



Jinnealogy

Everyday life and Islamic theology in post-Partition Delhi

Anand Vivek TANEJA, *Vanderbilt University*

In this article I explore what I call *jinnealogy*, a theological orientation that emerges when the genealogies of human memory are confronted with the amnesic forces of an obliterated landscape. In stories told in contemporary Delhi, long-lived *jinn* act as transmitters connecting human beings centuries apart in time. In petitions deposited to *jinn*-saints in a ruined medieval palace, medieval ideas of justice come together with modern bureaucratic techniques. Both stories and rituals attest to a theological newness intricately entwined with the transformations of the postcolonial city's spiritual and physical landscapes. *Jinn* are present in the blank spaces of the map, where the plans of the bureaucracy, the verdicts of the judiciary, and the illegibility of the post-Partition Indian state coincide to attempt vast erasures of the city's Muslim landscapes. Jinnealogy, the supersession of human chains of memory by the long lives of the *jinn*, challenges the magical amnesia of the state by bringing up other temporalities, political theologies, and modes of witnessing against the empty, homogenous time of a bureaucratically constituted present.

Keywords: Delhi, everyday life, Islam, Partition, bureaucracy, temporalities

Introduction

Near the center of the modern conurbation of Delhi, a few minutes south of the “Old City,” lie the ruins of Firoz Shah Kotla—thick medieval fortification walls enclosing lawns and trees and tumbledown masonry buildings containing subterranean passages and chambers. Though Firoz Shah Kotla was once a fortified fourteenth-century palace complex, most of those who come here today do not think of it as a citadel or a historical “monument.”¹ Despite the informational boards out-

-
1. The word “monument,” which has passed into common Hindi usage in Delhi, is a vexed one. It implies that the structure in question is merely a secular object of scopic pleasure, which cannot, or should not, be a place of active worship or veneration. Most “monuments” in Delhi are Muslim tombs, shrines, and mosques.

side its gates, despite it being under the jurisdiction and control of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), they think of the site as a *dargah*, or Muslim saint shrine. Firoz Shah Kotla is a very unusual dargah in the contemporary landscape of Delhi. Most dargahs are built around the sacred grave of a Muslim holy man.² Most dargahs, in Delhi and elsewhere, are bright spaces of marble and limewash, embodying the light of the saints buried within them (Ho 2006, 83–84). But Firoz Shah Kotla is a ruin, the time-darkened remnants of a medieval Sultan's palace. There are no venerated graves or *mazars* here in these vast ruins, at least none that are visible. Among the congregants of this dargah, many of whom had been coming for over two decades, there was an often vehement insistence that what matters here is not graves, but *jinnat ke asarat*, the influences/effects of the jinn.³



In Islamic cosmology, the jinn are a separate species of being, different from and older than humans. “He [Allah] has created man from dry clay and created the jinn from smokeless fire and made them invisible to the eyes of men” (Ashour 1986: 1). Formed of a completely different substance than humans, they are also said to be physically stronger and to have the ability to shape-shift and to travel vast

-
2. Graves are usual, but not necessary for spaces to be identified and treated as Muslim saint shrines. What matters is saintly presence. A well-known example of a dargah not centered on a grave is Hussain Tekri Sharif. See Bellamy (2011).
 3. When a young British writer stumbled upon Firoz Shah Kotla in the mid-1980s, his interlocutor told him about jinn, and how Delhi was full of them. It was from this encounter that he got the name of his famous book, and now a popular descriptor for the city, *City of Djinn*s (Dalrymple 1993).



distances very quickly. Like humans, and unlike angels, they exercise free will and can choose between good and evil. The jinn are mortal, like human beings, but live far longer lives; some of the jinn alive today are counted among the *sahaba*, the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, having seen him personally, and heard his recitation of the Qur'an.⁴

Human relations with the jinn, whether based upon fear or intimacy (and often both) are widespread in the Islamic world, but they are, even in the case of named jinn like Aisha Qandisha of Morocco (see Crapanzano 1981) usually seen as different from, though dependently linked to, the shrines and veneration of human saints. But at Firoz Shah Kotla, the jinn *are* the saints; in the ways they are talked of and talked to, in the rituals of their veneration. How do we understand the popularity of jinn-saints in a city full of *human* saints, arguably the most sacred city in Indian Islam, known as *bais khwaja ki chaukhat*—the threshold of twenty-two saints? While evoking precolonial traditions of intimacy with jinn and spirits, the dargah of jinn-saints and its traditions of veneration nevertheless represent a newness in the theological landscape of Delhi. This transformation in the theological landscape is intricately entwined with the transformations of the city's spiritual and physical landscapes—the massive erasures and displacements that shape the terrain of everyday life in the postcolonial city. Firoz Shah Kotla has been associated with jinn for a very long time and there is evidence of it having been a venerated site going back almost a century, though for most people, including people who go there regularly now, it was a space of fear and bewitchment, to be approached with caution.⁵ Firoz Shah Kotla became a popular (as opposed to marginal) dargah in 1977, a few months after the end of the Emergency of 1975–77.⁶

Stefania Pandolfo, in her work on the conflicting and overlapping regimes of postcolonial psychiatry and the “cures of the jinn” in Morocco, thinks of the cures of the jinn as another language, as it were, “other vocabularies of being, alterity and loss” (2009: 77), a language that holds open the possibility of bearing witness. “The space of the cure addresses an affliction which is singular, but which is also a symbol that speaks of a collective condition, and a history: healing, and the sickness itself, are a kind of bearing witness” (2009: 82). Similarly, I see the presence of the jinn in the ruins of Firoz Shah Kotla—and the rituals of their veneration—as a poetics of bearing witness to the postcolonial condition of everyday life in Delhi.

In the stories told about jinn in contemporary Delhi, long-lived jinn act as transmitters of authority and blessings, connecting human beings centuries and millennia apart in time. This supersession of human chains of genealogy and

4. On *sahaba* jinn in contemporary Lahore, see Khan (2006: 240–42).

5. The dangers of Firoz Shah Kotla make a brief appearance in Sudhir Kakar's (1982) *Shamans, mystics and doctors*. The *Pir* of the Patte Shah dargah warns Kakar to be careful when going to Firoz Shah Kotla, because malevolent spirits haunt the ruins. He then tells Kakar a story of how one of his disciples was seduced and then killed by one of these spirits in the ruins of the Kotla (Kakar 1982: 27–28).

6. The Emergency of 1975–77 was a two year period of the formal suspension of electoral government. It was also a period marked, especially in Delhi, by a draconian reshaping of the urban landscape and massive violence against and displacement of the urban poor.

memory by the *other-temporality* of the jinn is what I call *jinnealogy*. Jinnealogy, as I define it, is a theological orientation that encompasses the registers of ironic commentary, counter-memory, and apotropaic magic. The stories of jinn eyewitnesses who remember events and people from centuries ago are ironic commentary on the impossibility of human memory, on the destruction of the intricate webs of genealogy, memory, and belonging connected with Muslim saint shrines in the post-Partition city. The presence of the jinn-saints in the ruins of a fourteenth-century royal palace, a location of precolonial Islamic sovereignty, is an image, a counter-memory of precolonial ideas of justice flashing up against the violence and illegibility of the postcolonial state. As Veena Das (2007) shows, the illegibility of the state's actions is central to the magic of the state in the lives of its citizens. But as I show in this article, the illegibility of the state's archive, its will to *forget* is also crucial to the illegibility of the state. Jinnealogy challenges the magical amnesia of the state by bringing up other temporalities, political theologies, and modes of witnessing against the empty, homogenous time of the bureaucratically constituted present.

Matters of grave concern

The insistence on the *absence* of sanctified graves at Firoz Shah Kotla is significant precisely because saintly graves have played such a crucial part in the landscape of Delhi—the threshold of twenty-two saints—as sites of the intertwining of sacrality and everyday life, memory, and community.

Nile Green (2012) has argued that Muslim saint-shrines, built around the graves of Muslim holy men, serve as spaces of memory and belonging—both connecting local Muslim communities to memories of the distant places from which the saints came, as well as embedding them in local sacred geographies and local histories. Saintly graves are memory spaces, linking present communities to the memories of other lands and other times to which the saints belonged.

In the theological articulation of the importance of graves and grave visitation in the Indian Muslim tradition, as exemplified by Ahmad Riza Khan of the *Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at* (also known as the Barelwi *maslak*), graves are important because they are sites of *presence*. The spirits of both saintly and ordinary Muslims are present at the site of their graves. After death, the spirits of the *awliya* (saints) become even more powerful than before. For example, when someone reads the *fatihah* at the grave of a *wali* (saint), the spirit of the latter recognizes him. The dead can hear the living and can communicate with them; there is an interactive relationship between the dead and the living at the site of the grave (Sanyal 1996: 118–19). This relationship of presence with the saint also allows the pilgrim to connect genealogically with the Prophet. The Sufis are connected, through spiritual lineage (and often) descent, in chains going back all the way to the Prophet himself, and these genealogical chains are not only *historical* (in the sense of indexing an otherwise accessible past) but potentially *immanent*, because a person's relation with his *pir* (master) reaches back to his *pir's* own *pir*, and ultimately to union (*wasl*) with the Prophet (Sanyal 1996: 131–34).

These immanent connections with figures whose lives are widely separated in space and time are made possible, in Engseong Ho's words, by:



[an] ontological realm between the sensible physical world and the realm of the divine—an isthmus (*barzakh*). It is an intermediate realm in which angels and spirits exist. In the ontology of Ibn al-‘Arabi, this realm is an “imaginal world” of images or forms (Chittick 1994). The entities that subsist in this realm . . . [have] the light and incorporeality of the spirits, and . . . the forms of the physical world. The images that populate the dreams of human beings in sleep are a central instance of such nonphysical images. (Ho 2006: 126–27)

In Ho’s analysis of Shaikh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-‘Aydarus’s centenary biographical chronicle, *The travelling light unveiled*, he points to the interplay of chronological history and imaginal genealogy in this text. In the course of the chronicle, with its annalistic, year-by-year account of events spread over a wide oceanic geography, a sporadic, but nevertheless significant genealogical principle keeps manifesting. Figures far apart in space and time, but connected by genealogies, are brought together through dreams, names, and miraculous visions. *The Travelling light* shares many of the ontological and theological principles that inform Ahmad Riza Khan’s and the Ahl-e Sunnat’s defense of grave veneration.⁷ Spatializing Ho’s reading of text, we can think of saintly graves as spaces of complex interplay between the historical and the imaginal. Graves are spaces of historical memory and its connections to everyday life—these are spaces where communities are formed, people’s everyday troubles are recounted, rituals are elaborated and transmitted, family genealogies are recorded, stories are told. They are also spaces of connection to spirits and other imaginal realities in the ghaib, the realm of the unseen, through dreams and visions.⁸ Saintly graves are the spaces where, “The requisite shuttling between seen and unseen, unknown and to be known, potential and actual, and present and future draws a tissue of nominal connections between the imaginal world of immutable entities and the historical world of changing places and times” (Ho 2006: 137).

The Long Partition

This tissue of imaginal and historical connections, which made the landscape of Delhi both a sacred landscape and a landscape of memory and belonging, was utterly torn apart by the violence of Partition. The enormity of the violence done in 1947 and its aftermath, while a story much told, bears repeating. By the time the immediate violence had ended, approximately two thirds of Delhi’s Muslim population had either died, moved to refugee camps, or left for Pakistan and other places. From being a city with almost equal numbers of Hindus and Muslims, Delhi became a city with a Muslim population of about 10 percent, as the influx of Hindu and Sikh refugees swelled the city’s population to almost double its 1941

7. Both *The traveling light* and Barelwi theology are centrally concerned with the primordial *nur*, or light of the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad, and its continued active presence in the world through prophetic genealogy.

8. On the interplay between the historical and the imaginal at various shrine spaces in Delhi, see also Taneja (2012).

size.⁹ The violence was unprecedented, unlike anything seen before in Delhi. It did not stop with the taking of Muslim lives, or the looting and destruction of the personal property of Muslims. Muslim dargahs and tombs were viciously attacked, including four of the most ancient and venerated dargahs of Delhi—Qadam Sharif in Paharganj, Qutub Sahib's dargah in Mehrauli, the dargah of Chiragh Delhi, and the dargah of Sultan Ghari in Malakpur Kohi, and smaller dargahs, many of which were the focus of local veneration. In almost all cases, the violence targeted the grave—many of the reports of the damage speak of the effacement of the grave-stone and the destruction of the decorative *jali* screens surrounding the grave. Some of these tombs and dargahs were also monuments protected by the ASI (Archaeological Survey of India).¹⁰

As Vazira Zamindar's (2007) work shows, Partition was not a singular event but rather the inauguration of a structure of dispossession, displacement, and amnesia. The "Long Partition" continued to affect the Muslims of Delhi long after the events of 1947, being entrenched in the laws and policies of the postcolonial state, systematically eroding Muslim rights of property and citizenship. Nasim Changezi, 101 years old when I interviewed him in 2010, a man who presented himself as the memory-keeper of Old Delhi, embodied the effects of Partition on the landscapes of Muslim memory. He was in a strange mood for one of our interviews, and his constant refrain that day was, "*Ab kaun batayega?*" ("Who will tell you now?"). This refrain punctuated his rambling narratives, narratives that mostly dealt with the postcolonial transformation of Delhi and Partition violence. One story was about the tank outside Ajmeri Gate (filled up in the 1950s to make a market for refugees from Punjab), where delicious water chestnuts once grew, and where, as part of the annual enactment of the Ram-Lila, the annual Dushehra reenactment of Lord Rama's life, Ram and Sita were rowed across the tank in a boat. *But who will tell you all of this now?*

He pulled out *shajras* (family trees) that stated his lineage from Adam down to himself and showed how he was intimately linked to many of the prominent families of Delhi—*But who will tell you this? Who has these documents now?* He also told the story of his family documents. Many of them were kept in Bharatpur, where his grandfather was a minister of the kingdom of Bharatpur, and where he had looked at many of these documents as a boy. In 1947, mobs burned their house and destroyed their records, and nothing was left. There were documents going back to Mughal times he said, written on gold edged paper. *Who can tell you of these things now?*

Nasim Changezi told me a story of his uniqueness, of his indispensability in a city where memory has died. It was five or six years ago, he said, when the cricket ground just to the north of Firoz Shah Kotla was being renovated, and in the course of the renovation they tried to cover over an old grave near one of the gates. Ten thousand people from the Old City attended a massive protest against the effacement of the grave. In the meeting that followed with the government, the

9. Details extrapolated from the *Delhi Gazetteer* 1976, 130–36. Also see the statistics used by Gyanendra Pandey (1997: 2263).

10. File 5/1947/DCO "Damages caused to and occupation taken of protected monuments during disturbances and thereafter."



local MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) called upon Nasim Changezi to tell them of the importance of the grave, and the necessity of not destroying it. According to Nasim Changezi, he told them what he knew, that the grave was that of Amir Panjakash, the great calligrapher of Mughal Delhi. The grave was left undisturbed.

Archival amnesia

Oral testimony was needed to preserve the grave of a calligrapher, a man who produced documents for a living. Nasim Changezi's story, meant to be self-aggrandizing, is also deeply ironic. Why did a then ninety-five-year-old man have to be dragged out into this dispute to give oral testimony about the grave of a well-known calligrapher? Surely, there were documents? Where were the documents?

The absence of documents in the story of an attempt to save a Muslim grave from effacement tells us something about the relationship of the postcolonial Indian state to the Islamic landscapes it inherited. Haunted by the anti-Muslim violence of Partition, the state wished to forget all Muslim presence.¹¹ This will to forget, as incomplete and contested as it is, is crucial to understanding the "magic" of the postcolonial state. The forgetting was attempted in many different ways. One, as Nasim Changezi's story shows, was by attempting to efface signs of Muslim presence from the landscape. Another, attested to by the lack of documents in his story, was the antagonism of bureaucratic archives toward everyday life.¹² By this I mean not just access to the archives but the very organization and epistemology of the postcolonial archive, which made it well nigh impossible to turn to the state to verify histories of presence, practice, and belonging.

To illustrate what I mean, let me tell the story of my own experience with accessing the records of the Archaeological Survey of India. Accessing government documents relating to protected monuments in Delhi, such as Firoz Shah Kotla, was the most challenging aspect of my research. First, I met with a flat out refusal to access any files related to Delhi's monuments from the Superintending Archaeologist of the Delhi Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India. His reasons? "Those files have notings in them. They can be used by antisocial elements, anti-national elements."

Strangely enough, among the "antisocial" and "antinational" elements he was afraid of getting their hands on these notings was the Delhi Waqf Board, which is actually a government body that includes among its office-bearers elected Muslim members of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, and Muslim officers of the Indian

11. By presence I am trying to indicate both the usual senses of *present*: Present as the opposite of absent, and present as the opposite of past.

12. The "antagonism" between the archive and everyday life is at best a provisional characterization of the profound paradox that confronts those who work with the state and its documents in south Asia. While the state and its documents are deeply entrenched in all aspects of everyday life—birth certificates, building permissions, property records—yet the state works, both actively and entropically, to deny access to its own documentary records. Aradhana Sharma (2013) characterizes this, in the context of bureaucratic subversion of the spirit of "transparency" of the Right to Information Act, as the state's "mode of erasure."

Administrative Service (IAS). Waqf is technically a form of property dedicated to God (and in the language of the Central Waqf Act of 1954, given to the Muslim community for religious purposes) in perpetuity, and is not transferable. Many of the mosques under the custody of the Archaeological Survey of India in Delhi are also claimed by the Delhi Waqf Board. Under various acts passed by the colonial and postcolonial government, the Delhi Waqf Board is the ultimate custodian of all mosques and other waqf properties in Delhi, even those “protected” by the ASI or the State Department of Archaeology. Legally, there is no contradiction here. A protected building, under the 1904, 1958, and now 2010 Ancient Monuments Acts, is one that is protected irrespective of the proprietorship of the building. A building can, without contradicting the law in any way, simultaneously be in the custody of the Waqf Board, open for worship, and protected by the Archaeological Survey of India. But the ASI has a policy of excluding the Waqf Board and Muslim worshippers from sites under its protection, a conflict alluded to by the Superintending Archaeologist’s use of the terms “antisocial” and “antinational” to identify the Delhi Waqf Board.

I happened to coincidentally run into a lawyer for the ASI at a book launch, who found my project interesting and gave me the contacts of people in the ASI’s national headquarters to call. Even with this high-level introduction, and with all my credentials as a research-scholar from a reputed American university, it took me a over a month of phone calls and visits to get what turned out to be only two weeks of access to the record room, which was in deep and entropic disorder. There was no catalog, and the files were piled haphazardly in bundles with no appreciable system or order or organization. My process of research in my two weeks in the record room became what I can only characterize as “random access”—I would literally pull down a bundle of files from the shelves where they were stored with no visible attempt at chronological or thematic organization, remove the years of dust from on top with a special dust cloth that I’d brought with me, untie the knot that held what were often completely disparate files together, and start looking until I found something of interest.





The files, of course, had their own complex system of numbering and notation, a form and custom of numbering that still continues in the ASI and in other government departments and agencies, but this system vanished completely when it came to the archiving of the files.

Two weeks after I started accessing the archives, I was told that my use of the archives was strictly unofficial, merely a favor, and had led to some displeasure among other senior officials, and that I had to stop visiting the record room. It seemed that the ASI's archive was not an archive of authorized memory, but of authorized forgetting, where what was once consigned to dust and darkness was never meant to reappear in public, not even as diminutive flickers from academic footnotes. The authorized forgetting that characterized the ASI's archive was present not just in the impenetrability of the bureaucracy or in the disorder of the record room but also in the files themselves. This became clear to me when reading the postcolonial files I found in the record room in conjunction with the colonial files I read in another archive, the Chief Commissioner's Office Records stored in the Delhi State Archives.

In 1977, a certain Syed Ali Wajid wrote a letter to the ASI complaining that the staff of the ASI was interfering with people's veneration at Firoz Shah Kotla, which he claimed had been going on for more than a century. The officials of the ASI, instead of investigating the actions of their employees, launched an inquiry into the veracity of the claims of the longevity of veneration made by the complainant. The dominant tone of the file is surprise and annoyance, caught completely unawares by the seemingly sudden eruption of "religious practice" at Firoz Shah Kotla on their watch. The surprise is not altogether misplaced, because oral accounts also remember the popularity of Firoz Shah Kotla increasing dramatically in 1977. What was remarkable to me in reading the file was that in the course of their investigation, the officials of the ASI never once take recourse to their own records, relying instead of various oral accounts and published sources, *outside* the institutional archive and its system of files.

But in the Chief Commissioner's Office Records, archives of the colonial government, there are copies of a detailed series of correspondence with the colonial ASI relating to Firoz Shah Kotla when, under its jurisdiction, renovation and excavation began there in 1914, which reveal not only that there was a steady trickle of people constantly passing through Firoz Shah Kotla, but also that practices of veneration (like sticking coins to the wall) that are seen today were also seen back then (f. 166/1914/CCO). But as File 24/76/77 M(T) in the Archaeological Survey's Record Room reveals, no one in the ASI bothered to look at the files in their own record room, where a duplicate file of this correspondence surely exists or once existed, as the ASI's headquarters inhabits the same space it did in the 1930s, with the inauguration of New Delhi as the Imperial capital.

An even more striking case is that of the protected Qudsia Bagh Mosque. On June 30, 1983, in the case of "Muntazima Committee Masjid Qudsia Bagh, Delhi versus the Union of India and Others" the order passed by District Judge Jagdish Chandra declared, "There is no prima-facie evidence of the existence of any

recognized religious usage or custom in regard to the holding of prayers or other religious ceremonies in the Mosque in question.”¹³

But there was evidence in the colonial archive of the mosque having been used as a site of worship even after its declared protection by the ASI, with the active engagement (if not outright approval) of the colonial ASI. In 1929, the Qudsia Bagh Mosque was under the unofficial management of the Anjuman Mooayyed-ul-Islam, a Muslim charitable organization that, under an agreement with the Delhi Government in 1924, had taken over the administration of formerly derelict mosques under the protection of the Archaeological Survey of India.¹⁴

Why did none of this evidence come to light in the case of Muntazima Committee Masjid Qudsia Bagh, Delhi versus the Union of India and Others, and countless other such cases, where the ASI denied the prior religious use of monuments not on the basis of marshaling positive evidence, as it were, but based entirely on the lack of evidence? Why was evidence needed in the first place to prove the existence of prayer in a mosque, a structure whose very *raison d'être* is worship? What made it impossible for the state and the judiciary to acknowledge or remember the usage of medieval monuments as living spaces of worship and veneration?

Law-making violence

To answer this question, let us return to 1947 and the violence of Partition, inextricably bound to the birth of the new nation-state, when the violence forced the abandonment of these “monuments” as sites of prayer. In his famous essay on the critique of violence, Walter Benjamin writes, “If, therefore, conclusions can be drawn from military violence, as being primordial and paradigmatic of all violence used for natural ends, there is inherent in all such violence a lawmaking character” (Benjamin 1986: 283). The state, according to Benjamin, “fears this violence simply for its lawmaking character” (1986: 283).

The violence of Partition as it played out in India wished to remove all signs of Muslim sovereignty and belonging from India. This was a Hindu-majoritarian violence that the state could not (or did not) control, despite its avowed secularism. The specter of uncontrollable violence, foundational to the beginning of the new state, now haunted all government actions and social relations. The history of state and society in postcolonial India could well be the story of trying to accommodate the law-making violence that the state recognized it could not monopolize. This is reflected not only in the denial of Muslim claims to worship in monuments rendered “dead” by postcolonial policy¹⁵ but also in the erasure of Muslim graves

13. See f. 33/10/83/M/ASI “Suit filed by the Muntazima Committee Masjid Qudsia Bagh Delhi in the Court of Distt. Judge Delhi regarding the Claims for offering prayers.”

14. For the agreement between the Anjuman and the Delhi Government, see f. 56/1926/Education/CCO “Correspondence relating to the Rangrez Mosque.” For issues specific to the Qudsia Mosque, see f. 1(13)/1929/Education/CCO “Correspondence relating to mosque at Qudsia Gardens, Delhi.”

15. The policy (distinct from law) of the ASI differentiates between “living” and “dead” monuments. Living monuments are those in active use, including prayer and veneration. Dead monuments are those not in active use. Post-1947, especially when



and mosques and shrines, spaces of living Muslim memory, from the landscapes of the new nation-state. It is easy enough, then, to speak of the Waqf Board as “anti-national” because it remembers (and unfortunately, wishes to revive) forms of property and customary usage far older than the nation-state and its ideal Hindu citizens.

Some of the most eloquent documentation of the erasures of Delhi’s landscape is to be found in Maulana Ata-ur-Rahman Qasimi’s book *Dilli ki tarikhi masjid* [*The historic mosques of Delhi*] (2001). Qasimi writes about how not just homes and shops and businesses but tombs and graveyards were taken over by the Custodian (of Enemy Property), and then sold to Hindu and Sikh refugees for throw-away prices. But the most startling picture that emerges in his book is that of a city of modernist planning (as exemplified by the DDA, the Delhi Development Authority), which sees itself as completely at odds with the Islamic landscape it has inherited and does its best to completely efface.

After 1947 the sequence of occupation of Waqf Lands was started in Delhi under Jajmohan’s governorship. It was Jajmohan’s advice that wherever there is an old Muslim graveyard or empty Waqf land a DDA board should be put up on it, and so the DDA people put up their boards and prohibit the burial of the dead and to make their occupation secure they enclose the space with walls and to get rid of the graves and with great wisdom they plant trees. Slowly the trees go on covering the graves and finally these graves are leveled and this becomes a declaration that this is not the Waqf property of Muslims but the property of the administration. (Qasimi 2001: 35–36)

The graves disappear, Delhi becomes primeval: “virgin” territory for development. Qasimi tells us the anecdote of Maulana Azad (who was the Education Minister¹⁶ at the time and the only Muslim member of the central cabinet) trying to intervene with Prime Minister Nehru against the destruction of tombs and graveyards going on in Delhi, to which Nehru is said to have replied, “Maulana, half of Delhi is graveyards and mosques. Our schemes will fail if we don’t have room to build” (Qasimi 2001: 37). One of the most striking accounts Qasimi gives is of a buried Tughlaq-era mosque in the grounds of the Lalit Kala Akademi (Academy of Fine Arts) in New Delhi. He was in a car with some other Muslim religious scholars. As they approached the former location of the fourteenth-century mosque that he had heard so much about, he asked one of his older colleagues if he knew where the mosque used to be. They stopped the car and got out. “While indicating a mound in the enclosure of the Sahitya Academy and the Lalit Kala Akademi they said the Tughlaq mosque is buried inside this mound and that trees have been planted all around the mound” (Qasimi 2001: 44). When the plans for the Lalit Kala Akademi were drawn, the area of the mosque fell into the plans and the DDA wanted to destroy it. Maulana Azad intervened, and said that the mosque should not be destroyed at any cost. “After long arguments and debates it was decided that

concerned with Muslim monuments, the ASI’s policy is to only concern themselves with dead monuments and to actively discourage monuments from coming “alive.”

16. At that time the ASI was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

the walls and domes of the mosque be covered with rubble and a platform be built there” (Qasimi 2001: 45).

In the pre-Partition Delhi Guide Map (1945), the mosque still stands in the angle of Firozshah Road and Lytton Road, in a large vacant lot full of tiny, penciled trees. Now, even the mound is gone. A gallery annex was added later to the Lalit Kala Akademi. The Academy was built in 1954, less than a decade after Partition and Independence, as one of a whole series of cultural institutions built in the area now known as Mandi House Circle, institutions built to nurture and showpiece the modern cultural efflorescence of the new nation state. A medieval mosque had no place here.

Jinnealogy

Today, a stone’s throw from where the mosque used to be, diagonally across the Mandi House Circle, next to a defunct fountain, is a mazar, a venerated grave in the middle of the broad pedestrian pavement. The mazar is covered with asbestos roofing and marked off by small iron rails. A signboard says that it was established in 1966. The name of the saint present here is Nanhe Miyan Chishti.

According to Anwar Sabri, the old caretaker of this mazar, Nanhe Miyan Chishti is a *rahmani* (merciful) *buzurg* (elder), from the Qadiri Sabri *silsila* and a disciple of Gharib Nawaz Muinuddin Chishti of Ajmer. Anwar Sabri reassured me, even before my asking, “*Aapka qayam yahin hai, original hai, banavati nahin,*” “His place is here, it is original, not made up.”

A *qayam*, a place where one is established, is not necessarily a grave. He said that he started taking care of the place over forty years ago. At that time the grave here was nothing more than a hole in the ground. He raised the earthen grave and whitewashed it every week. He was a painter with the Delhi Development Authority. He supplemented his income by modest commerce by the side of the grave, selling incense and sweets and sheets for offerings at the grave, and by repairing bicycle punctures. Since he started taking care of the grave, he claims that there have been no accidents at the Mandi House circle, where seven roads come together. The municipal authorities often gave him trouble, not wanting him or the grave here, and he has spent at least one night in jail. But the baba appeared in a dream to an engineer with the New Delhi Municipal Corporation, who was planning a “beautification” of the area that would lead to the demolition of the grave to make way for a fountain. After the baba appeared to him in a dream, the engineer begged his forgiveness, moved the fountain in his plans to accommodate the grave, and even presented the baba with bags of cement to make the grave *pakka*, permanent. This is his biggest miracle, Anwar Sabri said, to not be reduced to dust where so many other mazars have been.

Other devotees, many of them Hindu, have provided a water tank, marble, and iron railings, solidifying the dargah’s hold upon its small patch of pavement. Many of the devotees, including many actors and staff from the nearby National School of Drama, have been coming here for the past thirty years, Anwar Sabri says. The baba has granted the wishes of many.



Nanhe Miyan is also the name of the first jinn-saint encountered upon entering Firoz Shah Kotla. His special place is a small alcove just off what would have been a large entry gate to the citadel. Nanhe Miyan was a name known in eighteenth-century Delhi and Lucknow, as Intizar Hussain (2003) tells us in his literary memoir of Delhi, *Dilli tha jiska nam (That which was named Delhi)*.

There were some special named jinns who had achieved a lot of fame among the ladies. They were Shah Dariya, Shah Sikandar, Zain Khan, Sadar e Jahan, Nanhe Miyan, Chahaltan; but the most fame was achieved by Shaikh Saddu. Mention of this can be found in the satire of Sauda [1713–1781]. Rangin [1755–1835] has also given a reference to this.

Kisi ko ji se hai ikhlas Shaikh Saddu se

Kahe hai aap ko Nanhe Miyan ki haram koi

Someone is sincerely devoted to Shaikh Saddu with their life

Someone calls themselves the intimate of Nanhe Miyan

It seems that the celebrity of Shaikh Saddu and Nanhe Miyan was from Delhi to Lucknow. (Hussain 2003: 115–16)

The poets that Hussain mentions were famous for their Rekhti—poetry written in stylized imitation of “women’s speech” and often ethnographically documenting their desires, life-ways, speech patterns, and beliefs (Argali 2006; Vanita 2012). This poetry had its heyday in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Delhi and Lucknow. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Rekhti poetry was censured by the reformist Muslim intelligentsia. Simultaneously, the practices seen in Rekhti

poetry, like the veneration of the jinn and the *pari* (fairies), were also sought to be suppressed. Both these repressions can be linked to the debacle of 1857–58, when the widespread rebellion against the British East India Company was brutally crushed. British vengeance was particularly hard on the North Indian Muslim elite, who they saw as being primarily responsible for the rebellion. The Muslim elite, in turn, saw 1857 as a civilizational defeat and started looking at Muslim cultural practices to find reasons for their downfall. Rekhti poetry was almost immediately identified as one of these cultural practices. The Urdu critic (and inventor of the modern Urdu canon), Muhammad Husain “Azad,” has this to say about Rekhti in 1880—“This invention [i.e., the rekhti] should be considered one cause for the effeminacy, lack of ambition, and cowardice that developed in the common people” (Azad, *Ab-e Hayat*, cited in Vanita 2004: 44).

Maulana Altaf Hussain “Hali,” among the greatest littérateurs of Urdu after 1857, famous among other things for the *Musaddas* (a.k.a. the Ebb and Flow of Islam) wrote a book (*Majalis un Nissa*, or the *Gatherings of women*, c.1875) to educate *ashraf* Muslim girls to be better Muslims and better women. The didactic content included warning them against the religious practices of the lower class women they would encounter in domestic life.

Sitting with such people, how can one pick up any civilized manners?
Indeed, you might learn a new religion which is unique in all the world, a
strange sort of faith which you won't find mentioned in the Quran or the
hadith. . . .

. . . in times of trouble, such people abandon God and call upon
Allah Bakhsh, or sacrifice a goat to Shaikh Saddu or a cow to Sayyid
Ahmad Kabir. In some places they pray to Bale Miyan or to Nanhe
Miyan or ask for Darya Khan's intercession. Whomever you meet is
obsessed with spirits or with the evil eye.

Anyway, many of these customs which were observed in this city until
recently are now dying out. Those that remain are mainly found among
ignorant and illiterate people, or in homes where the man and woman
both are totally uninstructed. (Hali 1986)

Hali's disparagement of the practices of jinn veneration was not singular. For many strands of Muslim thought and practice that emerged in the aftermath of 1857, the jinn were troublesome. The *nechari* (natural) school of thought exemplified by Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, committed to making Islamic beliefs commensurate with modern scientific rationalism, denied the existence of jinn and angels. “He [Syed Ahmad Khan] explained the Quranic assertion regarding the existence of jinns as being a reference to ‘uncivilized people’ or to man’s propensity for evil” (Koshul n.d.: 9). The Deobandis, committed to a more “traditional” Islamic ontology, did not deny the existence of the jinn. “Deobandis, however, feel that Muslims risk angering God with their excessive reliance on jinn, angels and saints, for it is God alone who ought to be relied on” (Khan 2006: 244). In Deobandi thought and practice, jinn are to be avoided and exorcised, and are mostly considered malevolent.¹⁷

17. I did not come across anyone who identified as Ahl-e Hadis during my fieldwork in Delhi, but as Khan notes (2006: 244), Ahl-e Hadis thought is characterized by an ontological suspicion toward the realm of the Invisible, including the jinn.



Even at Firoz Shah Kotla, the imam of the mosque¹⁸ insisted on the marginality of the jinn to the sanctity of this space. The insistence on the presence, saintliness, and efficacy of the jinn that I witnessed was usually articulated in opposition to the imam.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the name of Nanhe Miyan reappeared in the landscape of Delhi, at the shrine of Nanhe Miyan Chishti and at Firoz Shah Kotla. But the customs related to jinn in Delhi had changed. Nanhe Miyan and all the other named jinn used to be venerated in domestic spaces, in ceremonies held in private gatherings, as Rangin documents in the glossary accompanying his Divan of Rekhti poetry, the *Farhang-i Muhavarat-i Begamat* (*The glossary of women's idioms*):

Baithak: *Achha suthra farsh karti hain aur naha dho kar is par baithti hain aur Miyan Shaikh Saddu ya Miyan Shah Dariya ya Sikandar Shah ya Zain Khan ya Nanhe Miyan ya pariyan ya Bi Bachhri in ke sar par aati hain.* (Argali 2006: 32–33)

[A] Sitting: They spread a clean carpet and after bathing and washing they sit on it and Miyan Shaikh Saddu or Miyan Shah Dariya or Sikandar Shah or Zain Khan or Nanhe Miyan or the fairies or Bi Bachri come upon their head [possess them].

Now Nanhe Miyan is a public saint, claiming space and presence in the reconfigured landscapes of the postcolonial city, not restricted to sittings in domestic spaces. How do we understand the return of the jinn to prominence in the post-Partition city, and their transformation to public saints, when there exists such a strong oppositional discourse against intimacy with the jinn, similar to the discourses that Pandolfo (2009) documents in Morocco, where there has been a shift, in Islamic revivalist discourses and their attendant models of personhood, malady, and cure, of emphasizing the malevolence of the jinn and foreclosing the potentialities of benevolence (see also Spadola 2009).

To understand this presence, I turn to stories of the jinn circulating in Delhi. One of the most popular books about jinn published in Delhi, a book that many people immediately referenced when I mentioned that I was interested in jinn, is a book that could be characterized as an antijinn polemic. *Jinnat ke purasar halat* (*The conditions of the jinn with all their secrets*), was first published in the 1950s,¹⁹

18. Most of the spaces of veneration scattered throughout Firoz Shah Kotla are unregulated, without any officially appointed figure to lead ritual activity. However, the mosque has an Imam, or prayer-leader appointed by the Delhi Waqf Board. The Imam is trained in a Deobandi madarsa, and actively discourages and disparages the practices of jinn veneration at Firoz Shah Kotla, deeming them to be superstitions. The conflict with those who insist on the presence and sanctity of jinn seems like a classic conflict between those belonging to the Deobandi and Barelwi *maslaks* of Sunni Islam. However, the difference is expressed, by those who insist on the presence of jinn, as a difference between local Delhi people and outsiders (The Imam is from Bihar).

19. The copy of the book I own gives no mention of a first publication date or any publication date at all. However, I interviewed Muhammad Waseem, the current proprietor of Astana Book Depot, who told me that the book had first been published in the 1950s, when his father ran the publishing house. He also told me that the demand for the book has grown hugely in the past ten years, going into multiple reprints a year.

and has since become a bestseller for the Old Delhi based publishers, Astana Book Depot, currently going into several reprints a year according to the publisher. The book is written by a Mufti associated with Deoband who wishes to warn and empower men against the wiles of Satan²⁰ and the jinn. Mufti Shabir Hasan Chishti states in the introduction,

for the Muslim public, rather, for the information of all the children of Adam, and for the betterment of their condition, in this book there is such an unvarnished account (*kacha chitha*) given of the mischief making of Iblis (Satan) and the jinn that reading it will force you to think about what weapon to use to overpower such an enemy of humanity. (Chishti n.d.: 9)

But even in this book, the malevolence of the jinn is not the only theme. The book also has a benevolent role for the jinn in establishing connections between prophetic figures centuries apart in time. The jinn allow for the transmission of knowledge and traditions beyond all possibility of human memory.

The Prophet's meeting with the great grandson of Iblis [Satan]

Hazrat Abdullah bin Umar has narrated from his father Hazrat Umar Faruq—I was sitting with the Prophet on one of the hills of Tahama when an old man presented himself in front of the Prophet and saluted him. Huzoor [The prophet] answered and said, Your voice and accent seem to be those of the jinn. He answered, I am Hama bin [son of] Him bin Laqis bin Iblis. Huzoor asked, What is your age? He answered, At the time when Qabil [Cain] killed Habil [Abel] I was 43 years old. . . .

. . . In the age of Hazrat Nuh [Noah] I used to live with Muslims in a mosque. . . . I had told Hazrat Nuh that I was a part of the gathering of the killers of Habil bin Adam [Abel, son of Adam]. I desire God's forgiveness. Will God accept my repentance? Hazrat Nuh said, God is forgiving and merciful. Get up and do *wuzu* and offer two prostrations [of prayer]. I acted on Hazrat Nuh's advice and I hadn't yet lifted my head from the prostration when Hazrat Nuh said, lift your head from prostration, your repentance is accepted. . . .

. . . I often used to go on pilgrimage to see Y'aqub [Jacob]. I was with Yusuf [Joseph] in the place of his captivity. I used to meet Ilyas [Elijah] in the wilderness, and I still meet with Hazrat Ilyas [on occasion]. I have seen Hazrat Musa [Moses] too. He educated me in the books of the Old Testament and told me that when you meet Hazrat Isa [Jesus] give him my regards. I conveyed Hazrat Musa's greetings to Hazrat Isa. Hazrat Isa told me that when you meet Muhammad, you should convey my greetings to him. It is the narrator's statement that when he heard this, Huzoor [The Prophet] started crying and said, May salutations keep reaching Isa. And till the world exists O Hama, may there be peace upon you. You have fulfilled what was entrusted to you. (Chishti n.d.: 199-201)

I found the same anecdote in an English translation of Ibn Kathir's (1301-73) fourteenth-century Sirah of the prophet (Ibn Kathir 1998: vol. 4), which read

20. Satan [Iblis] is a jinni rather than a fallen angel in most Islamic traditions.



remarkably close to my translation of the same anecdote from Urdu, but with two crucial differences. First, Ibn Kathir's text gives us a long *isnad*, or chain of transmission that Chishti does not reproduce. Second, whereas Ibn Kathir finds this hadith troublesome and doubts its veracity, Chishti presents it to us without any such caveats.

The *hafiz* Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi gave here a very strange *hadith*—one indeed, that was either objectionable or fabricated. However, its source is a cherished one. And I wish to report it just as he did. It is strange to come from him. (Ibn Kathir vol.4: 132)

Al-Bayhaqi went on to state, “This Ibn Abu Mashar in the chain has had major *ahadith* related from him; however the scholars in the traditions consider him weak. . . . But this *hadith* is narrated from another and stronger line of transmission. God knows best.” (vol.4: 133)

In translating this fourteenth-century account in the mid-twentieth century, Chishti seems to be amplifying a logic already inherent in the story, the supersession of human transmission of memory by the longevity of the jinn—or what I have called jinnealogy. The memories of jinn, who live far longer than human beings, stretch back several generations of human history. They can connect individuals hundreds of years apart instantaneously, bypassing human institutions of memory and generations of transmission, short-circuiting genealogy (grey, meticulous, patient)²¹ into electrifying jinnealogy. Another jinnealogical story that is quite popular in Delhi, many versions of which were recounted to me in the course of my fieldwork, is directly linked to the mosque at Firoz Shah Kotla. The version of the story given below is a compression from the oral account of Chand, the son of Laddoo Shah, the figure to whom the current popularity of Firoz Shah Kotla as a dargah is usually attributed.

The story goes that Shah Waliullah, the famous mystic and theologian of eighteenth-century Delhi was once praying in the mosque at Firoz Shah Kotla when he saw a snake approaching him. He killed the snake with a stick. That night as he was sleeping, he was carried back to the court of the king of the jinn in the ruins of Firoz Shah Kotla, where the king of the jinn told him that that he stood accused of murder. He had killed the son of the king of the jinn, who had taken the form of a snake. In his defense, Shah Waliullah quoted a *hadith* [saying] of the Prophet, saying that it was perfectly legitimate to kill a dangerous creature approaching you if you are praying. Had he known that the snake was actually a jinni in disguise, he would have done no such thing. The king asked the gathered jinn if what Waliullah said was true. An old jinni said, yes it is true. I have heard it myself from the lips of the Prophet. The old jinni was a *sahabi*, a companion of the prophet by virtue of being a Muslim who had met the Prophet in his lifetime. Due to his interaction with this old jinni, Shah Waliullah gained the stature of one of the *Tabi'un*, those Muslims who were born after the Prophet's death but had met one of the *Sahabah*, the companions of the Prophet. The whole thing happened, in the explicit logic of Chand's version (and other versions) of the story, precisely because Allah wanted to raise the stature of Shah Waliullah.

21. Following Nietzsche in *On the genealogy of morals*, Foucault opens his essay with, “Genealogy is gray, meticulous and patiently documentary (1977: 139).”

Jinnealogy makes it possible for Shah Waliullah to overcome the thousand years between his life and that of the Prophet's and become one of the Tabi'un, the best generation after the companions of the prophet. Shah Waliullah, of course, is the founding father, as it were, claimed as such by all the major revivalist traditions in modern Indian Sunni Islam (Sanyal 1996: 35–41). His being raised to the status of Tabi'un thanks to the jinn is an about-turn of sorts from the criticisms of jinn veneration growing in reformist discourses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The possibility of respectable relations with the jinn is seen most clearly in Chisti's account, in *Jinnat ke purasar haalaat*, of jinn studying at the great reformist seminary, the Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband.

Jinn also study at the Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband

From the verbal accounts of some professors at the Dar-ul-Uloom I learned that jinns also study at the Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband. One night, around midnight, when Hazrat Maulana Habib ur Rahman Sahib, the mohtamam (caretaker) of Dar-ul-Uloom was patrolling the campus, he saw two young snakes fighting and playing with each other in a locked room. Books lay open in front of the snakes. On seeing this, Hazrat Mohtamam Sahib immediately scolded them and said—is this a time to study or to fight? Upon hearing this, those two snakes instantly came back to regulation human form and started apologizing and swore that God willing, we will not give you an occasion for complaint again. (Chishti n.d.: 150)

It is significant that this respectability, as seen in *Jinnat ke purasar haalaat*, first manifests in the 1950s, in the decade after Partition. It is also significant that this respectability of the jinn, as in the story of Shah Waliullah and the sahabi jinn, is linked to jinnealogy, to the transmission of knowledge not dependent on the institutions and genealogies of human memory. For in Delhi, jinn are present in the blank spaces of the map, where the plans of the bureaucracy, the verdicts of the judiciary, and the illegibility of the postcolonial state coincide to create vast erasures of the city's topographies, both lived and remembered.

Jinn space, jinn time

In traditional theological understandings, human saints were rooted to their graves (Baljon 1989: 191), embedded in a landscape that their presence made sacred. The violence of Partition and the policies of the postcolonial state uprooted both the living and the dead, disrupting the intricate tapestry of sacrality and memory that connected the communities to the local landscape. The stories told about the jinn-saints at Firoz Shah Kotla emphasize mobility rather than rootedness. The jinn-saints gather here on Thursday nights to read petitions, they leave when the ruins become too crowded, some of them can travel between India and Pakistan every ten minutes. In a city increasingly defined by mobility, whether the mass migrations of Partition, the more everyday migrations into Delhi prompted by rural poverty, or the everyday displacements of slum populations by state fiat, perhaps mobile jinn seem more relatable than the rooted human saints.

We can think of the dargah of the jinn-saints making possible the reformation of community in the aftermath of violence. It was only in 1977, a few months after the end of the Emergency, that we have the first record of people starting to come



to Firoz Shah Kotla in large numbers. This seems significant, given how destructive the Emergency was for the Old City and how many poor and working class people were displaced from the Old City to resettlement colonies across the river (see Tarlo 2003). The people who come to Firoz Shah Kotla are mostly working class and come from very specific geographical areas: Old Delhi / Shahjahanabad and its old suburbs, such as Paharganj, and from *Janna Par* (across the river) in East Delhi. Those who come from East Delhi often have family connections to the Old City. They were either forcibly removed to the slum colonies far across the river in the sixties or seventies, or moved out of the increasingly congested Old City to the nearer parts of East Delhi.

Of all the names of the jinn recounted in Rekhti poetry, only the name of Nanhe Miyan is now prominent in the landscapes of Delhi. Nanhe Miyan. *Little Mister*. The small voice of history, perhaps? The jinn of postcolonial Delhi are historical witnesses whose testimonies bridge chasms of time impossible to bridge by human memory. In the stories of the encounters of jinn with the Prophet Muhammad and with Shah Waliullah there is an insistence on the jinn being a *historical* witness. The jinn are not imaginal presences in these stories. They are *survivors* in the historical world of changing places and times. The connections they make between figures separated by centuries and millennia are not connections made possible by the ontological realm of the *barzakh*, but by the sheer longevity of the lives of jinn. The insistence on jinnealogy, on connections between figures centuries apart made possible by eyewitnesses is best exemplified by the story of Zafar Jinn in contemporary Indian Shia discourse. In this story, Mir Babar Ali Anis (1803–1874), the famed *marsiya* writer of nineteenth-century Lucknow, meets Zafar Jinn, who was an eyewitness to the battle of Karbala. Mir Anis used Zafar's accounts of what really happened at Karbala to write his *marsiyas*, odes to the martyrdom of Hussain and his companions. These *marsiyas*, which have canonical status in the South Asian Shia community, are thus not acts of historical interpretation and imagination, but photo-realist documentary evidence (“The real story of Zafar Jinn”).

The jinn alert us to new temporalities brought into being by the postcolonial state. We now live in times where what we were eyewitness to has become the unimaginably distant past, impossible to verify through human memory. Our time has become the time of the jinn.

The temporal magic of the state

Sultan Ghari, the venerated tomb of Sultan Iltutmish's eldest son, is the oldest Muslim tomb in India, dating to the early thirteenth century. Records of its veneration go back at least as far as Dargah Quli Khan's *Muraqqa-e Dehli* (1993) of the mid-eighteenth century. The tomb was brutally vandalized in 1947. Several years after this destruction, in 1955, the Jamiat-Ulema-e Hind wrote to the Ministry of Education, wanting to get the tomb of Sultan Ghari repaired and renovated in time for the upcoming *'urs*, or death anniversary of the saint.²² Following orders from the ministry, the Survey promptly repaired the tomb within two months of

22. The correspondence that follows is from f. 15B/10/55-G/ASI “Preservation of Monuments in Delhi-Request from Jamiat-E -Ulema New Delhi.”

receiving instructions from the Ministry of Education on March 16, 1955, and the DGA (Director General of Archaeology) wrote to the Ministry on May 16:

The work of reconstructing the graves has been satisfactorily completed as far as warranted by the existing evidence and by the drawings available in the Department. The Protected Monument is in good condition, and no further repairs are necessary. . . .

. . . it is noted that an Urs is going to be held at the monument from the 16th-18th July, 1955. *The monument has been a dead and deserted one for a long time, and no Urs has been held in the past.* There is therefore, no justification for the use of the monument for such purposes. (emphasis my own)

In looking at the “existing evidence and drawings available in the department,” the archaeologists seem to have pointedly ignored the report on Sultan Ghari by S. A. A. Naqvi, published in *Ancient India*, the Journal of the Archaeological Survey of India, in 1947, which clearly states, “His tomb is even now regarded as sacred by the Muslims and every year on the seventeenth day of the month of *Ziq’ad*, his ‘Urs or anniversary is celebrated and the shrine is thronged with pilgrims” (Naqvi 1947: 5–6).

How did the eight years between 1947 and the publication of the Archaeological Survey’s own report, become the *long time* in which the monument had *been a dead and deserted one* in the ASI’s 1955 estimation? The law-making violence of Partition inaugurated an entirely new relationship of the archive to everyday life, a new sense of time and of history. In this new temporality of the nation-state, Muslim time was firmly in the past, the *once upon a time* of fairy tales. Muslims had no claims to the present (or to presence) in the homogenous time (and space) of the new nation state. *Maulana, half of Delhi is graveyards and mosques. Our schemes will fail if we don’t have room to build.*

Das writes of the “illegibility” of the [Indian] state, which allows its “double existence . . . between a rational mode and a magical mode” (Das 2007: 167). Das focuses on the illegibility of the state’s actions, but what we have with the state’s archives is an illegibility of the state’s memory, a will to *forget*. In the case of Firoz Shah Kotla and the Qudsia Bagh Mosque, spaces that had been used for prayer within living memory (prayers stopped at both places as they did at many other mosques and other Muslim shrines in 1947 due to the violence of Partition and the mass displacement of Muslims), the ASI argued (and continues to argue), that there was no evidence that these spaces had ever been used for prayers since their “protection,” or official custodianship by the Government/Archaeological Survey. In the case of the Qudsia Bagh mosque, which went to court, the court agreed with the ASI. *There is no prima-facie evidence of the existence of any recognized religious usage or custom.*

What is clear from both these cases is that the ASI’s record room was never called upon to furnish any evidence in either of these (or several other cases). The state makes the papers, the only form it considers to be of evidentiary worth, vanish within the archive, hidden by dust and entropy, destroyed by insects and neglect. The archives had been rendered illegible by the state’s will to forget.

The forgetting enshrined at the heart of the postcolonial archive is central to the illegibility, the paradox of the state, its sleight of hand if you will. The state dismisses claims based on lived experience unless they can be supported by documents.

But the documents disappear within the archives of the forgetful state. The state demands magic from its subjects; to miraculously provide the proof that the state does its best to hide and make invisible. This in no small measure contributes to the particularity, transience, and irregularity of associations between state and local actors, mediated by graphic artifacts, in the functioning of postcolonial bureaucracy in Pakistan (Hull 2012: 20); in contrast to Weber's (1978: 988) understanding of files creating a system of institutional stability and bureaucratic memory. It is no wonder then that "documents produced by the state were invested with magical powers . . . that view was held by all subjects of the state" (Gupta 2012: 212).

The sacred politics of other days

Their government is just like our government, I have been told again and again at Firoz Shah Kotla ("they" being the jinn). *They have ministries, and parties, and the balance of power shifts*. One cannot help but see parallels between the bureaucracy of the jinn and the bureaucracy of the Indian government, where as Akhil Gupta's work (2012) shows us, the sites of governmental care for the populace are also sites of structural violence against the poor. The movement from malevolence to benevolence seen in the veneration of jinn at Firoz Shah Kotla is often an oscillation. Fear, and the overcoming of fear is an integral part of the experience of Firoz Shah Kotla, especially in the dark subterranean chambers below the mosque, which are unlike any other dargah space that I know of. In contrast to other dargahs, spaces of embodied light, spaces at Firoz Shah Kotla are often sooty, dark, and underground. On Thursday afternoons, these subterranean chambers, lit only by the flames of small candles dimly visible through the thick fog of incense, are other worldly spaces of sensory disorientation, and even terror.



People passing through this haze are themselves rendered ghostly, their voices echoing strangely in the gloom as bats' wings whirl overhead. The vertigo and terror of these intimate yet other-worldly spaces, so central to people's experiences of this site, where bat-wings and bureaucratic forms and saintly presence are encountered in a sensorium of smoke and darkness, tell us something about the threats and possibilities that underlie, and often burst forth into, the everyday in contemporary Delhi.

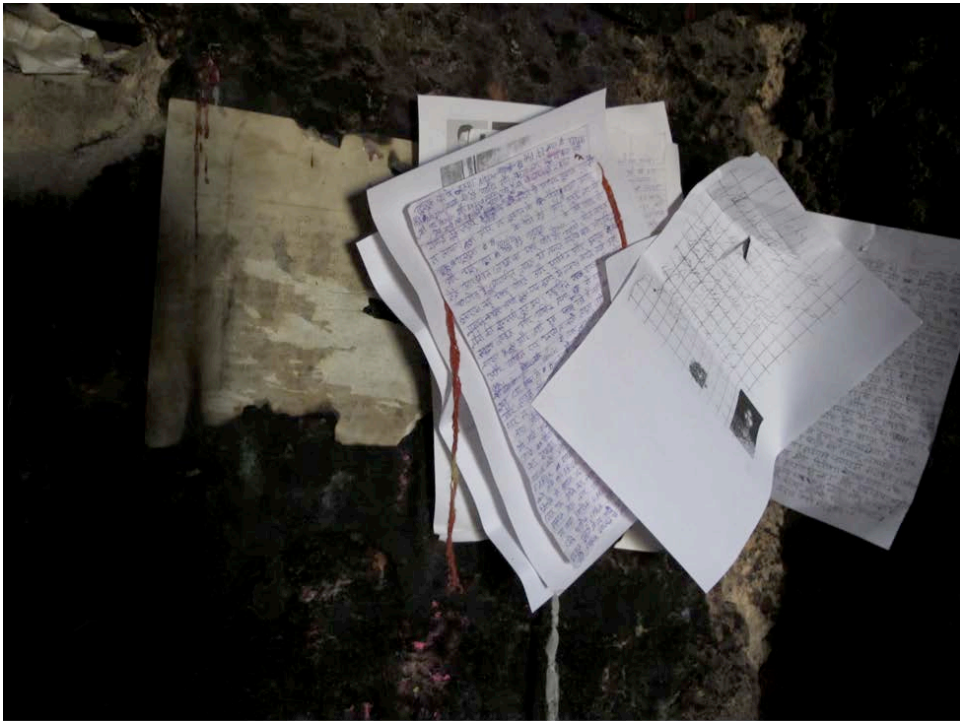
But the presence of the jinn is far more than this. Much of what has been virtually erased in other parts of the city is made present here—the names of jinn, the geographies of locality and congregation, the forms of petition. The presence of the jinn elicits a sacred politics of alternative times against the magical “art of forgetting” of the state. Jinnealogy brings forth other temporalities against the empty homogenous time of the bureaucratic present.

Muzaffar Alam's (2004) work has shown how the normative ideas of precolonial Muslim government, especially the Mughal empire, were deeply linked to Sufi ethics and ideas of justice. The entwinement of Sufi ethics and precolonial Muslim political theologies is reflected in the physical and ritual forms of Muslim saint-shrines, which are similar to that of a royal court or *darbar* (Eaton 2003), and where, as Carla Bellamy's (2011) work shows, the modalities of justice continue to be important to the ritual and efficacy of Muslim saint-shrines for healing pilgrims. At many Muslim saint shrines, such as the shrine of Bade Sarkar in Budayun, Uttar Pradesh (see Ghufuran 2011), there is a culture of petitioning the saints that is very similar to the legal form of the *shikwa*, a method of petitioning the Sultan, which was part of the political theory of and practice of the Delhi Sultanate.²³

At Firoz Shah Kotla, too, people write letters to the jinn and deposit them in various niches and alcoves. Matthew Hull (2012: 88–104) alerts us to the rooting of contemporary subcontinental practices of submitting petitions to the bureaucracy in precolonial South Asian political traditions. But even with such continuities in mind, to find petitions that are strangely resonant of a fourteenth-century legal form being deposited in the ruins of a fourteenth-century Tughlaq palace is striking. The letters are often photocopied, as when applying to a government office; multiple photocopies of the same letter can be found in various niches and alcoves all over the ruins, as if they are applications sent to the different departments of a modern bureaucracy. The letters are almost always accompanied by clearly legible and detailed address, and increasingly, with photographs. The desire for justice, even from the jinn, cannot be fulfilled, in the age of the UID,²⁴ without submitting the data needed to be recognized as a citizen of the state. There is a telling irony in the fact that people petition the *sarkar* or government of the jinn about their most intimate problems, in the ruins of palace, a premodern space of sovereignty, while using the bureaucratic forms and mechanisms of the modern state when, as Emma Tarlo observes, “the poor in Delhi relate to the state principally through the market.

23. For the *shikwa* form, see Messick (1993: 173). For evidence of use of shikwas in the Tughlaq court, see Ibn Batuta (1976: 84–86).

24. In recent years, the government of India has launched a program to develop a Unique Identification Number (UID) card, a unitary form of identification with biometric data that will eliminate the various diverse kinds of government issued IDs and collate all the data of citizens in one centralized database.



Basic amenities, such as land jobs, electricity, water and paving are things, not provided but purchased in exchange for votes [and] money” (2003: 11). The amplified sacrality of the premodern space of sovereignty in the aftermath of state violence seems to me to be both ironic commentary and apotropaic magic against the magic of the modern state.

Yeh insaf ki jagah hai is a phrase I have often heard to characterize Firoz Shah Kotla. This is a space of justice. In this space of justice, people deposit photocopied petitions that form a strange and transient archive of people’s everyday lives in the city, their problems and sorrows, their hopes and disappointments. The image I have of this space of justice, from all the narratives I have heard, is something like this—on Thursday nights, when the ruins of this medieval palace are once again deserted, the jinn return to read petitions that people have left behind, a transient archive of the city’s pain. This is the image of justice that persists among people at Firoz Shah Kotla, an image whose veracity they insist on despite open hostility from “establishment” religious figures (the Waqf Board appointed Imam of the mosque). What does it mean for the working class poor of Delhi to make this insistent turn to the jinn for justice?

At Firoz Shah Kotla, doing justice is inextricably linked to bearing witness. The jinnealogical story linked to Firoz Shah Kotla insists that the jinn who pass judgment are also witnesses—witnesses to other times, to other modes of being—like the *sahabi* jinn who witnessed the life of the Prophet. In the histories of the postcolonial city, there is no room for what those who come to this dargah have witnessed, what they have suffered, the stories they remember, and the lives they have lived. If Firoz Shah Kotla is a court, a space of justice, then perhaps the turn to the jinn is an insistence on the veracity of witness—lives lived in this world have an ethical

claim, what they have witnessed and remember has evidentiary weight—in spite of the magical amnesia of the state.

Acknowledgments

This article is based on research funded by a Dissertation Fieldwork Grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University. I am grateful to the devotees at Firoz Shah Kotla for welcoming me in their midst and letting me be one among them over several years. I would like to thank Partha Chatterjee, Brinkley Messick, and Michael Taussig for their encouragement of the ideas and research presented here; Mathangi Krishnamurthy, Mahesh Rangarajan, Amrita Ibrahim, and Seema Golestaneh for providing opportunities to present earlier versions of this paper in public; Nancy Lin, Bryan Lowe, and Diana Bell for their incisive critical engagement with an earlier draft of this paper; Sheba Karim for her generous editing and writerly insight; Sean Dowdy, Stéphane Gros, and especially Giovanni da Col at HAU for their encouragement, emails, and editorial support at every step; the anonymous reviewers for their enormously helpful criticisms and suggestions.

References

- Alam, Muzaffar. 2004. *The languages of political Islam: India 1200–1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Argali, Faruq, ed. 2006. *Rekhti: Urdu ke namvar rekhti go sha'iron ke kalam ka mukammal majmu'ah*. Delhi: Farid Book Depot.
- Ashour, Mustafa. 1986. *The jinn in the Qur'an and the Sunna*. London: Dar Al-Taqwa.
- Baljon, J. M. S. 1989. "Shah Waliullah and the Dargah." In *Muslim shrines in India*, edited by Christian Troll, 189–97. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bellamy, Carla. 2011. *The powerful ephemeral: Everyday healing in an ambiguously Islamic place*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1986. "Critique of violence." In *Reflections*, edited by Peter Demetz, 277–300. New York: Schocken Books.
- Chief Commissioner's Office Records, Delhi State Archives (CCO).
- Chishti, Mufti Shabbir Hasan. n.d. *Jinnat ke Purasarar Haalaat*. Delhi: Astana Book Depot.
- Chittick, William. 1994. *Imaginal worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the problem of religious diversity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Crapanzano, Vincent. 1981. *The Hamadsha: A study in Moroccan ethnopsychiatry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.



- Dalrymple, William. 1993. *City of Djinnns: A year in Delhi*. Delhi: HarperCollins.
- Dargah Quli Khan. 1993. *Muraqqa-i Delhi: Farsi matan aur Urdu tarjamah*. Translated by Khaliq Anjum. Delhi: Anjuman-i Taraqqi-i Urdu.
- Das, Veena. 2007. "The signature of the state: The paradox of illegibility." In *Life and words: Violence and the descent into the ordinary*, 162-83. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Delhi Gazetteer*. 1976. Delhi: Delhi Administration.
- Delhi Guide Map: Surveyed 1939-1942*. 1945. Dehra Dun: Survey of India.
- Deputy Commissioner's Office Records, Delhi State Archives (DCO).
- Eaton, Richard M. 2003. "The political and religious authority of the shrine of Baba Farid." In *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750*, edited by Richard M. Eaton, 234-62. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. "Nietzsche, genealogy, history." In *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews*, edited by D. F. Bouchard, 139-64. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Ghufuran, Iram. 2011. *There is something in the air*. DVD. Directed by Iram Ghufuran. Delhi: Public Service Broadcasting Trust.
- Green, Nile. 2012. *Making space: Sufis and settlers in early modern India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Gupta, Akhil. 2012. *Red tape: Bureaucracy, structural violence and poverty in India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- "Hali," Khvajah Altaf Husain. 1986. *Voices of silence: English translation of Hali's Majalis un-Nissa and Chup ki Dad*. Translated by Gail Minault. Delhi: Chanakya Publications. <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urdu/hali/majalis/03majlis.html>. Accessed March 15, 2013.
- Ho, Engseng. 2006. *The graves of Tarim: Genealogy and mobility across the Indian Ocean*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hull, Matthew. 2012. *Government of paper: The materiality of bureaucracy in urban Pakistan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hussain, Intizar. 2003. *Dilli tha jiska nam*. Lahore: Sang-i Meel Publications.
- Ibn Batuta. 1976. *Rehla of Ibn Batuta (India, Maldive Islands and Ceylon)*. Translated by Mehdi Hasan. Baroda: Oriental Institute.
- Ibn Kathir. 1998. *The life of the Prophet Muhammad: A translation of Al-Sira al-Nabawiyya*. Translated by Trevor le Gassick. Reading: Garnet Publishing Company.
- Kakar, Sudhir. 1982. *Shamans, mystics and doctors: A psychological inquiry into India and its healing traditions*. New York: Knopf.
- Khan, Naveeda. 2006. "Of children and jinn: An inquiry into an unexpected friendship during uncertain times." *Cultural Anthropology* 21 (6): 234-64.

- Koshul, Basit Bilal. n.d. "Varieties of the Muslim response." http://data.quranacademy.com/QA_Publications/articles/English/BasitBilal/VarietiesMuslimResponseI.pdf. Accessed October 31, 2013
- Messick, Brinkley. 1993. *The calligraphic state: Textual domination and history in a Muslim society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Naqvi, S. A. A. 1947. "Sultan Ghari, Delhi." *Ancient India: Bulletin of the archaeological survey of India* 3: 4-10.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. 1997. "Partition and Independence in Delhi: 1947-48." *Economic and Political Weekly* 32 (36): 2261-72.
- Pandolfo, Stefania. 2009. "'Soul choking': Maladies of the soul, Islam, and the ethics of psychoanalysis." *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious*: 71-104.
- Qasimi, Ata-ur-Rahman. 2001. *Dilli ki tarikhi masjid*. Delhi: Maulana Azad Academy.
- "The real story of Zafar Jinn." <http://www.shiachat.com/forum/index.php?/topic/74091-the-real-story-of-zafar-jinn/>. Accessed October 31, 2013.
- Record Room, Archaeological Survey of India Headquarters, Janpath, New Delhi (ASI).
- Sanyal, Usha. 1996. *Devotional Islam and politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and his movement, 1870-1920*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Sharma, Aradhana. 2013. "State transparency after the neoliberal turn: The politics, limits and paradoxes of India's right to information law." *PoLAR* 36 (2): 308-25.
- Spadola, Emilio. 2009. "Writing cures: Religious and communicative authority in late modern Morocco." *The Journal of North African Studies* 14 (2): 155-68.
- Taneja, Anand V. 2012. "Saintly visions: Other histories and history's others in the medieval ruins of Delhi." *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49 (4): 557-90.
- Tarlo, Emma. 2003. *Unsettling memories: Narratives of the emergency in Delhi*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Vanita, Ruth. 2004. "'Married among their companions': Female homoerotic relations in nineteenth-century Urdu Rekhti poetry in India." *Journal of Women's History* 16 (1): 12-53.
- . 2012. *Gender, sex and the city: Urdu Rekhti poetry in India, 1780-1870*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Zamindar, Vazira. 2007. *The Long Partition and the making of modern South Asia: Refugees, boundaries, histories*. New York: Columbia University Press.



Djinnologie. Vie quotidienne et de théologie Islamique dans le Delhi d'après la partition

Résumé : Dans cet article, j'explore ce que j'appelle djinnologie, une orientation théologique qui émerge lorsque les généalogies de la mémoire humaine sont confrontées aux forces amnésiques d'un paysage oblitéré. Dans des histoires racontées dans le Delhi contemporain, les djinns agissent comme des émetteurs reliant les êtres humains éloignés par les siècles écoulés. Dans les requêtes déposées pour les saints djinns dans un palais médiéval en ruine, des idées médiévales de justice se mêlent aux techniques bureaucratiques modernes. Histoires et rituels témoignent pareillement d'une nouveauté théologique intimement liée aux transformations des paysages spirituels et physiques de la ville postcoloniale. Les djinns sont présents dans les espaces vides de la carte, où les plans de la bureaucratie, les verdicts de la justice, et l'illisibilité de l'État indien après-partition coïncident pour tenter de vastes effacements des espaces musulmans de la ville. La djinnologie, la substitution de chaînes humaines de la mémoire par la longue durée de vie des djinns, conteste l'amnésie magique de l'État en mettant en place d'autres temporalités, théologies politiques et modes de témoignage contre le temps homogène et vide d'un présent bureaucratiquement constitué.

Anand Vivek TANEJA is an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Anthropology at Vanderbilt University. He completed his PhD in Anthropology at Columbia University in 2013. His work focuses on historical and contemporary Islam and interreligious interactions in South Asia. His book project, provisionally titled *Islam, history, and the sacred in the medieval ruins of Delhi*, proposes new approaches to ideas of community and religious difference by focusing on the shared topographies, temporalities, and cosmologies of the sacred across usual identitarian boundaries.

Anand Vivek Taneja
Department of Religious Studies
Vanderbilt University
2301 Vanderbilt Place
VU Box #351585
Nashville, TN 37235-1585, USA
615-343-9132
anand.v.taneja@vanderbilt.edu