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CHAPTER 7

Muslim Shrines and Multi-Religious Visitations in Hindus' city of Banaras, India: Co-existential Scenario

Prof. Dr. Rana P.B. Singh

[Professor of Cultural Geography & Heritage Studies, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi; & Head, Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, Banaras Hindu University].
Post at: New F - 7, Jodhpur Colony; Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, UP 221005.
INDIA. Cell: +091-9838 119474. Email: ranapbs@gmail.com

By the loving wisdom doth the soul know life.
What has it got to do with senseless strife of
Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Arab, Turk?

... *Jalalludin Rumi* (1207-1273)¹

Abstract. Banaras, known as cultural capital of India and Hindus' sacred city, records about one-fourth of its total population (1.65 millions in 2010) as Muslims. The importance of Muslims in Banaras is noticed by existence of their 1388 shrines and sacred sites, in contrast to Hindus' recording over 3300 shrines and sacred sites. Since the beginning of the CE 11th century Muslims started settled down here, with a predominance of the Sunni sect (90 per cent). These sects are attributed to their special rituals and performances attached to their sacred places, but they also participate to other groups. At the neighbourhood such places attract even the Hindus who especially visit such places for healing, exorcism and spiritual merits, and they maintain multi-religious characteristics that result into making Hindu-Muslim communal harmony. Among such fourteen popular places, five are studied in detail. At these places during religious ceremonies like the *urs* (anniversaries) or *melas* (religious fairs), occasionally developed bazaars to support the needs of visitors, Hindus and Muslims both. The above five sacred places of multi-religious nature were studied in 1989 and in 2009; the results show the continuity of tradition of communal harmony and peacemaking.

Keywords: communal harmony, devout Hindu, *mazars*, *melas*, Muslims, *urs*.

¹ As cited in B.N. Pande, 'The Vedant and Sufism: A comparative study', in Syeda Saiyidain Hameed (ed.), *Contemporary Relevance of Sufism* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1993), p. 19.

1. Introduction: Muslims in the Hindu city

According to a recent estimate (2010) there are 1.65 billion adherents of Islam, i.e. 23.9 per cent of the world's population, thus considered the second largest religion. Most Muslims (69.4 per cent) live in Asia, representing 27.4 per cent of the Asian population.² The Muslim community in India is the second largest community in the country, following the Hindu community (80.5 per cent); presently it constitutes 13.4 per cent (161.0 millions), recording decadal growth rate of 29.5 per cent, while it was only 21.3 per cent for the nation during 1991-2001.

Banaras/Varanasi is a peculiar city; it is one of the most ancient living cities. The sentimental feelings that Muslims have for Mecca, Jews for Palestine and Christians for Jerusalem or Rome, Hindus have for this city, which they regard with full respect and reverence. Of course Varanasi city is considered to be the holiest city for the Hindus, it records 33.7 per cent of its population consisting of Muslims (1.5 million in 2010 AD/ CE) who have earned a significant place in the society, culture, landscape and traditional economy of the city. Although Muslim settlement started in the 11th century, the formation of a stable cultural group had begun by the turn of 18th century. The invasions of Mahmud of Ghaznawi in CE 1021-1030 had opened the door to Muslim settlement in Varanasi. The two-fold transformation process that took place in this period was (1) to convert the maximum number of people to Islam, and (2) having converted them, to teach a set of standards that was a suitable compromise between the ideal and the practical. Cruel deeds of Ghaznawi are remembered in the form of plundering, destroying and killing.³ His nephew Salar Masud was only 19 years old when he joined one of the marches, but was killed in the fight. His sacrifice is commemorated in the form of a festival honouring him, i.e. *Ghazi Miyan* ('Salar Masud') *ka Mela*, and celebrated by most of the poor and lower classes of Muslim and alike Hindus too.

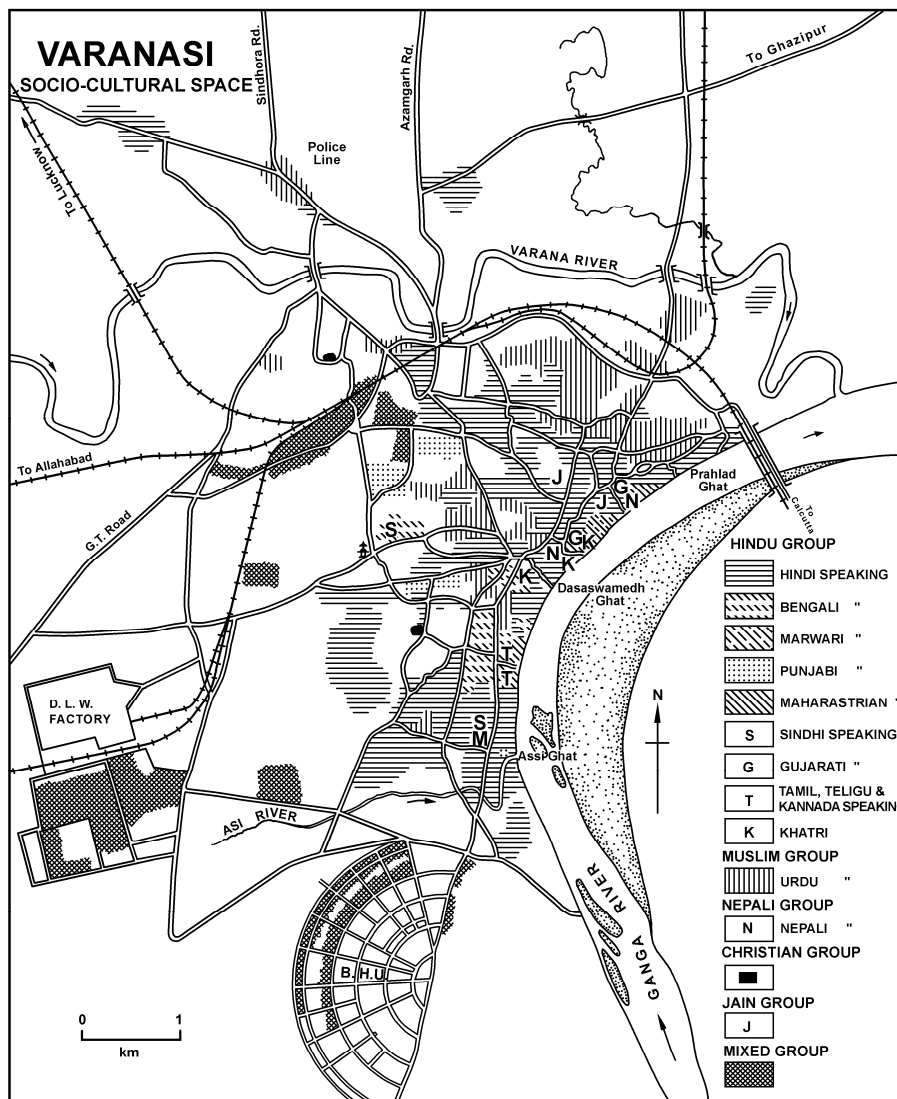
About 90 per cent of Muslims in Varanasi city belongs to the Sunni sect, subdivided into two groups: (i) *old schools*, like Hanafi, Shafai, Malaki, Hambali, and (ii) *new schools*, like Barelwi and Deobandi. The remaining 10 per cent consists of Shiya (consisting of three groups of Athna or A-Sari, Dawoodi Bohra, and Imam Ismaili), Ahmadiya (Qadiani), and Ahle-Hadith (Wahabi). The Wahabi represents a unified group that claims to be strict followers of the *Qura'n* and its tradition (*Shariyat*). All these groups form spatial congregation in the city, of course mostly concentrated in the northeast part (Fig. 7.1). Muslims settled mostly in the suburban areas in the north, corresponding to the present Jaitpura and Adampura wards, where they ruthlessly defaced earlier structures. The early Muslim settlers might have occupied some vacant spaces in the south also, particularly in the present Shiwala muhalla, the Muslim residents of which

² H. Kettani, '2010 World Muslim Population', *Proceedings of the 8th Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities* (Honolulu, Hawaii (15 January 2010) at <http://www.pupr.edu/hkettani/papers/HICAH2010.pdf> (accessed 28 July 2010)

³ K.G.V., Schwerin, 'Saint Worship in Indian Islam: the legend of the Martyr Salar Masud Ghazi', in A. Imtiaz (ed.), *Ritual and Religion among Muslims in India* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1981), p.146.

represent descendants of the dependants and retainers of the Delhi sultanate family.⁴ Over the course of time and with the impact of Hindu influence, a four-tier hierarchical ordering of society developed even among the Muslims: (1) *Ashraf* (higher), like Saiyyad, Sheikh, Mughal and Pathan; (2) *Atahar* (middle), like Rajput, Tyagi and Jat; (3) *Ajlaf* (low), i.e. occupational castes like Ansari (weaver), Darzi (tailor), Kassai (butcher), Mirasi and Arajal; and (4) the *Lowest* like Halalkhor, Lal Bagi and Mehtar.⁵

Fig. 7.1. Varanasi: Social Segregation and Spatial Concentration.



Around 90 per cent of Muslims belong to the weavers' community, known

⁴ Rana P.B. Singh, 'Socio-cultural space of Varanasi', *Ritual Space in India: Studies in Architectural Anthopology*, ed. J. Pieper (London: Art & Archaeology Research Papers, 1980), vol. 17, p.43.

⁵ Rana P.B. Singh and Pravin S. Rana, *Banaras Region: Spiritual and Cultural Guide* (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2002).

as *Ansari/ Julaha* who are involved in making Indian *saris*. It is estimated that there are 50,600 looms in Banaras, employing about 60,000 weavers, concentrated mainly in three areas: Alaipura (18,200), Madanpura (6,000) and Lallapura (3,300).⁶ Ansaris strongly believe that the ‘poverty is the will, and richness is the blessing of the Allah’. They also follow the Five Pillars (laws) of Islam, i.e. *Al-Shahadah* (declaration of faith), *Salah* (five times daily prayers), *Zakat* (welfare contribution), *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah), and *Sawwan* (fasting during Ramadan). Id and Bakra-id are the two main festivals when special prayers (*namaz*) are performed at historical mosques. These festivals connote the concluding day of the period of “fasting”, Ramadan. The birth and death of the prophet Muhammad, Barawafat, is celebrated with great rejoicing (*jasn-ade milaud-ul-naba*); this is mostly a domestic festival and avoided by youngsters. The festival of Muharram to mourn the death of Imam Hassan and Hussein celebrates the first month of the Islamic calendar. On this occasion an image of the mausoleum of Imam Hussein in Karbala, representing Hussain’s tomb made of colourful cloth and papers, wood, metals and other items are installed and finally carried in procession and buried. This unique image is called *Taziya*. On the ninth day of Muharram *Taziyas* are placed at Imamchauks; their number reaches to nearly 450. The three unique *Taziyas* of Banaras are famous all over the world, i.e. *Nagine ki Taziya* (made of diamond), *Tambe ki Taziya* (made of copper-brass), and *Range ki Taziya* (made of solder). On the tenth day these *Taziyas* are carried in procession to the burial places (*karbala*) of Fatman, Lat Bhairav and Shivala.

Table 7.1. Varanasi City: Types of Muslim Sacred Places

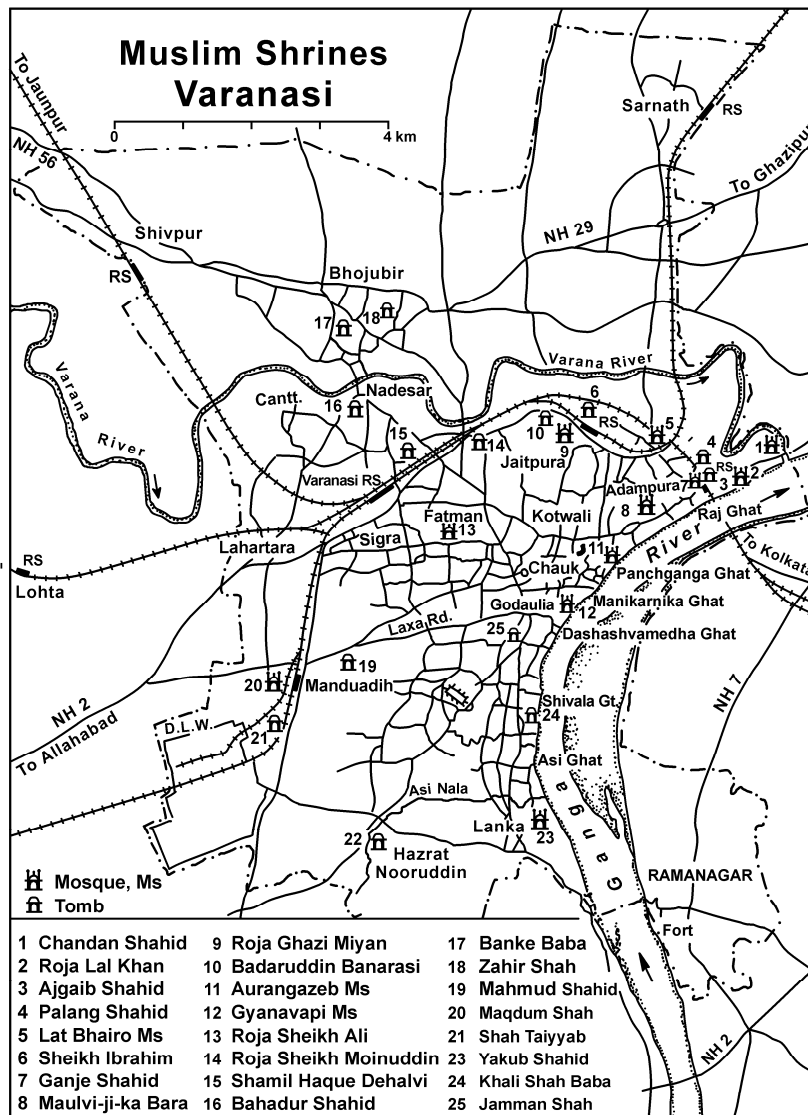
Se	Sacred places	Numbers	%age
1.	Masjid (mosque)	415	29.90
2.	Mazar (martyrs’ tombs)	299	21.54
3.	Imamchauk (the crossing site for <i>tazia</i>)	197	14.19
4.	Takiya (burial place)	88	6.34
5.	Idgah (place for special prayer)	11	0.79
6.	Imambara (the burial site for <i>tazia</i>)	3	0.22
7.	Others	375	27.02
--	TOTAL	1,388	100.00

(Source: Personal Survey, 2000, 2009).

With reference to spatial, functional and numerical perspectives, the Muslim sacredscapes of Banaras may be grouped into seven types (see Table 7.1). The total number of sacred places reaches to 1,388 of which over half falls under the mosque and *mazar* together. There are two types of mosques – the one historical, and the other general. Among the 15 historical mosques the most famous are Dhari Nim Kangoore, Ganje Shahada, Chaukhambha, Bibi Razia, Gyanavapi, Alamgiri Dharahra, Fatman and Abdul Razzaq (Fig. 7.2).

Fig. 7.2. Varanasi: Important Muslim shrines.

⁶ R. K. Dube, ‘Banarasi Sari industry: issue of its dignity’, in, K.K. Mishra (ed.) *Sanmarg Annual, Varanasi Visheshank* (Varanasi: Sanmarg Publication, 1986), p. 201.



[Note: the shrine numbers 1, 8, 9, 20, 23 are illustrated as case studies].

Almost all the historical mosques were built using the debris of Hindu temples demolished by the Muslim invaders or rulers. Ahmad Niyaltgin invaded the city in 1033, and demolished the Vishnu temple of Hindus and in 1071 the debris was used to build the Dhai Nim Kangoore mosque, the oldest and most distinct. The distribution of *mazars* and mosques with reference to their succession in history clearly indicate that during the period of 14th to 18th centuries around forty per cent, and during the period of 18th to the 20th centuries about 30 per cent of these structures were built (see Table 7.2).

Varanasi is not only famous for the separate identity of both Hindus and Muslims, but also for cultural integration through festivals at specific sacred spaces (e.g. *mazars*, mosque), and participation in the procession of *urs/mela* at different occasions. Hindus' participation in such Muslims fairs and festivals creates brotherhood at the local/*muhalla* level. During surveying at some of the selected shrines, it is found that Hindus from different groups also attend the

urs/fairs at selected and notable shrines. Of course there is rarely strong social assimilation among the Hindus and Muslims in the city, many Hindus have accepted some of the life-style of Muslims in daily life and likewise Muslims too. They follow some styles of expressing respects (*tahzib*) from the Muslims together with occupation and food items.

Table 7.2. Varanasi City: Historical distribution of Mazars and Mosques

Se	Period, <i>hijri</i>	Period ca CE	M ₁	M ₂	Total	%age
1.	before 400	before 1009	1	1	2	0.28
2.	400-600	1009-1203	46	22	68	9.52
3.	600-800	1203-1397	59	65	124	17.37
4.	800-1000	1397-1591	23	102	125	17.51
5.	1000-1200	1591-1786	30	132	162	22.69
6.	1200-1400	1786-1979	134	84	218	30.53
7.	after 1400	after 1979	6	9	15	2.10
--	Total	all	299	415	714	100.00

(Source: Personal survey 2000, 2009, and Nomani 1952 and 1968).

M₁ Mazar; M₂ Mosque.

[Note: Islamic year, *hijri*, is less 578 yeas to the Gregorian year AD/ CE].

A large gathering on both sides of the roads, around such *urs/fairs*, promotes socio-cultural interaction among the people, practising rituals end religious deeds together and maintaining mutual cohesiveness. With an aim to highlight the total perspective of multi-religion pilgrimages through Muslim shrines, in this essay through participatory observation emphasis has been laid on the distribution, historical background, spatial structure of the shrines, special happenings associated with shrines, consensus and conflict related with shrines, and finally searching grounds for the making of communal harmony and mutual integration, and also perception of the Varanasi and the Ganga river among the Muslims.

One of the main tasks of cultural geography and geography of religion is concerned with ceremonial activities that refer to sacrality of place and 'special' power manifested there in a span of time, and used for solace and soul healing. There are 20 such Muslims' sacred places in Banaras, all representing tombs of saints (*pirs, auliyas*), and are popularly visited for healing and receiving blessings (*duakhani*). They are distributed in all the corners of the city, of course predominantly surrounded by Muslims, but Hindus also live in the vicinity. The nearness to settlement and daily interaction promotes reciprocal impacts and mutual cohesiveness, known as brotherhood, *bhaichara*.⁷ It is believed that such sites have the mystic power to get relief from endogenous madness, which occurs because of excessive worry, anxiety, or by some physical illness, as well as disorders caused by demonic spirits.⁸

Of these, for the detailed investigation the five selected shrines of multi-religion visitation (pilgrimages) are: Saiyyad Salar Masud Ghazi known as Ghazi

⁷ Vasanthi Raman, *The Warp and the Wept: Community and Gender Identity among Banaras Weavers* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2009).

⁸ Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), p. 97.

Miyan, Maqdam Shah, Chandan Shahid, Maulvi ji Ka Bara, and Yakub Shahid (Fig. 7.2), distributed in different parts of the city. Visitors take part during *urs* (the death anniversary of the man entombed therein) *mela* from the inner and outer sides of the city. The *urs* is parallel to the Hindu practice of annual celebrations at local shrines, called *shringar*. In recent years, *urs* have been expanding manifold in number, municipality of locales, sound, dazzle, and effect, parallel to their contemporary Hindu *shringars*.⁹ Of course such expansions are a result of making identity stronger through shows; they also promote communal harmony through participation of adherents from other religions, mostly Hindus. Obviously, “every deity and shrine must always have its anniversary, thus “increase” means that the annual celebrations are more noticeable now: bigger, brighter, louder, and for more public than before”.¹⁰ Such celebrations promote pilgrimages on a local scale in a more open manner having beautiful blending of sacred and profane and replicated image that reflects the locality into universality.

2. Ghazi Miyan

The Indo-Islamic cult of Ghazi Miyan, originally Ghazi Saiyyad Salar Masud (1015-1034), a grandson of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi, is representative of a religious syncretism, still prevalent among both Hindus (of course low castes) and Muslims, that has become a source of surprise and embarrassment to (especially modernists of) both the high traditions. Anthropologists find it easy to pose as champions of an Indian folk religion that would conform neither to the Brahmanical nor to the Quranic models: the ideal hunting ground for leftist Indian intellectuals in search of a ‘subaltern’ (pre-) consciousness that would have resisted domination by both church and state. Of course Ghazi Miyan is absent from standard chronological histories of the Sultan of Ghazni and other official histories, Masud Ghazi, having various appellations like Ghazi Miyan, Bade Miyan, or Ghazi Dulha (lit. Hindi Ghazi bridegroom) has none the less overwhelming popular presence.¹¹ The cult and annual celebration on a grand scale of adherents and ‘commoners’ to his main tomb at Bahraich, or spatially manifested tomb in Banaras, has remained an annual affair even since Ibn Battuta (1304-1369), one of the greatest travellers of medieval period, visited the shrine in Barhaich in 1341 and found it too crowded for any sort of comfort. In fact, the foundation of Islam in Banaras was laid by many of the followers of Ghazi Miyan.¹²

The annual marriage festival of Ghazi Miyan culminated in the breaking not only of caste barriers, but even of religious barriers between Hindus and their Muslim neighbours. Surely, such blatant transgression of the law, the (temporary)

⁹ Nita Kumar, ‘Work and Leisure in the Formation of Identity: Muslim Weavers in a Hindu City’, in S.B. Freitag (ed.), *Culture and Power in Banaras* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 164.

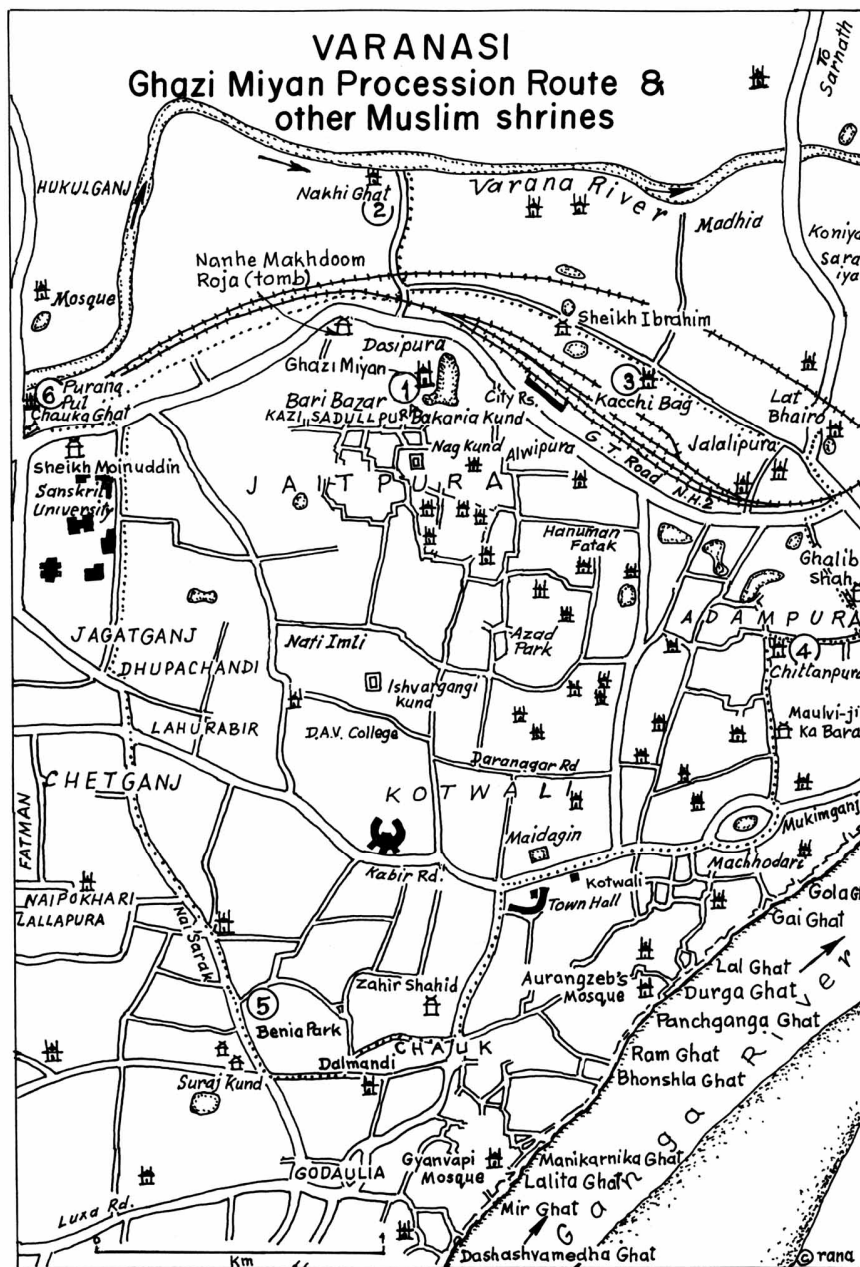
¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Partha Chatterjee and Arjan Ghosh (eds.) *History and the Present* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2004), p. 32.

¹² Nita Kumar, ‘The Mazars of Banaras: A New Perspective on the City’s sacred Geography’, *The National Geographical Journal of India*, 33/3 (1987): p. 264.

dissolution of both *shariat* and *dharma* in an atmosphere of general licence and promiscuity, could hardly constitute the true end of Islam nor of Hinduism, nor of any other religious tradition, at least as observed and understood by the majority of its adherents!¹³

Fig. 7.3. Ghazi Miyan procession route, and other Muslim shrines



The conversion of low-caste Hindus was generally not a self-conscious, sudden and total change of belief, but a gradual and still continuing process of

¹³ Sunthar Visuvalingam, 'Between Mecca and Banaras: Towards an Acculturation Model of Hindu-Muslim relations', *Islam and the Modern Age*, 24/1 (1992): pp. 20-21.

Islamic acculturation in which the syncretising adhesion to the tomb of *pirs* like Ghazi Miyan acted as a catalyst.¹⁴ Like Bijapur, in Banaras the masses of down-trodden community Julahas (*Ansaris*) were converted into Sunnism during the late Mughal rule, but they carried the tradition of celebrating the *mela* of Ghazi Miyan which has served the purpose of links to the traditional and adopted cultural systems; of course they also visit the original *mazar* at Bahraich.

The tradition and ways of worshipping Ghazi Miyan are passed from one generation to another including the hereditary overseers, the *khuddam*, serving at the shrine and folk singers venerating his spiritual powers. The invasions of Mahmud Ghaznavi or Ghazni are well known, for plundering, destroying and killings.¹⁵ His nephew Salar was only 16 years old when he joined one of these expeditions and came to India passing through Meerut, Kannauj and Malihabad, and further arrived in the township of Satrikh, where he stayed for a long time with his father. In the later part of his life he settled in Bahraich and died there. His grave was thereafter visited and worshipped as that of the pre-most martyr of the region. After the passage of time his tomb became a site of pilgrimage and healing. And further this tradition has been spatially superimposed in many places, including Banaras, which was a good retreat for such introduction. Thus, the worship of Ghazi Miyan became one of the chief festivities of Banaras for the majority of labour-class Muslims (prominently Julahas) and their friendly lower classes of Hindus.¹⁶

The *mela* (fair) of Ghazi Miyan is held for a week during the Hindu month of Jyeshtha (May-June) in the neighbourhood of the same name. The *mela* starts on the first Sunday of the solar month of Jyeshtha (falling between 14th and 21st May) at the tomb of Ghazi Miyan (in Bari Bazaar, near Bakaria Kund) and is shifted to a nearby location every evening:

“On Monday at Nakkhi Ghat, on Tuesday at Kachhi Bagh, on Wednesday at Chhitanpura, on Thursday at Benia Bagh and on Friday at the Purana Pul, the domed mausoleum in the Salarpur *muhalla*, within the same (Jaitpura) quarter, which houses (the replica of) his “tomb” at whose head is likewise a high pillar”.¹⁷

In this way the whole week becomes a ‘scenic landscape’ (see Fig. 7.3).¹⁸ At the Bakaria Kund, to the west on a hillock are the tombs of other noble men who came with Saiyyad Salar Masud, viz. Shah Qutb Ali Banarasi, Shah Sabir Ali Banarasi and Hazrat Malik Mohammad Baqr himself.¹⁹

In India (at the patron site of Bahraich) there is a “massive participation of Hindus in the offerings to the tomb and to the pole, symbols which they could

¹⁴ Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 173, 296, 309-313.

¹⁵ Schwerin, ‘Saint Worship in Indian Islam’, p. 146.

¹⁶ Kuber Nath Sukul, *Varanasi Down the Ages*, (Patna: K.N. Sukul Publisher, 1974), p. 263.

¹⁷ Sunthar Visuvalingam, and Elizabeth Charlier-Visuvalingam, ‘Bhairava in Banaras: Negotiating sacred space and religious identity’, in M. Gaenszle and J. Gengnagel (eds), *Visualised Space in Banaras: Images, Maps, and the Practice of Representations* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, & New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 111.

¹⁸ Abdul Bismillah, *Jhini Jhini Bini Chadaria (The Threadbare Woven Shawl)* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1986) p. 61.

¹⁹ A. S. Nomani, *Tarikh Asar-e-Banaras*, (Banaras: Maktabe Nadawatal Maurrif, 1968), p. 63.

easily assimilate to the material supports of their gods”.²⁰ Crooke (1896) had already suggested an original sun cult with a cosmogonic marriage²¹, and Gaborieau adds that the pole itself, “in the rites meant to obtain rain, appears as a sort of phallic symbol uniting heaven and earth”.²² Ghazi Miyan, the martyred youth, is not just the lord of rain and the harvests; his tomb dispenses all boons, particularly sons to the childless. It is thus not so much the martyr’s union with Allah that is the popular focus of the Muslim cult, but rather the regenerative forces unleashed by his tragic marriage, which begins to be celebrated in India even two to three days before the Sunday festival. A bed, a couch and other accessories are sent to the tomb in the belief that Ghazi Miyan annually re-enacts his wedding. He is even said to have been wearing his wedding robes when he was struck down. The men call him ‘the delight of the fiancé’ (*gajna dulha*) and the women call him ‘Salar the libertine’ (*salar chinali*). Gaborieau further narrates that “The women who enter the tomb fall down in a faint believing that the saint has sucked them; and the water pressed out from the under-garment (*lungi*) of the saint is distributed to the faithful as a sign of fertility”.²³

Table 7.3: Mela of Ghazi Miyan: Types of Shops.

Se	Types of Shop	1989		2009	
		H	M	H	M
1.	Pakauri (deep fried gram flour and vegetables)	4	12	6	18
2.	Sharbat (soft drink)	8	15	7	10
3.	Toys	4	2	7	5
4.	Kulfi (mould ice-cream)	2	-	3	1
5.	Nan-Khatai (rice flour sweet)	5	8	3	3
6.	Biscuits	1	2	2	4
7.	Ice-Cream	2	1	4	6
8.	Fruit	2	2	3	6
9.	Balloons	8	8	5	9
10.	Pan (betel leaf & lime)	8	9	6	8
11.	Tea	4	2	5	4
12.	Sweet/hot Chat	-	2	2	5
13.	Offering goods for rituals	3	2	2	6
14.	Sewada (salty cookie)	2	2	3	2
15.	Flower	1	1	2	1
16.	Wooden goods	1	2	2	2
--	Total	55	70	62	90

(Source: Personal Surveys, 1989, 2009). H Hindu; M, Muslim.

As preparatory rites for the *mela* at Ghazi Miyan’s tomb, the activities

²⁰ M. Gaborieau, ‘The Cult of Saint among the Muslims of Nepal and North India’, in S. Wilson (ed.) *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 305.

²¹ William Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, (2 vols., Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1896), vol. 1, p. 207.

²² Gaborieau, ‘The Cult of Saint’, p. 303.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

performed include decoration with electricity, flower garland, spraying scented water around the grave, replacing the old sacred shawl and washing the inner and outer side of the *mazar*. The procession of *Gagar* (a group of Muslim devotees carrying holy water and flower) of different localities and different groups come to the tomb. Hindus also offer the sacred shawl, sweets, and flowers after *Magarib namaz* (sun-set prayer). *Dua* (asking blessing) and *fatiha* (prayer) offered by the visitors (Hindu and Muslim) and offered *tabarrukh* (sweets distributed among attendants). After *Isha namaz* (night prayer) *mahfil-e-sama* (performance assembly) or *qawwali* (devotional singing) begins with full devotion. This fair is also known for “a great deal of *dafali*-music, which send some women into hysterical trance and ecstasy and they make prophecies and give blessings to persons, who try to propitiate them at the time”.²⁴

Although, the cultural programme at the tomb is performed under the supervision of policemen and volunteers, yet sometimes some anti-social elements enter the *mela* and try to disturb the harmonious environment, but mostly they fail. The structure of shop-keepers during the annual fair indicates participation of Hindus (mostly of low castes) and Muslims both, however since the last survey made the ratio of Hindu sharing fell down slightly from 44.0 in 1989 to 40.8 per cent in 2009 (see Table 7.3), indicating consistency and maintenance of the tradition.

3. Maqдум Shah

The ancestry of Maqдум Shah Tayyab may be traced back to centuries in Arabia. As *pir* he belonged to the Chisti Silsila. Early Chisti Sufi and their tombs (*dargahs*), located in different towns and cities in north India, belong mostly to the sixteenth century.²⁵ The oldest *dargahs* are those of Sheikh Muinuddin Chisti, respectfully called Khwaja Gharib Nawaz (1141-1230), the founder of the Chisti Silsila (order) in India; his tomb lies in Ajmer. His Khalifa (spiritual successor), Sheikh Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, popularly known as Kutb Saheb (1173-1235), was buried in Delhi, known as the second oldest *dargah*. As for the two remaining Chisti *dargahs*, they belong to Shaikh Hamiduddin Sufi Nagauri to whom his *pir* (religious preceptor), Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti had posted in Nagpur (died in 1276), and the other to Sheikh Fariduddin Masud Ganj-i-shakar, popularly known as Baba Farid (1173-1266); his *dargah* is located in Pakpattan in Pakistan. That's how Chisti silsila has spread throughout India. Maqдум Shah was also associated as one of the *pirs* to Chisti silsila. He loved peace and solitude and choose to settle in Manduadih for a long time; he also lived in the ruins of the old fort at the confluence of the Ganga and the Varana rivers (Raj Ghat), where he initiated one of his famous *murids* (spiritual disciples), named Hazrat Khwaja Mohammad Tahir Quddussira, whose father was Majid Sheikh Chanda (his tomb called Chandan Shahid).²⁶ Many of his followers also settled down around the place called Shariatabad, a village by that name still exists across the Varana river; when he died there his body brought to Manduadih and buried there.

²⁴ Sukul, *Varanasi*, p. 263.

²⁵ Kumar, 'The Mazars of Banaras', pp. 267-268.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

Many legends and stories people refer to are related to Maqdam Shah, which seek to testify his saintliness and spiritual power (*ruhani taqt*). It is believed that he lived during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605) and was declaredly hostile like a “*kafir*” (non-Muslim) to Badshah (king). He opposed local practices which had become popular such as playing the *nakkara* (mini drum) during anniversary celebrations (*urs*). Of course, earlier he was inclined towards the experience of *mahfil-e-ama*, procession during the rendering of *qawwali* (group singing). None of his followers, it is said, participates in *sama* or listens to *qawwali* to this day.²⁷ However, in a contemporary scenario the things are changing. Maqdam Shah also went to pray every *Juma* (Friday) *namaz* in Gyanvapi (Jnanavapi) mosque, which was the centre of *Din-e-ilahi* during Akbar’s reign.

The surrounded platform of this *mazar* was built successively by his *murids* (disciples), and the walls and dome by successive *murids*. Today the *mazar* consists of a vast compound, with an imposing building in the middle and a mosque to its one side, originally built in 1717 (1219 *hijri*) and reconstructed and repaired in 1977. To the west of the old pond that lies just outside the compound is another enclosure with the tombs of many famous and respected ancestors of his family where there also exist some burial spots of disciples. Mutawwali and visitors rooms are built just near the mosque, on the north side of the campus of *dargah*. There exists open space in the front and back side of the *mazar*, which is used for assembly and peoples’ gathering during *urs* and fairs.

Table 7.4: Mela of Maqdam Shah: Types of Shops.

Se	Types of Shop	1989		2009	
		H	M	H	M
1.	Pakauri (deep friend gram flour and vegetables)	--	7	1	11
2.	Sharbat (soft drink)	2	4	3	6
3.	Toys	3	1	5	3
4.	Bisatbana (trinkets & cloth shop)	4	3	5	6
5.	Fruit	3	--	4	3
6.	Flower	2	--	3	2
7.	Offering goods for rituals	1	3	2	8
8.	Mud/silt goods	4	--	6	3
9.	Pan (betel leaf & lime)	1	2	3	5
10.	Tea	--	5	2	9
Total		20	25	34	56

(Source: Personal Surveys, 1989, 2009). H, Hindu; M, Muslim.

The *mela* is held on every year in April/May, and at the same site *urs* of Shah Tayyab Banarasi is celebrated annually on the 7th of Sha-awwal. All religious rituals like cleansing of *mazar*, decoration, replacing the old shawl, offering and praying *fatiha* by *murids* and participants, should be completed before the start of *mahfil-e-sama*. A special *mela* at this *mazar* is held on Diwali when a number of men and women come to drink ‘Bhela’ for curing several

²⁷ A.S. Nomani, *Tazkara Mashaikh Banaras* (Banaras, Akram Hussein Press, 1952.)

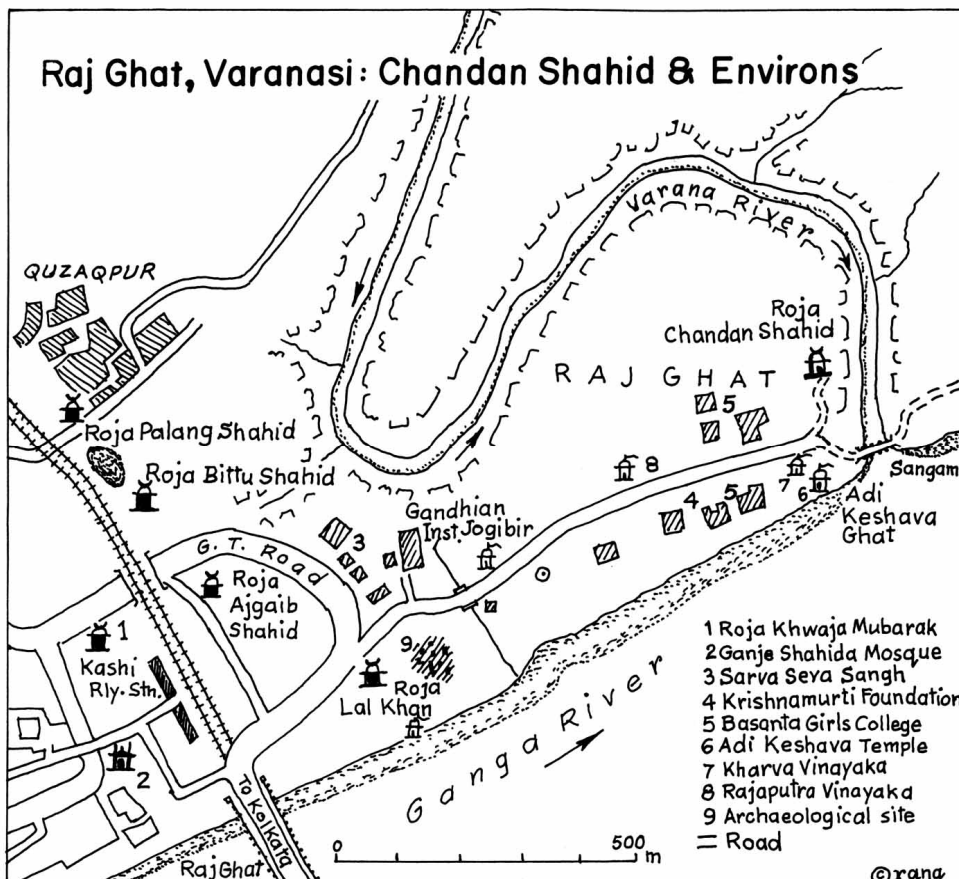
diseases like tuberculosis, asthma and related ones. The rituals are performed till the sun rise. Here another popular multi-religious *mela* is also held on every Thursday throughout the month of Chaitra (March/April). The performance of *mela* starts in the afternoon and continues up to about 10'o clock in the evening.

The structure of shopkeepers during the annual fair indicates the participation of Hindus and Muslims both, however since the last survey made the ratio of Hindu sharing fell down from 44.4 in 1989 to 37.8 per cent in 2009 (see Table 7.4).

4. Chandan Shahid

The two saintly martyrs, Chandan (Majid Sheikh Chanda) and Yakub were special *murids* (disciples) of Hazrat Maqdam Shah Tayyab Banarasi and are famous among Banaras *shahids* (martyrs of Islam) for healing and shaman. Many folktales appear about both of them that refer to their ancestry and mystical power. Sheikh Chanda's son Hazrat Khwaja Mohammad Tahir Quddussira was also a special *murid* of Maqdam Shah Tayyab.²⁸

Fig. 7.4. Raj Ghat, Varanasi: Chandan Shahid and Environs.



The *mela* of Chandan Shahid is also popular among the Julahas and held every year on Thursday in the Hindu month of Chaitra (March-April). The tomb

²⁸ Kumar, 'The Mazars of Banaras', p. 268.

of Chandan Shahid exists near the confluence of the Ganga and the Varana, and is close by to Adi Keshava temple (Fig. 7.4). Credit needs to be given to the Muslims of India for establishing so many *shahids* in the soil of this country, who project their mystic power to the common men on each Thursday; Chandan Shahid is one of them.²⁹ The tomb and its area are spread over a vast open space occupied with green thorny bushes and trees.

The *urs* of Chandan Shahid falls on 16th Shoberat. A number of *murids* and *zayarin*, both Hindus and Muslims, come and offer new shawls to the tomb and also take an active part in *mahfil-e-sama*. The male *qawwals* sing religious songs in honour of various saints and *pirs*. Faith healers from nearby districts come with a belief that by performing rituals every year, they can revive and make their possessed spiritual power stronger. Miraculous plays are also important at these *mazars*. Mutawwali and Maulvi sometimes practise exorcism, especially to get relief from spirit possession. These spirits are called as *jin* (*shaitan*) and they are relieved by putting on protective armlets (*taviz*). The structure of shop-keepers during the annual fair indicates the participation of Hindus and Muslims both, however since the last survey made the ratio of Hindu sharing fell down slightly from 46.2 in 1989 to 45.2 per cent in 2009 (see Table 7.5), indicating consistency and maintenance of the tradition and also negligible influence of Hindu-Muslim conflicts.

Table 7.5. Chandan Shahid: Types of Shops.

Se	Types of Shop	1989		2009	
		H	M	H	M
1.	Pakauri (deep fried gram flour and vegetables)	--	10	1	15
2.	Sharbat (soft drink)	2	1	2	2
3.	Toys	1	1	3	2
4.	Kulfi (mould ice-cream)	3	2	5	3
5.	Nan-Khatai (rice flour sweet)	4	--	6	1
6.	Biscuits	2	2	3	4
7.	Ice-Cream	1	1	3	2
8.	Fruit	2	--	4	1
9.	Balloons	--	2	1	4
10.	Pan (betel leaf & lime)	1	--	2	1
11.	Tea	2	4	4	7
12.	Sweet/hot Chat	2	--	4	2
13.	Offering goods for rituals	---	4	1	9
14.	Sewada (salty cookie)	1	--	2	1
15.	Flower	2	--	4	1
16.	Petha (white gourd sweet)	1	1	2	2
---	Total	24	28	47	57

(Source: Personal Surveys, 1989, 2009). H, Hindu; M, Muslim.

5. Maulvi Ji Ka Bara

Equally popular for the similar reasons is the *mazar* of Hazrat Qutub Zuman

²⁹ Bismillah, *Jhini*, p. 46.

Maulana Shah Saiyyad Mohammad Waris Rasoolnuma (1087-1166 hijri), known as 'Maulvi Ji Ka Bara' that lies within the densely packed *muhalla* of Koyla Bazar in Adampura ward. This *bara* is also famous for its old traditions and practices. The anniversary celebration of Qutub Shah Saiyyad at Maulvi Ji Ka Bara is held on the 12th to the 14th Rabi-ussani and is celebrated on a magnificent scale.³⁰ Visitors from local neighbourhoods come with 'gagar' (holy water and flower); after *Maghrib namaz* and offering Gagar with *tabarrukh* (offering and distribution of food) they pray to get their vow fulfilled. Traditionally, the pattern of celebration consists of *gusal* (cleansing the tomb with perfume, rose-water and sandal paste, followed up by replacing old shawls with new ones). After praying the *Isa namaz* cultural programmes are performed until the *Fajr namaz*.

Table 7.6. Qutub Shah (Maulvi Ji Ka Bara): Frequency of shops.

Se.	Types of Shops	1989		2009	
		H	M	H	M
1.	Pakauri (deep friend gram flour and vegetables)	-	7	1	10
2.	Sharbat (soft drink)	1	6	3	9
3.	Toys	3	-	2	3
4.	Flower/Sweet	1	1	2	4
5.	Bisatbana (trinkets & cloth shop)	1	1	1	3
6.	Pan (betel leaf & lime)	5	2	6	4
7.	Tea	3	1	4	6
8.	Offering goods	-	2	-	6
--	Total	14	20	19	45

(Source: Personal Surveys, 1989, 2009). H, Hindu; M, Muslim.

Of course, the structure of shop-keepers during the annual fair indicate participation of Hindus and Muslims both, however since the last survey made the ratio of Hindu sharing fell down rapidly from 41.2 in 1989 to 27.4 per cent in 2009 (see Table 7.6), clearly indicating a rising gap between Hindus and Muslim, especially after 1992 (Ayodhya incidence).

6. Yakub Shahid

Yakub Shahid was also related to the ancestry of Chandan Shahid, that is how in respect of tradition, identity, legend, and celebration his tomb also records similar happenings. This site is located in Nagwa, the southern part of Banaras, near the Asi drain, consisting of a sizeable compound for religious and cultural festivities. Of course the outer and inner structures of the *mazar* are messy and complex; there are several graves in the compound of the *mazar*, and also attached is a mosque. The *urs* day falls as on 6 or 7 Shawwal, the month of Id. Most of the ritual performances are similar to the *mazars* described earlier.

The structure of shop-keepers during the annual fair indicates the participation of Hindus and Muslims both, however since the last survey made the

³⁰ Kumar, 'The Mazars of Banaras', p. 269.

ratio of Hindu sharing fell down rapidly from 51.6 in 1989 to 31.7 per cent in 2009 (see Table 7.7), clearly indicating again a rising gap between Hindus and Muslim, especially after 1992 (Ayodhya incidence), when Hindu consciousness and forces of fundamentalism became successful at least in the areas dominated by the influence of conservative Hindus and political groups like BJP as in the neighbourhood of Nagwa.

Table 7.7. Mela of Yakub Shahid: Frequency of shops.

Se	Types of Shop	1989		2009	
		H	M	H	M
1.	Pakauri (deep fried gram flour and vegetables)	-	6	1	9
2.	Sharbat (soft drink)	4	2	3	5
3.	Sweet	1	-	2	2
4.	Flower	1	-	1	3
5.	Offering goods for rituals	-	2	1	7
6.	Biscuits	6	-	4	3
7.	Bisatbana (trinkets & cloth shop)	-	1	-	3
8.	Tea	3	2	4	6
9.	Pan (betel leaf & lime)	1	2	3	3
--	Total	16	15	19	41

(Source: Personal Surveys, 1989, 2009).

8. Salient characteristics of *dargahs* (martyrs' tombs): sites of pluralism

Hindu tradition and Islam might at a first glance seem very different from each other, but they have many things in common in theology, practice and religious reciprocity, especially in the context of Sufi shrines and martyrs' tombs, the places of faith healing. Similarly the mystical branches, like the *bhakti* movement and Sufism came closer to each other and thus learnt and influenced each other.³¹ The Sufi Jalalalludin Rumi (1207-1273) in the thirteenth century discussed the different ways verses from the *Qur'an* can be interpreted in favour of service to god and to the humanity, for example the verse 'And We made the House to be a place of visitation for the people, and a sanctuary' (2: 125), in other words: "Make of the place where Abraham stood to pray your place of prayer".³² Rumi does not interpret the house in the verse to be the Ka'ba in Mecca, but applies a spiritual interpretation instead. The Sufis say that 'it refers to our inner world [...that] 'provides a sanctuary where we can commune with him in peace and security'.³³

Islamic folk religion in India has been under the influence of pre-Islamic and Hindu traditions; according to Schwerin saint worship and pilgrimage to *shahids' mazars* (martyrs' tombs) are the exemplary examples of such

³¹ K. Lindahl, *Is the Mazar a Meeting Place for Multi-culture?: A Study of Yakub Shahid Mazar*, <http://kau.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:323694> (accessed 28 July 2010).

³² J. Baldock, *The Essence of Sufism* (London: Arcturus, 2004), p. 33.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

manifestation influence. Hero worship, or ancestor worship, was practised by Arabic tribes and after Islamisation it was transformed into saint worship of Sufi teachers. The people who 'fought to spread the creed, the so-called *shahids* or martyrs, are also enlisted among the saints'.³⁴

Every shrine has some distinct manifested power and is evolved within a particular physical environment, and after passage of time mythologies and rituals are manifested on the line of its functioning and glorification, thus emerges a distinct *faithscape*, which refers to a form of religious landscape. The spatial structure of the five selected shrines shows the similar visual impression, which in a broader perspective proves a set of 'formation, transformation, and eternal mind's eternal recreation'.³⁵ All these shrines create a sense of assimilation and diffusion of culture and tradition; they also provide the ground for communication of the cosmic reality and human experiences, and ultimately humans' quest for understanding the wholeness of self and its harmony.

It is obvious from the statistics (see Tables 7.3–7.7, 7.8) that *pakauri/pakora* is more popular in the *melas*; it is made of meat and gram-powder, onion and potato fried in deep vegetable or mustard oil. The *mazars* are integrating places for Hindus and Muslims both, where a feeling of communal inclusion/integration is generated, since both Hindus and Muslims visit the same *dargahs* (tombs) of the saints, and most of the times, their motives reciprocate within the common arena of receiving blessings (*duakhani*). This tradition can be traced back to the Mughul emperor Akbar (1556-1605) who was known for visiting shrines and graves of Hindu saints, and was credited to introduce a path of syncretism among the various paths called *Din-e-ilahi*. The interaction between the two traditions, i.e. Hindu tradition (esp. *bhakti*, and *nirguna*) and Islam (esp. Sufi) has encouraged cultural harmony and co-sharing of religious performances that ultimately helped to make an acculturated pattern of mosaic spaces and places where pilgrimages and auspicious visitation (*ziyarat*) are accepted as the main force.³⁶

The surroundings of these tombs provide a sense of understanding and learning *adab* (humbleness) and *tahjeeb* (respectful gestures) and their use in life. The spatial structure of tombs consists of three parts: the circulatory path; outer side; and inner side. The tombs are surrounded by open space, used for celebration of anniversary festivities like *urs/fairs*. The residences of Mutawwali (priest and care taker) of the tombs, including sometimes the management committee are attached to the *mazar*, mostly on the western side. The physical structure of these *mazars* commonly consists of a tomb in an enclosure which may or may not have a roof, with attached open land if the *mazar* exists on the outskirts of the city, however not having even a metre of extra space near or surrounding the ones in the middle of the congested neighbourhoods and bazaars.³⁷ The *mazars* of

³⁴ Schwerin, 'Saint Worship in Indian Islam', p. 143.

³⁵ See Carl G. Jung, *Mandala Symbolism*. (a collection of three works), translated by R.F.C. Hull (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. v.

³⁶ *Culture and Power in Banaras*, ed. S.B. Freitag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 9.

³⁷ Nita Kumar, *The Artisan of Banaras: Popular Culture and Identity, 1880-1986* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 76.

Maqdam Shah and Chandan Shahid exemplify the sites with open spaces, while the other three studies are examples of congested spaces. Others *mazars* in the city are also important for Hindu-Muslim participation on the occasion of *urs* and fairs.

Of course these *mela* at martyrs' tombs are overall dominated by Muslims, however, Hindus have an important role in each and every festivity and also in giving financial donations to organise the *melas*. The reasons behind this mixing include their mutual cohesiveness from living in the same neighbourhood, preponderance of the low caste community (both Muslim and Hindus), who feel more safer to maintain companionship, wherein such *melas* provide an opportunity for amusement, recreation, religious satisfaction and also for purchasing kitchen utensils. Of course, most of the visitors are from the city and city-periphery; a good mass of visitors from neighbouring cities like Jaunpur, Ghazipur, Azamgarh, Mau and Mirzapur also attend; obviously, a noticeable share of population among these cities belongs to Muslims. They come with family including male, female and children. Naturally such occasions give an opportunity for soul healing, assimilation and reviving old relations, entertainment and also helping young children to learn the traditions that the elders possessed and this is the occasion to pass on these to the young successors.

The surveys done in 1989 and 2009, referred to a period of 20 years. This longitudinal study provides a scale to understand the impact of change and modernity. Obviously, the scale of magnitudes expanded drastically, but the essence, ways, people's faith and images, ritual performances and special side-shows continued to be in the same manner since the inception of these *mazars*. It is interesting to know why Hindus and Muslims both visit the *mazar*. The simple reason has been the contiguity of tradition and receiving of merits, especially getting relief from the unidentified diseases related to spirit possession, and also issues related to unemployment, social-defame, marriage, having sons, etc. People believe that the miraculous blessings from the *pirs* and *mutawwali*, would certainly give them relief from such sufferings. However many of the visitors attend these fairs for entertainment; of course such visitors disturb the serenity, piousness and harmonious environment of the peace and inherent spirit.

The total number of devout visitors (*zayarin*) altogether at the five *melas* reached over 6000 in 1989, and over 9,500 in 2009, recording a growth of 57.2 percent (see Table 7.8). In 1989 the share of Hindu visitors was 23.0 per cent that fell down to 20.8 per cent in 2009. The variation of Hindu sharing is a subject of place-affinity and the local socio-cultural environment.

There is an orthodox way of celebrating the *urs*, i.e. pre-eminently the grave is bathed and sprinkled with rose water (*kewrapani*) and perfume, and old covering shawls on the tomb (*chadars*) are replaced by new ones, followed with accompanying sanctioned activities like *Halqii* (calling out the name of Allah), *qurankhani* (reading the *Qura'n*), *tabarrukh* (the offering and distribution of food), *fatiha* (praying), *nat* and *qawwali* (verses set to music).³⁸

Sacred happenings at martyrs' tombs and Sufi shrines help visitors in the realisation of their divine association with the Supreme Being — ultimately the Almighty (*Allah*). In all religions, cultural and folk traditions prescribe and

³⁸ Kumar, 'Work and Leisure', p. 164

integrate the ways and steps concerning festivities and rituals in terms of sacrality of space, time, and functions; thus emerges a place-ballet in geographic space, exposed in terms of assimilation of culture and landscape.

Table 7.8: Visitors to *melas* (approx.) on *urs*, the main day: Hindu-Muslim participation

Se	Mela	1989			2009		
		H	M	Total	H	M	Total
1.	Ghazi Miyan	531	893	1,424	726	1,589	2,315
2.	Maqdam Shah	331	1,013	1,344	485	1,521	2,006
3.	Chandan Shahid	225	1,021	1,246	392	1,574	1,966
4.	Maukvi Ka Bara	209	937	1,146	273	1,589	1,862
5.	Yakub Shahid	121	875	996	139	1,388	1,527
---	TOTAL	1,417	4,739	6,156	2,015	7,661	9,676

(Source: Personal Surveys, 1989, 2009). H, Hindu; M, Muslim.

It has been recently been observed that ‘almost all religious and economic Muslim elites in Banaras frown upon these rituals’ but they are still popular. The rich and influential people explain the popularity with poverty and lack of education, which make people ‘susceptible to the suspect influences of Hinduism’.³⁹ It is also noted that there appears a tension between high and low which reflects an important truth about religion in general, and Banarasi Muslims, and that is that no religion is monolithic.⁴⁰ A common misconception is to treat Muslims as a monolithic entity. The *Qura’n* urges Muslims to be a global community, the *umma*. The impression of monolithism is reinforced by Western campaigns aimed at the demonisation of Islam where violent groups are equated with the entire Muslim community.⁴¹ As both Chirico and Gill explain, the identity of a Muslim in India cannot only be explained as Muslim. Everyone is first of all an individual with multiple identities; religion is only one of those identities. The individual is the unit of a family, a part of a community, and a member of the global *umma*, and then a follower of Islam too.⁴² In the case of Banaras it is rightly said that “in Banaras, Muslims do not self-identify primarily as Muslims, but first by their identity as *ansari*, then as residence of a particular neighbourhood, then as Banarasi. Their religion dwells within these identities. [...] In short, there is no one, primary “Muslim identity”.”⁴³ This situation makes more

³⁹ P.C. Kerry San Chirico, ‘Religion in the Practice of Daily Life in South Asia’, in R.D. Hecht and V.F. Biondi (eds) *Religion and Everyday Life and Culture: Religion in Practice of Daily Life in World History* (3 vols., Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2010), vol. 1, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴¹ S.S. Gill, *Islam and the Muslims of India: Exploring History, Faith and Dogma* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p.33.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴³ Kerry San Chirico, ‘Religion in the Practice’, p. 25

openness of space where Muslim and Hindu can easily interact and make the happy and peaceful places.

8. Hindu and Muslim awakening: the voice of Kabir

During the reign of Nasiruddin Muhammad Tughlaq (CE 1395-1412) and Sikander Lodhi (1489-1517), Hinduism was in danger because of the religious fanaticism of the Muslim rulers. The Hindu religion, which had been a complete way of life and was well known for tolerance and acceptance of strange thoughts, became so weak in the face of Islam that an alternate path was much needed. The old Brahmanic taboos and rituals were challenged by Islam. This resulted in dividing the Hindu religion into various sects. In fact, there was no such religion as Hinduism, rather each sect had its own faith and tradition. In this situation of doubts and fanaticism, a new light came from Smarta scholars.⁴⁴ These scholars had given emphasis to new ways of rituals and religious practices, but this resulted again in traditionalism and fanaticism.⁴⁵ Ramananda (1299-1410) and his followers at Banaras started the first real revolution against these social evils. It is a question of controversy whether Kabir [1398-1518] was a disciple of Ramananda!⁴⁶ While giving the names of his contemporary spiritual teachers, Kabir referred to the names of Gorakh, Bharthari (Bhritahari), Gopichand, Namadev and Jaidev, but never Ramananda.⁴⁷ He was a great challenger, and “until now no such writer has yet been born using the highest level of satire like that of Kabir”.⁴⁸ His influence reached up to Punjab, Gujarat and Bengal. In fact, the religious idea of the *Din-e-Ilahi* proposed by the Mughal emperor Akbar (CE 1556-1605), to integrate the best parts from Hinduism and Islam, was based on Kabir’s teachings.⁴⁹

During the fifteenth century Banaras was being crushed between fanatic Hinduism and cruel Islam. Kabir realised that there was no religious tradition that could reduce the gap between the two religions, rather each tradition encourages conflict and tension and treats the other as an enemy.⁵⁰ The misinterpretation of religious epics provides a strong base in this respect. Kabir challenged both Hindus and Muslims:

Saints, I’ve seen both the ways.
Hindus and Muslims don’t want discipline,
they want tasty food.
The Hindu keeps the eleventh-day fast
with a bowl of chestnuts and milk.

⁴⁴ Hajari Prasad Dwivedi, *Kabir*, (Delhi: Raj Kamal Publications, 1971), p.171.

⁴⁵ Motichandra, *History of Kashi*, in Hindi (Varanasi : Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, 1985), p. 189.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴⁷ *Kabir Granthavali*, ed. M.P. Gupta (Agra: Sahitya Academy, 1968), p. 5.

⁴⁸ Dwivedi, *Kabir*, p. 164.

⁴⁹ Tarachand, *Influences of Islam on Indian Culture* (Allahabad: The Indian Press Ltd., 1963), p. 65.

⁵⁰ Bhisham, *Kabir Standing in the Bazaar (Kabira khara Bazaar mein)* (Delhi, Raj Kamal Publ.,1985), p. 65.

He curbs his grain but not his brain
and breaks his fast with meat.⁵¹

About the ritual sacrifice and fasting of the Muslims, Kabir says:

Fasting in the day but killing cows in the night
Killing and worshipping together, how thy Lord be blissful.

Again he asked satirically:

With stone and bricks a mosque is made
From the top the Mullah calls loudly Allah-ho-Akbar there.
Has God become deaf?⁵²

Kabir also challenged the Hindus who with their variety of complex rituals want to please God⁵³:

Neither God is pleased with austerity, nor meditation,
And neither with torturing the body.
Neither God is pleased with sacred bath or clothing,
And neither even by controlling the five sensitive organs.
Keep kindness, help others, and go far from worldly affairs,
Let your own soul lie everywhere — then will you meet God!

Kabir never compromised with fanaticism, whether propounded by Muslims or Hindus. He asked how it could be possible that, both treating each other as the enemy, they would compromise for the cause of humanity. It would only be possible when they would leave their fanatic and sectarian line of thought and action. Brahmins avoided even touching the shadow of Kabir, Muslims felt that only Muslims were their brothers; if both of them considered him lapsed, then who will serve the poor masses?⁵⁴ Kabir raised his voice against such social evils through the process of mass awakening and self-realisation. All this is still of much relevance in the modern cosmopolitan society of Banaras.

Kabir emphasised the universal brotherhood and wanted to understand it through the path of love. Even Mullahs were impressed by his revelation as 'he may be saying the plain truth with deep experiences, therefore whenever he spoke people were attracted to hear him in silence, whatever their status, high or low'. Whatever religious acts or rituals one may perform, one cannot understand the Almighty because these are deviant acts. All the paths merge into to the path of love, either Hinduism or Islam; it is only for our convenience to label them under disparate identities and belonging.⁵⁵ Kabir explained:

⁵¹ *Bijak* 4.10; *The Bijak of Kabir*, trans. L. Hess and S. Singh (Varanasi: Kabir Bani Prakashan Kendra, 1977), p. 10; see Rana P.B. Singh, *Cultural Landscapes and the Lifeworld. Literary Images of Banaras* (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2004), p.100.

⁵² *Bijak* 49.15-18; Sahni, *Kabir Standing*, p. 17; see Rana P.B. Singh, *Cultural Landscapes*, p. 100.

⁵³ Sahni, *Kabir Standing*, pp. 44, 65; see Rana P.B. Singh, *Cultural Landscapes*, p. 101.

⁵⁴ Sahni, *Kabir Standing*, p. 85.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

For conversation we make two:
 this *namaz*, that *puja*;
 this Shiva, that Muhammad,
 this Brahma, that Adam,
 this a Hindu, that a Turk —
 but all live on one earth.
Vedas, Quran, all those books,
 those Mullahs and those Purohits —
 So many names, so many paths,
 but all the pots are of one clay.
 Kabir says nobody can find Rama,
 both sides are lost in schism.
 One slaughters goats, one slaughters cows;
 they squander their birth in *-isms*.⁵⁶

Kabir always used to explain that the Almighty is infinite and he cannot be realised through the ordained and dogmatic rules and rites of religion or through rituals⁵⁷:

Thy Lord is Infinite, Hindus and Muslims are not different to me.
 Neither do I *puja* nor *namaz*, in my heart I pray to the Almighty,
 Neither go I to *haj* or *tirtha*, why follow the left-over.
 Says Kabir, now my illusions vanished,
 my heart loves the Supreme Spirit.

The search for god is an eternal quest and insightful process; the Sahni's play ends with Kabir's provocation in this context⁵⁸:

Where are you searching me, I'm near to you,
 Neither in temple, nor in mosque, Kaba or Kailash,
 Neither in rituals and *puja*, nor in yoga or asceticism.
 A searcher can find me easily within an instant of search.
 Says Kabir, hear O pious friends!
 Thy Lord is in every instant of breath.

9. Banaras and the Ganga-River: The Muslims' Perception

The Ganga river is not holy only for Hindus, but is also considered as holy (*dariyaye-pak*) by Muslims. Muslims feel proud and part of its soil, and sometimes compare the city to Makkah and Medina. Muslims accept the Ganga water as "Abe-jam jam" (holy water of Makkah-Medina). Many Muslims dwellers of the city go every morning and evening to the Ganga ghats and take a bath and enjoy the scenic beauty. The morning view of Banaras is famous for its fantastic beauty; in fact, "for picturesqueness and grandeur, no sight in all the

⁵⁶ *Bijak* 3.30; see Rana P.B. Singh, *Cultural Landscapes*, p. 109.

⁵⁷ Sahni, *Kabir Standing*, p.102; *Kabir Granthavali*, Gupta, p. 347; *Bijak* 8.13) ; see Rana P.B. Singh, *Cultural Landscapes*, p. 110.

⁵⁸ Sahni, *Kabir Standing*, pp. 55, 67, 103; see Rana P.B. Singh, *Cultural Landscapes*, p. 110.

world can well surpass that of Banaras as seen from the river Ganges”.⁵⁹ This natural scenic beauty is referred as ‘*Subahe Banaras*’ (morning view of Banaras).

Writing about the spirit of a place, we can consider two types of litterateurs: those living there who are part of that people and place (*in-patriotes*), and those who live and work away from home but write about it (*expatriates*). Abdul Bismillah belongs to the second category, the less common group, but frequently he pays a visit to Banaras. He reflects the experienced feelings, as also the influence of contextual and contemporary happenings. Following the latter line of approach, in the Urdu lyric “*The City of Banaras and the Weavers*” by Maruf Sharifi, the author exposed his perceptions in a holistic manner⁶⁰:

Settled at the bank, see the shining City
 The Ganga is flowing in the lap of the City.
 A delightful scene is made of reflecting light
 In Banaras early morning, see the glorious light.
 The luminous *ghats* and attractive buildings of Banaras,
 Where live thousands of weavers of craftsmanship.
 Reflection of places in the Ganga makes distinct scenes,
 Stars in the sky also reflect in the river like eyes.
 Holy mosques there, and the shadow of temples too
 How amazing attraction is the meeting of the two!
 The luminous *ghats*...
 Sages and saints found their destination here
 Buddha is alive, and the city of Rama’s here.
 There’re holy sites of worship for each community
 On each of its crossing one sees the mutual unity.
 The luminous *ghats*...
 In past were Kabir and Tulasi in this City
 Making glory of the country’s civilisation and piety.
 Centre of knowledge — art, and luminous site of vision
 Since ancient past Kashi is the sight of new vision.
 The luminous *ghats*...
 Since time immemorial the city of craftsmanship
 Is always famous for its silk clothes everywhere.
 Weavers got livelihood by their unique craftsmanship
 Their houses are fully inhabited by the looms.
 The luminous *ghats*...
 The highest state of craftsmanship they know,
 Deserted, but became inhabited by their own skills.
 The line of patriotism as shown by Gandhi
 With that zeal weavers operate the thread in looms.
 The luminous *ghats*...
 Ultimate product of the devotion they show
 Grandness of art of craftsmanship they show.
 With hope to get the reward of their labour
 This idea in mind, during dawn they go to the bazaar.
 The luminous *ghats*...

⁵⁹ M.A. Sherring, *Benares, The Sacred City of the Hindus: An Account of Benares in Ancient and Modern Times* (London: Trübner & Co, 1868), p. 9.

⁶⁰ Bismillah, *Jhini*; see Rana P.B. Singh, *Cultural Landscapes*, pp. 224-225.

Decorators of our motherland's border
 Promoters of the purity of Habb's daughter.
 Even the first man learnt culture from them
 These weavers do put your face under cover.

The luminous *ghats* and attractive buildings of Banaras,
 Where live thousands of weavers of craftsmanship.

The textile and silk industry in Banaras has a historical base, as recorded in the Vedic and Buddhist literature. During the twelfth to fourteenth centuries its glories reached a zenith, and by the turn of the 20th century Banaras became famous for its saris.⁶¹ Presently Muslims make up for one-third of the population of the city; and there are about 1388 Muslim shrines in the city.

Hindus believe that death in Kashi or funeral activities are the way to go to heaven. Like their Hindu counterparts Muslims also feel to have birth and death in Kashi as very pious rites. One of the famous Persian Shia poets Sheikh Ali Hazim (1692-1766), who came to Varanasi in 1734 and settled here and after passing 32 years was buried at Fatman, has expressed his deeper feeling in a stanza:

I won't leave Banaras for anywhere else,
 As it's a house of realising universalism.
 In fact, each and every Brahmin boy,
 Looks like Rama and Lakshmana.

Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869) also stayed in Banaras for four months. Being a Muslim-Sufi by belief, Ghalib was against casteism and religious taboos, therefore he used to think of himself as a follower of universalism and humanism. He developed a high sense of attachment (*topophilia*) to this great place, and wrote a poem of 108 stanzas in Persian known as "light of the lamp" (*Chiragh-i-Dair*), of which 69 stanzas directly show his feelings towards Banaras.⁶² He has compared other cities and provoked Banaras in a sense of its religious-educational and cultural values for the whole world.

The other face of the Ganga river presents a bad impression like the *ghats* as a place for cheating and sins, and also having sex, some hippies and bad elements smoking *ganja* (*Cannabis sativa*), heroin, brown-sugar, hashish and morphine and also drinking alcohols. The rest of the Banaras and the Ganga is famous all over the world for her purity and religious identity. Julahas, especially weavers after doing work, they go to the *ghats* in the evenings in a group and generally stay three or four hours for recreation, and relaxation. Muslims too avoid doing bad works and do not throw waste material and garbage in the Ganga river. Muslims blame the Hindus of the city for being mostly responsible for polluting the Ganga water through cremating and throwing dead bodies in the river. In spite of this, the Ganga is known as a holy river in the world, giving a divine feeling and message of peace and love.

⁶¹ S.K. Srivastava, 'Tradition of textile industry in Kashi', in T.P. Verma, D.P. Singh and J.S. Mishra (eds), *Varanasi through the Ages*, (Varanasi: Bharatiya Itihas Samkalan Samiti, 1986), pp. 205-206.

⁶² *Ghalib Gaurav*, ed. H.C. Nayyar (Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University, 1969), pp.135-150.

10. Epilogue

Robinson has argued that notions of primacy of the individual and the personal autonomy and 'empowerment' in religious practice were key elements in the nineteenth and twentieth century Islamic religious change.⁶³ This element of 'empowerment' through religion was also undoubtedly of significance in the self-assertion of the Muslim poor in a religious idiom.⁶⁴ It has been a tradition among Julahas, which also fits to their mindsets and deprived economic condition, to take active part in the Sufi practices "with great eagerness, the devotional contact of which could help them to cultivate a self of inner self, worth and personal autonomy in the face of external and material forms of subservience".⁶⁵

The influence of the martyrdom of Hallaj on Indian Sufism reveals itself further in the writing of Sayyid Mir Mah of Bahraich, a Sufi who flourished during the reign of Firuz Shah Tughlaq (1309-1388). His account is especially interesting since Mir Mah lived near the tomb of the warrior-saint (*ghazi*) Salar Masud in Bahraich, in an environment saturated with the symbolism of holy war and martyrdom.⁶⁶ He narrates that once a Hindu army raided Bahraich, killing several Sufis in the hospice and wounding Mir Mah himself. In setting the stage for describing this incident, Mir Mah has given a litany on the martyrdoms suffered by the prophets and saints, beginning with Adam.⁶⁷

These *mazars* (saints' tombs) are the meeting place of multi-cultures and multi-religions, where people from varying backgrounds meet and reciprocate their (mystical) experiences. They come for a variety of reasons, of course mostly for wishing, healing or prayer, but the history of the saint is not the first priority of the visitors.⁶⁸ It is noted that, "The Hindu-Muslim cult of Ghazi Miyan merely confirms that Islamic proselytism has succeeded through a judicious blend of violent imposition of symbolic (architectural) structures and syncretising accommodation that operates on the common ground occupied by both religions".⁶⁹ The study on Muslim weavers of Banaras concludes that since communal riots disturb the economic stability of the weaver's community in Varanasi, the Muslim weavers avoid taking part in such riots and in stead support the maintenance of peace.⁷⁰

The issue of Hindu-Muslim integration and mutual cohesiveness as seen in

⁶³ F. Robinson, 'Religious Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia since 1800', *South Asia*, 20/1 (1997): pp. 9-10.

⁶⁴ N. Gooptu, *The Politics of Urban Poor in the Early Twentieth-Century India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 262.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ K.A. Nizami, 'Ghazi Miyan', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. H. A. R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers (12 vols., Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965) vol. 2, pp. 1047-1048; R.M. Eaton, Richard M., *Sufis of Bijapur* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 22-37.

⁶⁷ C.W. Ernst, 'From Hagiography to Martyrology: Conflicting Testimonies to a Sufi Martyr of the Delhi Sultanate', *History of Religions*, 24/4 (1985): pp. 308-327.

⁶⁸ Lindahl, *Is the Mazar a Meeting Place for Multi-Culture?*.

⁶⁹ S. Visuvalingam and E. Charlier-Visuvalingam, 'Bhairava in Banaras', p. 113.

⁷⁰ Muhammad Showeb, *Silk Handloom Industry of Varanasi: A Study of Socio-Economic Problems of Weavers* (Varanasi: Ganga Kaveri Publishing House, 1994).

the context of social, religio-cultural, and economic perspectives has formed its own-roots in the historical past and maintained at present, especially through the multi-religious shrines and celebrating festivities attached to them. Among such places in Varanasi the martyr-sites and *mazars* play such a role, attracting Hindus and Muslims alike. Such places are associated with *pirs* (saints) and possess the special power of miracles. This attracts the people from both the groups, especially for getting relief from several diseases and spirit possession. With an aim to make a Hindu-Muslim harmonic relationship and brotherhood such sites need to be properly preserved, conserved and maintained. However, before any such plan understanding is a prerequisite; this is an attempt on this path.

Lord Hardinge, one of the British viceroys was candid enough when he wrote to Sir Harcourt Butler in 1926: ‘When the day of religious peace arrives in India, the day of our departure from these shores will draw nigh.’ The imperialist regime did not create the divide, but it had a vital stake in exploiting the differences to serve its own vested interests, and in our own times, before Independence, we have seen how this incited separatism had assumed the form of a conflagration.⁷¹ One should have taken a lesson from the imperial history. There also exists the other side of the scenario that records riots between Hindus and Muslim, and also Shias and Sunnis, but they are occasional and created by the people of vested interests. Yet, despite such severe jolts from disruptive forces, both before and since Independence, our basic democratic polity, its pluralistic character, the goodwill among the communities and their desire to live in peace has not been vitiated and turned into hostility and blind hatred.⁷²

By shifting the traditionally perceived notions to focusing on Hindu-Muslim relations away from conflict to that of everyday peace, everywhere found peace as an active process towards the non-violent resolution of communal conflict. Recent findings confirm the centrality of ‘civil society’ in minimising the potential for communal violence, but also significantly emphasise the vital role of human agency in understanding the processes by which peace is maintained.⁷³ It is rightly remarked that

“The intercommunal networks are sustained by everyday engagements between Hindus and Muslims, through both actual interactions and those facilitated by an ‘imagined community’. Whether or not Hindus and Muslims interacted with one another, they were united by a shared belief in their Hindu-Muslim ‘brotherhood’..... Furthermore, articulation of this unity in the public domain reinforced the community consciousness of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood”.⁷⁴

The most burning case of Hindu-Muslim conquest has been the issue of sovereignty and control over the ancient site in Ayodhya, believed to be the birth place of Lord Rama, which has been under the trial of court cases from both sides for the last 60 years; the first case was filed in 1950 by a pious Hindu Gopal

⁷¹ Bhisham Sahni, ‘Contours of our Composite Culture’, *Social Scientist*, 28/1-2 (2000): pp. 39-40.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Philippa Williams, ‘Hindu-Muslim Brotherhood: Exploring the Dynamics of Communal Relations in Varanasi, North India’, *Journal of South Asian Development*, 2/2 (2007): pp.153-176.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 174.

Singh Vishard, seeking an injunction for permitting 'puja' (worship) of Lord Rama at the disputed site. On 30 September 2010, Allahabad high court ruled that the 1.09ha (2.7 acres) of disputed land in Ayodhya, on which the Babri Masjid stood before it was demolished on 6 December 1992, accepting that historicity of this place is archaeologically proved dating CE sixth century, will be divided into three parts: the site of the Ramalala idol to Lord Ram, Nirmohi Akhara gets Sita Rasoi and Rama Chabutara, Sunni Wakf Board gets the rest. It was expected that there would be disturbances and riots all over India, but it turned into a noble way of Hindu-Muslim communal harmony. Most of the Banaras Muslim accepted it openly and nothing turned into turmoil. Of course, this decision created dissatisfaction among the right-wing Hindus to a level!

The religiosity of Banaras is supported by the special nature of the *mahatirtha* (a great place of pilgrimage), but maintained by the common folk of the community, both Hindus and Muslim, and others. The entire community is drawn together in this task through celebrations, festivities and religious processions. Each section of the community, and every individual, shares in maintaining this tradition in different ways at different degrees. Such a social structure of total community engagement is the main force behind the vitality of Banaras' multicultural tradition and the unity of the society. As long as the city dwellers are actively engaged in such age-old tradition of continuity and maintenance of mutual cohesiveness and co-sharing, the religiosity of the city will endure the harmony and peace.

Fostering a so-called rediscovery of forgotten common cultural heritage and practices at sacred places that centered on reverence to and harmony with the Earth as the source and sustainer of life, a balanced conservation and management plan of such holy sites (and pilgrimage places) would be a strong step in this direction.⁷⁵ Let us hope for more harmonious breakthroughs in India's cultural development. The root of the Indian mindset is Hinduism, a mindset that possesses the inherent roots of tolerance, secularism and adaptability in keeping with changing socio-economic conditions at a global level. Let that spirit move on the Gandhian path. Gandhian thought of *ahimsa* has shown us the right path on which to proceed.⁷⁶ Think *universally*, see *globally*, behave *regionally*, and act *locally* but *insightfully*. This is an appeal for cosmic vision, global humanism, and self-realisation.

⁷⁵ Singh, Rana P.B., 'Politics and Pilgrimage in North India: Varanasi between Communitas and Contestation', *Tourism, an International Interdisciplinary Journal* [Zagreb, Croatia], vol. 59 (3), October 2011, p. 301.

⁷⁶ Singh, Rana P.B. 'Culture and Civilisation for Human Development: Perspective in India on the Gandhian Path', in P. Maiti (ed.), *Development Studies*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2007), p. 147.

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The Author**Contact & Corresponding Address:****Prof. Dr. RANA P. B. SINGH**

Professor of Cultural Geography & Heritage Studies,
 Head, Department of Geography, Banaras Hindu University
 # New F - 7, Jodhpur Colony; B.H.U.,
 Varanasi, UP 221005. INDIA.

Tel: (+091)-542-2575-843. Cell: (+91-0)- 9838 119474.

Email: ranapbs@gmail.com ; ranapbsingh@dataone.in

§ **Rana P.B. Singh** [born: 15 Dec. 1950], M.A. 1971, Ph.D. 1974, F.J.F. (Japan) 1980, F.A.A.I. (Italy) 2010, Professor of Cultural Geography & Heritage Studies, and Head, Department of Geography, Faculty of Science at Banaras Hindu University, has been involved in studying, performing and promoting the heritage planning, sacred geography & cultural astronomy, pilgrimage studies and goddess landscapes in the Varanasi region for the last four decades, as consultant, project director, collaborator and organiser. He is also the Member, UNESCO Network of Indian Cities of Living Heritage (- representing Varanasi), since 2005. As visiting scholar on these topics he has given lectures and seminars at various centres in Australia, Austria, Belgium, China PR, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, USA (& Hawaii), USSR. His publications include over 225 papers and 41 books on these subjects, including *Banaras (Varanasi)*, *Cosmic Order*, *Sacred City*, *Hindu Traditions* (1993), *Environmental Ethics* (1993), *The Spirit and Power of Place* (1994), *Banaras Region: A Spiritual & Cultural Guide* (2002, with P.S. Rana), *Towards pilgrimage Archetypes: Panchakroshi Yatra of Kashi* (2002), *Where the Buddha Walked* (2003), *The Cultural Landscape and the Lifeworld: The Literary Images of Banaras* (2004), *Banaras, the City Revealed* (2005, with George Michell), *Banaras, the Heritage City: Geography, History, Bibliography* (2009), and the eight books under 'Planet Earth & Cultural Understanding Series': – five from Cambridge Scholars Publishing UK: *Uprooting Geographic Thoughts in India* (2009), *Geographical Thoughts in India: Snapshots and Vision for the 21st Century* (2009), *Cosmic Order & Cultural Astronomy* (2009), *Banaras, Making of India's Heritage City* (2009), *Sacred Geography of Goddesses in South Asia* (2010), and – three from Shubhi Publications (New Delhi): *Heritagescapes and Cultural Landscapes* (2011), *Sacredscapes and Pilgrimage Systems* (2011), *Holy Places and Pilgrimages: Essays on India* (2011), and *Hindu Tradition of Pilgrimage: Sacred Space and System* (2013). Presently he is working on a book, *Kashi & Cosmos: Sacred Geography and Ritualscape of Banaras*.
