of sacred words.

Faqirs are extremely aware of the various levels of mystical meanings associated with certain numerals. Coterminous with their understanding of the mystical meanings of numerals is their correspondence with the human body. More often than not, a *faqir* will view the body as a living matrix of mystical numerals that are inter-connected in an elaborate invisible latticework. For instance, my initial dealings with various *faqirs* began with narratives regarding the numerical significance of my body as being a visual symbol of Allah’s presence. “Look at your hands”, I was once told by an old *faqir*. “Do you see how on the palms are written the numerals eighteen and eighty-one”. These numerals when added together totalled ninety-nine, the number of Divine Attributes. Another *faqir* also told me that the human body in its vertical position represents the numeral ‘one’ which corresponds to the letter *alif* (the first letter of the Arabic alphabet) which symbolises Allah. However, it is the employment of numerals in *faqirs*’ mystical practices that mostly informs their understandings of numerals and their mystical meanings. This is evident in *faqirs*’ regular practice of chanting (*wazifa*), where a rosary is used in order to keep count the number of repetitions which a Divine Attribute is recited. During spiritual retreat (*chilla*), a *faqir* may repeat anyone of the Divine Attributes tens of thousands of times, over a period of several days or weeks. The appropriate number of repetitions is essential for either attaining the inherent power of a specific Divine Attribute, or for capturing a spirit familiar.

Parallel with this fascination for numerals, is the vast amount of literature that is available at various book-stores located throughout the *basti*. The believer or aficionado of Islamic symbolism can browse or purchase from an array of books dealing with the numerical properties of the Divine Attributes to prayer books in Arabic and Urdu languages. For example, the popular prayer book called the *Panjshura Shareef* possesses an assortment of magical squares and amulets that are supposed to be the numerical equivalents of specific Quranic passages. The reader is told, for example, that the magical square for the Chapter “*Yasin*” (considered by Muslims to be the “heart of the

Quran”) assists the person in becoming prosperous and endows them with worldly honour and prestige. On another page the reader is informed that by reciting the opening chapter of the Quran (“*Al-Fateha*”) forty-one times he/she will triumph over their enemies. This chapter (and other Quranic chapters) is also attached to its specific magical square. Other books deal mainly with the construction of talisman. Most notable among these is the *Prophetic Medical Sciences* — a compilation of four books containing selected extracts from the Quran and the *hadith* for the treatment of numerous physiological and psychological maladies. In section three, entitled “*Naqsh-e Sulaimani*” (talismans of Solomon), the author Khwaja Ashraf Ali Lucknowi is solely dedicated to the art of talisman making. The reader is taken through a veritable tour de force of magical squares for nearly every possible purpose.⁶⁷

Similarly, the use of numerals form a crucial component in a *puleeta*’s spiritual efficacy and reflects a *faqir*’s understanding of numerals and their mystical meanings. A characteristic of most *puleeta* is the use of odd numerals displayed in various configurations, whether depicted in magical squares, by themselves, or along with letters. According to one saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, he compares Allah to “the odd number”, denoting His incomparability and Uniqueness. The “odd” feature of Allah, as expressed in the testament of faith (*shahadah*), signifies that Allah is One, and is reaffirmed throughout the Quran. In this way, odd numbers are associated with the Divine and are endowed with sacred significance.

Odd numerals underpin many of the social and religious ceremonies and practices of *faqirs*, *basti* locals, and devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine. The numbers 3, 5, 7, and 9

⁶⁷ The author shows when a specific magical square should be made according to certain periods of the day and month. Although this book initially gives the reader the impression as being a kind of “do it yourself kit” for making magical squares, the author endorses that the reader must be instructed by a spiritual teacher “in the correctness of the instructions” without which the process “is null and void” (Lucknowi 1994:29). A list of other conditions accompany this including the strict observance of *shari’a*; the necessity of being secluded from women and children; maintenance of bodily cleanliness; avoidance from “meat, fish, egg, honey, musk, lime of oyster, olive oil, milk, curd, garlic, onions, and other eatables with bad odour” (Lucknowi 1994:30). Moreover, one finds that they need astrological precision in order to attain a talisman’s “therapeutic efficacy” (Luhmann 1989:248). While a number of books extol the merits of constructing magical squares according to the stars few Muslims have either the inclination or the time to dabble in the intricacies of magical square making. Furthermore, the commercial selling of magical squares and other kinds of talismans, from any one of the numerous hawkers around the *basti markaz* gives to the consumer all the benefits of the talismans on sale without the labour. Generally speaking, Muslims believe in the power of visual symbols which arouses a sense of awe in them.. This is especially the case when a magical square is made up for them by a reputed *faqir*.

relate to “biosocial cosmic cycles”, as well as marking the patterns of Muslim religious life, which contour the “intentional engagement between body-subject and world” (Krolick 1987:78). Space is only sufficient to quote a few examples of how odd numerals are manifested in Muslim life. From an early age, Muslims are taught that Allah has 99 Divine Attributes, and that there are 5 daily prayers that must be performed.⁶⁸ There are 5 members of the holy family of the Prophet known as the “*panc biran*”, and 5 major *Chisti* saints that are praised in the evening lighting ritual (*roshni*).⁶⁹ After a child has attained the age of 7 months, close relatives are invited for the child’s *chattana* (licking ceremony), where either a little sugar, *ghee*, or milk is placed on the child’s tongue after offering prayers in the Prophet’s name. During special Islamic holy days and the death celebrations of Nizamuddin and Amir Khosrau, disciples and other followers of certain *Chisti pirs* are obligated to give gift offerings of cash. Tradition demands that cash be given in odd denominations of either 5, 7, 11, 21, 55, and 101 rupees. From a mathematical point of view, the number 55 is a divisible of 5, while 21 is a divisible of 7. The number 5 also relates to the human body, as represented by 2 arms, 2 legs, and a head. The body has 9 orifices (2 nostrils, 2 eyes, 2 ears, 1 mouth, a genital and anal orifice). Seven of these are located on the head.⁷⁰ Furthermore, as indicated earlier, a *puleeta*’s visual schema is divided according to a tri-partite division. During performance of circumambulation of the Nizamuddin shrine, a devotee should recite 9 chapters of the Quran. Ideally, the first section of the Quranic Chapter (“*Baqara*”, literally “the cow”) should be recited, after which 5 more verses should be recited. Of the 9 chapters, the Chapter *Ikhlas* (purity of faith) is recited 3 times. Prior to the actual performance of circumambulation, the devotee should have purchased 3 shrouds; one each for the tombs of Nizamuddin and Amir Khosrau while keeping one for him/herself. Nine chapters are also recited during the death celebration of Nizamuddin. During the evening lighting ritual (*roshni*), seven lamps are lighted. Popular ritual celebrations at the

⁶⁸ These are: *Fajr*, *Zuhr*, *Asr*, *Maghrib*, *Isha*. Each prayer is composed of the following number of *rak'ah*: *Fajr* = 2, *Zuhr*=4, *Asr*= 4, *Maghrib*=3, *Isha*=4. The total number of *rak'ah* = 17.

⁶⁹ These are: Moinuddin Chisti, Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Fariduddin Baba Ganj Shakar, Nizamuddin Aulia, Nasiruddin Chiragh Delhi.

⁷⁰ Further ways in which the numeral 7 is employed by Muslims in general are: pilgrims during the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca, must circumambulate the holy *ka'ba* 7 times in an anti-clockwise direction. The first chapter of the Quran, called *Fateha*, which is recited by Muslims during formal prayer is composed of 7 verses. There are 7 sacred verses in the opening Quranic Chapter *Fateha* (Opening); the Qur'an contains seven kinds of revelation “commandment (*amr*), prohibition (*nahy*), history (*qissah*), parable (*misāl*) exhortation (*wa'z*), promises (*wa'dah*), and threatening (*wa'id*)” (Hughes 1988:570). According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have witnessed the 7 heavens during his night journey (*miraj*).

shrine seemingly occur during odd dates. The most important of these is the death celebration of Nizamuddin occurring from the 16th to the 18th (a derivative 7 and 9) of the month of *Rabi-us Sani* (mid September). Similarly, the washing ceremony (*ghusl*) of Nizamuddin's tomb is on the 27th (a derivative of 9) of the month of *Saffar* (25th July) (a derivative of 7).⁷¹

Furthermore, connected to the shrine rituals are the death celebrations of Nizamuddin's mother, Bibi Zuleykha that occurs on the 29th (a derivative of 11) of *Jamad-ul-sani* (5th November), at her shrine near Merauli, New Delhi. This is performed by family members from the three lineages of the *Chisti Nizamia*. The same members also conduct the monthly vigil (*fatihah*) at her shrine on the 29th of the moon. On the 1st night of her death celebration 5 different coloured shrouds; green, gold, yellow, blue, and red, are placed on her tomb. The ritual of *ghast kirat* (literally, "to take around") is held on the 9th of *Muharram* during the evening of *qatal kirat* (night of martyrdom). The 3 *Chisti Nizamia* lineages are in charge of making a large *Muharram* banner (*tazeeah*). From the 1st to the 9th of *Muharram* *Chisti Nizamis* go to the *Imam bara*, a large building located in the *basti* nearby the major entrance to the shrine complex. Three representatives, each from the 3 lineages are in charge of making the *tazeeah*. On the 9th of *muharram*, the wives and female relatives from the 3 lineages prepare food for the vigil of Imam Hussein.

While I have cited some examples of how odd numerals are interwoven in the social and religious fabric of the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*, they are also featured in many *puleetas'* motifs. Their most notable inclusion is in their use of magical squares. Magical squares (*tawiz*) are composed of a series of squares, with numerals or letters placed in each square. Each numeral or letter usually has mystical significance for the

⁷¹ At 11 p.m., lineage members go to the *Imam bara* and offer salutations (*salami*) to the *tazeeah*. This is accompanied by the beating of hand drums (*tasha* and *dhol*). After this *Qawwals* recite songs of martyrdom to Imam Hussein. This is repeated at the houses of 5 *pirzade* (the suffix, "zade", denotes that the person is an offspring of a *pir*). Other important ceremonies expressing the importance of odd numbers in the wider Muslim religious context are: 1) *Id-ul-Azha*, known also as *Qoorbanee* (sacrifice), that is held on the 9th day of the month *Buqr-eed*. After the ritual animal (usually a sheep or goat) is sacrificed it is divided into 3 parts and given to the poor and the person's relatives. The holy month of *Ramadan* (*Ramazan*) is the 9th month, which Muslims are obligated to fast, desist from sexual relations, and perform extended nightly prayers (*tarāwih*). Many *faqirs* and *basti* locals perform the *tarāwih* prayer in the *Khijli* mosque, next to the Nizamuddin shrine. According to tradition, "the night of power" (*lailatu 'l-qadr*) being the most auspicious night in the *Ramadan* calendar, falls on the 27th. According to Islamic tradition,

faqir, and are often the numerical equivalents of any one of the Divine Attributes or Quranic passages. When used in *puleeta*, magical squares serve several purposes. Firstly, magical squares are invariably placed at the head or torso sections of the *puleeta*.⁷² The placement of magical squares at these areas is based on *faqirs*' belief that evil spirit beings reside in the head and torso regions of the human body after having entered it, via the ears or sometimes through the genital or anal orifices. *Faqirs* explained to me that evil spirit beings liked to inhabit the stomach and uro-genital regions since it was there where the *nafs* was particularly strong. Therefore, the placement of magical squares on the *puleeta*'s head and torso regions is intended to spiritually transfer the magical squares' various qualities and potencies to the corresponding regions in the patient. Secondly, magical squares are used to spiritually transfer in the patient the qualities of psychic equilibrium, balance, and protection. This is usually denoted by their equal numerical values when added in either horizontal, vertical, or angular directions, as illustrated by the middle magical square in figure 7.6.

This popular form of magical square depicts the nine numerals, from 1 to 9, which are written in the following configurations:⁷³ The numerical values of each equals the odd numeral 15.⁷⁴

HORIZONTAL LINES	VERTICAL LINES	ANGULAR LINES
$4 + 9 + 2 = 15$	$4 + 3 + 8 = 15$	$2 + 5 + 8 = 15$
$3 + 5 + 7 = 15$	$9 + 5 + 1 = 15$	$4 + 5 + 6 = 15$
$8 + 1 + 6 = 15$	$2 + 7 + 6 = 15$	

prayer engaged during *lailatu 'l-qadr* has several spiritual merits, including the expiation of sins and the granting of certain wishes.

⁷² Magical squares may sometimes be written on other areas of a *puleeta*.

⁷³ This magical square is a variation of Jabir's nine-squared magical square. Jābir ibn Hayyān was a medieval alchemist who was renowned for his study in magical squares in which he incorporated complex mathematical and medical formulae. According to Stapleton (1953), Jabir "was able to prove the Jabirian alchemy was essentially an extension of the Pythagorean theory that Number is the basic factor not only of the universe but of all that the universe contains. The Jabirian theory maintained that matter was made of 4 elements, Heat, Cold, Moisture, and Dryness, in varying proportions of the numbers 1, 3, 5, and 8". This magical square is also traditionally attributed to the planet Venus who was called Ishtar in the Middle-east. As Saggs notes, in Mesopotamia "each of the gods could be designated by a symbolic number, and Ishtar (Venus) was 15" (1962:336). The traditional system of the *Kabbalah* commonly employs 'magical squares' or *kamea*. "The magical squares of the planets are an important part of the science of talismanic magic. To each planet belongs the number of the Kabbalistic *sephira* to which it corresponds, as well as the other number, which are the sum of the various horizontal and vertical rows of the square" (González-Wippler 1993:246-248).

⁷⁴ I was unable to ascertain the mystical significance of numeral 15.

Figure 7.6

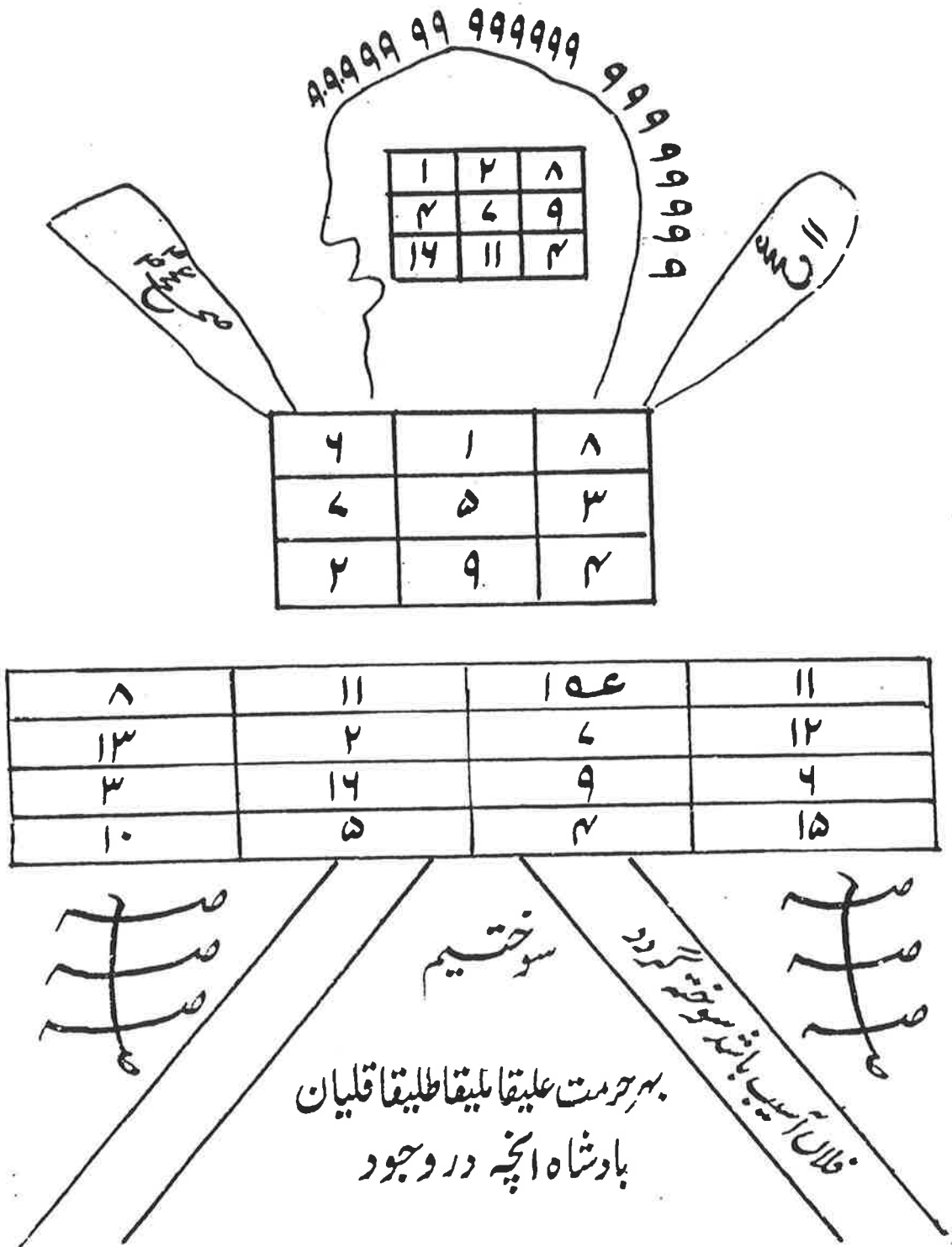
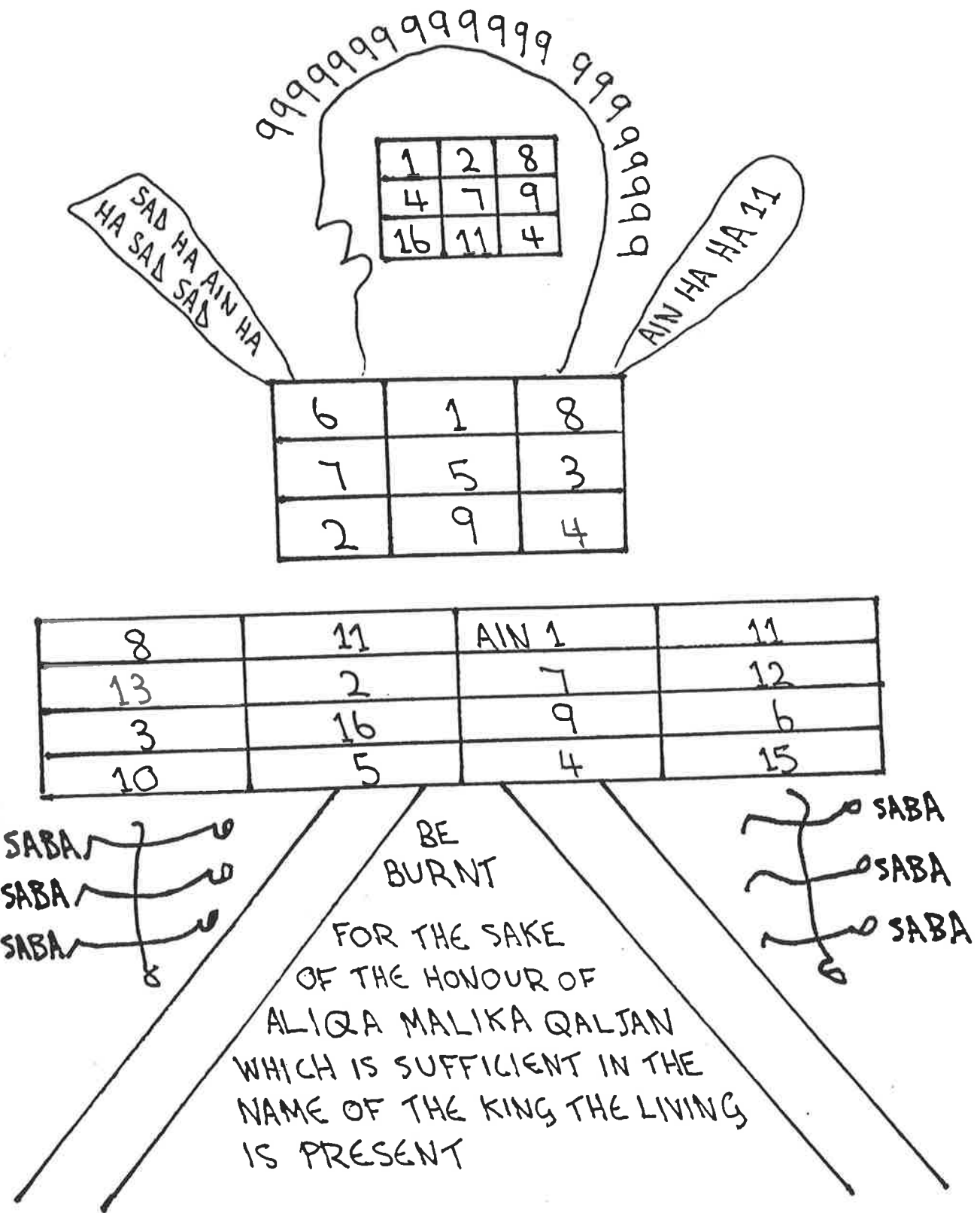


Figure 7. 6



Here again the significance of odd numerals is clearly shown. Baba Ali also incorporates other variations of this theme. Thus, the numerical sequence of numbers of this magical square depict symmetrical patterns, which are synonymous with the circle and the four cardinal points, as illustrated in Figure 7.7.

Figure 7.7

E	O	E
O	O	O
E	O	E

E= even numerals, O = odd numerals

Firstly, the numerical sequence of equal and odd numerals equates with the circle (*hissar*), an equal field of power. As depicted in the first exorcism ritual, Baba Ali as well as other *faqirs* usually make the image of a circle around themselves in order to protect themselves from psychic invasions from the spirit being within the patient. Similarly, for Baba Ali this sequence of odd and even numerals, as well as their equal numerical totals denote an equal field of power, which he aims to spiritually transfer in the patient. Moreover, the sequence of odd numerals, depicted in the middle, horizontal and vertical lines, denotes the four cardinal points which are associated with the protective aspect of the four archangels, as outlined earlier.

Another variation is indicated in the top magical square in figure 7.6, where the totals for the vertical lines add up to the numeral 21, which is a derivative of the numeral 7. Furthermore, at the top of the head of figure 7.6 is a redundancy sequence of the numeral 9, which is repeated 21 times. When I had asked Baba Ali what was the significance of this numerical sequence, he stated that it meant “enough”, alluding to the aspect of completion which the number 9 represents, since it is the last numeral, as well as being

the common numerical denominator of the numeral 99, which is the number of Divine Attributes.

Tambiah notes that “ritual words and acts” are characterised by “formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)” (Tambiah 1968). According to Luhrmann, these features allow ritual to convey various levels of social and esoteric information: “to do certain kinds of socio-cultural jobs... to convey analogical associations” (1989:221). In contrast, Wollheim points out that repetition as being “coincident with a large number of our expectations being realized” (1970:150). Layton also notes the concept of redundancy as a means for making communication more efficacious (1991:145).

On this note, the theme of numerical redundancy in *puleeta* serves to increase the inherent power of the numeral, in a similar way that the recitation of a Divine Attribute during ritual chanting is believed to assist in the transference of its mystical qualities to the *faqir*. In relation to the lowest magical square in figure 7.6, it can be shown that when the numerals in opposite squares in the are added together they come to the numerals of 19 and 15 as depicted in figure 7.8.⁷⁵

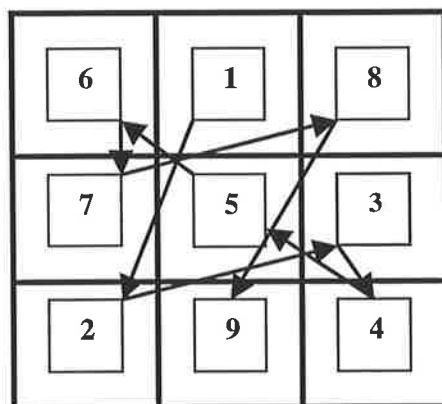
Figure 7.8

8 + 11 = 19	AIN HA ALIPH + 11
13 + 2 = 15	7 + 12 = 19
3 + 16 = 19	9 + 6 = 15
10 + 5 = 15	4 + 15 = 19

While I have argued that magical squares incorporate various numerical patterns which allude to the notions of equilibrium, balance, and protection which *faqirs* attempt to spiritually transfer into the patient, this does not preclude other ways in which *faqirs* construe them. *Faqirs* may also employ magical squares in *puleeta* in order to confuse spirit beings. For example, Ahmad Shah explained to me that magical squares also acted like a kind of maze for confusing a host spirit being, and hence, weakening its power.

While pointing to one magical square he stated that the apparent random like nature in which the numerals were written in the squares were a means for confusing the host spirit being. “You see, the *jinn* gets trapped inside the *tawiz* and it cannot get out. It goes around and around and in so doing gets tired and confused”. I have attempted to represent this idea in figure 7.9.

Figure 7.9



For *faqir's*, the element of confusion plays an important factor in diminishing a host spirit being's power over the patient, an aspect that was indicated in the second exorcism ritual earlier. The idea that spirit beings may succumb to this ploy reflects *faqirs'* conceptions

⁷⁵ The numeral 19 is a significant numeral in the Quran and is endowed with profound mystical meaning. According to Ali (1976), several of the Qur'anic chapters beginning with the mystical series of letters employ the numeral 19. For example, "Suras (Chapters)..7, 9, and 38 each has the letter *Sād* in its openings. In each of these three *suras* the letter *sād* occurs $19 \times 8 = 152$...*Sura* 20 likewise opens with the letters *Ya* and *Sin* which together constitute its title. Each of these two letters occurs $19 \times 15 = 275$ times in this *sura*...The joint occurrence of 'Ain Sin Qāf in *sura* 42 *Shurā*, amounts to $19 \times 114 = 209$... In *sura* 13, entitled *Rād* the joint recurrence of the four opening letters *Alif*, *Lām*, *Mim*, *Rā* was found to be $19 \times 79 = 1501$ " (Ali 1976:69-70).

of spirit beings as being inferior in intelligence to human beings. For instance, *faqirs* consider *jinn* as lacking in common sense, and can, therefore be duped. The notion of the inferior intelligence of spirit beings is conveyed by an exorcist's use of various food items including fruit and sweets during exorcism rituals as a means of enticing the host spirit being from out of the patient, even though such food items cannot be consumed by it.

While numerals and their various mystical meanings are important to a *puleeta's* spiritual efficacy, symbolic motifs alluding to breath and the wind also feature widely in *puleeta*. By exploring their symbolic motifs I draw out some of their levels of meaning, and how they mediate Baba Ali's psychic presence in *puleeta*. Again, any analysis of the mystical levels of meaning of the breath and the wind as they are represented in *puleeta* necessitates an exploration of *faqirs'* understandings of them.

The breath and wind (air) as carriers of mind

Faqirs believe that there is a strong correlation between intention (*niyat*) and breath. All *faqirs* I knew incorporated some kind of breathing technique during their healing sessions. The most popular of these breathing techniques is called *dum*, which as discussed earlier, and consists in a *faqir* breathing on a patient or in water.⁷⁶ While the practice of *dum* is frequently employed by *faqirs* and other Muslims, I came to understand that each *faqir* had his own unique style of performing *dum*. Baba Ali, for example, would blow three times on a patient's affected area, after which he drew three imaginary horizontal and vertical lines in the air. Other *faqirs* would place their hands on a patient's affected part and similarly breath on it. This was usually accompanied by a short prayer, either a small *darood sharif* or some verses from the Quran. The breath could also be incorporated in the making of spells. One couple who had visited Baba Ali complained that they were being harassed by their landlord for money. Baba Ali took out a piece of string from his old trunk and tied a series of knots with it. With the completion of each knot he breathed on it. Five knots were made in all.⁷⁷ As I found out later, each knot symbolised one of the *Chisti* saints. He then gave it to the woman and said that it

⁷⁶ The notion that the breath is endowed with an animating force probably derives from the Islamic notion of "*Idn Allah*" — the Divine breath that gives life to all living creatures (Chisti 1991).

⁷⁷ In *faqirs'* lore, The idea of making knots is a metaphor for holding spiritual power.

would protect them.⁷⁸ These healing sessions not only gave me an insight into the mechanics of breath, but also its underlying assumptions. The logic of breath is posited on the belief that it carries the person's core personality and characteristics. While some Muslims and non-Muslims consider the breath of *faqirs* to be healing, the breath of impious people and evil spirit beings can cause illness.

I also noticed that *faqirs*' use of breath was also a way of disclosing their life-world. My many journeys with *faqirs* through the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* bore witness to their knowledge of their various places. In Chapter Four I revealed how *faqir*'s used their sense of smell to verify whether certain places around the *basti* had "bad air". In an environment where various spirit beings, both good and evil, were believed to live, such knowledge was vital. My journeys with *faqirs* were more like survival courses rather than sociable encounters where I learnt those places in the *basti* to avoid as well as those places which were considered to be safe. I also learnt that by conceptualising the landscape in this manner was a means of achieving some kind of control over its interminable boundary crossings by spirit beings. As Jackson (1998) has shown, intimate knowledge of the landscape among various tribal peoples not only ensures their connectedness with the non-human world, but also assists in maintaining those boundaries between human and other. Jackson further states:

Consider the linkages and lines of communication between the natural and the social world. Being able to decipher these correspondences is vital to life and livelihood – a way of gaining insight into the workings of one's world as well as controlling it (Jackson 1998:168).

The healing and destructive power of the breath finds its homologue in the air and wind (*hawa*). Like the breath, the wind is appropriated by metaphors of fecundity, malice, and destruction. For instance, *faqirs* and *basti* locals believe that the north wind, which is referred to as "*saba*", comes in the morning and replenishes the households with good fortune while expelling sadness and misfortune from them.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ See Appendix VI in the section of Jaundice 3 where I discuss the symbolic and cosmologic aspects of this healing method.

⁷⁹ I was also informed that *saba* could bring messages of love between two persons. The theme of *saba* as a carrier of spiritual love between the seeker and Allah, commonly known as the 'lover and the Beloved' is a common motif in Sufi poetry. The Persian poet Hafiz often employs it in his poetry. In one verse Hafiz says: "O *saba*, bring that fragrance to me from the soil upon which my beloved has trodden". ("Ey *saba neckati az khāke rahe yar biar bebar andoohē delo mojdēye deldar biar*").

In Baba Ali's *puleeta*, the notion of air or wind is often written by the letter *ha*, accompanied by the letter *ayn*, which is a representation of himself. Thus, the two symbols together represent the force of Baba Ali's psyche that is carried by the air or wind. These two letters are often employed in redundancy sequences, as shown in figures 7.3, 7.4 and 7.6 (the letter sequences on the left and right sides of the *puleeta*'s head). Baba Ali informed me that the expression of redundancy in his *puleeta* served as a means of reasserting his psychic presence; of stamping his personal authority over the host spirit being. Here, the pleonastic use of language is reminiscent of the repetitious stylistic patterns exhibited in exorcism rituals. Generally, exorcism rituals are characterised by recurrent elements, whether in the form of prayers, spells, or specific gestures which are employed by *faqirs*. Intimated in the sequences of repetitious words, gestures, and emotions, lies a *faqir*'s concern to assert himself before the patient and the host spirit being. It is because of the insidious nature of spirit possession that *faqirs* are resolved to this kind of repetitive polemics. My experiences of witnessing exorcism rituals allowed me to explore their arduous quality. Exorcism rituals often test a *faqir*'s physical and emotional mettle. Sometimes, a *faqir*'s nerves will become frayed by a patient's failure to respond positively to him. In such cases, a *faqir* may threaten to burn the patient, or will resort to grabbing them by their hair. However, such forays may not produce the desired affect. There are no guarantees that a host spirit being will be expelled from a patient even after the performance of one or more exorcism rituals.

Here, the logic of redundancy in *puleeta* and during the performance of exorcism rituals plays a crucial part in a patient's psychic retrieval. For *faqirs*, repetitions of sacred words, whether aural or written, is believed to compound their spiritual effect. The aim in the end is to literally "muscle in" on the host spirit being, to instil fear in it, to hassle, to rescind its power, and finally, to expel it from the patient.

While some symbolic representations of wind or air motifs in their letter forms convey a *faqir*'s psychic presence in *puleeta*, other motifs symbolise the fecundating aspects of the wind. This is represented in figure 7.6 via the recurring motif of *saba* (the wind of special blessing), which is located on the left and right sides of the *puleeta*.

Up to this point I have examined core symbolic themes in *puleeta*, and some of their cultural resonances. My last section will explore the themes of evil and time and their symbolic representations, how they are constituted and how they intimate on the notions of control and mystical mastery.

Sacred time in *illo tempore*: The battle between good and evil

Two notable features which are found in various *puleeta* are their symbolic representations of evil and time. Firstly, *faqirs*' concept of evil as the antithesis of the Divine order is personified via various beings. The archetypal personification of evil is *Iblis* or *Shaytan* (Satan), who is mentioned in various passages in the Quran. The Quran (2:34), mentions *Iblis* as refusing to bow down before Adam after Allah commanded him and the angels.⁸⁰ For his disobedience *Iblis* was banished from Allah's grace, but was given freedom to tempt humanity.

The name of *Iblis*, as the primordial foe of Allah and the embodiment of evil, is often written in *puleeta*, and is often included along with other individuals who are also mentioned in the Quran. For example, in figure 7.10, we see the name of *Iblis* written, central right of the *puleeta*, opposite to the name, *Haman*. Central left of the *puleeta* are featured two other names, being *Shaddad* and *Pharon* (*Pharaoh*).

For *faqirs* and other Muslims, these three men are earthly manifestations of evil and represent an opposition to the Divine order. Common to all of them is their refusal to bend to the Divine Will. In the Quran, *Hāmān* is mentioned as being the Prime Minister of the Egyptian Pharaoh. It notes: "(Remember also) Qārun, Pharaoh, and Hāmān: there came to them Moses with clear signs, but they behaved with insolence on the earth; yet they could not overreach (Us)" (Quran 29:38).

Both the Quran and the Torah, depict Pharaoh as the arch-enemy of Moses. *Pharaoh* is mentioned several times in the Quran, and is referred to by the title "Lord of Stakes". The Quran states: "Before them (were many who) rejected apostles, — The People of

⁸⁰ *Iblis*'s refusal to bow before Adam was due to his belief of his own superiority. Thus the Quran (7:12) states: "Allah said: "What prevented thee from bowing down when I commanded thee?" He said: "I am better than he: thou didst create me from fire and him from clay".

Figure 7. 10

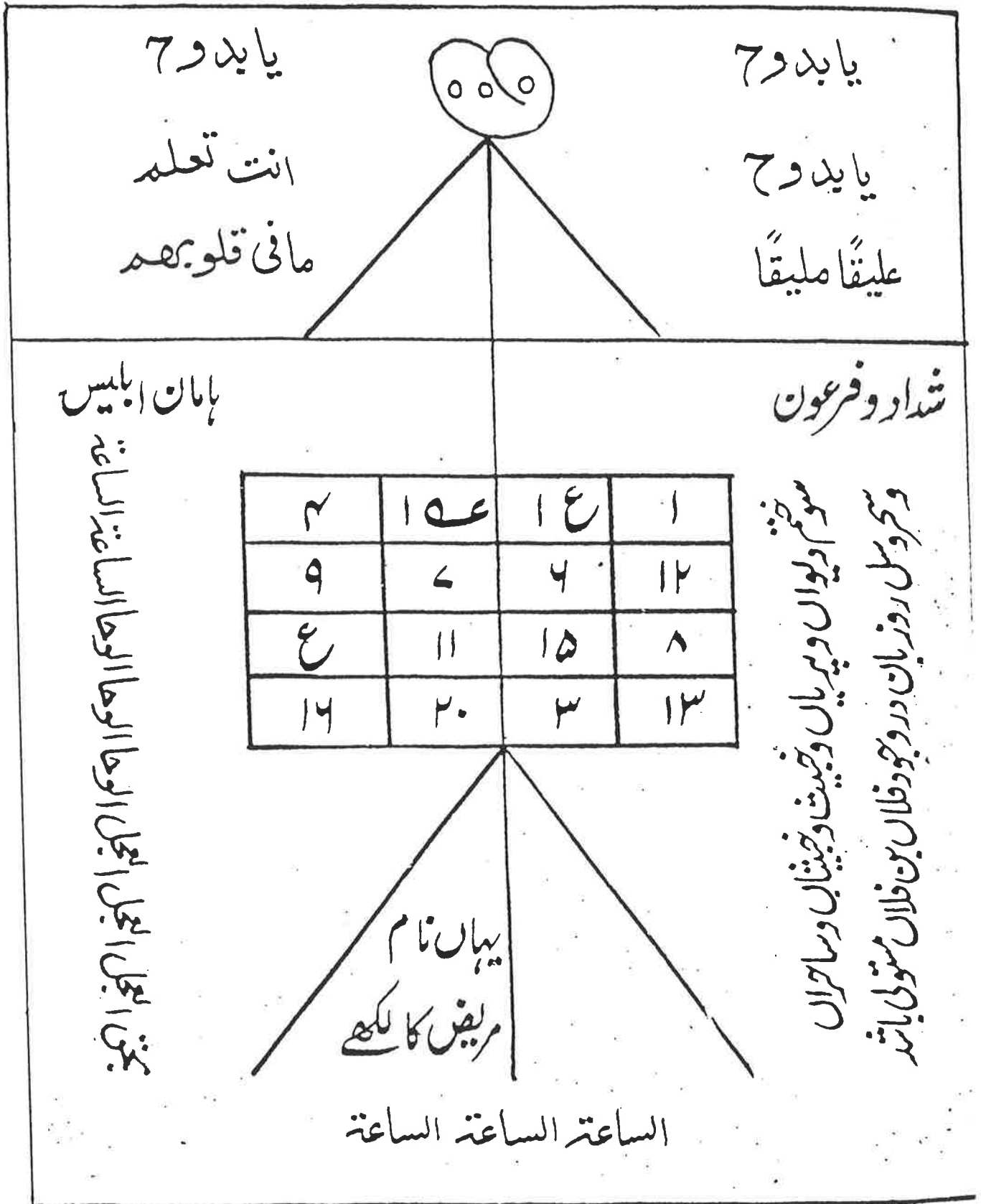
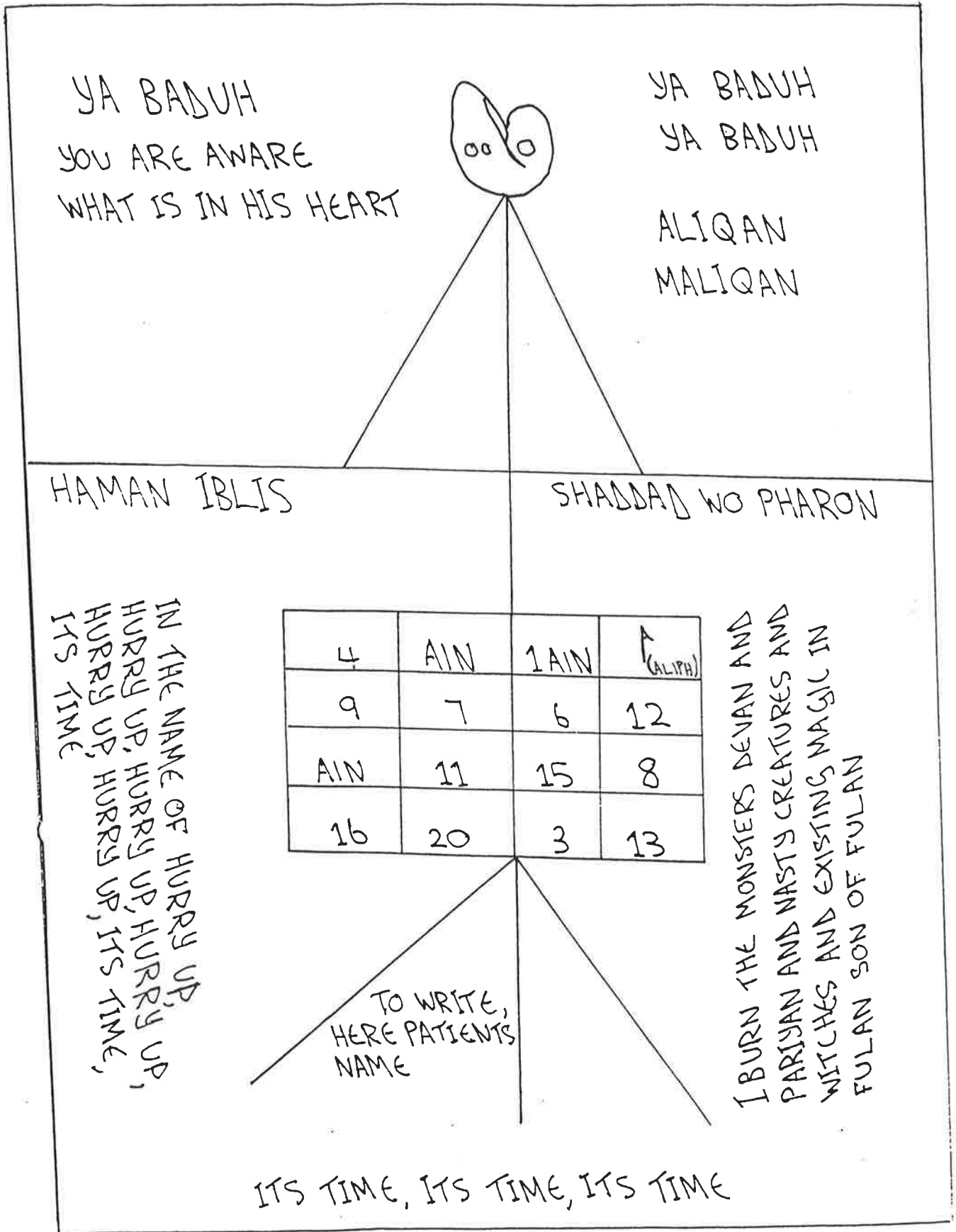


Figure 7.10



Noah, and 'Ād, and Pharaoh, the Lord of Stakes..." (38:11). *Faqirs'* narratives portray Pharaoh as the epitome of arrogance and false pride.

In Muslim folklore, *Shaddad* was a king who created an earthly garden. *Shaddad's* garden was unsurpassed in beauty anywhere on the earth. Believing that his garden rivalled Allah's paradise, *Shaddad* became tainted with the sin of pride. Although *Shaddad* is not mentioned in the Quran, his name is synonymous with conceit, on par with *Haman*, *Pharaoh* and *Iblis*.

The names of other "evil" people, for example, *Abu Jahle* (located at the bottom of the left leg in figure 7.2, who was the adversary of the Prophet Muhammad, are sometimes featured in *puleeta*. In Arabic, *Abu Jahle* means the "father of folly", as he was renowned for his arrogance and impiety.⁸¹

The inclusion of the "evil collective" in *puleeta* attempt to express to the *faqir* the state of spiritual disorder in the patient. As I discussed earlier, spirit possession is often conceived by *faqirs* and other Muslims as being caused by one's lack of observance to core social mores and laws as prescribed by Islamic canon. Failure to perform regular ablution before prayer or after coitus and excretion or laxity in prayer, leave an individual susceptible to spiritual attack. As Jackson (1998:113) has shown, the consequences of moral laxity may lead to personal crisis and psychic disarrangement:

But perhaps the most poignant of all the speculations that begin to take hold is the view that the disturbed order of the world is a result of some ancestral error, or something one has done wrong — a reflection of some essential moral inadequacy (Jackson 1998:113).

Secondly, the act of writing the names of the "evil collective" in *puleeta* allows a *faqir* a means of symbolically regaining some degree of spiritual order in the patient, by connecting them to other motifs which mediate the ideas of sacred authority, time, and intimidation. This is a poignant example of Baba Ali's capacity to retrieve the sacred past "within the context of a living present" (Krolick 1987:83), by means of transposing it

⁸¹ His real name was 'Amr ibn Hisham, and was killed in the battle of *Badr* in 624 (Hughes 1988:8). According to Hughes (1988:8), it is *Abu Jahle* who is alluded to in the Quran when it states: "There is a man who disputeth concerning Allah without either knowledge or direction". (27:8).

to the patient's personal crisis. Krolick declares that this process of transposition is pivotal to the mythopoeic imagination (1987:82).

A *faqir* may employ motifs which are intended to intimidate a host spirit being. For instance, "burning" motifs are regularly featured in Baba Ali's *puleeta* and aim to symbolically threaten a host spirit being with fire. One variation of the "burning" is illustrated in figure 7.10 by the line, "*so khatam devan wo pariyan wo khabis-o-khabisan wo sahiran wo sahar wasal rozban dar wajood fulan bin fulan mastoli bashad*" ("I burn the monsters *devan* and *pariyan* and nasty creatures and witches, and existing magic in *fulan* son of *fulan*".) Again, in order to comprehend this idea we must explore it in relation to exorcism rituals, where a *faqir* may threaten to burn a patient with fire. This may take the form of either a verbal threat or by a *faqir*'s use of employing a lighted candle or lamp which is brought to a patient's ears.⁸² This strategy was often employed by Baba Ali during his exorcism rituals. The rationale behind "burning" has an affinity with Islamic conceptions of hell (*jahanam*), as the abode of endless suffering. Fire is also linked to light, an element which spirit beings avoid. Other variations of the "burning" motif are found in figures 7.11 and 7.12.

The theme of time also plays an important part in *puleeta*, and underscores a *faqir*'s concern to quickly perform an exorcism ritual once spirit possession has been diagnosed. Baba Ali was always mindful of the impending social implications of spirit possession, and conducted his exorcism rituals with a sense of urgency. This concern is reaffirmed by a patient's family and relatives who are aware of the negative social effects of spirit possession. Social stigmatisation is especially critical for unmarried women as it can diminish their opportunity to marry. Since many female victims of spirit possession tend to act in a lewd and provocative manner poses the threat of them being negative labelling even after a cure has been achieved.

Ahmad Shah had told me how he had mediated on behalf of a young Muslim women to the parents of a boy whom she intended to marry. The boy's parents had found out that the girl had been possessed by a spirit being. Consequently, they annulled any wedding

⁸² As I stated earlier, *faqirs* believe that spirit beings can enter the body via the ears.

Figure 7.11

بمحق سليمان بن داود
عليهها السلام
يا ايها الناس بمحق يا اسرافيل
بمحق جبرئيل

نوع	۴۸۴	۵۰۰	۳۹۶	۴۹۳
شماره	۴۹۸	۴۹۳	۴۹۶	۴۹۹
ماه	۴۹۲	۴۹۵	۵۰۳	۴۸۸
روز	۴۵۰	۴۸۹	۴۹۱	۴۹۶

و بمحق يا عزرائيل
ون

عليقا مليقا تطبيقا انت تعلم ما في
قلوبهم اچه در وجود فلاں بنت فلاں يا
فلاں بن فلاں ابليس و جن و بهوت و ديوانه
و پيري باشد در روغن قليته درآمده
حاضر شود بسوزد

بمحق جميع الجن و الشياطين
بسم الله

بمحق جميع الاموات

Figure 7. 11

BAHAQ SULEIMAN BIN
DAWOOD ALEHUMUS SALAM
By the grace of Sulaiman son
of Dawood money upon them.

BAHAQ YA BAHQ WO BAHQ ASIF
BIN BARKHIYA ASHA'B SULEIMAN
ALEHIS SALAM
By grace fulfill and by grace of Amir
son Barkhiya Ashab Sulaiman money upon
in the name of

the named YA AYUHAN NAS BAHQA
And by sacred YA ISRAFEEL BAHQA
of Israfel GABRIEL

Every people by sacred
of Israfel by sacred of
Gabriel.

PHARAH	۴ ۹۴	۴ ۷ <	۵ ۱۱	۷ ۱۷
NAMRAH	۴ ۹۹	۴ ۹ <	۴ ۹ ۴	۴ ۹ ۱
SHARAH	۴ ۱۱	۵ ۴	۴ ۹ ۵	۴ ۹ ۲
HAMRAH	۴ ۹ <	۴ ۹ ۱	۴ ۹ ۲	۴ ۵

WAO BAHQA JAMEIL JINN
AULIA ALLAH.
By the grace of all friends of Allah
& JINN.

ALIQ A MALIQ A TALIQ A
ANTA TALAM MAFI QULEBE-
HIM ANCHE DAR WAJOD
FULAN BINT FULAN YA FULAN
BIN FULAN IBLIS - JINN -
BHOOT - DEO - PARI BASHAQ
DAR ROGANE PULEETA
DAR AMDA HAZIR
SHOOD BASHUZZO

You are aware of whatever
exists in their hearts.
Whatever exists in Fulan
son (daughter) of Fulan
devil, jinn, ghosts, monsters,
pari, they come to the oil
of the puleeta and burn.

BAHAQ JAMEIL ARWAH
By the grace of all souls.

SHARH

QARON

Figure 7.12

والجلس والفاقت والقصد والعتياق والوسواس
والكرامت والنصر والوسواس

٣٠ ٤٤ 



٤٤٨
ولهو

		ج		ب	
فلاان ابن ناصر مضمي الدين		فلاان بن فلاان		فلاان بن فلاان	
صرد		١٦		١٦	
٢٥	١٤٣	٢٥	١٤٦	٢٥	١٤٦
٢٥	١٤٨	٢٥	١٤٦	٢٥	١٤٦
٢٥	١٢٨	٢٥	١٨٠	٢٥	١٤١
٢٥	١٤٥	٢٥	١١٤	٢٥	١٤٩
ب		حب ٢٨		ع ٤٢	

سوم ديوان پريان پير ملا جنيان و مسان
سوم ديوان پريان پير ملا جنيان و مسان
سوم ديوان پريان پير ملا جنيان و مسان

فلاان بن فلاان با شند بن مومني
فلاان بن فلاان با شند بن مومني
فلاان بن فلاان با شند بن مومني

سوم ديوان پريان پير ملا جنيان و مسان
سوم ديوان پريان پير ملا جنيان و مسان
سوم ديوان پريان پير ملا جنيان و مسان

Figure 7.12

IN THE NAME OF THE SEATED ONE, FROM THE TEMPTER,
 GENEROUS, PLEASE ASSIST ME

۴۰ ۷۷
 30 77



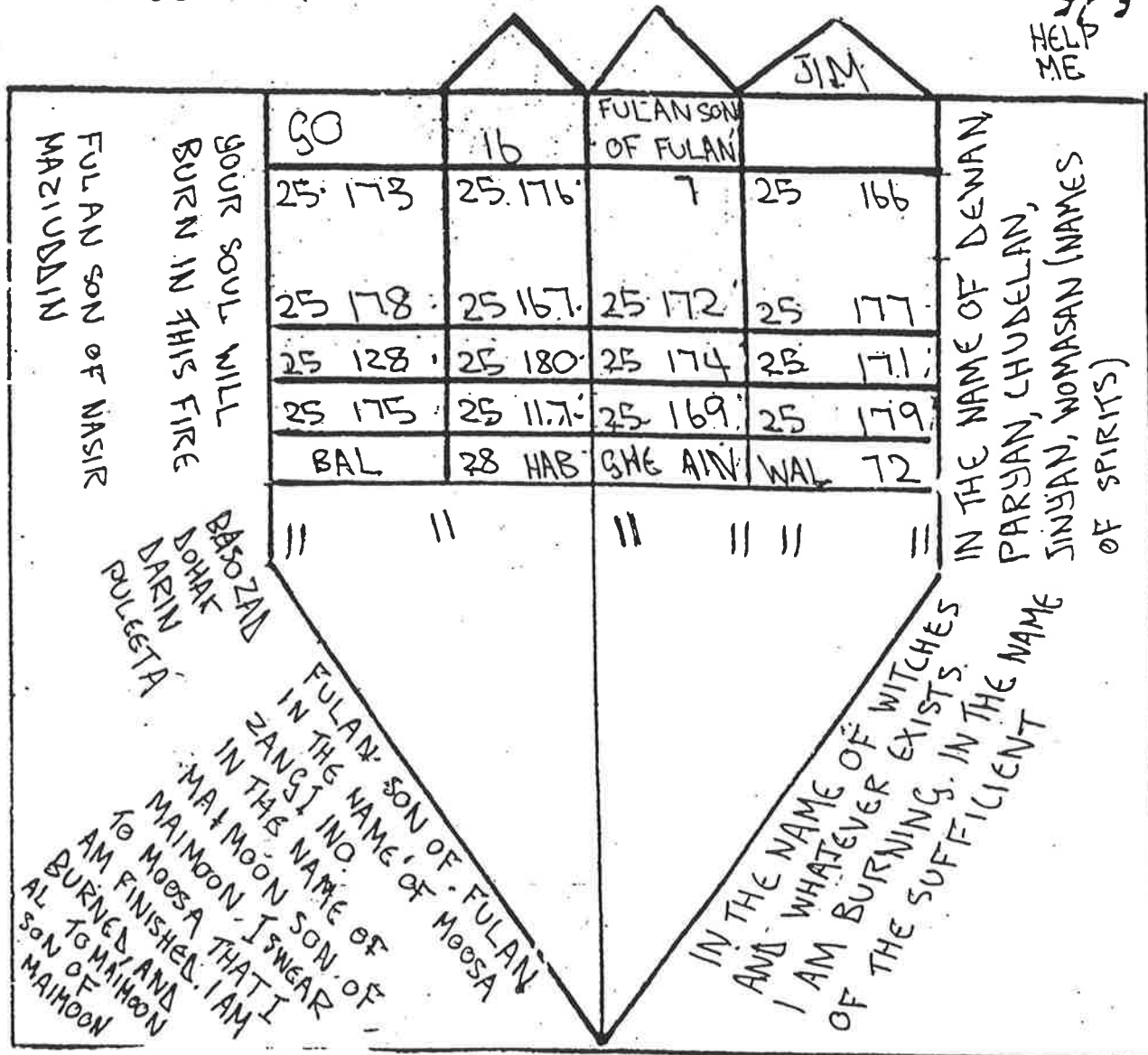
والسواس



6 AIN 8

۶ ع ۸

و ليو
 HELP ME



plans for their son. Ahmad Shah informed them that the girl was no longer afflicted by spirit possession. The couple eventually married.

In *puleeta*, the theme of time is conveyed by two particular words: “*al-ajal*” and “*asā’at*”. The word “*ajal*” is used in the social context that something is due to eventuate. “*Ajal*” is often used in relation to death and termination. For example, a person’s death may be talked about in terms of it having been his/her *ajal* (time) to die. In colloquial discourse, the term, “*asā’at*” refers to destiny — that there is a right time for everything to happen. When a certain event happens it is considered by Muslims as having been the right time (*asā’at*) for it to have occurred at that particular moment in time. Figures 7.3, 7.4 and 7.10 show variations of these two words that are written in repetitive sequences, and which conjointly reinforce the idea for the host spirit being to be expelled from the patient. As in other motifs incorporated in *puleeta*, the use of the words *al-ajal* and *asā’at* provide a way of authoring “some sense of mastery” (Jackson 1998:32), over the spiritual other and of restoring existential control in the patient.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed *puleetas*’ various levels of symbolism and their significance in *faqirs*’ religious imagination. As an entry point into my analysis of *puleeta*, I began by giving an overview of the nature and treatment of physical and spiritual afflictions. I explained that the ideology of *puleeta* is rooted in *faqirs*’ therapeutic lore, which is predicated on the belief that “action in any one domain” can affect or influence the other (Jackson 1998:174). This belief is reflected in the use of the Divine Attributes where the inherent properties of each divine Attribute can be spiritually transferred to a patient in order to effect a cure or to fulfil a certain desire. This process is also intrinsic to the process of spiritual transference of a *puleeta*’s symbolic properties into the patient. I have contended that a *puleeta* can be construed as a symbolic field consisting of various strategies which aim towards diminishing a host spirit being’s control over a patient and for restoring his/her psychic balance. By using various examples of *puleeta* I disclosed some of their symbolic levels of meaning and how they attempt to initiate this kind of spiritual transference. To make sense of *puleetas*’ various motifs, I explored some of their social manifestations within the Muslim lifeworld. I drew on the notion that there is a relationship between the body of *puleeta* and the embodiment of *puleeta* in human action and the religious imagination. *Puleeta* are not just

idiosyncratic creations of a *faqir's* religious imagination, but rather conjoin various motifs drawn from wider Islamic and Muslim cultural representations. As I have argued, these include the relationship between sacred beings found in the Quran and the invocation of sacred authority in *puleeta*: The significance of the centre in *puleeta* and how it attempts to restore psycho-physical balance in the patient: The importance of odd numerals and their use in magical squares, and how they mediate notions of sacred power, balance, protection, and confusion in *puleeta*: The association between the air and a *faqir's* psychic presence in *puleeta*, and the themes of evil and time as strategies of intimidation and existential retrieval.

Puleeta are poignant manifestations of *faqirs'* mystical craft, and tell us a lot about their conceptions of various spirit beings, power, balance, mastery, and the importance of stamping their psychic authority over spirit beings. Behind each *puleeta's* apparent conundrum of traditional, cryptic, and idiosyncratic symbols lies a *faqir's* creative resolve in reaffirming his alleged mystical prowess to himself and others. Thus, *puleeta* enable *faqirs* to negotiate with several spiritual others and for gaining mystical mastery. In the next chapter, I continue my exploration of mystical mastery in relation to mystical states and their performative representations.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SPEAKING WITH THE SAINTS: *HUKM* AS A CREATIVE SOURCE OF *FAQIRS'* MYSTICAL EXPRESSION

If the body which cannot serve God, better be dead.
Hazrat Junaid Abul Qasim Baghdadi

Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty.
The Prophet

Introduction

In this chapter I explore the tie between the invisible and the visible through an examination of *hukm*¹ and *faqirs'* ritual performance. I examine the role of *hukm* as a creative source of *faqirs'* mystical expression. My purpose for pursuing this theme is to provide the reader with a greater awareness of the nature of *hukm*; how it constitutes *faqirs'* understanding of the saints, and how this is dramatised in ritual genres. At the same time I describe *faqirs'* ritual performances as not only reaffirming the mystical tie between *faqir* and saint but also as revealing an aesthetics of emotion and experience which lies at the heart of *faqirs'* mystical complex. In the first section I provide an overview of *hukm* as understood by *faqirs*. Any attempt to examine the nature of *hukm* and the means by which it is expressed in *faqirs'* ritual genres demands an analysis of emotions and aesthetics, since these two elements are crucial to them.

This chapter is in two parts. In the first part I examine *hukm* as a creative source of *faqirs'* ritual expression via an analysis of *nara* — a type of expletive used to communicate with the saint in a euphoric state, as an expression of a *faqir's* bond with the saint.² I argue that the interplay between *hukm* and *nara* generates a form of creative expression. Moreover, I briefly examine the role of *cannibus* (*chillum*) in the performance of *nara*.³ The use of *chillum* assists in the performance of *nara*, by allowing

¹ Arabic word meaning “order” or “command”, and is used in various senses in the Quran, connoting Divine judgement, knowledge, and rule (Quran 12:40; 21:79; 3:73).

² The term “*nara*” is used in both the singular and plural.

³ *Faqirs* smoke *cannibus* in the form of concentrated oil which are formed into blocks. This is smoked in a small pipe.

the participant to engage in non-ordinary states of awareness, which intensifies their tie with the saints.⁴

In the second part I further examine *hukm* as a creative source of *faqir's* ritual performance in relation to one particular performance given by the *faqir*, Shams. I have chosen to analyse Sham's performance since it aptly expresses the integration of *faqirs'* mystical experience and creative performance. I contend that Sham's gestures can be construed as idealised templates containing key psycho-cultural themes which inform *faqirs'* experience of *hukm* in their everyday lives. *Faqirs* possess a rich gesture language incorporating various hand movements and postures, and forms an integral part of *faqirs'* mystical repertoire. These gestures are employed mainly during private rituals. *Faqirs'* gestures are endowed with profound mystical meaning and aid in the mystical, emotional, and aesthetic impact of their ritual genres. I provide a brief analysis of each posture in Sham's performance sequence and show how their mystical and social levels of meaning are incorporated in the beliefs and actions of *faqirs*. These postures are examined here for the first time, and provide several new ideas for the field of anthropological knowledge into *faqirs'* mystical complex. While I recognise that the use of static postures as an analytical tool allows only a limited glimpse into Sham's performance sequence,⁵ I contend that this kind of textual reading still offers an invaluable method for examining its experiential quality.⁶ Although, little of its "experiential force"⁷ can be

⁴ Among *faqirs* the use of *chillum* corresponds with some aspects of Myerhoff's notion of "transcendental communitas" (1974) as it is employed as a means for heightening a *faqir's* proximity to the saints. The use of hallucinogens has been well documented in several anthropological studies. Myerhoff (1974) claims, that the *Huichol* Indians in south-west United States, ceremonially ingest the sacred plant, *peyote*, as part of their pilgrimage rites in order to become "one with the gods". The magico-religious use of tobacco and other plants is germane to some South American tribes, among which the shamans of the *Warao* of the *Orinoco* delta which "represent the sole psychoactive agent employed by shamans to transport themselves into the realm of the metaphysical (Wilbert 1976:17). Other studies done by (Wilbert 1976: 55-83; Cooper 1949:534; Padre Gabriel 1944:58; Koch-Grunberg 1923:329; Nimuendaju 1952:104) record the "psychotropic effect" of tobacco and its association with trance and psychical events.

⁵ In this section, one or more photographs will accompany each posture in Sham's performance sequence.

⁶ Like movement-writing (an important ethnomusicological technique) in which the sequences of dancer's movements are noted in text, an exegesis based on still photographs may also provide in Farnell's terms a "possibility for the imagination" (Farnell 1995:26). While still photographs, like movement texts, are static representations of performance, they are important for their documentary and referential aspects (Williams 1997:163).

⁷ Borrowed from Desjarlais (1994:100).

conveyed here, I attempt to flesh out its textural rhythms and poetic resonances, in order to convey to the reader aspects of its emotive style as I had encountered it.⁸

My analysis of *hukm* as a creative source, and how it is manifested through *faqirs'* ritual genres is partly informed by Merleau-Ponty's concept of the relationship between "the visible and the invisible"(1968). This relationship pertains to the intangible (invisible) and tangible (visible) reality, that Gill describes as "the way the latter is somehow already within and/or mediated by the former" (1991:75). According to Merleau-Ponty, it is the invisible dimension that endows the visible dimension with meaning and upholds "the bond between the flesh and the idea, between the visible and the interior armature which it manifests and which it concerns" (1968:149). As Merleau-Ponty notes:

Rather, it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being (1968:151).

I am particularly interested in Merleau-Ponty's idea of the intertwining nature of these dimensions and how each dimension is "known and through the other" since it resonates with *faqirs'* practice and understanding of ritual as defining the type of engagement a *faqir* has with the spirit world. However, Merleau-Ponty fails to explain the nature of this inter-relationship; how it is constituted in the lifeworld, and how it informs human sensibilities. In contrast, Csordas (1990, 1997) is attentive to the nature of the inter-

⁸ My particular nuance on *faqirs'* performance as disclosing the mystical tie between *faqir* and saint has been prompted by a paucity of critical analysis in this area. Catherine Ewing's study on the *Qalandar faqirs* in the *Punjab* (1984) (geographic area encompassing north-west India and south-east Pakistan), briefly mentions *hukm* as a source of spiritual direction for *faqirs*, whereby "every action is said to involve a direct infusion of the sacred into everyday life, of direct communication with God or a saint" (Ewing (1984:359). While Ewing's analysis makes some inroads in understanding the nature of *hukm*, it does not discuss *hukm* within the context of ritual performance. On a similar note, apart from Michael Gilsenan's analysis of collective religious chanting (*dhikr*) amongst Egyptian Sufis (1973), most studies are limited to descriptive, historical, or psycho-physiological analyses of spiritual audition (*samā*) and ritual chanting (*dhikr*). Of interest here is Gilsenan's intimation of Victor Turner's concept of *communitas*, when he states that the ritual participants are brought together in order to experience a "transcendental" reality which is antithetical to that experienced in the everyday world (1969,1987). This state of transcendental *communitas* is elaborated by Myerhoff (1974) in her analysis of the Huichol pilgrimage to Wirrikuta. For Haas, Sufi ritual is foremost a psycho-physiological technique for inducing altered states of consciousness (1943:18). In contrast, Hoffman subscribes with traditional Sufi views of *dhikr* as leading to the attainment of *fana* (annihilation or dissolution of the self) (1995:170). See also Haas (1943); Haq (1944); Laurence (1983) and Hoffman (1995) for an analysis of historical and psycho-physiological aspects of Sufi rituals.

relationship between the visible and the invisible within the domain of religious behaviour. Csordas (1997:160), following Singer (1972), notes that it is “by creation of a specific mood the constancy and intensity of which become a religious devotee’s concern”. The interplay between spontaneity and creativity in *faqirs’* ritual performance brings us to Csordas’s notion of ritual performance as a source of creativity that is modulated through spontaneous acts (1990,1997). As Csordas claims:

Performance is thus an aid to inculcating a disposition for guided spontaneity and regulated improvisation in imaginative practice (1997:190).

This aspect of Csordas’s theory is taken up here since it expands upon previous models of performance in relation to evoking heightened emotive states (Geertz 1973; Singer 1972)⁹ to include performance as making “key psychocultural themes real not only in an ideational sense but also in a phenomenological sense (Csordas 1997:159). For Csordas, spontaneous religious acts define the state of intimacy an individual has with the sacred, disclosing “the moment of relationship to the divine order” (1997:264). This matches Doty’s analysis of ritual as providing a way for the personal and the transpersonal to conflate (Doty 1986:112).¹⁰ However, I would go further here by arguing that such religious acts invoke an aesthetics of experience, insofar that they disclose the condition for being in the world. By this I mean, *faqirs’* ritual performance with its entourage of language and other kinaesthetic acts disclose the essence of *hukm*.¹¹

Hukm: the embodiment of the invisible in the visible

One of the most important notions in the *faqirs’* mystical complex is *hukm*. *Hukm* can be defined as the mystical tie between a *faqir* and saint. *Hukm* may also connote a specific command or order given by a saint to the *faqir* where the latter is expected to perform. *Hukm* contours and informs a *faqir’s* engagement with the spirit world, and is a source of

⁹ Singer argues that ritual performance generates intense and “long lasting moods...which lend a chronic character to the flow of...activity and the quality of...experience” (1972:201). See also Geertz (1973:90,95),

¹⁰ This compares with Zuesse’s notion of ritual performance as a “vehicle for conveying and embodying the highest symbolic truths” (Zuesse 1975:519). Elaborating from Zuesse, Doty (1986:112) suggests: “In this way ritual does not merely represent ideas. It does not merely illustrate mythological abstractions but is an immediate acting out that bridges and unifies the somatic and ideational, the bodily and the mythic”.

¹¹ Moreover, he claims that ritual gesture discloses and locates a participant’s position in the cosmos, pointing “out a universe, too, and makes spaces in it for the human life. In a word ritual is body language” (Zuesse 1975:519).

creative and emotional expression. *Faqirs* stress that it is *hukm* which binds them to the saints and informs their mystical beliefs and practices. *Faqirs* often speak of their *hukm* as being acquired through a special vision or sacred dream (*basharat*), or during spiritual aroused states. This may entail the *faqir* either seeing or hearing the voice of a specific saint summoning the *faqir* to become his servant. *Hukm* is almost always engaged during non-ordinary states of awareness. In the course of my field-work, I became aware that *hukm* lay both within and outside the domain of a *faqir's* control. Arguably, while sacred dreams, for example, lay beyond a *faqir's* ability to initiate or control, a *faqir* could incorporate the appropriate "corporeal techniques"¹² posited on entering in a spiritually aroused state, in order to communicate with the saint. *Hukm* is enshrouded in ambiguity; a *faqir* does not know when he will receive a saint's command and where, or what kind of duty he will be obliged to perform. Moreover, a saint's command is non-negotiable; a *faqir* must adjust to the conditions that a saint makes on him. Concomitant with this realisation was that each *faqir's hukm* was unique and individualised, reflecting his emotional and mental proclivities and level of mystical awareness (*maqam*).¹³

A *faqir* considers himself as the saint's servant (*bandah*), and speaks of his *hukm* as his solemn duty (*khidmat*) to the saint and to Ali. The *faqir's* aim is to attend to the saint's commands faithfully and diligently. Interestingly, a saint's *hukm* is usually objectified through various kinds of social service such as cleaning of the saint's tomb, or healing the poor. Failure to comply with the requirements of *hukm* may lead to the loss of the saint's favour or dissolution of the intimate bond of *hukm*. Alternately, the correct observance of *hukm* is believed to increase a *faqir's* mystical powers and strengthen his tie with the saint through whose assistance the *faqir* can attain higher stages (*maqamat*) of spiritual awareness. However, *hukm* should not be merely viewed as the asymmetrical relationship between *faqir* and saint, but rather as a mystical symbiosis where the sacred other is intimately accessible, and at the same time is experienced by a *faqir's*

¹² The term "corporeal techniques", as mentioned by Mauss (1936), refer to "biological methods of entering into communication with God" (Mauss 1936:336). Mauss contends that corporeal techniques underlie all mystic states (1936:336).

¹³ The word "*maqam*" is an Arabic word often used by *faqirs* as well as in traditional Sufi texts to refer to a level of spiritual achievement or station.

“kinaesthetic feelings” (Csordas 1997:240). Alternately, *hukm* may also be considered as a means of externalising the gamut of feelings and emotions generated by a *faqir*'s engagement with the saint.

Faqirs refer to spiritually aroused states (non-ordinary or altered states of awareness) as “*hal*” (plural “*ahwal*”). *Hal* is a difficult term to define precisely and its usage varies according to context. *Hal* always relates to a trance or ecstatic state. My definition of trance coincides with Crapanzano, who defines it as a:

complete or partial dissociation, characterised by changes in such functions as identity, memory, the sensory modalities, and thought. It may involve the loss of voluntary control over movement, and may be accompanied by hallucinations and visions which are often forgotten” (Crapanzano 1981:195).¹⁴

Hal characterises a state of “otherness”, assuming some of the qualities of Turner’s liminal state.¹⁵ *Faqirs* claim that *hal* is a “gift of Allah”, a state of sanctified euphoria. *Hal* serves as a means of intensifying experience; it constitutes a way of guiding powerful emotions and feelings, where ordinary states of awareness are considered as insufficient for expressing them. *Hal* may last for a few seconds to a few days. *Hal* also manifestly reasserts the intimate nature of a *faqir*'s bond to a saint, since it is based on a total or partial dissolution from normal states of awareness; psychologically leading a *faqir* away from phenomenal existence, towards the realm of the sacred other.¹⁶ This can be further

¹⁴ In the context of Moroccan Sufism, *hal* refers to anyone of the “psycho-gnostic states, such as intimacy to God or divine intimacy, over which the mystic has no control” (Crapanzano 1981:195). According to Crapanzano, *hal* is also inter-linked with the saints’ blessedness, and is intrinsic to the success of a cure for those persons suffering from spiritual maledictions (Crapanzano 1981:167). “For the Hamadsha (Moroccan Sufi brotherhood), *hal* is both a generic and specific term. Generically, it refers to any trance which occurs during the collective ritual called *hadra*; specifically, it refers to a non-violent trance, which corresponds roughly to what is known in the literature on hypnosis as a somnambulistic state” Crapanzano (1981:195).

¹⁵ However, my sentiments reflect somewhat with Colin Turnball’s re-analysis of liminality who warns us against limiting this concept to a “transitory in-between state of being” (Turnball 1990:80).

¹⁶ *Hal* shares some similarities with Rouget’s notion of trance, “since it is the factor that not only underlines all representations related to trance but also governs most of its ritual and external manifestations” (Rouget 1985:20).

understood in relation to the notion of *bātin*, which in *faqirs'* thought refers to the inner or spiritual man.¹⁷

Faqirs distinguish between two types of *hal* — *jalal* and *jamal*. The *jalal* type is considered as being more dramatic and is characterised by involuntary body movements. Due to its truculent nature, this type of *hal* can be potentially dangerous to the ritual participant. The *jamal* type is considered less volatile and corresponds to Crapanzano's somnambulistic or hypnotic state (Crapanzano 1981:195). *Hal* may also be induced via listening to religious poetry and *Qawwali*, or by prolonged chanting. In either case, the somatic sensibilities are prone to disruption; the individual manifests temporary dissonance. At worst, a *faqir* becomes as one gripped by physical affliction, often lapsing into an incoherent state. In effect, *hal* is a pertinent example of the temporary dissolution of the human psyche.

Faqirs view the high gestural content of their ritual genres as a means of expressing their level of intimacy and intensity with the saints which verbal speech alone cannot convey. *Hukm* as a creative source of mystical expression engages the *faqir* at the heart level, the level of spiritual intimacy. Seen in this light, a *faqir's* concern in entering non-ordinary states emphasises the highly intimate level of *hukm*, and the saint's relationship with the "inner man". This is cognate with Csordas who suggests that,

Intimacy is not only an interpersonal ideal for relationship to the social other but also one that defines the moment of relationship to the divine other (1997:264-265).

¹⁷ *Bātin* as described by *faqirs* reflects cultural understandings. In Muslim thought, *bātin* is the seat of intimacy. *Bātin* is not only the locus of intimacy emotions i.e. love, compassion, peace, but also of stirring emotions such as "romantic passion, indignation and righteous anger" (Beeman 1988:14). Inner turmoil, spiritual agitation, and emotional imbalance also find their source in *bātin*. Beeman states that in Iranian society, for example, the emotional tensions found in *bātin* "are generally positively valued, and their expression on appropriate occasions is not only socially sanctioned, it is demanded" (1988:14). Such values are similarly found amongst Muslims, for whom the expressing of one's true feelings removes the emotional dross from the heart, making it more spiritually receptive to the Divine. Diametrically opposed to *bātin* is *zāhir*, which refers to the person's outward actions that can be scrutinised by others. *Zāhir* pertains to the external world where individual sensibilities are controlled by social rules governing every area of Muslim life (Beeman 1988:14). Whereas *bātin* is associated to the domain of authentic emotions, *zāhir* governs the "realm of politesse, and of proper expression of behaviour, where one's true feelings must be controlled, where a proper public face must be put on one's words" (Beeman 1988:14).

Arguably, nowhere is this inter-relationship between “aesthetic media and affectivity” (Saniotis 2001:363), more evident than during *faqirs*’ performance of *nara*.

Social context of *nara*

It was Friday evening on September 16th, 1995. The Nizamuddin shrine and *basti* seethed in the religious fervour of Nizamuddin’s death celebration (*urs*), an event which attracted thousands of devotees. Religious festivities continued there throughout the night, transforming the medieval ambience in an unparalleled kaleidoscope of sights, smells, sounds, and tastes. It was an exciting time to be there. Apart from the various liturgies, devotees were entertained by the rapturous melodies of *Qawwalli* groups. Some of these groups had come from various parts of India to celebrate the occasion. Each *Qawwalli* group seemed to vie with other ensembles to gain the crowd’s favour, and their expectant money offerings (*vel*). I found myself overwhelmed by the scale of this human pageantry. Waves of devotees vied with each other to gain entrance into the inner chamber of the saint’s shrine.

Having left the Nizamuddin shrine complex, I walked to the meeting place (*dhoona*) of some of the local *faqirs*, located in the *basti*. The religious occasion had assembled many *faqirs* there, many of whom I had seen for the first time. They all sat around the communal fire (*dhooni*), talking and smoking *chillum* (concentrated hashish oil that is smoked from a small pipe). The air reeked with pungent hash smoke and piss. I was invited to sit down. I sat down next to a local transvestite (*hijra*) who candidly offered me some *chillum* to smoke. I turned down her offer. She was a tall person with a round face and long hair. Her long hands wavered in the air as she spoke.¹⁸

Some of the *faqirs* had their customary androgynous appearance, dressed in colourful turbans, and wearing bangles, finger-rings, and earrings. Some had staffs by their sides. One of the *faqirs* was carrying a small ornamental rod that had a large metallic knob on its end from which dangled several chains. The rod narrowed to a sharp point. I was told that the rod was used for tongue piercing during ecstatic states.

¹⁸ Such congregations of *faqirs* and *hijras* are not uncommon since both embody the qualities of social margins (Douglas 1969). *Hegiras* at the Nizamuddin shrine are usually looked upon as objects of sympathy and to be “confused men”. Perhaps this explains the ease in which *hegiras* are allowed into *faqirs*’ social space.

The casual atmosphere of the *faqirs*' gathering was suddenly broken by a young *faqir* who stood up and ejaculated a staccato of gibberish sounds. His wiry body became gripped in a fit of ecstasy, and began to shake erratically while he shouted, accentuating his "wild" appearance. "What's he saying?" I asked a *faqir* sitting next to me. "Who knows? Only he knows", he replied. After a minute or so had elapsed, the young *faqir*'s expletives finished with the discernible phrase "Ya! Ali!" (O! Ali!), followed by what sounded like two grunts. After this, the assembly of *faqirs* reciprocated loudly with shouts of "Ya! Ali!" and "Mast Qalandar". The *faqir* then sat down and all continued on with their chatting. This episode was repeated over several times while I sat there. Other *faqirs* shouted *nara* before smoking *chillum*.

***Nara*: mystical expression and the rupturing of being**

The previous vignette has attempted to disclose the sociological context in which *nara* is disclosed. The synthesis between speech, gesture, and emotion as exhibited by the young *faqir* is armorial to the performance of *nara* and is distinguishable from other poetic forms amongst Muslims (i.e. *munajat*, *hamd*, *rubai*, *qassida*, *ghazzal*) by its spontaneous and ecstatic manner. Unlike these literal poetic genres, the performance of *nara* is not acquired through a preparatory stage of learning, nor does it necessitate that the performer be literate, but are usually performed spontaneously. As in the case of other styles of ecstatic religious speech, i.e. *glossalalia* (Csordas 1990: 1997), *nara* evokes Merleau-Ponty's notion of language taking up an "existential position in the world" (Merleau-Ponty 1963; Csordas 1990), by virtue of its improvisational rendition.¹⁹

Earlier on, I explained that *nara* can be defined as a kind of poetic utterance or expletive that is endowed with profound religious meaning for *faqirs*. Essentially, many *nara* are invocations to Ali. *Faqirs* believe that by reciting *nara* they can access the spiritual power of Ali. The importance of Ali for *faqirs* cannot be over-emphasised. Ali holds such a pivotal place for the *faqir* that it may sometimes appear to have idolatrous tendencies. Ali's significance to Sufism as noted by previous authors (Hoffman 1995), derives from his spiritual pedigree. As elsewhere in the Islamic world, Indian Sufi orders

¹⁹ While my intention is not to exhaust the cosmological and cultural meanings presented in *nara*, they do present issues that demand further anthropological exploration, such as the use of poetic metaphor in mediating transformational states, as well as the nature of the interplay between poetic imagery and hallucinogenic substances in "transformational efficacy" (Kapferer 1983:248).

trace their spiritual lineages (*shijra*) to Ali. *Faqirs* consider Ali as the wisest and most beloved of the Prophet's companions. *Faqirs* assert that the Prophet Muhammad transmitted his spiritual power (*raz*) to Ali through a hug. Ali is viewed as spiritually most like the Prophet Muhammad, endowed with courage, wisdom and mystical insight. According to a one account, Ali was the only person that the Prophet Muhammad had told of his spiritual journey, the "*Miraj*". In another account, only the Prophet Muhammad and Ali were given privy to seeing the Divine Throne of Allah (*Arsh-e-Mualla*'). Shams' story relates to how,

the creation of the universe is due to Ali having seen the *Arsh-e-Mualla*. Having observed the Islamic declaration of faith "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger" (*La ilahā ilah 'Lāh Muhammadar rasululāh*) written above the Divine Throne, Ali inquired to Allah what it meant. In response to Ali's inquiry Allah created the universe. For each of the four elements, Allah took forty days to create. For this reason, *faqirs* engage in the practice of *chilla* for a period of forty days.

In addition, the recitation of *nara* like other poetic styles is considered as a means of praising the saints through the invocation of Ali who represents the holy collective of saints (*auliya*). This idea conforms with Muslim devotional speech acts that may serve as receptacles of the saints' blessedness (Kurin 1992:284-285). *Nara* range from idiosyncratic expressions, that are seemingly meaningless, to short phrases that follow an intelligible semantic structure. However, it would be incorrect to distinguish these types of *nara* into spontaneous and pre-composed categories. In my experience, both types of *nara* can be incorporated during spiritual arousal. *Faqirs* explain that all *nara* are spontaneous expressions of their love for Ali and the saints. They also cite that the high variation of "improvisatory creations" (Racy 1991:18), of *nara* objectify the individualising aspect of a *faqir's hukm*, that is instantaneously accessed through the body. At the same time, it is the transcendent which *nara* attempts to mediate through bodily gesture where the former "inheres within the other" (Gill 1991:77).

The tie between *nara* and *chillum* sheds further light into the improvisational nature of *nara*. For many *faqirs* the use of *chillum* is an important mystical practice (Plate 8.1). *Faqirs* claim that *chillum* serves as a kind of "short-cut" to Allah. Having asked Shams as



Plate 8.1: *Faqirs* smoking *chillum*, 1995.

to why he smoked *chillum*, he replied, “*sirātal mustaqeem*”²⁰ Denotative here is that the smoking of *chillum* facilitates direct communication with the spirit world. However, it should be pointed out that a *faqir’s* resorting to *chillum* as a kind of a psychological “launching pad” for entering into *hal* is not used in every instance, but is employed when a *faqir* feels a need. The decision to use or abstain from *chillum* reflects the highly personal nature of *hukm* and should be considered in this light. Admittedly, while *chillum’s* use is oftentimes (but not always) a ritual requirement in the performance of *nara*, it would be presumptuous that a *faqir* is solely dependent on *chillum* due to its supposed “lift-off” effect in inducing *hal*. The use of *chillum* is but one of several corporeal techniques at hand in a *faqir’s* mystical arsenal for inducing *hal*.²¹ Alternately, the smoking of *chillum* may be incorporated with other factors for inducing *hal*. For instance, the communal smoking of *chillum*, as illustrated in the previous vignette, can bring on the needed psychological disposition for the onset of *hal*. I contend that a *faqir’s* *hal* may also be partly triggered by the powerful emotions aroused by other *faqirs*. I remember the raw exuberance of emotion exhibited by *faqirs* at these gatherings as they shouted *nara*. Their bodies writhed by the sheer power of their paroxysms. With each *faqir’s* *nara* the milieu seethed with the collective voice of the *faqirs* around him; their vocalisations seemed to grip participants in emotional effervescence. It was as if this soiree of sound became consolidated in one efflorescent voice, which somehow was being drawn into the *faqir’s* body, animating it with the cadence of its rhythm.

While it may be suggested that the incorporation of *chillum* on one level facilitates in the spontaneous creativity of *nara*, since it allows the *faqir* to engage in altered states of perception, it is just as reasonable to suggest that the use of *chillum* as a ritual act enhances communion with the sacred other.²² In other words, *chillum* promotes metastasis, which in turn aids in entering non-ordinary states of awareness that *faqirs* believe are necessary for engaging with the spirit world. Thus, *chillum* enhances mystical experience by guiding a *faqir* away from the external world — the realm of *zāhir* (the “outer man”) and towards his inner being — the realm of *bātin* (the “inner man”), which

²⁰ Arabic for “the straight path” as cited in the Quran (1:6), which states, “show us the straight way” (*Ih-diinasirātal mustaqeem*).

²¹ *Faqirs* are quick to distinguish between *hal* and other mental conditions that follow a similar symptomatology (i.e. types of spiritual illnesses).

²² Although *nara* are also performed without the smoking of *chillum*, it is reasonable to suggest that its use, as indicated, intensifies states of awareness of the sacred Other.

facilitates in communication with the spirit world (Ewing 1984:363).²³ Furthermore, my understanding of the use of *chillum* amongst *faqirs* concurs with Ewing who points out that *chillum* reinforces the *faqir's* attitude of rejecting the “external world” and their desire to concern with the spirit realm (1984:363). The following are examples of *nara* are regularly used by *faqirs*.

1. Allahu Akbar
(Allah is Greater)

2. Ya Ali! Madad
(O Ali! help us)

3. Ya Ali! Mushkil kusha
(O Ali! Protect us from difficulties)

4. Ali Haider, mast Qalandar²⁴
(Ali drunk Qalandar)²⁵

5. Qadir Qalandar, mast, mast, Ah! Ah!
(Powerful Qalandar drunk, drunk Ah! Ah!)

6. Ya Ali! Panch nara Haiderika ek nara Ya Ali! Qadir Qalandar mast mast Ah! Ah!
(O Ali! five nara for Ali one nara O Ali! Empowered Qalandar drunk, drunk, Ah! Ah!)

7. Ya Ali! Shay mardan
(O Ali! king of humanity)

8. Ya Ali! Sheri Khuda
(O Ali! lion of God)

9. Ya Ali! Shay wilayat mahab
(O Ali! king of the saints)

10. Ya Ali! Ali Haider mast Qalandar Haq! Haq! Haq!²⁶
(O Ali! Ali drunk Qalandar Truth! Truth! Truth!)

A slight variation of this *nara* is Ya Ali! Mast Qalandar Haq! Haq! Haq!

A common feature of most *nara* is their characteristic commencement with the word “Ya!” equivalent to the English exclamation “Oh!” and is an exhortation to Ali who represents the holy collectivity of the saints. Several types of *nara* invoke one or more

²³ My view here concurs with Ewing (1984:363).

²⁴ The word “Haider” is a name for Ali.

²⁵ The term “Qalandar” refers to a type of wandering *faqir*, noted for his ecstatic repertoire, found predominantly in North India. These *faqirs* are invariably found at more famous *Chisti* shrines such as the shrines of Nizamuddin and Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Khaki (located nearby to Merauli, New Delhi), and Bu Ali Shah Qalandar, located at Panipat, Uttar Pradesh.

²⁶ The term “Haq” in Arabic meaning “truth” is the forty-third Divine Attribute of Allah. “This is because Allah is the Truth. He brings the dead to life and He has power over everything” (Quran 22:6).

attributes of Ali. Some *nara* incorporate redundancy, manifested by such words as “*haq*” (“truth”) or “*mast*”. The term “*mast*” is a Urdo-Persian word, literally meaning “drunk”. However, it is commonly employed by Muslims to indicate a state of spiritual intoxication. The frequency of these words is an important feature of *nara* and highlights the importance of hypereasthetic states as being intrinsic to *hukm*.

The content of many *nara* consists of an established set of words, drawn from Persian, Arabic, Urdu, and Hindustani languages. Although *nara* often incorporate many words found in other Muslim poetic genres, their stylistic rendition distinguishes them from these. *Nara* may be uttered when alone or when in the company of other *faqirs*. *Nara* are uttered aloud and are often accompanied by a repertoire of controlled and volatile bodily gestures such as shaking, trembling, waving of limbs and laughing (Plate 8.2). The truculent style of their delivery is not only suggestive of spiritual arousal but also denotes a level of creative spontaneity, as the linguistic improvisation of *nara* (an important feature of its practice), underlines the intimate tie between *faqir* and saint.

In order to shed further light on the relationship between *hukm* as a creative source of *faqirs’ nara*, I would like to draw into this analysis Csordas’s concepts of ritual gesture and embodiment (1990, 1997), through an exploration of the practice of “*glossalalia*” or “speaking in tongues” as it commonly referred to by its practitioners and other Christian groups.²⁷ My inclusion of *glossalalia* here is not merely to identify the correlations between *nara* and *glossalalia*, but to reaffirm Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the inter-relatedness of the invisible and the visible domains, and how ideas and beliefs of the sacred are the “locus of cultural creativity” (Csordas 1990:26).

Firstly, from a semantic level, the practice of *nara* is comparable with *glossalalic* prayer, since both performative genre incorporate illocutionary and perlocutionary levels (Austin 1975, Csordas 1997:162). For example, the utterance of *nara* asserts a *faqir’s* tie to Ali and the saints characterised by its bodily force, while at the same time being a conjunction between gestural utterance and emotion. As I have already explained, the exhibiting hypercognised emotions during spiritual arousal, as embodied in *hal*, are

²⁷ *Glossalalia* is commonly engaged by Catholic Pentecostal Christians and non-Catholic Pentecostal Christians in various countries e.g. North America, Australia, United Kingdom.



Plate 8.2: *Faqir* performing *nara* outside the main gates of Nizamuddin shrine, July 1995.

highly prized amongst *faqirs*, since they approximate to the level of intimacy of a *faqir's* love for the saint.²⁸

Nara may manifest itself as a form of idiosyncratic speech, as in the case of *glossalalia*, or can be more akin to the semiotic structure of ritual chanting (*wazifa*). In either case, both address the indeterminate nature of language. *Nara* may fluctuate between inchoate and vernacular speech. Following from Csordas, I would argue that this switching phenomenon may indicate that *nara* is not simply the “transcendence of one’s normal self” (1990:26), where a *faqir* is assumedly emptied of consciousness, but reifies a degree of neuro-physiological control, cognate with elements of shamanic trance (Rouget 1985:14).²⁹ In practice, *nara* is radically different from other poetic genre by virtue of its existential posturing. By this I mean that, on a semantic level *nara* is suggestive of a raw or pure communicative form of language, a stage prior to codified speech, resonating Csordas’s “unitary language of pre-Babel” (1990:31), where intimacy, authority, passivity, and activity coalesce as a unity between speech and perception, body and mind. For as Csordas (1990:25), echoing Merleau-Ponty (1963) declares:

Speech does not express or represent thought, since thought is for the most part inchoate until it is spoken (or written). Instead, speech is an act or phonetic gesture in which one takes up an existential position in the world.

Similarly, the inchoate structure common to many *nara* is reminiscent of Eliade’s idea of shamanic poetry (1957), as a kind of secret language, expressed during euphoric experiences. Moreover, Dissanayake notes that poetic language employs deviant speech patterns or “deliberately obfusate language” as depicted among Eskimo poets, and poets of 17th century England (1992:115).³⁰ As I have noted, the structure and euphoric

²⁸ In consonance with Mauss (1950,1973) and Bourdieu (1977), Middleton claims, that emotional style marks “the dimensions of emotions as sociocultural constructions” (1989:189). In other words, each cultural group has a set of constitutive rules which delineate how certain emotions are given gestural expression, as well as which emotions tend to pre-dominate over others. For instance, Myers explains that for the Pintupi compassion is extolled since it sustains “nurturant behaviour” (1986:124). Amongst the Utku Eskimos, the control of hostile emotions is highly favoured while good will is promoted (Briggs 1970:332). See also Levy (1973).

²⁹ Rouget (1985) and Eliade (1964) claim that a distinguishing feature of shamanic trance is the degree of control he/she exhibits when undergoing this state. As Reinhard notes, a shaman “can enter at will into a non-ordinary psychic state (in which either he himself becomes possessed by a spirit for the purpose of making contact with the spirit world on behalf of members of his community” (1976:16).

³⁰ See also Birket-Smith (1959) and Freuchen (1961).

element of *nara* intimates a movement away from everyday speech patterns, since these are by-products of the exterior world.

Another interesting feature of *nara* is its inclusion in vernacular rituals. I remember observing how one *faqir* during his beautiful rendition of *munajat* (an extempore prayer recited after formal prayer) broke the melodic rhythm of his chant with a vociferous *nara*. In this example, as well on other occasions where this phenomenon occurred, the tie between physical or experiential utterance (*parole*) and syntactic speech (*langue*) became lucid. What can we deduce from this? I would argue that the interplay between these two modes of speech in poetic performances aids in the process of creative improvisation, whereby the rupturing of *langue* constitutes an experiential breakthrough with the sacred. Precisely because *faqirs* often deviate from normal speech to *nara*, and vice versa (as is also the case of *glossalalia*), this may also suggest the inadequacy of the vernacular for facilitating a *faqir's* experience of the sacred. From an improvisational level this switching between *nara* and the vernacular could be construed as a checking mechanism against repetitive mimesis — for Blau the harbinger of mindless reproduction (Blau 1990:255). Blau's position corresponds with Eliade's notion of shamanic poetry as providing the "impetus for linguistic creation" (Eliade 1964:508). *Nara* is the accretion of this creative impulse. At the same time, the indeterminate nature of *nara* may also be construed as a corporeal technique by which a *faqir* learns to achieve a level of mystical mastery over non-ordinary or extraordinary states of awareness, or as Bruner suggests, as a "special form of violating fixity" (1976:31), in order to commune with the spirit world.

While *nara* plays an important role in reaffirming a *faqir's* mystical tie with the saints, *faqirs* also possess various bodily gestures, incorporating both seated and standing positions. The performance of bodily gestures embodies a vocabulary of emotions and sentiments and are creative and spontaneous expressions of *faqirs'* experience of *hukm*, or what I contend as being a method of speaking with the saints. This will now be explored.

"*Usne piyar ka izhar kiya:*"³¹ gesture as the unfoldment of divine truth

I was sitting alone in the *basti*, while listening to the evening call to prayer as the last threads of daylight left the sky and the evening star heralded the coming of night. Shams

³¹ A colloquial expression, which in Hindustani refers to the act of expressing one's love for another.

suddenly approached me from nowhere, it seemed, and grabbed me by the arm. He told me that we must hurry to the shrine of the Sufi saint Inayat Khan to go to his tomb, as he had received a special command from the saint.

Our trip was marked by silence. His mercurial walk seemed to be masked with a hidden purpose. When I did speak out of curiosity he told me to be quiet. As we approached the shrine, Shams mood began to change. He became more intense and started to chant to himself in quiet tones, sometimes breaking out with laughter. His intense mood was synonymous with a trance like state which seemed to occur when he approached a saint's shrine. I apparently became oblivious to him and remained so throughout his performance at the shrine.

Having entered the shrine, I went to the shrine's perimeter. Shams lit two candles and placed them on the tall candelabra behind the saint's tomb. He then lighted some incense and began to breathe in its aromatic fragrance. Afterwards, he produced a bottle of rose oil from out of his pocket and poured some onto his palms and wiped the oil onto his beard and clothes. He seemed to be totally absorbed. For *faqirs* at the *basti*, light in the form of fire has several levels of meaning. At the *basti*, it is common to see *faqirs* gathered around a large fire. Such fires (*dhoonee*) are integral to all *faqirs'* gatherings (*dhoona*). Amongst *faqirs*, the lighting of such fires symbolises Ali. *Faqirs'* told me that Ali and other companions of the Prophet Muhammad lit fires during the night for prayers.³² I learnt that *jinn*s' power could be accessed by breathing in the fire's smoke, a practice which is further evinced during exorcism rituals where the smoke emitted from religious designs (*puleeta*) (which are employed as lamp wicks) is imbibed by the patient. I contend that *faqirs* are drawn to fire as they believe it to embody mystical power. For example, amongst the four elements fire is considered to be *jalal* while the other three elements are *jamal*. Moreover, fire is linked to power, danger, wrath, and destruction. The inter-relationship between power, *jalal*, and fire is culturally manifested in Muslim belief that the eyes of certain people emit a destructive force. This belief is particularly popularised by numerous stories known to *faqirs* and other Muslims, regarding the supernatural powers of Muslim saints, as I discussed in Chapter Four. For example, the

³² As I explained in Chapter Three, *faqirs* may gaze into fire in order to communicate with *jinn*.

famous *Chisti* saint Ali Ahmad Sabir (1199-1297) is reputed to have had such devastating powers that he was not permitted to look directly at another human being.

Salami karna:³³ **mystical gestures as expressions of *hukm***

From here Shams began his virtuosic series of postures.³⁴ The entreating gestures, active facial expressions and assemblage of senses unfolded a synchronicity between rhythmical elegance and internal feelings, coalescing his body with the surrounding space of the saint's tomb. Intimated in these interweaving patterns was a poetics of the heart, disclosing a repository of hidden emotions and sentiments to the saint. It was as if the shrine's inner space became submerged in a sensuous suaré of body and soul.³⁵

Aana: (“to come”)

Shams sequence begins with the posture “*Aana*” (Plate 8.3), the verb meaning “to come”. The pose is reflective of the Muslim form of salutation called *taslim*; the left hand is characteristically placed on the heart, denoting piety. The deferential quality of Shams gesture implies that he is in the presence of a high personage. This theme of deference is captured by the expression given by devotees at saints' shrines: “*Mai tere dar pe aa-gaya hun*” (I am at your doorstep). A *ruba'i* from Amir Khosrau echoes this sentiment in the following:³⁶

³³ Literally meaning “to give *salam*, or to honour the saint”.

³⁴ Shams' movements were conducted in a smooth and unhurried manner, expressing beauty of form and grace.

³⁵ Tuan (1990) discusses the relationship between space and ritual performances. A performer's involvement in space is the “submergence in the sensuous ambience” of the ritual domain (Tuan 1990:243).

³⁶ *Ruba'i* is a style of Persian poetry written in quatrains. The classic work, “*The Ruba'iyat*” written by the Persian scholar, Omar Khayyam (1048-1131) is probably the most famous collection of *ruba'i* poetry.

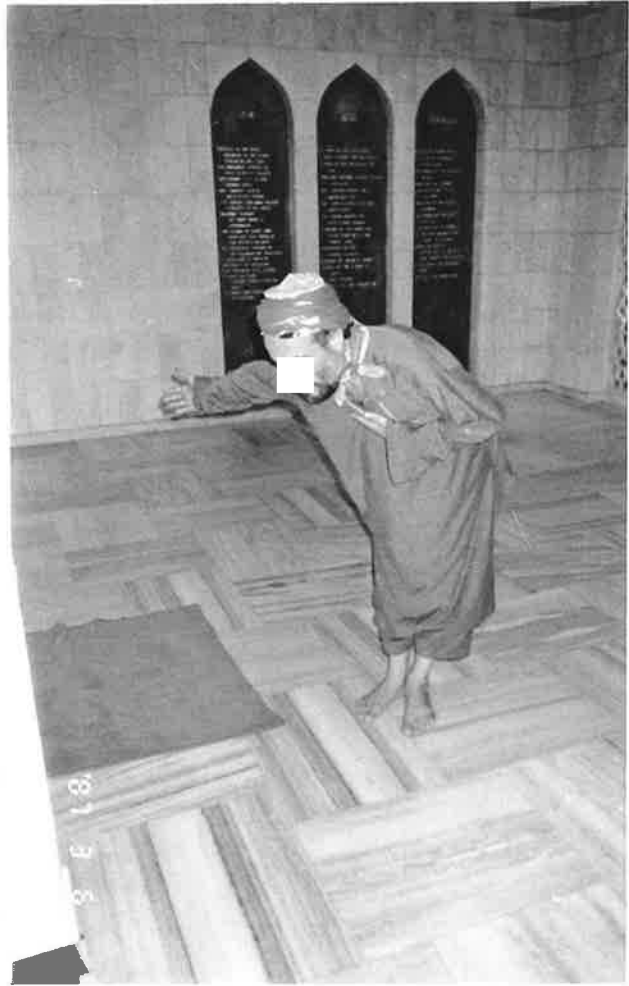
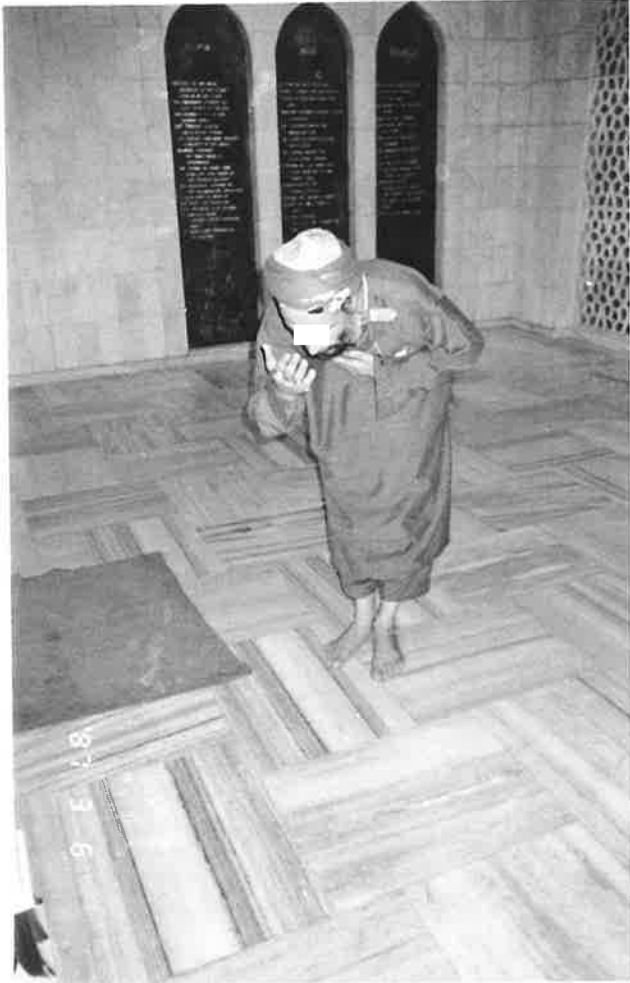


Plate 8.3: *Aana* (“to come”).

*Toa ān shahee ke bur aiwān-e-qasrat,
Kabutar gar nashinad bāz gardad.
Gharib-e-mustamandey bur dar amad,
Beyayad androo yā bāz gardad..*

(translation)

*You are that exalted spiritual monarch upon,
Whose palace if a pigeon sits it becomes a lark.
A poor and humble soul has come to your door,
Should he enter or go away.*

For *faqirs*, acts of deference are a vital part of *hukm*. Deference not only implies submission to the saint's will but also informs the nature of his ritual practices at Muslim shrines. Reverence for the saints falls into the logic of submission to Allah; a pivotal aspect of Muslim thought and practice. For *faqirs*, reverence for the saints is construed as a means of worshipping Allah, due to their favoured status implied by the term "*Wali Allah*" meaning "friend of Allah". *Faqirs* explained that to love the saints is to love Allah, to respect them is to respect Allah, to show disobedience to them is to show disobedience to Allah. The concern to appease the saints is conveyed by the ritual performance of circumambulation (*ziarat*). Circumambulation includes various ritual actions including prostrating oneself before the tomb or shrine (*qudum bosī*), kissing the tomb's shroud (*chaddar bosī*), presenting ritual offerings flowers (*gul*), incense (*agharbatti*), rose oil (*ittar*), rose water (*gulab*), sweets (*batasha*), shrouds (*chaddar*), beseechment (*dua*), memoriam (*fatihā*), and petitioning (*mangna*) to the saint.³⁷ For both *faqirs* and devotees, the act of circumambulation evokes feelings of intimacy, as conveyed by the colloquial saying, "*Maine apna dil khol kar tumhare samne rakh diya hai*", (I have opened my heart and put it in front of you). *Faqirs* state that the opening of one's heart to the saints is tied to *bātin*, the site of "true" emotions, where the bond between *faqir* and saint is maintained. Shams asserted that only the heart was important since it did not lie.

***Bekararee* ("agitation" "intense desire")**

"*Bekararee*" (Plate 8.4) reflects the intense emotions which derive from *bātin*. *Bekararee* assumes an upright posture with the right leg forward with the hands' palms facing upwards. *Bekararee* is the product of social tensions between Muslims

³⁷ See also Kurin (1992).



Plate 8.4: *Bekararee* (“agitation”, “intense desire”).

where feelings are unresolved or where an individual has been wrongfully accused. Disputes between individuals are dangerous matters since the flaring of emotions can lead to the wronged party placing a curse (*badua*) on the other. In contrast to proscribed acts of cursing which use sorcery (*jādu, kala jādu*), *badua* is a permissible means of personal retribution in response to a personal sleight. The pronouncement of *badua* is considered to be especially serious due to the belief that it is divinely sanctioned. Whereas sorcery is secretive and can be annulled through the reading of certain Quranic chapters, *badua* once given can only be absolved through the offending party(s) seeking clemency from the affronted individual.³⁸ *Badua* may be pronounced either in public or in private. The following incident illustrates when *badua* is employed. There was an old woman that lived alone in the *basti*. As I passed her one day she was shouting and cursing some individuals ahead. The latter were making fun of her. Her frail figure became revived with hostile feelings. Her *badua* was terrible and embodied an aesthetics of explosive emotions. I had learnt that the old woman had been the locus of gossip. Being old and lonely she had no one to assist her. Later on, the accursed individuals approached the old woman and asked her forgiveness for their rude actions. They had feared the consequences of the old woman's *badua*.

The tie between *badua* and Divine sanction³⁹ was once vividly expressed at Nizamuddin's shrine. It was Thursday evening on October 5th, 1995.⁴⁰ I had been sitting next to the *Khijli* mosque while listening to the *Milad* ceremony. After it had finished, flat bread (*roti*) and sweet carrot were distributed amongst the devotees. There was a considerable amount of pushing amongst the devotees for food, eventually degenerating to individual acts of wantonness. Such displays of social disorder are regular occurrences at the Nizamuddin shrine and manifest the abject state of many devotees who journey there. During these frenzied proceedings a fight had broken out in the northern courtyard between some devotees. Other devotees joined in as well as some of the shrine guardians. The fight quickly engulfed the entire courtyard like some explosive conflagration, lasting in fury for approximately ten minutes. A number of women had

³⁸ Sorcery may be used in to order to nullify most of the *badua's* effect.

³⁹ While a *badua* can be enunciated anywhere, its pronouncement at Muslim shrines can be suggested as giving it greater sanction.

⁴⁰ The use of Muslim shrines as arenas for assigning *badua* reflects Muslim conceptions of the saints as arbitrators of Divine justice as discussed in Chapter Four.

been badly beaten. After the fight had subsided one of the beaten women began to verbally abuse the shrine guardians. A younger woman then stood next to the saints' shrine, and while pointing to one of the shrine custodians shouted "*Meri hai lege gi*" ("Just as you hurt me you will get it back too"). In this instance, the word "*hai*" denoted the idea of heart-felt despair because of a wrong or injustice committed. The entire expression in this context was used in the act of cursing. *Faqirs* may also resort to *badua* in response to a personal affront and request a saint's permission before *badua* is pronounced. As one *faqir* stated:

Before I perform certain things, be it *dua* (prayer) or *badua*, I ask Hazrat Nizamuddin for permission because I am not the best judge. If he says "yes" then I do it — if "no" I don't do anything. However, sometimes I will do *badua* as I don't like to bother him.

The alleged effects of *badua* were indicated to me by an old *faqir*. He said that he had declared *badua* to a young Bengali man because he had been spreading rumours about him that he had been flirting with women. "He's been shitting blood for four days. I am punishing him slowly, slowly. He's also been sacked from his work. He should not have said such things", the *faqir* said. "How long will he continue to shit blood?" I inquired. He replied, "Until I change my mood".

In contrast, the word "*karaa*" also expresses the ideas of peace, happiness and desire. In Muslim culture, to have "*bekaraa*" is to have an intense desire for someone or something, as reflected by the expression "*dil bekarar hai*" (the heart is impatient). *Bekararee* alludes to the Muslim ideal of love as mediating between unwavering joy and despair.⁴¹

Yet how is such inward peace attained? According to *faqirs*, inward peace derives through intense emotional agitation. This was sometimes expressed to me as "pulling one's strings". Embedded in this idea is the capacity to re-empower the individual

⁴¹ These themes pervade Muslim and Hindu sensibilities, and are played out through an array of aural and visual media; from the soulful *ghazzal* (love songs), to the evocative rhythms and dancing of Hindi bollywood movies. As one Hindi bollywood lyric voices: "*gia be karar hai oai bahar hai*" (my heart is very impatient because spring is there). The redundant nature of most bollywood movies, typified by the handsome protagonist's arduous attempts at securing his *femme* from an assortment of villains and from her recalcitrant father, arguably, conveys the concern with *bekarar* in popular Hindi culture. Despite their commercial panache, Hindi movies find the spiritual resonances of *bekarar*. For as the protagonist's desire finds its ultimate fulfilment through union with his beloved, knowledge of one's inward nature can only be attained once the heart has resolved itself to peace ("*mere dil ko karar aa gaya*").

through arousal of emotional states. The arousal of *bekaraa* between *faqirs* fits into the framework of *jalal* and *jamal*. A certain *faqir* at the *basti* had been attracted to a young woman. Having learned of this, Shahida told me to refer to the woman's name to the *faqir*. Shahida and the *faqir* had shared a peculiar relationship where they would communicate between each other through Sufi poetry. Having met up with the *faqir* I told him that Shahida had a message for him. I then pronounced the young woman's name to the *faqir*. He immediately became gripped with anguish.⁴² I was taken aback by the intensity of his emotion. It was as if I had hit the proverbial 'sore nerve' unleashing a stream of rage. "What have I done?" I said to myself, while trying to console him. Even after an hour had passed my efforts to relieve his anger were in vain. The next day, I relayed my experience to Shahida. With a smile, she replied, "The anger will do him good. It is the only way to get him out of his *jalal* (anger) so that he will become more *jamali* (peaceful)".

Bekararee may also relate to the sense of frustration and anguish that is a concomitant aspect of a *faqir's* performance of *hukm*. A *faqir* is sometimes prone to mental grief which is symptomatic of his intimacy with the saints. A *faqir's hukm* is sometimes enshrouded in ambiguity. Although a *faqir* may consider his *hukm* as a way of expressing his devotion to a saint does not ensure that the saint will be appeased. Often the saints remain silent. Consequently, a *faqir* may fall into despair and confusion. The loss of the saint's presence provokes feelings of personal failure that he has displeased the saint. One day I visited an old *faqir* at the *basti*. He was dispirited. He told me that he had been suffering and that his saint had failed to assist him in his need. He was at a loss for his saint's oversight. The seeming dejection shown by the old man evinces a *faqir's* need to remain in communion with the spirit world, without which he falls into psychological malaise.

***Dekho* ("to see")**

Plates 8.5 incorporates the posture "*Dekho*", meaning "to see". The two poses convey a symmetry of purpose via the congruence between the outstretched hand and front leg, symbolising directness of thought. In this posture the leading hand is stretched with the palm facing upwards, intimating the action of showing. Sham's left hand is placed over

⁴² I cannot comment on the reason for the *faqir's* anger.

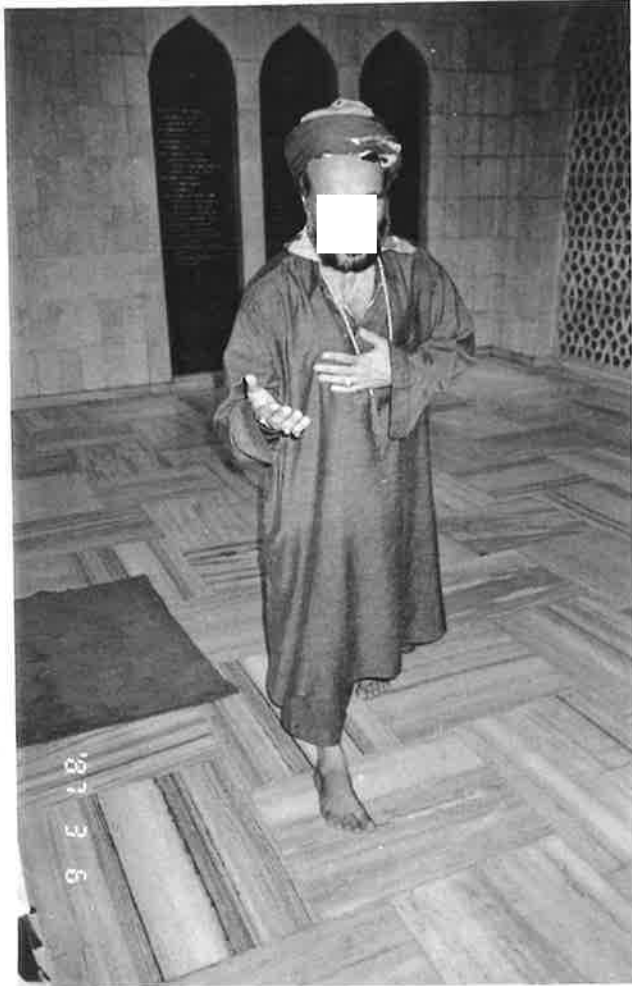


Plate 8.5: *Dekho* (“to see”).

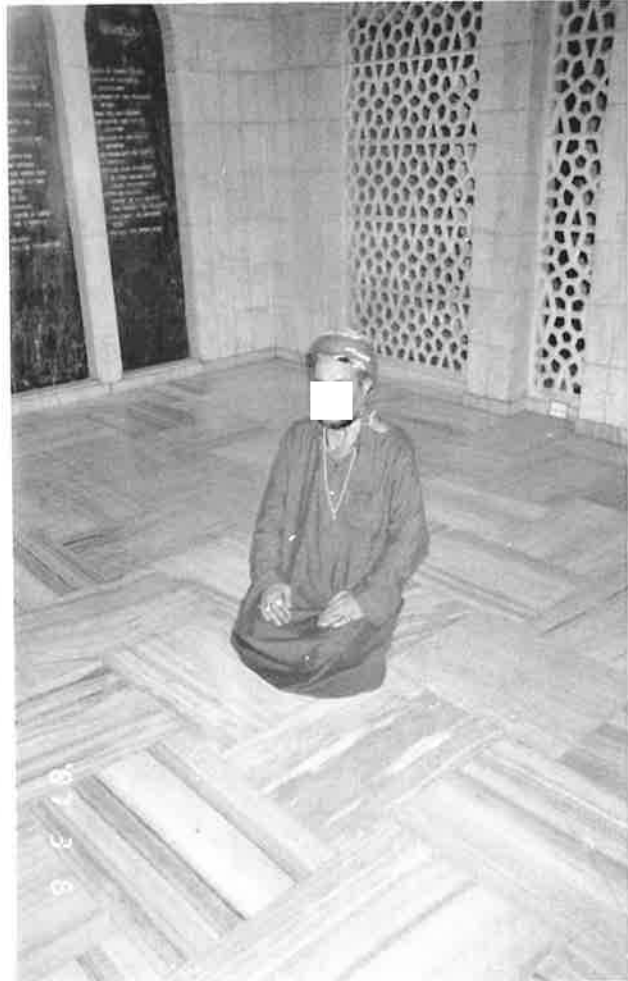


Plate 8.6: *Aamne-saamne* (“face to face”).

his chest, while he looks intently at me, denoting truthfulness in seeing. For *faqirs*, the act of seeing underpins the notion of mystical insight (*kashf*). Unlike perceptual vision, *kashf* is believed to penetrate the facade of external appearances and invade the visceral domain of mind and heart. *Kashf* is not only often attributed as being an intrinsic element of a *faqir's* mystique but also denotes his favoured status before Allah and the saints. Despite a *faqir's* alleged ability to know things beyond the domain of ordinary perception, he is often given to the same foibles and frailties apparent in other Muslims. In contrary to cultural perceptions of *faqirs'* high state of spiritual advancement, it became evident to me that *faqirs* were particularly prone to back-biting, jealousy, suspicion, pride, and short-sightedness.⁴³ Despite this, I appreciated their genuine compassion for others and keen insight into the nature of life.

On another level of meaning, seeing underpins *faqirs'* notions of gazing at the saint as a way of fostering love. For the *faqir*, his performance of *hukm* is a way of inwardly focusing on the saint, the source of his devotion. Shams once explained this notion via an analogy of two lovers whose eyes are fixed on each other, conveyed by the Hindustani expression “*dil ka aana*” (literally, “your heart is fixed on someone”).

***Aamne-Saamne* (“face to face”)**

Plate 8.6 displays the posture “*Aamne-Saamne*”, meaning “face to face”. Notice the composed attitude of the pose, torso erect and hands placed on the laps; the face is noticeably calm with the eyes looking intently at the saint’s tomb. The name *Aamne-Saamne* denotes the action of facing another. The accent of attentiveness is embodied by this posture. It is not surprising perhaps that this posture is often incorporated by *faqirs* and devotees during the performance of religious musical concerts (*samā'*), since its comportment is believed to induce concentration.⁴⁴

Aamne-Saamne lies at the heart of a *faqir's* bond with his saint, and denotes a *faqir's* deepest desire to live in constant communion with him. *Aamne-Saamne* is sometimes called “*ruh-be-ruh*” (literally, “spirit to spirit”). As denoted here, the face is likened to a

⁴³ Most *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine tend to share a common dislike for many *Chisti pirs* whom they condemn as being charlatans. It is also not uncommon for *faqirs* to gossip about other *faqirs*.

⁴⁴ This is discussed later on.

person's soul.⁴⁵ The action of facing each other, therefore, can be argued to symbolise the *faqir's* need to disclose his deepest feelings to the saint. This was reinforced to me by Shams who once said that, "If you want a person to gain your attention, to tell them how you feel, you look at their eyes".

As in other postures in Shams performance series, *Aamne-Saamne* finds its reference in the Muslim social context. Among Muslims, it is considered polite to face another during conversation. This concern in maintaining visual access of another's face is important, not only for reasons of correct social etiquette but also because of the repertoire of facial expressions and head gestures incorporated during conversation which assists in guiding the flow of information, giving speech its "kinaesthetic presence".⁴⁶ The belief that the face conveys one's inward nature also promotes this concern. For instance, Shams, like other *faqirs* believed that a person's face usually gave them away if they were not telling the truth. "How so?" I asked. He replied, "Their eyes betray them". The concern with facing another is clearly depicted in the ritual practices at Muslim shrines. For instance, shrine dictum demands that all devotees entering the inner chambers of Nizamuddin's and Amir Khosrau's shrines must not at any point turn their backs towards the saints' tombs. This also applies when exiting the saints' tombs. To act contrary to this is a highly offensive act, and would on most occasions be met with swift action by the attending shrine custodians.⁴⁷

***Shikayat* ("to complain")**

Plate 8.7 discloses the pose, "*Shikayat*", meaning, 'to complain'. Here, the lineaments of Sham's body conveys a remonstrative resolve towards the saint. *Shikayat* is a popular theme in Hindustani and Urdu love poetry in relation to the dissonance between lovers. Just as lovers express feelings of unhappiness and complaint to each other ("*tu shikayat*"), *shikayat* discloses a *faqir's* vicissitude with the saints. A *faqir's* penchant for complaint not only reflects his intimacy with the spirit world, but also expresses his capacity for remonstrative resolve. The notion that a *faqir* quietly acquiesces to the dictates of *hukm*

⁴⁵ As suggested in Chapter Three, in Muslim thought the eyes mirror the properties of an individual's inner nature or soul (*ruh*). In this way, *faqirs* believe that an individual's inner state is manifested by their face.

⁴⁶ I am using Desjarlais's concept of "kinaesthetic presence" (1994:85) here in relation to highlighting the gestural quality of Muslim speech.

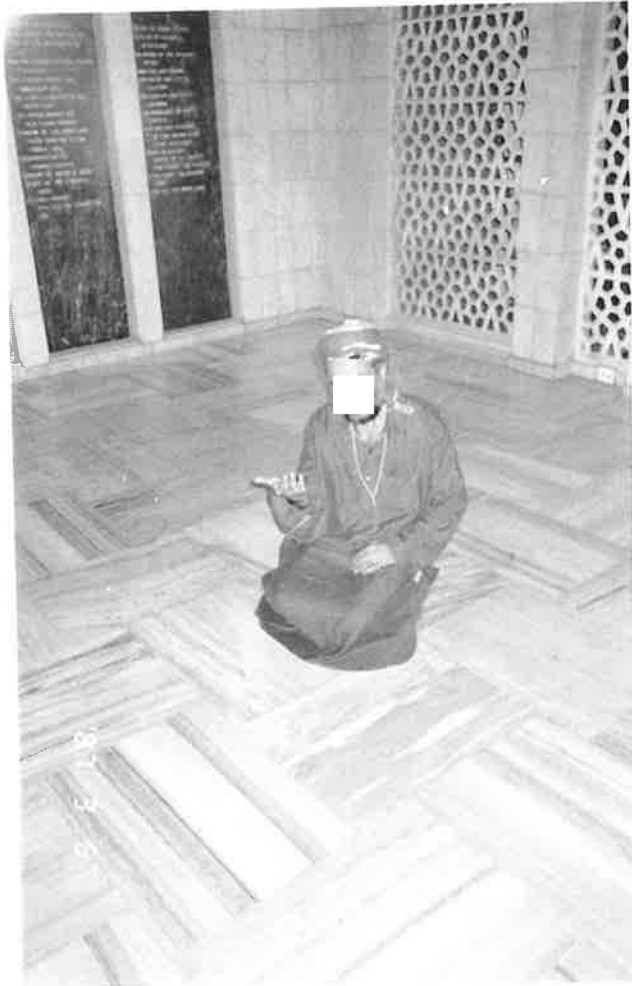


Plate 8.7: *Shikayat* (“to complain”).



Plate 8.8: *Haqiqat izhar karna*
 (“to show the truth”).

is challenged here. The nature of *hukm* can be particularly arduous, testing a *faqir* to the limits of his emotional and physical mettle. Paradoxically, the desire to fulfil a saint's *hukm* may immerse a *faqir* in a gamut of demurred emotions.

While a *faqir* is obligated to follow a mendicant lifestyle (*faqaa*), he is generally tied to the domestic sphere of life, by his dependency on the goodwill of others for his daily subsistence. This irony places duress on a *faqir's* emotional state as it can challenge his spiritual values. For instance, I was sometimes asked by some *faqirs* for either monetary assistance or to buy certain food items.⁴⁸ Perhaps, in this contradiction between fulfilling the ideal of poverty and succumbing to the exigencies of life the proclivity for *shikayat* is heightened.

***Haqiqat izhar karna* (“to show the truth”)**

In the pose *Haqiqat izhar karna*, “to show the truth” (Plate 8.8), Shams is depicted arising from his haunches with his arms raised forward in a gesture of showing. *Haqiqat izhar karna* embodies the gesture of asking. Here, Shams is pleading for the spiritual guidance of Ali, who as earlier mentioned, is venerated by *faqirs*, and is considered as being the spiritual head of all Muslim saints. *Faqirs* do not shy away from their praise of Ali, an adulation which may sometimes be construed as verging on idolatry (*shirk*). It is my understanding that a *faqir's* relationship with Ali nourishes his deep seated need for “inculcating a disposition” for creative disclosure, as depicted by the performance of *nara* (Csordas 1997:190). *Faqirs* tend to avoid debating over the spiritual importance of Ali with more traditional Muslims. As in other parts of the Islamic world, the issue of Ali is a contentious one since it lies at the heart of the *Sunni-Shia* schism.⁴⁹ While all *faqirs* I knew at the Nizamuddin shrine were *Sunni* Muslims (lit. “one who follows the path”)

⁴⁷ The prohibition on turning one's back towards the saints' tombs can be understood in relation to Muslim body conceptualisations, where the backside is associated with carnality and excretion.

⁴⁸ My aim here is not to castigate *faqirs* but to highlight the physical hardships which they endure, to the degree where they must sometimes ask for assistance. I would argue here that this tendency may be reflective of the social changes operating in urban Indian in general, where spiritual values are being continually eroded by an increasingly secular minded Indian middle class.

⁴⁹ See Hoffman (1995) on Ali. The conclusive schism between Sunni and Shia Muslims occurred during the battle at Karbala, approximately fifty miles south-west of Baghdad, where the followers of Yazid, representing the Sunni camp martyred Ali's son, Al-Husain. According to tradition, this conflict dates back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, where differences of opinion arose whether his successor (caliphate) should be Ali or Abu Bakr. Ali was the fourth caliph of Islam and was murdered in 662 by Ibn Muljam, at Kufah.

their marked veneration of Ali, in this respect, accords with *Shia* Islam and the central place of Ali in *Shia* cosmology.

Underscoring *haqiqat izhar karna* is a *faqir's* dependence on *hukm* as a source of his mystical life. It is impossible to over-emphasise the saint's role in a *faqir's* mystical training and practice. A *faqir* considers his saint as his foremost spiritual guide and teacher who takes him through the various levels of mystical training. However, much of a *faqir's* training remains secret and cannot be confided to another. Shams would often refer to this aspect as “*raz*”, a secret eluding human ears. The training a *faqir* undergoes within *hukm* varies according to his intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacities. Training may include performing certain mystical practices and social service over a specified period. *Faqirs* generally concede that physical and emotional hardship is a crucial part of *hukm*. Rather than dissuading a *faqir*, the arduous nature of *hukm* seemingly infuses him with resolve.⁵⁰

***Udasi* (“sadness” “melancholy”)**

In Plate 8.9, Shams is performing the pose “*Udasi*”, meaning “melancholy” or “sadness”. Among *faqirs*, sadness is one of the most crucial emotions for praising the saints, and characterises a *faqir's* level of intimacy with the spirit world. A *faqir's* desire to engage with the spirit world is believed to take him through various states of awareness. A feature of a *faqir's hukm* is the effusion of intense emotional states such as profound sadness. For *faqirs*, pain is thematised as a meritorious longing to be in proximity with the Divine, but it may also emerge out of feelings of personal inadequacy to express oneself using verbal language. Here, the accent of *Udasi* is distinct from western connotations of sadness which Desjarlais (1994:103) informs us are more likely to indicate personal failure, rejection and fear of psychological dissonance.⁵¹ Rather, *udasi* is connotative of melancholy and loneliness. The following poem recited to me by a *faqir* encapsulates this sense of soulful despair:

⁵⁰ See Chapter Six.

⁵¹ Also see (Desjarlais 1991:387-420; Abu Lughod 1986; Abu Lughod & Lutz 1990), on poetry and emotion. Desjarlais avers that Yolmo poetry informs the participants how to feel and express their emotions during funerals. Since for the Yolmo emotions are rarely discussed poetic songs serve as a means for objectifying their emotions in a socially approved way (Desjarlais 1991:406).



Plate 8.9: *Udasi* (“sadness”, “melancholy”).

*Hamara dil dukhaya ja raha hai,
Diya gam ka jalaya raha hai.
Hameen ko qatal karte hein Elahi,
Hamain qatal bataya ja raha hai.*

*Hamara zakham jo rasne laga hai,
Us par teer mara ja raha hai
Elahi kaun si basti mein jaien,
Har ek janib sataya ja raha hai.*

*Khushi milti nahin ham ko yahan par,
Gamon ka daur chaya ja raha hai.
Ali jesa koyee insan ata kar,
Hameen jang mein bulaya ja raha hai.*

(translation)
*Our hearts are being hurt,
And worries are being lessened.
We are being killed O Lord,
But we are called murderers.*

*Our wounds are being dried,
But arrows are thrown over it.
O Lord, where should we go,
We are being tortured everywhere.*

*We are not getting happiness here,
Our worries are increasing.
O Lord, provide a man like Ali,
As we are called for fighting.*

Here, the expression of emotional effete underscores the paradoxical quality of the human state. Human existence is likened to an efflorescent wound, an allusion to its constant state of pain. While the heart is the centre of joyful and sad emotions, it instinctually inclines towards the latter, in response to its loss of union with the Divine. This notion finds its cultural homologue in the pain one feels when separated from a family member or a close friend and underpins Muslim concern for having strong communal ties. *Udasi* may have an insidious effect on the body. In its extreme aspect a person may refuse to eat and socialise with others. Their physical malaise is believed to mirror the forlorn state of their hearts. Here we again find Muslim depictions of the heart/body connection. Where joyful emotions make the body strong and full of vigour, constant sadness makes it weak and empty of feeling. Even so, a *faqir's* mystical practices such as "reciting the chant of melancholy" (*Udasi ka wazifa*), attempt to promote *Udasi* as a means of

expressing his longing for the saint. As Shams once said, “ To remember the saints through *Udasi ka wazifa* and poetry is a duty (*ibādat*); it makes the heart clean”.

Among *faqirs* the fostering of *Udasi* via religious chanting and poetry conveys the tie between emotional pain and creativity and plays an important part of *hukm*. Accordingly, sadness is culturally expressed by various poetic genres in combination with other themes (i.e. *Shikayat*, *Bekararee*). For instance, through the recitation of lyrical poetry such as *qassida*, a *faqir* learns to explore the rudiments of his emotional pain. In this way sadness is sublimated into a mystical and cultural ideal of love (*ishq*) for the sacred other. Shams once recited to me a four-line poem, encapsulating the theme of idealised love as embodied through emotional pain:

*Gulose khar behtar hai,
Judaman tham leta hai.
Azizuse rakib acha,
Joojalkar man leta hai.*

(translation)

*The thorn is better than the flower,
Who holds the separated heart.
The unknown is better than relations,
Who affords all problems but helps.*

In her book, *Touched With Fire* (1994), Kay Redfield Jamison argues that there is a connection between “intense creative activity” and “pronounced elevations in mood”. (1994:108). Jamison’s claim that a “person’s thinking processes are hastened and loosened by mild manic states” that give a “distinctive quality” to the creative process is reminiscent to how *faqirs* talk about their inner pain.⁵²

***Sunnlar and shukriya* (“to listen” and “thankfulness”)**

Plates 8.10 and 8.11 show Shams in the poses “*Sunnlar*” (“to listen”) and “*Shukriya*” (“thankfulness”). The emphatic repertoire of hand gestures is indicative of those

⁵² Jamison’s approach begins with the early Greek philosophers who made correlations between profound artistic endeavour and as Jamison puts it, “dipping into pre-rational or irrational sources while maintaining ongoing contact with reality” (1993:104). For instance, Aristotle attempted to draw a connection between profound sadness (melancholia) and inspiration. “Why is it”, Aristotle inquired, “that all men who are outstanding in philosophy, poetry or the arts are melancholic?” (Jamison 1993:51)



Plate 8.10: *Sunnlar* (“to listen”).



Plate 8.11: *Shukriya* (“thankfulness”).

performed by devotees when listening to *Qawwalli* songs or public poetic recitals (*mushaira*), both of which are regularly performed at Nizamuddin's shrine. For most *faqirs* the act of listening to religious songs and poetry is a mystical practice and is often accompanied by the use of hand gestures and the shouting of cries or noises (*huhā*) indicating spiritual arousal. For instance, listeners may raise one of their arms high (usually the right arm) during religious elation or appreciation (*hāth uthānā, hāth batānā*). I remember at a spiritual music concert (*samā'*), which I was attending at the shrine of Inayat Khan in October, 1994, there was a an old man who would raise his arms while exclaiming "*illah lah*" ("but God") after hearing certain verses being sung by the *Qawwalli* players. Rather than having an interruptive effect his vociferous expletives seemed to intensify the cadence of the lyrical compositions, heightening their poetic movement.

A *faqir's* concern with listening can be partly explained by the belief that the auditory faculty has a direct connection to the heart. The practice of listening to poetry aids in making a *faqir* attentive to the saints' voice; and therefore, is crucial to *hukm*. For example, *faqirs* regularly listen to different styles of sacred speech that are regularly performed at Nizamuddin's shrine. These include Quranic recitals, *Qawwalli* songs, public poetic recitals (*mushaira*), and religious liturgies such as praising the saints (*munajat*). Trimingham alludes to the religious importance of listening in Islam when he states,

It is hearing, then, that makes religion obligatory; and for this reason Sunnis regard hearing as superior to sight in the domain of religious obligation (1971:195).

Faqirs emphasis on listening to the Quran and religious poetry; for example, *milad* which praises the Prophet Muhammad; *manqabat* which praises the saints, and *hamd* which praises Allah, is believed to aid inward purity, an essential requirement for becoming receptive to messages from the spirit world, and is therefore, crucial to *hukm*.

As I have discussed in Chapter Three, *faqirs'* believe that sacred words in the form of religious script or poetry, have a cathartic action on the heart, leading to higher states of mystical awareness. Perhaps, it is helpful to explain here that among *faqirs* words are more than verbal language. Religious script and poetry are considered to have veiled

levels of meaning, containing various levels of mystical power. To reiterate what was discussed in Chapter Three, *faqirs* insist that each Divine Attribute (*asma ul-husna*) contains a specific quality of Allah, in which a *faqir's* practice of chanting seeks to evoke and harness. Sacred words, in this sense, are keys opening sub-liminal states of awareness. Sacred words underline the incarnate quality of speech as they can become inscribed into the body's viscera.⁵³

***Dua* (“prayer”)**

Plate 8.12 shows Shams in “*Dua*” (“posture of prayer”). The salient happiness expressed by Shams in this pose exemplifies *faqirs'* unorthodox expressions of religiosity. As stated in Chapter Two, a *faqir's* abrogation of many aspects of Muslim religious and social etiquette, not only distinguishes him from other Muslims at the Nizamuddin shrine and the *basti*, but also reflects the highly idiosyncratic quality of a *faqir's* mystical complex. While laughter, in this instance, may be considered as conveying Sham's spiritual euphoria, it also underscores a *faqir's* penchant towards unorthodox styles of expressivity in relation to religious practices. Laughter in Bakhtin's words assists in dissolving those social structures which repress the creative imagination (1968).

While *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine tend to portray a facade of sombreness, it does not preclude them from humour. On the contrary, I was surprised how *faqirs* often resorted to play. Whenever Shams and Nazim Baba were together the mood was usually one of joviality. Once, when I brought my small tape recorder with me, the two of them grabbed hold of it and began reciting Urdu and Persian poetry into it. Such occasions were replete with laughter. I learnt to value their humour not only for its playfulness but also because it conveyed to me their capacity for “creative parody”.

Following *Dua*, Shams begins to dance joyfully around the tomb holding a peacock feather duster (*farasha*). (Plate 8.13) A *farasha* is par excellence a vehicle for the transmission of the saint's blessedness (*barkat*) from the saint to the ritual participant.⁵⁴ *Faqirs* told me that they would sometimes take hold of a *farasha* in order to *barkat* into themselves.

⁵³ See Chapter Three, in reference to my episode with Shah Alam.

⁵⁴ A *farasha* is usually found at the tombs of Muslim saints.

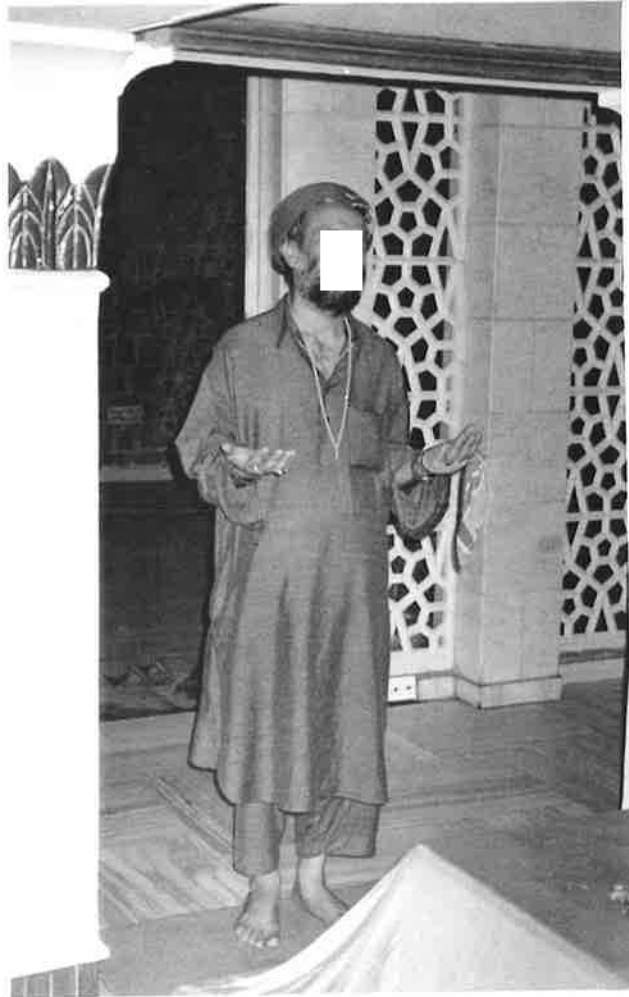


Plate 8.12: *Dua* (“prayer”).



Plate 8.13: Shams performing with peacock feather duster (*farasha*).

Having dispensed with the *farasha*, Shams took out his handkerchief (*dastmal*) from his pocket and placed it on his left forearm (Plate 8.14). A *faqir's* handkerchief is an important mystical item and is used in mystical practices.⁵⁵ As noted in Chapter Three, *faqirs* at the shrine are also distinguished from other Muslims by their habit for using the left hand, as it is believed to be linked to the heart — the organ of spiritual insight. The aspect of concealing the left hand reflects the secretive nature of a *faqir's* mystical complex. A concern for secrecy also reflects a *faqir's* habit to perform his mystical practices in isolation and usually at night. Moreover, a *faqir* treats his acquired mystical knowledge with a high degree of secrecy, rarely imparting his practices and techniques to others.⁵⁶ In an environment where both Muslim and Hindu practitioners of mystical knowledge are commonly viewed by others with a sense of awe, the accretion of mystical techniques enhance a *faqir's* sense of mystical mastery and distinguishes him from others.⁵⁷

From here, Shams takes his handkerchief and clutches it in his right hand where it is incorporated in a wide pose with arms outstretched, and is indicative of *hal* (Plate 8.15). The joyous nature of this pose flows naturally to those in (Plate 8.16) where Shams employs the gestures of welcoming. The convivial accent of his pose conveys a *faqir's* obligation to serve others. An important feature of *hukm* is a *faqir's* service to others such as welcoming devotees at saints' shrines.⁵⁸ For *faqirs*, service to others is incumbent to the practice of *hukm*. *Faqirs* are aware that service to others plays a central part of *hukm*. Service to others is not only a means of obeying a saint's commands but

⁵⁵ On an interesting note, the manner which the handkerchief is used parallels with the *tantric* (a branch of Hindu esotericism) application of the shawl over the left hand when performing repetitions of cryptic words and sounds (*japa*) with the rosary (*mala*). Shams told me that placing a handkerchief over the left hand enabled a *faqir* to use his rings for attaining mystical powers.

⁵⁶ My own view on "mystical knowledge" concurs with Luhrmann's definition, as the compendium of practices and beliefs which a practitioner learns their mystical craft (Luhrmann 1985:139).

⁵⁷ This corresponds with Luhrmann in relation to western magicians' ascriptions to their own knowledge, when she says that: "The secrecy of magical knowledge reinforces magicians' beliefs by exploiting secrecy's respect-inspiring, awe-producing properties" (1985:139).

⁵⁸ *Faqirs'* hospices (*khanaqahs*) and their meeting places (*dhoonas*) are usually located near to saints' shrines and operate as temporary sanctuaries, providing food, tea and shelter to devotees and guests. *Faqirs'* hospices are open to all people regardless of religion. The *faqirs'* hospice at the shrine of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, located in Merauli, New Delhi, is a noteworthy example.



Plate 8.14: Shams holding handkerchief (*dastmal*).

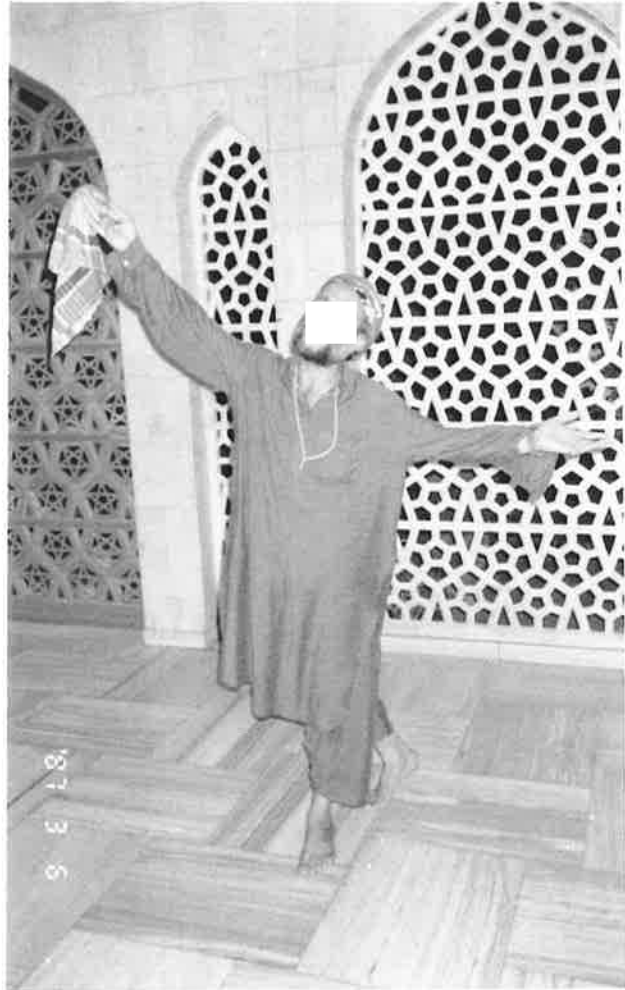


Plate 8.15: Shams in *hal*.



Plate 8.16: Shams performing the gesture of welcoming.

also checks a *faqir* losing contact with the social world. *Faqirs'* mystical practices are intense by nature to the point that some *faqirs* seemingly lose awareness of everyday reality. Nazim Baba would sometimes be immersed in *hal* for days at a time, unable to communicate or eat. While this kind of behaviour is synonymous of a “*madzub*” (“holy madman”), a term often used by Muslims to label *faqirs*, it does reflect the tension between mystical practice and social praxis. An old *faqir* pointed out that too much time spent in prayer and chanting may elide a *faqir's* duty to others. He had also confided to me that his saint had once reprimanded him for his over indulgence in prayer and neglect of the poor.

***Soch* (“to think”)**

The ecstatic nature of the previous gestures undergoes a metastasis (Plate 8.17). Shams unravels his belt (*bundh*) from under his long shirt (*qasimi*) and reties it over it. The end part of the *bundh* is tied around the candelabra. He is momentarily motionless. This pose, called “*Soch*”, “to think” reflects the *faqirs'* belief in telepathy. Like other *faqirs'* paraphernalia, the *bundh* is an important mystical item. Shams told me that he would wear different coloured *bundh* according to the way he felt. *Faqirs'* understandings of colour are based on Muslim colour schemata; each colour denoting one or more referents, articulating the matrix of inter-subjective life (Jackson 1998:84). Shams stated that:

If I feel that I may be confronted in a potentially dangerous situation I will wear a red *bundh*. I put on a green *bundh* always when I am going to heal someone. Green is a peaceful colour, and I also like to wear it because it is *sardi* (cooling).⁵⁹ Red is *garmi* (heating), while black reminds me of impending death. Red is the colour of blood, and is, therefore, dangerous, so it must be worn with care.

Shams' notions on different colours are not merely metaphoric but mark modalities of experience (Jackson 1998:85). For example, the colour green, being emblematic of Islam is experienced as having a calming effect on the mind. Alternately, red is linked to inimical emotions.⁶⁰ Green is a popular colour among many *faqirs* and is also linked to

⁵⁹ *Jamal* is used in this context to denote the notion of “cooling”, or calming the mind.

⁶⁰ It is interesting that the words “cooling” and “heating” used in the context of these two colours are associated to Muslim food categorisations. All foods are classed according to the Perso-Urdu terms “*sardi*”, meaning “cold”, and “*garmi*”, meaning “hot”. These concepts are rooted in Indo-Islamic, Aryvedic (traditional Indian medicine), and Greek (*Unani*) medical systems, and refer to the different metabolic effect certain foods have on the body and mind.



Plate 8.17: *Soch* (“to think”).

the semi-mythical teacher “*Khidr*” (the “Green One”), the guardian saint of Sufis. Hence, an experience of seeing or talking with *Khidr* signifies spiritual excellence. Black is an ambiguous colour denoting distance as well as intimacy. In its basic attribute black signifies death. Alternately, wearing a black band on his left arm denotes a *faqir*’s tie to the Prophet Muhammad and Ali.

Shams’ use of the candelabra, in this instance, is based on the notion that certain items or objects act as proxies for spiritual forces such as a saint’s blessedness and the evil eye. The tying of the *bundh* to the candelabra coincides with Tambiah’s idea of ‘performative’ act, “by which a property is imperatively transferred to a recipient object or person on an analogical basis” (1973:199),⁶¹ and is also reminiscent of Luhrmann’s idea of the creative use of symbols during magical rites (1986).⁶²

Faqirs pride themselves on their ability to meditate and chant for prolonged periods of time, an aspect that they claim harnesses their mystical powers. *Faqirs* also assert of being able to enter the dreams of others and using telepathy. This sense of mystical mastery is crucial to controlling the *nafs* and checking the “loss of existential control and capacity” (Jackson 1998:54).

After performing *Soch*, Shams is again immersed in ludic performance (Plate 8.18). After this, Shams performs the gesture called “*Bikh*” (“to beg”) (Plate 8.19). *Bikh* reflects a *faqir*’s obeisance to the saint. In (Plate 8.20) Shams continues his ludic performance which is synonymous with being in *hal*.

Shams’ performance cycle is completed via the poses of kissing the saint’s shroud and taking it to his eyes (*Chaddar bosī*) (Plate 8.21) and prostrating before the tomb (*Quddum*

⁶¹ Tambiah points out that many western anthropologists have attempted to analyse ritual performances from non-western societies from “their own historic experience and intellectual categories” that has eventually led to the arising of misconceptions regarding the “semantic basis of magical acts” (1973:200).

⁶² For Luhrmann, magical training provides a means for creating personal symbolism. In the Hornsey magician’s group, adepts were given courses in creative visualisation and meditation, where they were taught to draw into archetypal symbols into their emotional experiences. As Luhrmann states: “Magicians draw connections and comparisons, teaching strange symbologies and interpretations” (Luhrmann 1992:235).



Plate 8.18: Shams in *hal*.

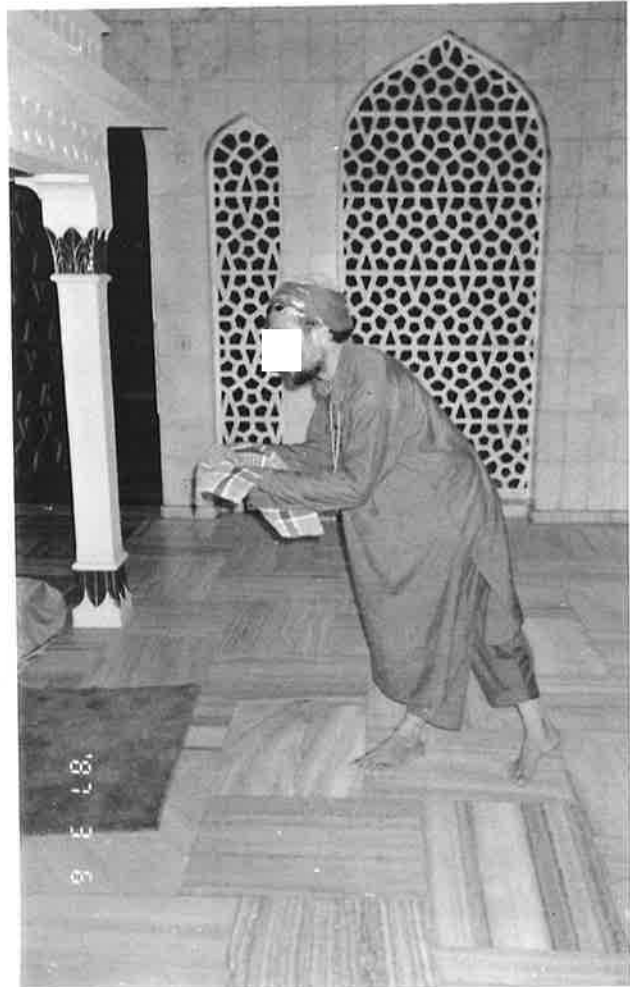


Plate 8.19: *Bikh* ("to beg").



Plate 8.20: Shams in *hal*.



Plate 8.21: *Chaddar bosī*



Plate 8.22: *Quddum bosī*

bosi) (Plate 8.22).⁶³ These postures feature in a devotee's ritual veneration of a saint at his/her shrine called *ziarat*. The accent of humility embodied in these postures reaffirm a *faqir's* mystical bond with the saint. This sentiment is collectively expressed in one ceremony during the death celebration (*urs'*) of Nizamuddin, where the saint's shroud is carried by *Chisti pirs* and other devotees while *Qawwalli* players sing the following verse:⁶⁴

Ek piya sara alam suhargan
Aise piya ke main wali.

(translation)
There is only one lover in the entire world
And the entire world is the beloved.

Shams then stood up and said "*as-salam alaikum*" (peace be with you) and "*Khoda hafiz*" (May God protect you) and left. I was alone. The shrine still lingered with the smell of incense.

Creative expression and mystical mastery

Shams' performance evokes a configuration of sentiments and emotions which underscore *faqirs' hukm*. Moreover, his performance co-ordinates his unique penchant for creative expression with affective states to the production of a spiritual discourse with the saint. Yet to define Shams' performance as simply being representational of meaning and emotion is to fall into Foucault's notion of the "gaze"; the way of seeing the world through the western empirical looking glass (Foucault 1970).⁶⁵ Each gesture discloses a poetics of experience that is intrinsic to Shams' *hukm*. What we can draw from here is the continuity between ritual gesture and meaning; *hukm* promotes creativity, which in turn is gesticulated as ideal themes of Muslim belief, that lie at the core of the *faqir-saint*

⁶³ The veneration of the saint's shroud (*chaddar*) constitutes another way for transmitting a saint's blessedness to the ritual participant. Shrouds covering Nizamuddin's and Amir Khosrau's tombs are replaced weekly by the incumbent lineage. These shrouds usually find themselves back at the shops belonging to *Chisti pirs* where they again are sold to devotees. The recycling of shrouds by *Chisti pirs* reflects the degree of entrepreneurship that has infiltrated the Nizamuddin shrine arena after partition (post 1947; see Chapter Four).

⁶⁴ Another verse says, "Allah is one and the whole world is *suhargan* (married woman)".

⁶⁵ Stoller (1986) as does Foucault, challenge western styles of perception in relation to anthropological representation. As Stoller asserts: "The result of this tendency is that we represent the other's world in a generally turgid discourse which often bears little resemblance to the world we are attempting to describe" (1986:38-39).

relationship. For *faqirs*, the manifestation of *hukm* through ritual language and gesture is vital in maintaining their bond of intimacy with the saints. The more a *faqir* engages in spontaneous forms of ritual language and gesture the more he defines his sense of self through the sacred other. As Csordas points out:

The strongest sense of creativity, however, becomes evident only when we can specify the ways in which the psychocultural themes have been phenomenologically “thematized in practice (1997:263).

As I have attempted to show, a *faqir's* sense of mystical creativity cultivates and innovates cultural themes characteristic of some devotional practices performed at Muslim shrines. This includes the engagement of the bodily sensorium, or as Merleau-Ponty refers to as synaesthetic perception. This is further expressed by Csordas who states that:

Creativity cannot be understood as a function of representation without being in the world, or of textuality without embodiment. Imagination is not a matter of mental representation but a multisensory engagement of the world best understood as transformative, imaginal self process (1997:262).

This process articulates with Merleau-Ponty's conception of the symbiotic nature of the visible and the invisible. For Merleau-Ponty (1968), the source of creative expression is posited on giving his/her body to the world, in the sense that the participant's sensorium is open to “be penetrated by the world of the other”, as Stoller (1986:39) suggests.

For *faqirs*, like Shams, their arsenal of bodily gestures convey a sense of *auctoritas*, a way of stamping his legitimacy as arbiter with the spirit world. In this way, expressions of religious creativity reaffirm a *faqir's* mystical identity. And yet, Shams' performance embodies a playful aspect, enjoining both serious and facetious dimensions; seemingly purposeful gestures are disrupted by joyful paroxysms, soberness is intertwined with the ludic. Bakhtin claims that the coalescence between the carnivalesque and mirth, “Frees human consciousness, thought and imagination for new potentialities” (1968:49). Similarly, Rosaldo, Lavie & Narayan suggest that, “Carnival and laughter thus dissolve the world of earnest necessity into imaginative blueprints and perhaps later realizations of human potentialities” (1993:7). Perhaps, here also, this switching between the serious

and the ludic may promote dissolution of the exigencies of a *faqir's* life, whereby “stepping out of seriousness proves creative, subversive, and innovative” (Rosaldo, Lavie & Narayan 1993:7).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the notion of *hukm* as a creative source of a *faqir's* mystical expression through an analysis of two types of *faqirs'* ritual genres. I have also examined the tie between experience and affective states and their incorporation in ritual language and gesture. It is through a *faqir's* engagement with *hukm* that mediates his experience and meaning of the sacred other. In *faqirs'* ritual genres experience of the sacred other is mediated through non-ordinary or extraordinary states of awareness, and is reminiscent of Csikszentmihalyi's notion of “flow”, that Myerhoff claims is “the state where action and awareness merge” (1990:247).⁶⁶

While functionalist and psycho-analytic approaches would tend to view *faqirs'* ritual genres as a means of averting a psychological crisis via objectifying powerful emotions which could otherwise implode on the psyche, I have attempted to by-pass these reductionist models by considering the creative dimensions of *faqirs'* rituals. Csordas considers that the “locus of the sacred is the body for the body is the existential ground of culture” (1990:39), while claiming that the evocation of the sacred may lead to new kinds of creative expression and experience (Csordas 1997:157).

While on one level *hukm* is posited on a master/servant relationship does not preclude *faqirs* developing their own personalised creative expressions and meanings of *hukm*. It is the development of this creative impulse generated by *hukm* that not only allows a *faqir* to express an array of intimate feelings to the saint, but also endows him with an empowered voice; a means of negotiating some degree of *auctoritas* as a consequence of his loss of personal control.⁶⁷ This finds its homologue in Gill (1991: 78), echoing Merleau-Ponty (1968), when he notes:

⁶⁶ I find Rapaport's conviction that transcendental states are a kind of self-induced lie as being problematic in examining the ecstatic element of *nara* and gestural styles of *faqirs'* ritual genres. As Eliade reminds us that the cognisant orchestration of “transformational states” in shamanic trance does not “render them inauthentic” (Eliade cited in Myerhoff 1990:247). For a further discussion of this see Myerhoff (1990).

⁶⁷ As I suggested earlier on, one aspect of *hukm* conveys ambiguity as a *faqir* does not know when or where the saint's command will be given, or the nature of the saint's request.

When the visible and the invisible, the mundane and the transcendent, are initially conceived of as symbiotic dimensions of the other, the need to define the latter as the negation or denial of the former does not arise”

A *faqir's* need to recover this sense of equity within *hukm* was poignantly expressed to me by Shams who compared his relationship with his saint to lovers who experience the sum of human emotions and feelings; anger, love, sadness, desire, complaint and acknowledgement of each others' personal worth and dignity.

CHAPTER NINE

DOMAINS OF MASTERY

*Nature loves to hide...The Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither reveals nor
conceals.
Heraclitus*

In this thesis, I examined various kinds of mystical mastery in the everyday lives of *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine and how it shaped and informed their world worldview and experience. In highlighting the importance of mystical mastery I attempted to expose how we can appreciate *faqirs'* mystical complex. I contended that mystical mastery is not only a means for attaining and wielding various kinds of mystical powers, but is based on a *faqir's* concern with maintaining existential control and personal autonomy.

Through my focus on particular areas of *faqirs'* mystical mastery I have sought to reveal how *faqirs* construe mystical mastery; how mystical mastery is constituted and how its expressions reaffirm a *faqir's* mystique to *basti* locals and devotees at the Nizamuddin shrine. I adopted Jackson's concept of inter-subjectivity in order to observe the influence of *faqirs* inter-relationships with humans and spirit beings. Jackson's work on inter-subjectivity assisted in delineating my ideas on *faqirs'* mystical complex and its implications.

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to develop an orientation for exploring *faqirs'* mystical complex which privileges *faqirs'* accounts. Thus, I have sought to ground *faqirs'* experiences by actual events, case studies and "interpersonal relationships" (Jackson 1989:2), at the Nizamuddin shrine and *basti*. I was influenced by Jackson's phenomenological anthropology which privileges how "people immediately experience" their lifeworlds and give meaning to their experiences (Jackson 1996:12). Jackson claims that the implication for this kind of anthropological investigation avoids the tendency to impose systematic models of human action to peoples' life experiences. For

Jackson the incongruous nature of life limits the imposition of human models of action. Life is in perpetual flux, as the Greek philosopher Heraclitus claimed, and is borne out of, and sustained, by seemingly ambiguous forces, circumstances and ironies which diminishes our sense of ontological security. Although human experience is universal, each person's life experiences are atypical. The atypical nature of human experience, therefore, demands researchers to suspend their enquiries of "hidden determinants of belief and action" (Jackson 1996:11), to an exploration of how people give meaning to their experiences in their own terms.

My particular exploratory approach of *faqirs'* mystical complex has been partly prompted by the paucity of anthropological studies done in this area. By examining critical elements of *faqirs'* mystical complex I have attempted to reveal how their identity is constructed. My investigations also revealed that *faqirs* seemed to have been more preoccupied with attaining mystical powers and engaging with the spirit world, rather than being concerned with attaining mystical union with Allah. Consequently, my thesis has attempted to capture the nature of *faqirs'* mystical complex as it is experienced by modern day *faqirs* at the Nizamuddin shrine.

I argued that mystical mastery is instrumental in shaping a *faqir's* mystical identity. *Faqirs* are not content in adhering to prescribed systems of religious and social action but privilege their own conceptions and experiences of the Other, that is, the various kinds of spirit beings, as well as the "base or animal self" (*nafs*), which are central to their expression of mystical mastery. A *faqir's* need to form close ties with the spirit world is a way of distinguishing himself from others and reauthoring his sense of self. In a sense, a *faqir's* mystical identity is formed from the struggle between his concern with existential control and the apparent arbitrary nature of life. Mystical mastery is the search for meaning in response to this existential dilemma and seeks to redress this imbalance. Life is a constant struggle with death, as Hegel asserted (Hegel cited in Jackson 1998:192). The self is informed within this dialectic and defines us in relation to human and non-human others (Jackson 1998:192). We live in a world of "otherness" which demands us to adjust to its demands and imperatives. Edward Said speaks of "otherness" as a language of identity construction (1978). In short, people confer other people with "otherness" as a way of defining themselves. The ostensible and implicit features and expressions that distinguish a person or cultural group from others are a way

of addressing “otherness”. Implicit to Said’s discourse which is relevant here is by knowing the Other one can engage in an active interplay with it, no matter how this interplay is defined. In this way, the “ambiguity” which is usually inferred to “otherness” becomes manageable rather than problematic.

But this is the irony; the Other which shapes and gives meaning to a *faqir’s* mystical identity may also diminish him to nothingness (Jackson 1998). In this analysis, I have attempted to flesh out how *faqirs* come to terms with the other as a source of power and ambiguity. Probably nowhere is this double bind more poignantly expressed than by the biblical Job. Job’s life is shattered. He loses his family and possessions. His conceptions of God as a compassionate being are tested. Eventually God recompenses Job for his loss only after Job undergoes a crisis of faith.

However, like other human beings *faqirs* come to terms with the paradoxical nature of the other by conferring on it qualities of permanence and constancy. Plato’s thesis that we live in a mirror world which embodies eternal archetypes corresponds with *faqirs’* conceptions of the Divine Attributes. In a world of flux the Divine Attributes reaffirm the immutable power of the sacred Other. Yet as my investigations into *faqirs’* mystical complex revealed that the promise of mystical power through *faqir’s* engagement with different spiritual beings was demanding.

I have also shown how mystical mastery includes strategies of the self which allows *faqirs* to reauthor their lives. This may entail modifying, adjusting and innovating various personal and cultural symbols which give meaning to a *faqir’s* subjective experiences and for explaining ambiguous life circumstances. *Faqirs* become adept in these kinds of reauthoring strategies which not only underscores their refusal to resign to circumstances which may render them ineffectual, but also provides ways for re-empowering themselves in their own terms (Myerhoff 1986:263).

Chapter One provided an ethnographic background and theoretical issues and directives for this analysis. I chose the Nizamuddin shrine as my research site as it was a locus for various *faqirs*. My decision was also influenced by the Nizamuddin shrine’s long and rich tradition in Sufism and its unique geographical and historic linkups with the surrounding *basti*. The Nizamuddin shrine provided a relevant arena for analysing

critical issues of *faqirs'* practices and beliefs. I decided to use Jackson and other phenomenological approaches for this analysis for their "penetrative immediacy" in exposing the multi-textured and experiential quality of *faqirs'* lifeworlds.

Chapter Two explored *faqirs'* body image and comportment as expressions of mystical mastery. I contended that a *faqir's* worldview is grounded on the notion of *tariqah*, the inner or mystical path, which denotes a manner for engaging with the spiritual Other. I argued for an approach for viewing *tariqah* as a way to other, by examining how *faqirs'* body image and comportment embodied notions of ambiguity, inordinance, alterity and mystery. These aspects were incorporated by a *faqir's* habit for androgyny, boundary crossing, exaggeration and volatile behaviours. I also argued that the use of androgyny as a way to other, provided *faqirs* a means for diminishing the perceived "polluting" aspects of women. A *faqir's* tendency for confounding social categories through their various outward expressions not only distinguishes him from other Muslims and non-Muslims, but also infer qualities to him which are usually consigned to spirit beings. By comparing the body images and behavioural styles of *faqirs* and *Chisti pirs* I sought to highlight the distinguishing features of *faqirs'* outward expressions.

Chapter Three examined the inter-linking themes of mystical mastery and the other through an exploration of the sensuous dimensions of *faqirs'* mystical practices. *Faqirs'* mystical practices provide ways for engaging with the other, in this case the *nafs* (animal, base or satanic self) which is believed to exist in the body. What I attempted to convey in this chapter was *faqirs'* need to diminish the threat of the *nafs*. The *nafs* relentlessly predates on a *faqir's* sense of bodily control which is crucial to attaining mystical mastery. A *faqir's* mystical practices are ways for checking the *nafs* by allowing him a means for inward surveillance. A *faqir's* mystical practices, are therefore, attuned to the sensuous contours of corporeality, to its existential rhythms and movements. I also argued that *faqirs'* use of their sensory perceptions in their engagement with the spiritual landscape of the Nizamuddin shrine complex as mystical mastery. A *faqir's* sensory perceptions constitute an orientation of the body to its surrounding lifeworld. My use of the phenomenologies of Merleau-Ponty, Abram and Seres sought to reveal the textural quality of mystical mastery. The way in which *faqirs* engage with the spiritual lifeworld of the Nizamuddin shrine complex conveys Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh of the world" — the reciprocal engagement between the human

beings and the non-human world. Thus, by drawing the saint's blessedness into themselves by their various sensory perceptions, *faqirs* come to view their bodies as receptacles of mystical power.

Faqirs' engagement with the lifeworlds of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and the *basti* was further examined in Chapter Four in relation to spirit beings. Various types of spirit beings influence *faqirs'* and *basti* locals' conceptions of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti*. Yet, as I showed, changes to the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* after 1947 prompted *faqirs'* and *basti* locals to reformulate their domains. Changes to their "moral" landscapes, particularly from the 1980's onwards which saw Hindu elements encroaching into the *basti*, were considered to have a "demonising" impact. *Faqirs* such as Ahmad Shah who had unsuccessfully protested against the constructions of the *Samshat Ghat* and the *Shiv mandir* at the *basti*, consequently, reconstrued their presence in such a way which enabled him to diminish the spiritual threat of the Hindu other and in retrieving a sense of existential control. This sort of reinterpretation of the Nizamuddin shrine complex and *basti* reveals how social change has prompted an orientation of their lifeworlds which is consistent with *faqirs'* and *basti* locals conceptions of them as a moral universe.

Chapter Five examined the relationship between *faqirs* and their spirit familiars. I took the reader through *faqirs'* conceptions of the spirit familiar and how it is linked to notions of personal autonomy and power. The spirit familiar is the epitome of the "ambiguous other", a source of power and paradox. I offered an analysis which explained how *faqirs* actively engaged in constructions of spirit familiars in which they legitimated themselves as mystically powerful. By analysing the biographies of Baba Ali and Ahmad Shah I revealed how this process of legitimisation was facilitated by their use of turning to significant past events in their lives.

In Chapter Six I analysed *faqirs'* divination practices as symbolic and experiential arenas for reaffirming their mystique to patients. Divination practices reconfirm patients' conceptions of *faqirs* as possessing mystical insight. I argued that mystical insight was an expression of mystical mastery which incorporated various inductive and oracular methods of divination. I also showed that *faqirs'* divination practices incorporated

different ways of knowing which deviated from “normal” social systems of knowledge. I contended that *faqirs*’ expressions of mystical insight also provided patients with various possibilities for negotiating and restoring existential control in patients’ lives.

Chapter Seven continued my analysis of *faqirs*’ therapy through a symbolic examination of *puleeta*. I explored some of the cosmological and cultural levels of symbolism of *puleeta* and how they attempt towards a spiritual transference between *faqir* and patient. I argued that *puleeta* are composed of various symbolic strategies which aim to diminish a host spirit being’s control of a patient while restoring existential control in him/her. *Puleeta* are poignant representations of a *faqir*’s mystical mastery and emphasise his ability for symbolic innovation. *Puleeta* conjoin a *faqir*’s religious imagination and his mystical experiences for contesting the spiritual Other. Like his alleged mystical insight, a *faqir*’s *puleeta* invokes his sense of *auctoritas*.

Chapter Eight explored the tie between *faqirs*’ mystical relationships with the saints and their mystical expressions within two ritual genres. I suggested that *faqirs*’ mystical expressions are modes of action for reauthoring their relationships with the saints. At the same time, *faqirs*’ mystical expressions address notions of “otherness”, as manifested by a *faqir*’s habit for fluctuating between ordinary and alternate states of consciousness during his mystical performances. *Faqirs*’ mystical expressions incorporate Csordas’ notion of the sacred as grounded in the body and Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the inter-relationship between the visible and the invisible. My analysis elaborated on Merleau-Ponty’s concept to an orientation which exposed the synthesis between mystical states and their ostensible and creative expressions.

Appendix I

The shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya

The saint's grave (*mazar*) is outstanding for its architectural beauty. Although the original building, built by the ruler Firoz Shah Tughlaq is now non-existent, a number of additions have been constructed onto the shrine through the centuries. The original building had a domed chamber, and walls composed of pierced screens. Both the walls and screens were made of sandalwood. Four golden cups were suspended in four alcoves of the dome. Firoz Shah had also erected a *Jama'at Khana* (congregational chamber) (Delhi Archives, *Delhi List of Religious Monuments*, p.149). Faridun Khan erected the present building in 970 A.H. (1562). The shrine measures approximately 9 metres square. The outer veranda measuring 2 metres in width is made of white marble, having five arched portals on each side. Khahilulah Khan, the governor of Delhi in 1652, constructed the present day veranda out of marble and red sandstone. Along the veranda perimeter are twenty marble columns which carry trefoil arches. The colloquial name given to the shrine building is "*bis dari*" meaning "twenty pillars". The tomb, which is made of marble, measures 2.5 metres in length and 1.2 metres wide, with a height of approximately 32 centimetres. It is surrounded by a marble balustrade said to have been a gift by Khurshir Khan of Hyderabad (Delhi Archives, *Delhi List of Religious Monuments*, p.149).

The tomb chamber measures 5 metres square internally by 6-7 metres externally. Entrance into the tomb chamber is via a single door on the south side flanked by marble screens. A curtain upon the tomb's closure always screens the door every evening at 10 p.m. The outer walls consist of marble latticework giving visual access of the tomb to devotees along the outer veranda. On some of these are elaborate and colourful mosaics, which are periodically restored. The interior side and dome walls are inscribed with decorations and inscriptions. The many additions to the inner sanctum over the centuries have tended to accentuate its medieval ornateness. On the eastern side of the tomb are three lattice screens, the centre screen being the largest. Alternately, the central panel of the western wall displays an exquisite gilded mihrab. With the exception of the ritual washing of the tomb called *ghusl*, performed once a year, a shroud always covers it. An outstanding feature of the shrine is the series of poetic adulations to the saint inscribed along the interior walls, written mainly in *nastaliq* characters, as illustrated in the following:

The tomb chamber is usually congested with devotees engaged in all kinds of devotions. Two or three shrine guardians, who are descendants of the saint (*Chisti Nizami*), are usually attired in white long shirts and pants, and donning back hats, stand outside the front entrance where they control the flow of devotees entering the tomb. While entrance into the tomb is usually conducted in an orderly fashion, it is not uncommon for some devotees to squabble with the shrine custodians. The shrine guardians are often seen carrying folders containing the names of new devotees arriving to the shrine. I quickly learnt that this was an important method for finding patrons. Some shrine guardians are noted for their intimidating and coarse manner, sometimes leading to public disputes by devotees. On one occasion, during Friday public prayer held at the Nizamuddin shrine, I

witnessed some shrine guardians abruptly telling women to quickly go to the perimeters of the courtyards in order to allow space for males to pray. At that time I was sitting alongside my female assistant who was a young Indian woman. Outraged by their behaviour, my assistant was determined to stay there. It was only after one of the shrine guardians had demanded her departure in abrasive Hindi that I quickly retorted that she was my wife. He immediately left us.

The tomb chamber is a hub for various devotional activities. These include performing circumambulation of the tomb in a clockwise direction (*ziarat*), sprinkling rose petals and rosewater over the tomb, offering sweets to the poor, placing shrouds on the tomb, lighting incense, and beseeching the saint, and reciting of Quranic prayers. Several copies of the Quran are usually placed on the western perimeter of the shrine.

Appendix II

Khijli mosque

The *Khijli masjid*, or otherwise known as the “house of assembly” (*Jama’at Khana*) is the oldest monument at the Nizamuddin shrine complex (Plate 1.5). It is located on the immediate western side of the central shrine. The mosque is constructed of red sandstone, and is 29 metres in length by 17 metres wide, with a height of 14.5 metres. The mosque is composed of three compartments, the diameter of the central dome measures just over 11 metres, while the side prayer rooms are covered by twin domes measuring 16 metres by 5.5 metres.¹ The interior arches and mihrabs are decorated in gold Quranic inscriptions. The perimeter of the entrance arch is inscribed by large Quranic passages. Apart from its liturgical functions the mosque is also a centre for Quranic instruction and serves as a place of rest for devotees.

Appendix III

Tomb of Amir Khosrau

Amir Khosrau was one of the most outstanding genius’s of his age. He was born in 1253 in Mominabad. His real name was Abul Hasan Yaminuddin, being of Turkish descent on his father’s side. From an early age he excelled in poetry and music as well as in a variety of other fields. He was a prolific writer of poetry and prose, and composed over ninety volumes. He achieved mastery in a number of poetic styles, and is said to have been an influential force in the development of the Urdu language via his poetic compositions which combined Persian and Hindi languages. Tradition also claims the invention of the Indian musical instrument *Sitar* to Khosrau. Khosrau enjoyed the patronage of several of Delhi’s rulers, and was himself a wealthy merchant and seller of precious jewels. From his early youth he became a disciple of Nizamuddin. The two shared a deep attachment for each other, to the extent that Nizamuddin once remarked, “If *shari’a* (Islamic canon)

¹ The central dome was built during the lifetime of Nizamuddin by Khizr Khan, son of Alauddin Khijli. The latter ascended to the throne of Delhi in 1314 A.D. The side compartments which function as women’s prayer areas were latter additions to the mosque, and were built by Feroz Shah Tughlaq (d. 1388).

permitted, I would have preferred to sleep with Khosrau in one and the same grave". At arrival of his teacher's Khosrau recited the following famous couplet in Hindi:

*Gori soye par mukh par daaley kais,
Chal Khosrau ghar aapne sary bhayee chau-des.*

translation

*My beloved sleeps covering her face with the beautiful locks of her hair.
Khosrau, go home, the darkness of the evening has engulfed the whole world.*

Tradition claims that the grief stricken Khosrau violently bashed his head against Nizamuddin's tomb, thus rendering him unconscious, from which he never recovered. He died six months afterwards in 1325 (Begg 1972:158-161). His tomb is buried near to his teacher's grave, symbolising the deep seated affection which they both had for each other during their lives, and is a celebrated testimony of the inviolable union between teacher and disciple (*piri-muridi*) in Sufism. The tomb enclosure measures just over 33 metres in length by 17 metres wide. The tomb is supported on twelve pillars and is superimposed by guldastas. Lattice marble screens occupy the space between the pillars with the exception of the south wall, containing the entrance. The entrance displays an attractive pair of copper doors, however these are a recent addition to the shrine.² A number of inscriptions cover the northern and western walls, being noteworthy for their splendid poetic Persian verses, acclaiming India's rich poetic tradition. Toward the southern end of Amir Khosrau's shrine is a small courtyard called the *Sehen Astana*. Along its perimeter are graves to disciples of Nizamuddin and his descendants known as *Chisti Nizami*.

A second entrance into the main courtyards is located on the eastern side of Amir Khosrau's shrine. Next to this entrance stands a three to four hundred year old *Kirni* tree. Devotees entering from this entrance must first travel through an arcade of shops which sell all kinds of devotional articles as well as music shops selling *qawwalli* music. A few small bookshops are also located there selling Islamic hagiographic literature. These shops belong to various *Chisti Nizami*. Along this twisting arcade can also be found the former food hall (*langar khana*) area as well as the area outside the main entrance gates (*sarwar darwaze*).

² These were given as a gift by a certain Miiyanjan in 1863. In similar fashion to the dargah of Nizamuddin a number of additions have been constructed to this dargah, including the large marble tablet inscribed with elegant Persian verses, standing on the northern end of the tomb, which is attributed to the emperor, Babar (1483-1530), who founded the Mogul dynasty in India. Delhi Archives, *Delhi List of Religious Monuments*, p. 161.

Appendix IV

Divine Attributes (*asmā ul-husna*)

In Islamic cosmology the ninety-nine Divine Attributes (*Asmā ul-husna*) are divided according to *jalal/jamal* divisions. This system of categorisation is employed in faqiri practice of *wazifa* and within faqiri curative lore.

ALLAH (GOD)

Ism az-zat (The Essential Name)

JALAL

Al-Mutkabir (The Majestic)
Al-Musawwir (The Bestower of forms)
Al-Bāri (The Evolver)
Al Wahab (The Grantor)
Al-Razzaq (The Sustainer)
Al-Qabiz (The Punisher of the Wicked)
Al-Basit (The Spreader)
Al-Rafī (The Exalter)
Al-Muiz (The One Who bestows honour)
Al-Muzil (The Abaser)
Al-Adal (The Just)
Al-Khabir (The Aware)
Al-‘Aliyy (The Sublime)
Al-Muqit (The Maintainer)
Al-Wāsi (The All-Embracing)
Al-Haqq (The Truth)
Al-Wakil (The Witness)
Al-Qawi (The Strong)
Al-Muhyi (The Giver of Life)
Al-Mumit (The Giver of Death)
Al-Hayy (The Living)
Al-Qayyum (The Self-Subsisting)
Al-Wajid (The Existing)
Al-Ahad (The One and Only)
As-Samad (The Eternal)
Al-Qadir (The Lord of Power)
Al-Muqtadir (The Majestic)
Al-Awwal (The First)
Al-Akhir (The Last)
Az-Zāhir (The Manifest)
Al-Jabbar (The Compeller)
Al-Muqadim (He Who bestows Good and Bad)
Al-Mughni (The Maker of Independence)
Al-Muhi (The Burner of Corpses)
Al-Qahhar (The Destroyer)
Al-Barr (The Source of all Goodness)
Al-‘Afuw (The Pardoner)

JAMAL

Ar-Rahman (The Compassionate)
Ar-Rahim (The Merciful)
Al-Malik (The Sovereign)
Al-Quddus (The Most Holy One)
As-Salam (The Source of Peace)
Al-Mu’min (The Giver of Peace)
Al-Muhaimin (The Preserver of Safety)
Al-Aziz (The Exalted in Might)
Al-Ghaffar (The Great Forgiver)
Al-Rahar (The Irresistible)
Al-Fattah (The Judge)
Al-Alim (The All-Knowing)
Al-Hafiz (The Preserver)
Al-Sāmi (The All-Hearing)
Al-Basir (The All-Seeing)
Al-Hakam (The Arbiter)
Al-Latif (The Subtle)
Al-Halim (The Clement)
Al-Azim (The Great One)
Al-Ghafur (The All-Forgiving)
Ash-Shakur (The Appreciative)
Al-Karim (The Generous One)
Al-Kabir (The Most Great)
Al-Hafiz (The Preserver)
Al-Hasib (The Reckoner)
Al-Mujib (The Responsive)
Ar-Raqib (The Watchful)
Al-Jalal (The Glorious)
Al-Hakim (The Wise)
Al-Bātin (The Unmanifest)
Al-Wadud (The Loving)
Al-Majid (The Most Glorious One)
Al-Baith (The Awakener)
Ash-Shahid (The Witness)
Al-Wali (The Protector)
Al-Hamid (The Praiseworthy)
Al-Muta’ali (The Most Exalted)

Malikul Mulk (The Lord of Power and Dominion)	An-Nur (The Light)
Al-Jami (The Assembler)	Ar-Ra'uf (The Kind)
Al-Muwakhir (He Who places last as He Wills)	Al-Muqsit (The Equitable)
Al-Qāhir (The Omnipotent)	Al-Khāliq (The Creator)
Al-Sabir (The Patient)	Al-Hādi (The Guide)
Al-Mubdi (The Creator of Humanity)	Al-Warith (The Inheritor)
Al-Bā'ith (The Awakener)	Al-A'la (the Most High)
Dhul Jalali Wal Ikram (The Lord of Majesty and Bounty)	

Appendix V

Taxonomy of spirit beings

The following section gives a taxonomy of types of *jinn* and other spirit beings. *Faqirs* tend to categorise *jinn* and other spirit beings according to good (*pak*) and evil (*napak*).

JANN

These are a high order of *jinn* whose major purpose is to protect and safeguard shrines, mosques, and other Muslim holy places. They may also police lakes, rivers, and cemeteries from evil spirit beings and witches. The *jann* are believed to protect the shrines of Nizamuddin and Amir Khosrau. The *jann* are categorised according to higher and lower types. Baba Ali explained this notion in the following: "Its like a government; you have a prime minister, a deputy prime minister, ministers, and beneath them are the secretaries and other functionaries. Everyone has an assigned position." On an aside, such conceptions mirror traditional Sufi lore pertaining to the hierarchy of saints. Baba Ali's view mirrors traditional views of the Sufi saints as categorised as a hierarchy of saints is governed by a leading Sufi saint called a *qutub*. Below him are two *imams* (leaders). Then there are four pillars (*awtad*), each one assigned to each of the four cardinal points. Below them are seven deputies (*abdal*) who abide over the affairs of the seven continents, and who are served by five supporters (*amd*). Seventy saints who are assigned to different regions of the world further serve these. Hosts of chiefs and lesser saints come under the authority of the *amd* (Shah 1973:88).

PARI

The *pari* are female *jinn* analogous to the western version of fairies. Opinions vary between *faqirs* and other Muslims in relation to whether these creatures are harmful to humans or not. Interestingly, this confusion is also conveyed by Shureef's nineteenth century study of the *pari nahown* (fairy bath) which, to my mind, mistakenly places the *pari* in the category of *shaytan* (Shureef 1991).

LAILA MAIMUNA

A powerful female *jinn* said to be peace loving.

LAILA MALIKA

A female *jinn* referred to by *faqirs* as the Queen of the *jinn*. I was told by one *faqir* at the Nizamuddin shrine that in order to invoke her presence, her name should be repeated for 125,000 times over a period of fourteen days, after *Isha'* (Evening prayer).

KHWAJA KHIJR HAYAT

Khwaja Khijr Hayat is probably the most mysterious of all the *jinn*, and the most powerful. *Faqirs* consider him as the ruler of all the *jinn*, and is said to live in the lowest celestial plane, in proximity to the angelic realm. From there, he is able to hear the speech of angels. Consequently, *Khwaja Khijr Hayat* may impart this knowledge to whomever he pleases. In accordance with his royal status, *Khwaja Khijr Hayat* rides a white horse and commands legions of good *jinn* in serving humanity and protecting it against the whims of evil *jinn*. He wears special clothes and can materialise anywhere at will. By summoning him one can attain wealth and earthly power.

Like other *jinn* of high rank, *Khwaja Khijr Hayat* can be invoked via mystical practices. The invocation of *Khwaja Khijr Hayat* is an arduous exercise, as illustrated in the following narrative, written by Baba Ali:

The person should wear simple and comfortable clothes and should use scents such as *udh* and *ittar* (scented oil). After this he should choose an appropriate place and begin to recite the chapter *Muzzamil*.³ Before reciting this sura he should recite the sura *Ikhlas* three times and should make a circle around himself written with the verses of this sura. His heart and mind should be made clear of unnecessary things. Sura *Muzzamil* is recited forty times and this practice must be continued for forty nights. During this period there should be no person nearby. After some days humans with dire faces will appear, however, the *amil* (controller) should not be afraid. If he becomes fearful and leaves the circle he may become harmed. If he remains in the circle no harm will come to him. On the fortieth day the *amil* will see the bloody faces of animals and people. Again, he must not be afraid. If his heart remains dauntless by morning the king of *jinn* and his retinue will appear, and ask why he has been summoned. He will be under the *amil's* control.

QAWIZ/KA WIZ

An evil male spirit being which lusts after women and has coitus with them. The *Qawiz* have the power to possess people. They are believed to be the disembodied spirits of people who had committed suicide — a heinous sin in Islam, or who have died in a state of impurity. They are grotesque in appearance with vulture like faces, having fangs,

³ This is the seventy-third chapter of the Quran, and is characterised by its mystical content. *Muzzamil* is one of the titles given to the Prophet Muhammad, meaning “folded in garments”. This alludes to the Prophet’s practice of covering himself in a folded sheet while performing his austerities in the cave of *Hira'a*. This chapter, often quoted by *faqirs*, gives credence to the practice of prayer and meditation after midnight since according to the Quran (73:6) “the rising by night is most potent for governing (the soul), and most suitable for (framing the word (of prayer and praise))”. The relevance of this chapter to the invocation of the king of *jinn* can be understood by the fact that it is performed during the night, the time when the *jinn* are most active in the visible world.

talons, horns, and burning eyes. There was some discrepancy amongst *faqirs* whether the *Qawiz* was a *jinn* or not.

CHINAL

The female version of the *Qawiz*, considered extremely dangerous and powerful. A vision of a *Chinal* is supposed to incite a temporary state of madness called *pagal*. The *Chinal* has the power to transform herself into a beautiful woman in order to entice males to have coitus with her. Some *faqirs* referred to the *Chinal* as being witches while others to as prostitutes.

MARID

An evil *jinn* who enjoys tormenting people and possessing those who are ritually impure i.e., being out of a state of *wuzu* (ablution); who have not washed after coitus. He is said to live from the blood of animals. The *Marid*, like the *Qawiz*, *Chinal*, and other lesser spirit beings, reflect Muslim concern with moral and spiritual impurity. As with other spirit beings, *Marid* are associated with illicit desires.

IFRIT

Stalwart, impressive *jinn* but lower kind of helpful *jinn*, believed to use their powers on behalf of human beings. According to *basti* locals and *faqirs* these *jinn* were employed under king *Sulayman*. Although the *Ifrit* are believed to be beneficial, they possess a volatile nature and are best left alone. In the Quran (27:39-40) the *Ifrit* is portrayed as being haughty and crafty.

CHALAWA

Chalawa are malicious, clever *jinn* with the power to change themselves into various creatures (i.e. man, woman, buffalo, giant). Moreover, a peculiar characteristic of this *jinn* is its ability to become fire. One *Chisti pir* told me the following story of a *Chalawa*:

One night after finishing his work, a farmer sat down to have some *ganja* (*cannibus*). Soon after he saw a fire nearby him. He thought that it was strange since there were no people near it. As he approached the fire it mysteriously disappeared. The farmer then went back and sat down. Soon after he again saw the fire burning at the same spot where it appeared before. Upon approaching it, the fire vanished. This episode was repeated three times. After the third time the farmer thought that the fire was a *Chalawa*. He then began to take off his clothes in order to frighten it. The *Chalawa* then beckoned the farmer that it wouldn't bother him any more if he discontinued his actions.

BHATAKTI ATMA

Bhatakti atma are loosely ascribed to ghosts (*bhut*) that remain in perpetual limbo on the earthly realm. These liminal spirits are usually formed from the ranks of people who have died in an impure (*nāpak*) state; who have regularly contravened religious conventions (in this case Islamic social doctrine) e.g. prostitutes, drunkards, thieves,

adulterers, murderers, suicides, or those who have died through violence. According to one *Chisti pir*, the spirits of those persons who had committed suicide must remain on the earthly plane for the duration of their original life spans. This may include women dying during child-birth or a person who dies as a result of being stabbed with a knife. It is interesting to note that Hindus hold similar views to sudden or unnatural death, "or in the case of sinners", the bodies of such people are deemed unfit for cremation (Das 1977:123). Das further states that, "The preta of unnatural deaths and of sinners is not incorporated and is doomed to permanent liminality" (Das 1977:124). They can also include the spirits of Muslims who were not given the appropriate death rites. *Faqirs* often attribute deceased Hindus as being *bhatakti atma* since their spirits are perpetually enveloped in agonising fire, as a consequence of having been cremated. This idea contrasts with Hinduism which views cremation as being essential for ensuring that the deceased person's spirit (*preta*), "merges with the cosmic forces" (Das 1977:123). In all these cases a social or biological disruption is implied. Such spirits like to attach themselves to people and "make them mad". Violent death, for example, is viewed as socially and spiritually ambiguous since the victim's life has been untimely severed. *Bhatakti atma* are considered to be extremely dangerous since they seek revenge on humans for their state of ignominy. *Basti* locals are warned not to walk near graveyards or cremation grounds during night lest these forsaken spirits attack them.

Symptomatic of possession from a *bhatakti atma* is the apparent disruptive influence it has on both the victim and social others. *Faqirs* explained that a victim of *bhatakti atma* is always angry, unpredictable, and may resort to violence. One *Chisti pir* at the shrine told me that a *bhatakti atma* makes known its presence by the appearance of smoke.

Faqirs and *basti* locals consider harmful disputes and unresolved conflicts as potentially dangerous since the deceased may meet out vengeance against those whom he/she had disliked during their life-times. Ill-health or misfortune may also be attributed to discordant *bhut*. This closely resembles the Nepali Yolmo notion of *Dasa graha* (literally, "ten planets") (Desjarlais 1994:53). For *faqirs* and *basti* villagers, *bhatakti atma* may also reflect unresolved tensions between people.⁵

MAHAKALI

The Hindu goddess, *Mahakali*, is a notable inclusion to the *jinn* pantheon. To my mind, *faqirs'* understandings of *Mahakali* are based on her terrifying cultural image depicted in Hindu iconography. In my experience, few people from both Muslim and Hindu backgrounds are educated in the spiritual symbolism associated to her otherwise grotesque appearance. Carrying a freshly severed head, sword wielding, wearing a girdle of bloodied arms, and a necklace of skulls; standing fearsome with dishevelled hair, for most Muslims she is the personification of evil. For a historical and symbolic analysis of *Mahakali* see Kinsley (1987). Traditionally, *Mahakali* or *Kali* is the wife or consort, and associate of the god *Shiva*, who incites her to wild behaviour (Kinsley 1987:116). According to *Tantra*, an esoteric and ill-understood branch of Hinduism, *Kali* is

associated with death, destruction, and capricious quality of nature (Images India Collection 1994). She is the personification of *Shakti*, “the operative factor of male principle,” from which all existence emerges and is dissolved (Images India Collection 1994:10). *Kali* is a principle deity in Bengal where she is known as the “Divine Mother”, an image given widespread recognition via the popular Hindu saints Ramakrishna (see Kakar 1991).

Sociologically speaking, *Mahakali* may be considered to represent the degree of religious tension between Muslims and Hindus. Many *faqirs* I associated with had little knowledge of Hinduism, and considered it as being wayward due to its belief in many gods. Moreover, they considered the Hindu practice of cremation as anathema. *Faqirs* in general extol the spiritual excellence of Islam in comparison to Hinduism. Such notions are mirrored in the *faqirs*' belief of *Mahakali* as being the evil sister of *Khwaja Khizr Hayat*, and the Queen of evil *jinn* and other evil spirit beings. Notwithstanding this, her inclusion discloses a level of syncretism of Hindu symbolism within *faqirs*' cosmology.

GHUL

Ghul is a female demon *jinn* which seduces men in their sleep. In Morocco, this type of *jinn* is called *ghwal*. The *Ghul* is cognate to the latin “*succubus*”. Westermarck writes:

The *ghwal* are said to live in the Sudan or Sahara or in a thick wood from which they come out in the shapes of animals or who knows where? They have black faces and eyes like flaming fire and are fond of human flesh. Some people maintain that *ghwal* are not *jinn* but a species by themselves or a kind of men or wild animals, whereas others, who seem to be particularly well-informed, are of the opinion that they are of the *jenn* kind (1926 (I):397).

Appendix VI

PHARMACOPEIA

The following herbal remedies were passed to me by Baba Ali during the period of my field-work, and cover a broad range of illnesses.

ASHAKTI/WEAKNESS: REMEDY 1

Singara powder 1½ kilograms.

Almonds 250 grams.

Pistachio 100 grams.

Dried Ginger powder 15-20 grams.

Elichee (Cardamom) 5-10 pieces.

Jaiful 1 piece

These ingredients should be powdered, and 1 teaspoonful taken with warm milk during morning.

ASHAKTI/WEAKNESS: REMEDY 2

Turoli 250 grams.
Almond 250 grams.
Pistachio 250 grams.
Kamar Kakeri 250 grams.
Singara dry powder 500 grams.
Cardamom 5 grams.
Jaiful 2 pieces.
Musk 10 grams.
Honey 150 grams.
Ghee 1 kilogram.
Sooji 500 grams.
Dried red grapes.
Ginger powder 25 grams.

First fry *sooji* and *singara* powder in *ghee*, and then put in the rest of the ingredients. Place mixture in cake tin and set. This should be given to people suffering from anemia and physical weakness or during convalescence.

BODY ACHES/STIFFNESS: REMEDY 1

Take *Lahore namak* (salt) and rub on painful area.

BODY ACHES/STIFFNESS: REMEDY 2

Takes some *neem* leaves and place them in bath tub with water. Water should be boiled. When the water is warm the person should bathe in it. This is supposed to alleviate body aches and pains attributed to tiredness.

BODY ACHES/STIFFNESS: REMEDY 3

Take *khakan* ointment and rub on affected area.

BOILS

Mix *tsunam* and *joggery* (sugar), and form into paste. Rub paste on boil. Place a clean cloth over boil with a small hole, and should be placed on the boil's centre. This medicine is said to make the boil burst.

BROKEN BONES

Make paste from *Baba Ganj* stone. Apply and bandage affected area. May also be used internally.

CIRCULATION

Pour a little cinnamon oil onto clean cloth and massage onto skin. Cinnamon oil has heating properties, increasing circulation.

COLD/COUGH: REMEDY 1

Put 2 drops of *nilligri* oil on a teaspoonful of sugar. Take this, and slowly melt it into the mouth, then swallow. Recommended dose of *nilligri* oil: Adults, 2 drops. Children, 1 drop. No water should be taken after taking medicine for some time.

COLD: REMEDY 2

Put small amount of *ghee* onto finger and smother within nose. This assists in opening the nasal channels.

COLD/COUGH: REMEDY 3

Joggery 1 kilogram.

Linseed 1 kilogram.

Dry ginger powder 15 grams.

Linseed should be washed and slightly baked. Do not burn. Powder linseed on grinding stone. Mix with *joggery* and dry ginger powder. Put powder in bottle for use. One teaspoonful of this powder should be taken during evening, before bedtime. No water should be taken for some time after this. This remedy is believed to be beneficial for the relief of coughing, and assists in clearing mucus from the chest, and protects against tuberculosis.

CONSTIPATION

Arder (long seed) 500 grams.

Ginger powder 5 grams.

Lahore namak (salt) 1 piece.

Grapes 100-250 grams.

Mix ingredients with 150-200 millilitres parafin liquid and store in bottle. Take one teaspoonful with cup of warm black tea without sugar.

DIABETES: REMEDY 1

Powder 1 kilogram of seeds from *jamul* (small, purple coloured fruit).

Powder 500 grams *gokhroo* seeds and mix together with *jamul* seed powder.

1 teaspoonful of this mixture is to be taken before breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with plenty of water. Drink plenty of coconut juice and beer.

DIABETES: REMEDY 2

Take 1 teaspoonful of *jamul* vinegar before breakfast, lunch, and tea.

ERECTION/PROLONGED

A few grams of opium should be mixed with a little colon water and applied to penile shaft to dry.

HAIR STRENGTHENER

Powder some dry *hinna* leaves, and mix powder with a little *niligri* oil. Mix with 1 egg. Rub mixture onto scalp before bedtime, and leave overnight. Wash hair the next morning. For best results, this should be applied 2 times a month. It is advised that gloves are used when rubbing mixture unto scalp in order to prevent staining of hands.

Discussion

The application of head ointments are also believed to assist in removing excess heat from the head that may lead to anger and overt passion. This notion is cognate with the principles of 'heating' and 'cooling' found in *Unane* (Greek), *Hakimi*, *Aryurvedic*, Tibetan and Chinese systems of medicine

IMPOTENCY

There is a special part of the rooster's stomach that has a blue colour. This should be mixed with honey to form a paste. Apply to the penile shaft only. During this treatment the male should abstain from intercourse.

JAUNDICE: REMEDY 1

Eat 1-3 pieces of *karela* (type of vegetable) daily.

JAUNDICE: REMEDY 2

Put 1-2 drops of *karela* juice in eyes and nose. Drink one glass of *karela* juice. Barley water or coconut juice can also be taken.

Discussion

Baba Ali believed that by taking *Karela* drops, Jaundice is expelled through these orifices.

JAUNDICE: REMEDY 3

Take 1 piece of string, measuring from the chin to one's solar plexus, and tie a series of knots in the following order, as indicated below:



While tying each knot, the *darood sharif* should be recited.

Discussion

Baba Ali stated that the string would lengthen of its own accord. The reason for this derives from *faqirs'* belief that disease leaves the body, or is expelled, via its lower regions. The series of the five knots (*panjeen pees*) tied symbolise each of the five major *Chisti* saints, beginning with Moinuddin Chisti, and ending with Nasiruddin Chiragh Delhi. Robson says that "the practice of tying knots goes back to pre-Islamic times", and was used for healing purposes, as well as to bewitch others (1934:34). Also see Zwemer (1917) on the uses of objects such as the hand, hair and nails amongst Muslims. The

expulsion of noxious substances through the anal-genital orifices coincides with the idea that evil spirit beings invade the body through these regions, among other bodily sites.

Faqirs are ubiquitous in their belief in the efficacy of therapeutic objects and their capacity to summon spiritual power. *Faqirs* like Baba Ali were fastidious in their making of therapeutic objects. Here, the five knots are arranged in such a way so as to point their source to the centre, and is a central idea to Islamic cosmology. In this configuration, the sequence of knots underlines the unity between the visible and spirit worlds by virtue of the fact that their sequence is identical when moving either in a clockwise or anti-clockwise direction, as illustrated in the figure below

LOOSE MOTIONS OF BOWELS

Swallow 1 small tablet of *kafur* (camphor). For a child *jaiful* should be taken mixed with a little warm water.

LOW BLOOD PRESSURE

Take fruit of *amla muramba*. Put small piece of silver paper (not aluminium) on fruit, and eat. To be taken once a day. Water should not be drunk for a while after eating this.

MASSAGE OIL/MAKING OF

Sweet oil 1 kilogram. (Mustard oil can be used as a substitute).

Garlic 250 grams.

Dry Ginger powder 50 grams.

Heat oil in pan until warm. Throw in garlic with husk. Put in dry ginger powder, and mix thoroughly. Cover pan. When cooled, oil should be stored in a bottle for future use. This oil is beneficial during cold weather, and should be warmed before using.

MISCARRIAGE: REMEDY 1

Make chutney from papaya and dry ginger powder. Put a few drops of lime in mixture. This is then eaten. Not to be cooked. This is continued for four days. On the fifth day take some parafin oil with 2-3 teaspoons of black tea without sugar. Keep glucose tablets at hand and take 2 tablets in the morning and evening.

MISCARRIAGE: REMEDY 2

Take roots of papaya tree, wash and eat. Glucose tablets should also be taken.

PARALYSIS

Jungle pigeon should be obtained and drained of blood. Pigeon's body is to be cut into pieces. The person should drink the blood. Pigeon pieces are to be applied to affected body part. Pigeon pieces should then be boiled and eaten. Person should abstain from spicy foods, tamarind, and vinegar.

PILES: REMEDY 1

Cut baby coconut tree 8-9 inches from the ground and peel outer bark. Eat flesh of plant with *joggery* (sugar). To be taken 2-3 times a day.

PILES: REMEDY 2

Mix a few grams of opium with colon water and make into a paste. Apply paste on affected area with fine horse hair.

STOMACH WORMS

Eat 2-3 walnuts, or, otherwise, powder and mix with a little water to form a paste and eaten before bedtime. For a child, take 1 teaspoon of this paste. For elderly people, take 2 teaspoons. Should not be taken before or after meals, and without water. For elderly people ¼ cup of parafin oil should be mixed with hot tea, without sugar and drunk. This assists bowel motions. Should be continued for 3-4 days.

TOOTHACHE

A little clove oil should be poured on some cotton. The cotton should be put at the end of cinnamon stick, then applied to affected tooth.

WHITE SPOTS ON SKIN/LEUCODEMA

Black cobra should be killed and cooked in pot. Sweet oil should be added. The mixture should cook until burnt. The burnt residue is then to be powdered. Mix this powder with sweet oil and rub onto white areas.

Appendix VII

Classification of spiritual illnesses

The following section discusses the categories of spiritually based illnesses that make up the corpus of *faqirs'* curative lore. Some illnesses follow a prescribed symptomatology.

As earlier suggested, some spiritual illnesses may share one or more symptoms that show subtle distinctions. On a physiological level, as every illness engenders a list of symptoms, these symptoms also disclose the stage of pathology. Spiritual afflictions are divided into two kinds: illnesses that affect or impress a person with suddenness, and those that are caused due to possession. Although some of these illnesses i.e. *asrat*, *aseb*, and aspects of *jhapta* have already been discussed in Chapter Seven, I have also included them here.

ASRAT

Although I have discussed *asrat* in chapter seven, I have also included it here. The term *asrat*, being the plural of *asar* or *asre*, means “effect”, and is an umbrella word covering several kinds of illnesses associated with striking and possession. A major kind of *asar* is *nazare bud* (evil eye). Evil eye can be caused by a person’s look at another. The gaze of some people is believed to carry a destructive power that can cause various symptoms i.e. lethargy, fever, and sometimes paralysis of limbs. The effects of the evil eye are known to be sudden but of temporary duration. Medicine is believed to be useless against its effect. Evil eye can be employed in an intentioned act of spite, but is often given unintentionally. The evil eye seethes into cultural notions of the eyes as disclosing one’s

inner nature. According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet was a believer of the evil eye. In one of the traditions, Asma' bint 'Uwais said, "O Prophet, the family of Ja'far are affected by the baneful influences of an evil eye. May I use spells for them or not?" The Prophet said, "Yes, for if there were anything in the world which would overcome fate, it would be an evil eye" (Hughes 1988:112). *Faqirs* construct various talismans against the evil eye. A common amulet used by people to prevent against the effects of the evil eye is the hand of Fatima, colloquially known as the "*panch biran*".

Some kinds of *jinn* are also believed to have the ability to strike down a person with their eyes. Spirit possession also comes under this generic term, and is referred to as "*asre jinn*". "*Asre jinn*" is the most serious of this genre and the most difficult to cure.

JHAPTA

Jhapta is another kind of *asar* that is related to food. Food has a central importance to Muslim life since it enjoins people in the act of commensality. According to Muslim tradition, the best of foods is shared with others. To eat by oneself is considered discourteous and contravenes Islamic edict. *Faqirs* and *basti* locals suggest that eating with others has a prophylactic function as it prevents the *jinn* from targeting a single person.

Faqirs and *Basti* locals pointed out that *jinn* are attracted to some foods more than others. On top of the list is *masaledar khana* (spicy food). While *nāpak jinn* like mango they are also partial to spicy food since they cannot ingest it. This leads to retribution on those persons who eat spicy food. This is one reason why many Muslims prefer to eat in the company of others. Among the types of *masaledar khana* that can be effected are:

- 1) *Aam ka asar*
- 2) *Biryani ka asar*
- 3) *Zarde ka asar*
- 4) *Khir ka asar*
- 5) *Burfi ka asar*

Faqirs reason that white or yellow foods are also susceptible to *jhapta* since they are more conspicuous during the night than darker foods. As night approaches *basti* locals cover uneaten food. Food that has been left out in the open is susceptible to *asar*. These foods include:

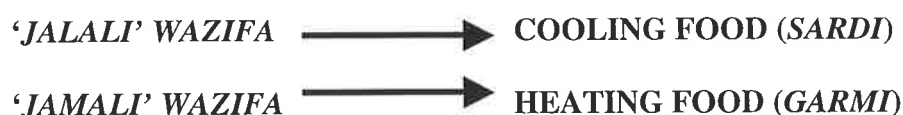
- 1) yellow or light coloured fruits.
- 2) *White khir* — white rice and milk mixed with dried fruits.
- 3) *Zarda* — yellow rice mixed with dried fruits and sugar.
- 4) *White burfi* — white sweet made from milk and sugar.

Caution is also given to meat. Meat should be *halal* (lawful food); the animal's carcass must be completely drained as any traces of flowing blood, *basti* locals refer to as "bad blood" since this can attract the attentions of evil spirit beings. *Faqirs* believe that evil

spirit beings can inhabit unlawful meat, thereby entering the bodies of those who ingest it.

DIET AND WAZIFA

Attention to diet during *wazifa* is critical as non-adherence from this rule of thumb may render the person insane. This is especially the case when a person is engaging in a *jalali* (fiery) *wazifa*. Avoidance of *garmi* (heating foods) should be strictly observed. These include meat, eggs, spicy food, garlic, onion, honey, oysters, and the wearing of fragrant oil. *Faqirs* reason since *jalali* Divine Attributes are by nature fiery and wrathful, the consumption of heating foods increases their effect. As a rule, foods should be eaten which have an opposite quality of a particular Divine Attribute.



Abstinence from coitus is essential during the period of a *jalali wazifa* since the man's *jalali* force can effect the woman. Since *jalal* is associated with the chaotic and destructive aspects of Allah, this can affect any future progeny with physical or mental debility.

One Hindu healer brought to my attention the need for caution when undergoing a change in diet. Change of diet is liminal since it entails a process of transformation. While the maintenance of diet prolongs health, any change creates a temporary disequilibrium bringing on physical weakness. In this state the body becomes susceptible to spiritual attack. The Hindu healer stated that: "Food is like a watchman; it makes the body strong and protects against illness. But if the diet must be changed then the body becomes temporarily weak because of this transition. For this reason, change of food should be done slowly".

ASEB

A collection of illnesses attributed to "bad air" (*hawa*). *Aseb* is caused by the act of a spirit breathing on a person. The breath of evil spirit beings is considered highly noxious and can quickly effect humans. *Aseb* can effect a person during sleep. According to locals, sleep is akin to death since the soul is believed to leave the body when dreaming. Evil spirit beings can attack the body during this time. In this way, *aseb* is cognate with striking rather than possession. Symptoms include giddiness and fever. People sometimes associate the act of seeing a *jinn* or *bhut* as forms of "bad air" since this has also the power to cause affliction.

MAJNUN

Majnun is another generic term referring to a series of mental afflictions of temporary or permanent duration. Symptoms may range from inchoate or uncouth behaviours to apathy and chronic melancholia. A *majnun* may also be unaware of his/her immediate environment. There are five ways which one can become *majnun*.

1) Through a personal tragedy or life crisis where the person is stricken with intense grief. In the western bio-medical model such symptoms would be ascribed to a deep depression. Early in my field-work I noticed an old woman walking around topless in the *basti*. Nobody took any notice of her. Sometimes, she would lift up her dress exposing her vagina to passers by. People told me that she was a *majnun*. Baba Ali had stated that the old woman's present state had been caused by the drowning of her son at the *Baoli* many years before. She had never left the *basti* since then but lived in a small hovel made of pieces of wood and tin near the main gates of the shrine complex.

2) An ecstatic state as a consequence of deep religious devotions where a person has "lost themselves for Allah".

3) A person can become *majnun* through the incorrect performance of *chilla* or breathing practices, or through the taking of prohibited foods during *chilla*. The notion that the incorrect performance of spiritual practices can cause psychological malaise is common in Hindu and Muslim esoteric traditions. For instance, *faqirs'* understandings of breath control resemble the Hindu practice of breathing (*pranayam*). Common to both traditions is the belief that the breath contains a conglomeration of physical and spiritual forces essential for psycho-physical well-being. The centering of the breath is integral to the release of spiritual power (Zarrilli 1989:136). In Hindu cosmology *nadi* refers to the numerous channels that are believed to circulate "vital energy" (*vayu*) throughout the body. According to this school of thought, the body consists of 72,000 *nadis*: of these there are twenty-four principal channels that are given specific importance (Sivapriyananda 1989:11). Moreover, "there are ten currents of 'vital energy' (*vayu*) that circulate through the body. Five of these belong to the inner subtle body and are called: *prana*, *apana*, *samana*, *udana*, and *vyana*. *Prana* circulates in the region of the heart, *apana* in the region of the anus, *samana* in the navel region, *udana* in the throat and *vyana* pervades the whole body" (Sivapriyananda 1989:12). The three most important channels of these are *ida* (left channel), *pingala* (right channel), and *sushumna* (central channel). Interesting here is the correlation of these three main channels with *jamal*, *jalal*, and *kamal* in Sufi cosmology.

Although in my experience Muslims do not generally view the body in terms of a network of energy meridians, as posed by Hindu cosmology,⁷ breath, nonetheless, is an intrinsic factor in altering psychological changes. For example, *faqirs* claim a connection between breath control and concentration. Here, different types of breathing cycles can direct the flow of *ruh* in order to aid the healing process and, therefore, enhance mystical mastery.

The belief that the incorrect performance of mystical practices may cause psychological malaise is ubiquitous amongst Hindu and Muslim spiritual traditions. Like other forms of mysticism, the *faqirs'* mystical complex is both a system of gaining spiritual power and for controlling it (Luhmann 1985:158). This, of course, parallels with western and non-western systems of magic that imply "the intervention or assistance of some power or

force of a supernatural or not yet understood nature” (Green 1979:1). Even in these mystical models, a neophyte’s ill-formed tampering of esoteric symbols can lead to psychic disrapture.

4) *Majnun* may also be passed on from mother to child as a consequence of her breach with the moral quorum. Unlike the temporary symptoms of other types of *majnun*, the child’s debilitation is believed to be permanent.

GARHAN AND MYTHOPOIESIS OF MAJNUN

A fifth type of *majnun* is linked to certain cosmic events that are believed to inscribe themselves on the body’s psycho-physical processes. I would like to explore this theme here briefly via the solar eclipse (*garhan*) that occurred in Delhi on October 24th, 1995.

I was fortunate to have been in Delhi during the solar eclipse. This was a one off event that was given substantial publicity by the electronic and print media. Media concern focused on alerting the general public of the dangers to one’s eyes at gazing at the ecliptical corona. (see diagram). Physical concerns aside, what was significant for me was the mythopoeitic constructions of the eclipse amongst *faqirs* and other Muslims. Unusual natural phenomena are believed to threaten those cosmic boundaries that ensure existential continuity. Eclipses especially fall into this anomalous category and are considered inauspicious. The eclipse is metaphorically suggestive of the cosmic powers being temporarily out of control. The sun’s abatement behind a shadow of darkness is cognate with the descension of evil forces over the world.

From approximately 7.30 am. to 11.00 am. Delhi was plunged in twilight darkness. There was a discernible lack of people on the roads during this time. A number of Delhi’s commercial centres were temporarily closed. Many Muslims prayed at mosques.⁴

Prior to the eclipse, Hindu and Muslim pregnant women were warned not to go near any kind of cutlery during the eclipse as it had the potential to cut them. Furthermore, they were cautioned to remain indoors due to the belief that the eclipse could harm the foetus. For anyone to venture out for too long during the eclipse would risk becoming *majnun*. According to one *faqir*, the eclipse was even more perilous since it fell on a Tuesday, an inauspicious day for Muslims, and followed Hindu *Divali* — commemorating the defeat of the cosmic demons (*asura*) *S’umbha* and *Nis’umbha*, by the goddess *Durga*. The *faqir* Ahmad Shah told me that Tuesday was believed to be inauspicious as it was associated to the Hindu deities Kali and Hanuman. For this reason, sorcery is usually performed by Muslims on Tuesday.

According to anecdotes from various Hindus and Muslims, an eclipse is auspicious for creating either malefic charms and spells or attaining special powers. The capturing of unusual forces is sometimes expressed in idioms of loss and gain. As one Hindu healer said: “During an eclipse the sun is powerless, therefore, mantra is extremely beneficial since one can attain optimum results during this time”.

⁴ According to one tradition, the Prophet Muhammad requested Muslims to pray during the onset of an eclipse.

In moon's shadow, sun set to shine

STAGES OF THE ECLIPSE

BAILEYS BEADS

Seen seconds before or after totality. Sunlight peeping through shallow valleys at the edge of the moon's disc.

DIAMOND RING

Momentary flash before or after totality. Sunlight peeping through a single large valley at the edge of the moon's disc.

PROMINENCES & CHROMOSPHERE

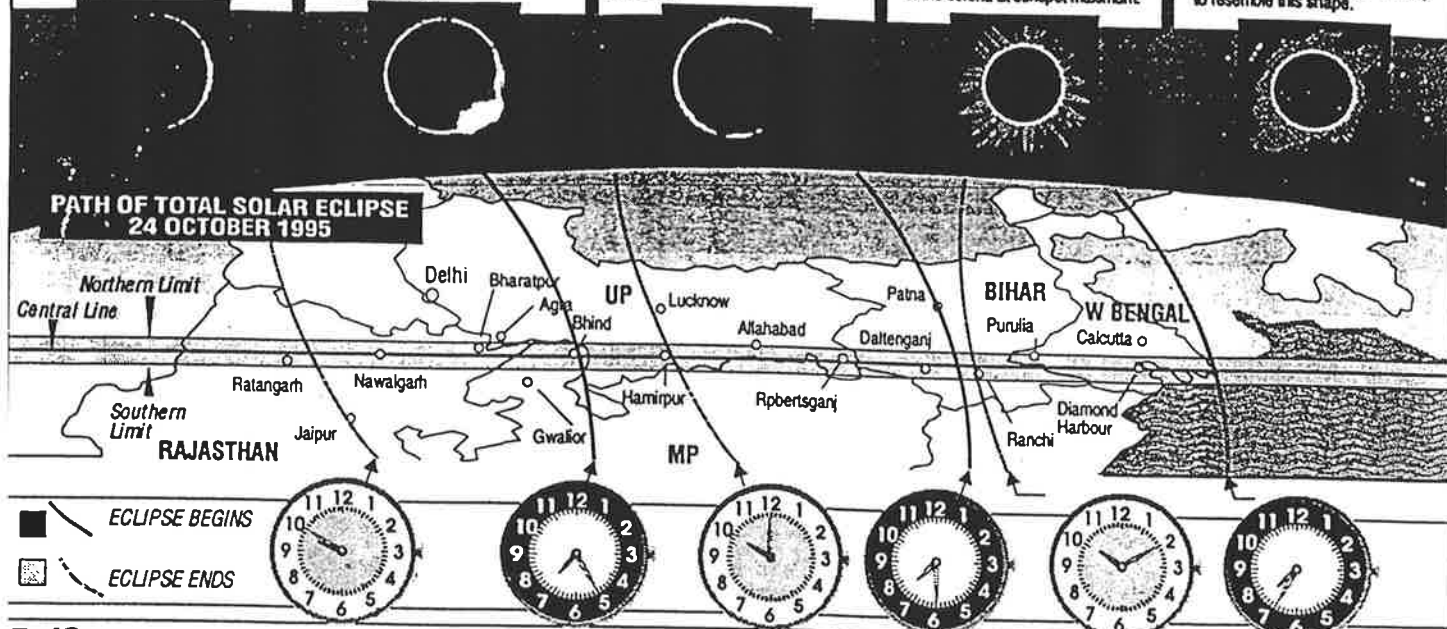
Pale red in colour seen during totality. Emission from the hydrogen present in a layer above the normally visible layer of the sun.

CORONAL STREAMERS (A)

Corona means crown. Sunlight scattered by electrons confined along closed magnetic fields. Streamers are all around the dark disc of the moon. This is typical of the corona at sunspot maximum.

CORONAL STREAMERS (B)

The streamers are longer in some directions and shorter in others. This is typical of the corona at sunspot minimum. The shape of the coronal streamers at the Oct 24, 1995 eclipse is likely to resemble this shape.



Do's

- ✓ View only reflected image or projection of the sun
- ✓ Project the image on a shade wall through a pin hole
- ✓ A small mirror covered with a piece of paper can be used
- ✓ Direct viewing of the partial eclipse should be done through scientifically tested filters

Don'ts

- ✗ Don't see the partial or total eclipse with naked eyes
- ✗ Don't look at the sun through a telescope or binoculars
- ✗ Don't use smoked glass or film negative
- ✗ Don't look at the reflection in water or shiny surface

VINEY

By Anju Sharma

NEW DELHI, Oct. 19
With less than four days to go before the moon's shadow temporarily gobbles up the sun, all other issues appear to have been eclipsed, judging by the trend of conversation these days. Scientists, keen eclipse watchers, amateur astronomers and many ordinary people can scarcely talk of anything else.
MiG 21s have been borrowed from the Indian Air Force to chase this rare cosmic spectacle which is expected to last not even for one-

and-half minutes at any place. Some resourceful persons are slated to use hot air balloons to catch sight of sun's rendezvous with the moon.
The air of expectancy has sent adrenalin rushing down scientists' veins. Astronomers from abroad specially Japan and Russia are reaching Delhi in droves. Says a senior Customs official: "Despite the strike their equipment has been cleared on a priority basis."
Ordinary residents, oblivious of the scientific jargon, are no less excited. Solar eclipses occur when moon comes between the sun and earth. What appears thus is a brilliant ring of fire, the solar corona, trapped

behind dark side of the moon. Dr Nirupama Raghavan, Director, Nehru Planetarium says, there is lot of excitement as the line of totality passes through heavily populated areas across 1,500 km. The previous total solar eclipse on Feb. 10, 1980 was visible only in peninsular India. The next one predicted on Aug. 11, 1999 will not be as great an event because of monsoons in most parts of the country.
The total solar eclipse will begin at 7.22 (IST) and end at 12.43 (IST). The moon's shadow will first fall over Iran at 8.23 (IST). Traversing south-east the shadow will reach the Afghanistan-Pakistan border at

about 8.27 (IST). Moving at tremendous speed, the shadow will enter India through Rajasthan at 8.30 (IST).
As the sun moves higher, the duration and width of totality will increase slowly from Rajasthan to West Bengal reaching a maximum of 83 seconds at Diamond Harbour near Calcutta.
According to Dr Raghavan, the totality will last longer as one goes east. However, for eclipse gazers the most unpredictable part is the weather. Since the spectacle lasts for just a minute, even a single cloud floating across face of the sun will
Continued on page 10

MADZUB

A condition whereby the person is afflicted with madness (*pagal*); characterised by behaviours and speech that are incomprehensible to others. Although a *madzub* is usually effected from birth it is considered less serious than *majnun*. While there are parallels between these two conditions, the *madzub's* actions are believed to be governed by a special insight. The *madzub* fits into the category of the "holy madman". His madness is said to be divinely inspired and may serve in a teaching or prophetic function. In contrast, the *majnun* is considered as being unaware of his/her actions. The *madzub* is highly respected since he/she is believed to be near to Allah. Inayat Khan (1994:224), relates a story that highlights the *madzub's* prophetic faculty:

There used to be a *madzub* who in Kashmir; and he was allowed by the Maharaja to roam about in the palace and the gardens wherever he wanted to, and he was given a piece of ground where he could dwell. And there was a miniature toy canon in the garden; and sometimes this *madzub* used to get a fancy and play with it. He used to take this gun and he would turn it again and he would make all sorts of gestures, and after making those gestures he would be delighted. It used to seem as if he were fighting; and as if after that fighting he was now victorious and delighted. And every time he acted this way Maharaja Ranjit Singh used to give orders to his army to prepare for war; and there was success. The war had been going on for many, many years, and it was going slowly and nothing had happened, but every time the *madzub* played with the canon, results were achieved.

GHAIB

Ghaib (literally, "invisible") is believed to be caused in response to a person's communion with Allah or one of the holy saints. Characteristics of *ghaib* include being in frequent states of *hal*. Another feature of *ghaib* is the belief that a person undergoes direct initiation by a saint through dreams (*pir ghaib*, literally "invisible *pir*").

Appendix VIII

Chart of numerical correspondences of Arabic letters

The following was written by Baba Ali.

K. Kaf	ك	20	A	Alif	ا	1
L. Lam	ل	30	B	Ba	ب	2
M. Meem	م	40	J	Jeem	ج	3
N. Noon	ن	50	D	Dal	د	4
S. Seen	س	60	h	Ha -	ح	5
Ain	ع	70	w	waa	و	6
F. Fai	ف	80	Z	Zay	ز	7
Ṣaad	ص	90	H	Haα (Hutti)	ح	8
Q. Qaf	ق	100	T	Taa	ط	9
R. Rai	ر	200	ye	yei	ي	10
Sh. Sheem	ش	300		Kaf	ك	20
T. Taw	ت	400				
Ṭhai	ث	500				
Kha	خ	600				
Zal	ذ	700				
Da. Dad	ض	800				
Zoi	ز	900				
Gh. Ghain	غ	1000				

GLOSSARY

“as-salam alaikum”— Muslim greeting literally meaning “peace be upon you.” A Muslim is obligated to say this whenever he/she meets another Muslim. Its reciprocation is “alaikum salam”— “and upon you be peace.”

A.H. — literally meaning ‘after *hijrah*,’ the beginning of the Islamic calendar. *Hijrah* (lit. “migration”) is the date of the Prophet Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina, calculated by Islamic scholars to have occurred in the year 622 A.D.

adab — Muslim etiquette; an essential pre-requisite in conducting oneself with others.

agarbhatti — incense.

agharbatti — incense.

ahl-i-subhat — in the company of others, sociable.

al-asma al-husna — *Lit.* the “Beautiful Names”; the ninety-nine Divine attributes by which Allah manifests Himself in the phenomenal universe.

amal — an exorcist.

amil — derived from the verb *amal*, meaning “to perform an action.” *Amil*, therefore, suggests a person who performs a prescribed series of actions, usually mystical formulae, for the purpose of attaining a desired result. See also “*amal*.”

ankh — eye.

aql — mind, wisdom.

asa — small stick or club.

asar — an unusual effect believed to be caused by supernatural forces that brings the body in a state of malaise.

aseb-wali — spirit possession. It is also known as “*asre jinn*.”

auliya — assembly of holy Muslim saints.

azad — “abstracted”. A label usually accorded to a *faqir*.

azimut — incantation.

bandah — slave, servant, individual.

bari-dari — rotation system operating at the shrine in that its organisation and collection of monies is allocated to one of the three major lineages of the *Chisti Nizamis*. This is done on a weekly basis.

ba-shar — meaning “with *shari’a*”, pertaining to Sufis who follow the edicts of *shari’a*.

basti — village.

batasha — sweets.

bātin — one of the ninety-nine Divine attributes meaning “The Non-manifest.” Concealed, non-apparent, hidden; mysterious bond between disciple and spiritual teacher.

bayat — spiritual initiation.

bay-shar — meaning “without *sharia*”, often ascribed to define a *faqir*.

bazaar — market place.

bhut — ghost.

burkha — a large robe covering the entire body, usually black in colour, that is worn by Muslim women.

chaddar — death shroud covering body or grave.

chaddar bosī — the act of kissing the shroud covering a saint’s tomb. This may also include placing the shroud to one’s eyes.

chaddar-phul-kay — flower covering that is placed on graves.

chatta — arcade.

chilla — spiritual retreat, commonly engaged by *faqirs*.

chillum — colloquial word used by *faqirs* for “*hashish*”.

chiragh — lamp.
choki — qawwalli group.
chokut — threshold of tomb.
chu'huree — staff, wand; made of wood with assorted paraphernalia attached to it.
dargah — saint's shrine.
darvaze — door.
dawut — literally, "invocation", where divine assistance is invoked during exorcist rituals.
dhoona — gathering place which is peculiar to *Qalandar faqirs*.
dhoonee — lighted fire.
dil — human heart; the site of emotion and feeling.
dua — prayer, beseechment.
dum — a healing technique consisting in a *faqir* or other person breathing onto another individual. This can also be done with water.
dunya — natural or human world.
dunya-ka-admi — society.
dupatta — woman's head shawl.
faqaa — state of mendicancy.
farasha — feather duster made of peacock feathers, and is often used to clean saints' tombs.
fatiha — memoriam.
ganda — alluding to either physical or moral impurity. For example, an immoral person may be referred to as "*gunda*".
garmi — heating, usually employed in reference to food. Believed to generate passionate emotions.
ghat — Hindu cremation ground.
gul — rose.
gulab — rosewater.
hadith — literally, meaning "statement", are a collection of sayings and discourses attributed either to the Prophet Muhammad, or to one of his companions.
hakim — one of the divine attributes meaning "The Wise". The title given to a traditional herbalist.
hal — state, ecstatic trance, considered as being a gift of Divine Grace.
halal — *Lit.* "That which is lawful". Often used in the context of food that is permitted to be eaten, as prescribed by the Quran and the *Sunna* (prophetic traditions). It is distinguished from *harām*, or "that which is unlawful".
hamd — poetic themes of praise to Allah
haram — prohibition as proscribed by the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions (*sunna*).
hashish — cannabis, otherwise known as "*chillum*".
hazrat — Arabic-Persian title meaning "saint".
huhā — shouts or cries indicating spiritual arousal.
hujra — cell used for prayer or meeting place.
hukm — meaning 'order' or 'command,' in relation to a *faqir's* communion with a saint. The saint is said to disclose him/herself to a *faqir* via *hukm*, usually via a vision or dream.
ibādat — religious duty or service.
ishq — Divine love or to love Allah (*Khuda*).
ishq-i-haqiqa — Literally, "truth of divine love", and relates to the unique bond between a *murid* and *pir*, and also between a *faqir* and saint.
ism — name; usually associated with the Divine Attributes.

ittar — fragrant oil used as a bodily perfume or for religious purposes. *Ittar* is the generic word for fragrant oil of which there are numerous kinds. The most popular of these is rose oil, used in venerational rites.

jādu — “black magic”, sorcery.

jāduga — sorcerer, magician.

jagar — liver.

jalal — Divine power, majesty, wrath, strangeness, ineffable, ‘wild’ (*azad*), masculine, mysterious, dangerous.

jamal — Divine beauty, harmony, balance, friendliness, sociality, feminine, apparent.

jhapta — food that has been affected by spirits, through the action of them passing by it or breathing on it.

jhuggi — city slum dweller. Many of these people have come from rural areas in order to find work.

jism — physical body.

kabr — grave.

kabrastan — Muslim graveyard.

kafsh — pre-cognition, insight, special power.

kala jādu — black magic, sorcery.

karamat — miracle-working power, miracle.

kasif — dirty.

khadim — guardian, caretaker.

khanqah — hospice where *faqirs* often reside, and is used as a place of spiritual training.

khidmat — duty, service, office.

khun — blood.

khutba — Friday sermon given by the prayer leader (*imam*).

khwaja — *Lit.* “master”; a spiritual teacher of high acclaim.

krishna — a popular Hindu deity. One of the incarnate forms of *Vishnu* who is the principle of universal maintenance. *Krishna* and the warrior, *Arjuna*, are the central characters in the *Bhagavad-gita*, one of the principle spiritual texts in Hinduism.

langar — food distribution to the poor, commonly practiced at larger Muslim shrines usually on a daily level.

majnun — state of madness.

malang — devotee. A name sometimes given to *faqirs*.

mamnu — prohibition indicated but to a lesser degree than *haram*. Not necessarily mentioned in the Qur’an or the Prophetic traditions.

manat — a religious oath.

manat bundana — the act of tying a strand of hair near a saint’s shrine, or by placing written request under the shroud of a saint’s tomb.

manat-ka-piala — large marble cup located at Nizamuddin’s shrine used as a part of religious devotions there.

mandir — Hindi word for “temple”.

mangna — petitioning.

manqabat — poetic themes of praise to the saints.

maqam — plural (*maqamat*); station, place in terms of degree of spiritual evolvment.

marai — General term for the assemblage of spiritual beings.

markaz — centre. The name allocated to the social and economic region of the *basti*.

mazar — tomb.

mehman — guest.

mujaheda — spiritual practices.

munajat — special prayer of remembrance to Allah, the Prophet, and the saints, after obligatory prayer, and is a feature of the lighting ceremony (*roshni*) conducted at *Chisti* shrines.

murid — disciple, follower of a spiritual teacher.

murshid — spiritual teacher.

nafs — animal or lower aspect of human nature.

nafsaniat — false pride.

nafs-kushi — self denial, mortification, overcoming the false ego.

nāpak — unclean.

nazar — spiritual sight.

nazare bud — evi eye.

nazr — charitable offerings usually given to *faqirs*, and may include money donations at shrines.

nikah — muslim wedding rite.

pak — clean.

panc biran — the symbol of a hand that is used as an emblem by *Qalandar faqirs* in India. Each finger denotes one of the members of the “holy family” in Islam: The Prophet Muhammad, his daughter, Fatima, her husband and cousin to the Prophet, Ali, ibn Tālib, and their two sons, Hassan and Hussain.

pardah — *Lit.* “curtain”. Relating to the segregation of women from the male domain, practiced by many *basti* villagers.

phool charahna — the act of scattering rose petals on the tombs of Muslim saints.

piala bharna — the act of filling the *manat-ka-piala* with either milk or fruit as apart of a devotee’s fulfilling of their pledge to the saint.

pir — see *murshid*.

pir-ghaib — spiritual guide that manifests themselves during dream states.

qalandar — a wandering *faqir* that often engages in altered states of awareness through the smoking of *hashish*, as a part of his mystical repertoire. *Qalandar faqirs*, are usually categorised by others as being ‘abstracted’ (*azad*), due to their uncouth and volatile behaviour. Islamic clerics (*ulama*) often refer them as “*bay-shars*.”

qalb — heart.

qamiz — long shirt worn by men.

qawwal — song

qawwalli — Indo-Pakistani devotional music performed at Muslim shrines.

qibla — position of Mecca, usually indicated by a niche (*mihrab*), in mosques or houses.

qudrat — intimating spiritual power.

qudum bosī — the act of prostrating before a saints’ tomb.

raz — mystery, secret, concealment.

roti — unleavened flat bread.

roza — a religious fast, usually performed by *faqirs*. *Roza* begins at morning and finishes at sunset.

ruh — soul, spirit.

ruhani khitmatgir — healer.

saf — clean.

safā — sincere.

samā’ — “to listen”. Religious ecstasy. A special religious musical gathering.

sardi — cooling, usually employed in reference to food. Believed to control passionate desires.

shahvat — strong desire, impulse.

shaitaniyyat — ‘black magic’, sorcery. See also “*jādu*”.

shirk — idolatry.

sunna — “traditions” of Islam, many of which are attributed to the prophet Muhammad, and which Muslims are obligated to follow.

tabarrukat — blessed food.

tasbih — Muslim rosary. It is distinguished by having ninety-nine beads, divided into three sections of thirty-three beads.

ummat — the ideal community of Muslims.

unane— Perso-Urdu word meaning “Greek” given to the Hippocratic system of medicine being practiced mainly in north India.

urs — *Lit.* “wedding”; a saint’s death celebration.

vel — method of offering of money to *Qawwalli* musicians during *Qawwalli* performance.

wakil — guardian, protector.

wazifa — a method of repetitive verbal or silent chanting of one of the Divine attributes or cryptic formulae regularly performed by faqirs.

wuzu — ritual ablution which is performed prior to formal Islamic prayer.

zāhir — one of the ninety-nine Divine attributes meaning “The Manifest”. To reveal, apparent, open, that which is evident to the senses.

zatka — the process of extracting “power” from the shrine, often through proscribed behaviours.

ziarat — circumambulation, visitation, pilgrimage. Usually in the context of a holy shrine.

ziarin — pilgrim.

zikr or dhikr — religious chanting of the divine names of Allah. This may be conducted collectively or by oneself.

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