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Navtej K. Purewal & Virinder S. Kalra

BEYOND RELIGION IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

Gender and Caste, Borders and Boundaries

B L O O M S B U R Y

Beyond Religion in India and Pakistan

Bloomsbury Studies in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality

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Gender and Caste, Borders and Boundaries

Virinder S. Kalra and Navtej K. Purewal

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Bloomsbury Publishing plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA

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First published in Great Britain 2020

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019949345.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3500-4175-2
ePDF: 978-1-3500-4176-9
eBook: 978-1-3500-4177-6

Series: Bloomsbury Studies in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality

Typeset by Integra Software services Pvt. Ltd.
Printed and bound in Great Britain

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To the resilience and resistance of the social

For Nuvpreet and Eesher



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Acknowledgements

There are many people who have been a part of the making of this book, especially as it has been over ten years in the making. At the forefront are all of the people who spoke with us at the shrines and sites of the research, as well as those who live in the localities or work at the universities near the research sites. Our two bases during the field research, Lahore and Chandigarh, became enabling, fortifying and enriching spaces for us to make sense of our field research. Our insights were shaped by their insights.

We were fortunate to have people around us who understood our project and supported us in our endeavour to engage with the underlying dynamics of a society overtly shaped by nationalism and religious identity but intrinsically connected: Ishaque Chaudhary, for his unrelenting and cutting critique of the overarching discourses of religion and nationalism; Najm Hosain Syed and late Bibi Samina for creating the space of Sangat in Lahore for the appreciation and distillation of Punjab's rich poetic-philosophical heritage; and B.S. Rattan and Rama Rattan for providing a base in Chandigarh from which we could develop our fieldwork. We are indebted to Iqbal Kaiser, whose lifelong commitment to sustaining the continuities across the border despite the ruptures of nationalism has provided much inspiration for this book.

We are grateful to Ursula Sharma, who accompanied us to east and west Punjab and provided us with much clarifying advice during an otherwise bewildering ethnographic experience in helping us to make sense of our complex field. Her assurances and uniquely rich insights were invaluable to us in the depths of the field. For conversations, facilitations and critical engagement with the research at its various stages to make this text possible, we are indebted to colleagues at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) – Ali Khan, Furrugh Khan and Turab Hussain; Government College Lahore – Tahir Kamran, Umber Ibad and Tahir Jamil; Chittrkar – Shahid Mirza; Punjabi University, Patiala – H.S. Bhatti and Gurpreet S. Lehal; Panjab University, Chandigarh – Ishwar Dayal Gaur, Surinder Singh, Sherry Sabbarwal and Ronki Ram; Guru Nanak National College for Women – Principal Mrs Gurmeet K. Atwal. To our research assistants in their various capacities with their multiple skills in the research: Muhammad Abbas for fieldwork assistance in west Punjab; Hani Taha for assisting with

various aspects of coding our material in west Punjab; Manpreet K. Gill who assisted with processing and coding the survey data; Gagun Chhina for helping with organizing the visual data; Irshad for acting beyond the call of duty of a driver by being a companion and advisor during extended shrine visits across west Punjab; and Kirpal Singh, whose understanding of the field was invaluable to our analysis of the fieldwork which he continued on an ongoing level in east Punjab. We are grateful to the team of students from D.A.V. College in Amritsar for the surveys and interviews carried out in Amritsar and Himachal.

To other colleagues/friends for their comradery over the years which was essential as the ideas percolated across sites, borders, debates and contexts: Ajay Bhardwaj, Darshan S. Tatla, Mandeep Kaur, Jasdeep Kaur, Nida Kirmani, Shams Rehman, Ayesha Siddiqua, Geoffrey Samuel and Santi Rozario. The generosity of friends in Lahore made our fieldwork in west Punjab not only possible, but also a memorable and fond time. In particular, we thank Mariyam and Ali Khan, Rabeea and Furrukh Khan, and Sara Zaidi and family. We are grateful to relatives who made the fieldwork in east Punjab a continuum of the west Punjab fieldwork. Special thanks to Mano 'Mami ji' Bedi, Vicky and Hema Bedi, K.P. Singh, Rana, Manak and Raunak for their kind hospitality and interested questions about what it was we were actually doing. We also thank Jagmohan Singh Kalra and Honey, Daljit Bhua, Nimmi, Sahil, Henna, Balbir Bhabi, Timmy, Keenu and all the other cousins and branches of family who supported us not only during the core fieldwork time but also during our numerous trips.

On another level of inspiration are those who passed away over the span of the research: Ustad Hafeez Khan Sahib, whose wisdom and knowledge of Punjab's musical heritage we were fortunate to behold; Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand who was the last of a generation who embodied the spirit of the resilience of the 'shared' philosophical-poetic tradition of Punjab; Bibi Samina who in many ways introduced these learned souls to us; Bilal Ahmed for a Diwali in Lahore in 2008 which implemented border crossing; Gurdeep Bhua whose joy at calling us the '*Lahore waale*' and whose own childhood memories of Lyallpur, a city she left in 1947, continue to coalesce her extended family; and finally, Surjit Singh Kalra whose passion and spark for Punjabi lit the flame for this book to come into fruition. Their memories are each bound in the pages of this book.

Our two daughters, Eesher and Nuvpreet, embarked on this journey with us through multiple uprootings, border crossings and experiences. This project, which began with them at the ages of four and eight, grew with them.

Our families span a network that links Punjab to the United Kingdom and the United States, a diasporic reckoning that informs much of the bordering works

and our alertness to gender and caste that is so central to the intellectual project presented here: Balbir Kaur Kalra, Amarjit Kaur Purewal, Tarlok Singh Purewal, as migrants and our elders; Paul and Andi, Jasi and Vivian, the first generation; Kiran, Arjan, Gurtej and Gursymrun, the next and future generations.

Research for this book was generously supported by a large grant held between 2008 and 2010 from the Religion and Society programme which was jointly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in the UK. Without this funding, the ideas behind this project could not have been pursued empirically, and this book would have remained in the realm of conversations and ideas without being collated or written down.

We wish to express our gratitude to the Bloomsbury Academic editorial team for their patience and professionalism throughout the publication process and to the Bloomsbury Studies in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality series editors, in particular Sian Hawthorne for her close sixth-sense reading of, and comments on, the text. We thank Jennifer Ung Loh for editing and producing the text and Gopinath Anbalagan at Integra Software Services for the care and attention given to the copyediting and typesetting of the book in its final form. Finally, we are thankful to the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript whose knowledgeable engagement with our work helped to refine the book into what is presented here.

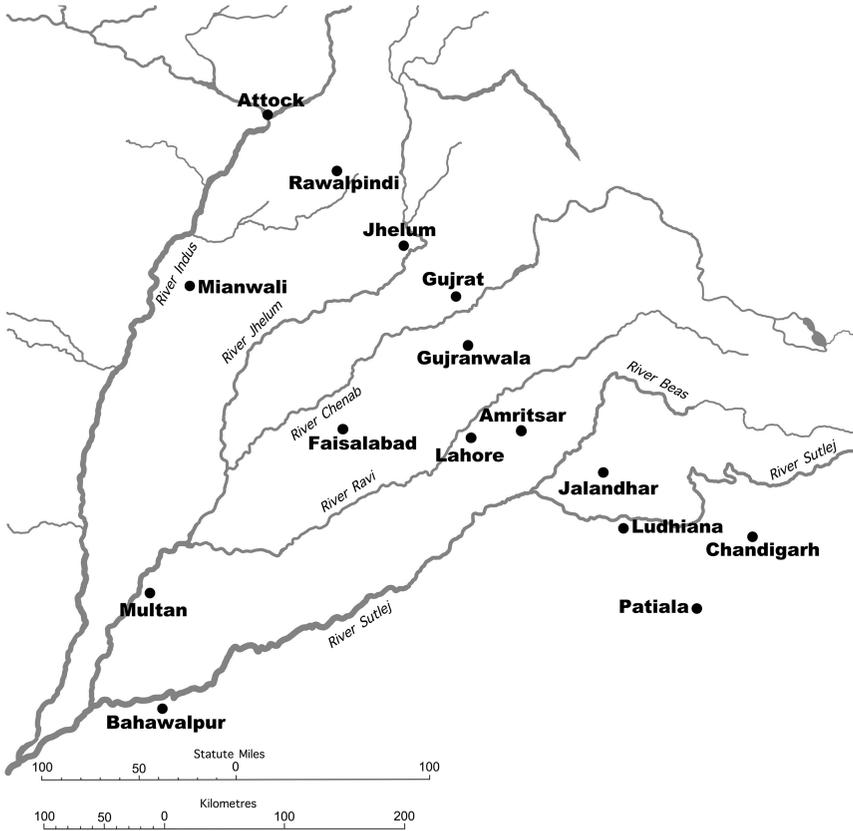
Note on translation, transliteration and digital resource

There are many Punjabi words in this book which are written in Romanized form. In the first instance of a word's appearance, it is italicized followed by the definition in parentheses. Thereafter, these words continue to appear in italics. We avoid diacritical marks in the text, apart from the use of 'n' to designate the nasalized sound. As we have drawn from sources which are both textual and oral, we reflect these using a simplified phonetic scheme of transliteration to make the text comprehensible through the Romanized medium to make it most readily accessible.

A website which contains images, videos, audio and other resources in relation to the material presented in this book is available here:

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/summaries/virinderkalra/beyond>





The region of Punjab. Map created by the authors.

Introduction

Our entry into 'the field' in contemporary Punjab was in 1995 when we lived in Amritsar, a city which was just emerging out of a decade or more of militancy and state repression following the attack and ambush of the Golden Temple in Operation Blue Star. We lived in an area off the Grand Trunk (GT) Road directly opposite Guru Nanak Dev University called Kabir Park, a veritably named locality. There were a few social encounters which introduced us to the area and, on reflection, to the questions which we subsequently raise in this book. The first was with our neighbours who, on appearance, seemed 'Sikh' in that the male head of the household tied a turban, had uncut hair and beard, and wore a *karha* (bangle) on his wrist. We were admittedly confused by the fact that on a number of occasions the family held all-night devotional music functions (*jagraataan*) in praise of the *devis* (goddesses). The loudspeaker-amplified chanting of *Jai Mata Di* penetrated the night and kept all awake. We were regularly invited but attended only a few of these gatherings; yet, as marginal participants, we were always invited to partake in *langar* (communal food). Our perplexity arose due to our respective upbringings in Punjabi diaspora households in the United Kingdom and the United States, where the boundaries between Sikh and Hindu, and Sikh and Muslim were seen as eternal and absolute. Discernible levels of inter-community solidarities and alliances existed in these postcolonial migration contexts, but they were temporally different types of negotiations with boundaries compared to those we were exposed to in the Punjab milieu. Indeed, boundary-breaking seemed the norm and challenged our limited imaginary. While we were in Amritsar, in this era, the crude mapping of the further reduced polar binary of Hindu/Sikh and Muslim mapped onto the geographical separation of India and Pakistan that circulated all around us. Even though our respective elders came from what was now demarcated as West Punjab and our passports gave us access to both sides of the border, the perception of an impassable geographical boundary mirrored

firm religious binaries. Just as our neighbour caused us confusion, the examples of national border crossings were equally puzzling.

A second social relation that exemplified the porous nature of the Indo-Pak border and tested our understandings was with a mother and daughter, named Sheila and Asha respectively. Sheila knocked on our door the first day we arrived asking if we would employ her or her daughter to clean our house. Asha, Sheila's daughter, who was eighteen years old at the time, worked a few hours each morning and began to spend longer time with us, as we would teach her typing and basic computer skills. She had gone to school until the age of sixteen and was fluent in written Hindi and Punjabi and was able to read and write basic English. She was interested in gaining employment beyond domestic work, the fate of most *dalit* women in Punjab.¹ During one of our conversations with Asha, she mentioned, in passing, that her father's 'other family' would be visiting from Pakistan. This other family was Muslim, she reluctantly revealed. Her father's second wife wore a *burkha* and came with their children at least once or twice each year. Her father also visited them in Pakistan occasionally; she revealed this with some hesitation at first, but more openly when she met our friends from the UK who had just crossed the border at Wagah to visit us from Pakistan. We discovered that Sheila's father and his second family did not cross the border at Wagah, but slipped across without dealing with passport and visa controls. The impenetrable geopolitical border and seemingly firm religious boundaries all seemed to fragment and dissolve in Asha's story.

We are also aware of the limitations of the idea of border crossing. A close friend, Ishaque Virk, whose family were split across the border in 1947, refused until recently to cross the India–Pakistan border on the basis that it legitimated the existence of the two nation-states. His argument was: why did he need to cross a border to visit his family in what he considered the same land? On our visit to Islamabad in 1995 and subsequently for the past twenty-three years each time we have met, Ishaque has shared stories of how both sets of his grandparents had nominally (or performatively) converted to Islam in order to stay in West Punjab to retain their land; how his *nani* (maternal grandmother) had taught him the Gurmukhi script; and how their cognizance of a dissonant identity persisted despite the tides of religious nationalism that swirled around them. Ishaque wears a *karha* and has children and grandchildren whose names are ambiguously placed in terms of religious identification. In this case, 'border crossing' is only a useful concept in that it opens a conversation about the permeability of borders, the subjectivity of the people who navigate them and the acts within which they articulate agency.

Twelve years later, having moved to Lahore to carry out our fieldwork, our older daughter, who was then eight years old, was asked innumerable times, particularly at school, whether or not she was Indian with each new introduction made. For Lahore Grammar School in the posh locale of Defense at the heart of the national and army elite of Pakistan, this was not surprising. A year later and across the border in Chandigarh, at an equally elite international school, the classroom register was given to the children on the first day of school which listed not only the names of the children but also the names of both parents, supposedly for the benefit of organizing after-school activities. The interest which the children and their parents took in 'the list' seemed to be directed towards the last names. On the first day of school, our older daughter was asked by classmates what her caste was and again a few days later, once the list had been absorbed and discussed by parents with their children at home. It had been pointed out to her by her classmates that her parents had two different last names, which in their caste-patriarchal framing they viewed as either incorrect or in need of correcting. Names were clearly perceived by this dominant-caste school community as signifiers of acceptability to this community intent on building social capital, through new networks, though ironically framed by the rigidities of caste normativity. If a border-crossing gendered, young body can unsettle understandings of caste and religion in India and Pakistan, then the potentiality of an analytic that dethrones patriarchy and Brahminism is surely a necessity.

As researchers who are products of the diaspora, our positionality is continually being shaped and questioned whilst in India and Pakistan. The literature and archives are replete with writings on Punjab and Punjabi society coming from a range of knowledge production regimes, predominantly the colonial record, but also South Asia-based self-publishing. Our own mission was, in many ways, to redress and address the ways in which positionalities shape narratives. Coming from dominant caste (in the Punjab context) backgrounds with the privilege of US/UK passports but of minority religious groups in both India and Pakistan, in a heteronormative relationship, with each of us differently positioned within the gendered hierarchies, the knowledge that we have generated reflects each of these subject positions. In that sense feminist knowledge production informs our overall project. As Ann Oakley (1998) in her multiple interventions states, it is out of social engagement that we generate social knowledge. Our own subject positions were read in specific gatherings differentially, but our overall experience of living at the margins in Lahore (as religious minorities) and at the centre in Chandigarh (as members of dominant castes), within an overall

Punjabi patriarchal social context, notwithstanding our elite class position in global political-economy terms, is a constant refrain to the narratives presented in this book.

An outline of a field across borders: People, places and institutions

Our interest in Punjab as a site for intensive and extensive fieldwork has from the start been framed by its internal and external boundaries and bordering logics. The most obvious dimension of this is the Radcliffe Line, the international, colonially-mapped divider which splits East and West Punjab between India and Pakistan. It is a border that requires visas, visas which are becoming increasingly unattainable as the religious majoritarian agendas within the respective national governments continue to impede and obstruct people-to-people contact. This physical border has been fortified and militarized most noticeably over the past two decades, whereas up to the mid-1980s it had been more porous for local residents than was commonly known. While the physical frontier has now become so difficult for ordinary people to traverse physically and formally, the effect of bordering processes on the internal dynamics and structuring of society on both sides of the line is perhaps more entrenched and pernicious. The patrolling of the boundaries of religion is an integral part of this, though this may not seem odd in the context of the Islamic republic of Pakistan, where it is assumed that religion is policed and guarded. However, the ascent to power of Hindutva in India exposes how thinly drawn the veneer of religious freedom and tolerance were drawn in the once so-called secular republic of India.² The demarcation of physical and symbolic borders can be seen in the othering of people through communal discourse, constructed notions of culture and practices across the line officially drawn only seven decades ago. This gulf between people, on both sides, seemed colossal during our earlier visits in the 1980s and 1990s with a dualistic rhetoric of curiosity/longing and stereotyping/xenophobia framing the public discourse of the two nations which was reflected across Punjab. There has been a substantive popular counter-discourse shaped by desires to reconnect across the India–Pakistan border accompanied by a cynicism around political uses of religion, not least of the backing of political candidates and leaders by spiritual leaders and religious bodies, who amass followings for their own purposes. Public opinion on the state's role in religion is both astute and varied.

Despite having familiarity with and experience of doing research in Punjab, we began our fieldwork for this particular project in Lahore in 2007.³ This book has thus been more than ten years in the making. Our explorations began with an attentiveness to seeing what people do in the every day in relation to the backdrop of postcolonial, post-Partition, post-Zia, post-militancy Punjab, a series of 'posts' which do not signal the past but rather a perpetual unfolding.⁴ In particular, our preliminary observations were somewhat bewildering. We witnessed meticulous policing of the formal observation of religious boundaries and identities; meanwhile we also saw a tremendous amount of spiritual openness by way of an underlying perseverance and desire to sustain practices which did not necessarily 'fit' in accordance with formal religion. Thus, our attention to 'what people do,' rather than 'what they say they do' from the onset, informed our analysis (De Certeau 1984). It was often unclear how to disentangle the complex processes at play at a shrine or in a case study and the lengthy time taken to write this book reflects the necessity for slow absorption as well as revisits to the field in order to trace and track change. Ultimately, what we realized was that boundaries are continually being erected and dismantled, made and remade, asserted and resisted. Our empirical chapters trace these dynamics as a means of demonstrating how borders are in motion (Konrad 2015), despite the existence of mutually exclusive nationalisms, a geopolitical border, and established, differentiated religious identities.

In taking 'borders in motion' as an organizing principle, our project not only set out to explore practices, sites and figures in Punjab across the Radcliffe Line, but it also endeavoured to examine how other exclusionary logics such as religious categorization, state intervention and naming or labelling practices operated across the various sites and contexts. We set out to resist the straightjacket of methodological nationalism from the onset by not taking labels or categories at face value which was made possible only because of our access to both sides of the border. Our privilege in holding non-Indian and Pakistani passports, but perhaps equally relevant was that we were identified as Sikh, meant that we were able to traverse the border as pilgrims to Pakistan and as diaspora when returning to India. We became quickly aware that subsequent to the 2014 election victory in India that such mobility became increasingly difficult and that the environment for privileged border crossers was intentionally being made more difficult.⁵ Challenging methodological nationalism, however, does not merely relate to the ability to access and cross the physical border; it also refers to the ability to imagine or construct a field which is not reliant on the

framings or frameworks tied to bordering processes. South Asia area studies has for too long cast an India-centric view on the region. This is not merely a product of the proportionally larger population of the region which resides within India's national boundaries or of India's hegemonic geopolitical position vis-à-vis its neighbours. State-driven boundaries are also tied to a range of hegemonies and framings that close off certain possibilities for analysis. The lack of cross-border research and enquiry sums up the quandary we are faced with. We have continually been surprised to see how few researchers consider fields across national boundaries as epistemological and methodological interventions. Certainly Punjab in the borders of India has been reduced to the formation that came into being in 1966, with a topography that is flattened not only in geographical terms, but in relation to the diversity of its cultural formation. Even the counter to this, the Punjabi nationalist position, draws a boundary in some or other historical moment, most often at that of Ranjit Singh's kingdom (1809–1849). Our field sites⁶ were spread across the Punjab province of Pakistan and the Punjab state of India, with one site in Himachal Pradesh with references to Sindh and Kashmir. This is not to fetishize or romanticize about a grand geographical or cultural Punjab, but rather to indicate that the borders of what we call Punjab are neither fixed nor refer to any geographical or political time. Indeed, the borders of Punjab have been drawn and redrawn so many times that no map would be able to depict the layers of movement and change. Our methodological approach, therefore, has been an attempt to engage with the layering of temporal and spatial movability, mobility and change which mark the region so distinctively. The fact that Punjab does not exist as a political or geo-spatial entity but is rather split offers a critical starting point to question all boundary-making processes that take its name. Thus our heuristic use attempts to subvert a romantic notion of Punjab as a counter to Sikh, Hindu and Muslim identity formations, by recognizing that all identities are produced on the basis of the concealment or suppression of others. In the context of caste exploitation and patriarchy/misogyny, the noun Punjab refers to a dismal sex ratio (Purewal 2010) and persistent *dalit* exclusion (Jodhka 2009). It is this recognition that motivates us to develop an approach which recognizes boundary-making and -breaking processes as coterminous.

Following through our commitment to conceptualize and design a means for analysing dynamics of gender and caste within the practices, sites and institutional processes we were observing was not a simple task. Much of our fieldwork was shaped around questions of inclusion, exclusion, margins, authority, power and borders. However, our own subject positions served as an

advantage in some contexts, when wishing to explore gender for example, but a hindrance in terms of caste. In this respect, we found the spatial restrictions on women in the public sphere in Pakistan made shrines significant spaces of mingling and hence excellent sources for empirical access. Similarly, caste stratification that permeates sociality in India has meant that specific shrines have effectively become markers of presence in a public sphere which excludes *dalits*. These empirical openings and constraints further refined our approach, as it became clear that many of the sites at which we were carrying out fieldwork were imbued with historiographies that at some point began to exclude women and *dalit* devotees. Contested narratives around piety crossed borderlines of gender and caste in their contemporary elicitation but did not map onto historicized accounts of shrine formation. Thus whilst we gathered large amounts of historical material, it did not always read back to the interviews or ethnography of practice. Rather, it was in the Punjabi poetic-philosophical tradition, and most notably the names of Waris Shah, Bulleh Shah and Piro spanning the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, that synergy was found with present concerns. This is not to say that we treated these authors/figures as historical sources (though they no doubt can be considered as such), but rather noted how they their names and texts circulated in popular discourse to puncture the hegemonic forces of dominant caste ideology and patriarchy in a way that connected to the concerns of women and *dalits*. This may be seen as a crude set of juxtapositions in relation to our theoretical case, but this nonetheless reflects a broad popular culture and is thus relevant to our reasoning.

By remaining attentive to our theoretical perspective, we were able to design a research strategy, through mixed methods, which enabled us to access and amplify the rich and complex data we were collecting. These methods included ethnography, semi-structured interviews, devotee surveys at shrines, textual/inter-textual analysis and photography, and video recording of practices and performance at *melas* [fairs] and shrines. We found that the classificatory logics of names and categories were constantly at play in terms of the sites and practices we were observing. We were conscious of not creating new categories in our navigation, and even avoidance of religious categories or in assuming that certain practices could *de facto* be conjoined with a particular identity. This became most acute when training our research assistants who were students at Punjab University in Lahore, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Panjab University in Chandigarh and D.A.V. College in Amritsar who persevered in carrying out the surveys and in recording practice and performance in line with the sensitivities around labelling which we had indicated to them.

For students in their early to mid-twenties, the initial prospect that the practices we were seeking did not have direct resonance with demarcations or labels was simply not commonsense to them, yet we saw how they too joined us in revelling in the field we were observing and in which we were immersed. Most of the interviews were conducted by the authors in Punjabi with a few done by two postgraduate researchers, one in Chandigarh and the other in Lahore. It was the field observations and interviews which presented the most bewildering and puzzling insights. Consequently, this book is written in the style of an ethnography for how it centres the human experience within each of the practices or sites being explored. We went into the field admittedly with certain conceived notions of 'shared' or overlapping boundaries and a perhaps naïve view of resistance to organized, institutionalized religion. However, these were refined by what the multiple sources of information presented to us and through the extended period of what Geertz calls 'deep hanging out' (1998) in providing depth to our perceptions and edges to our precepts. Making sense of how sociality is grafted onto piety, rather than the other way around, is the summation of our humble contribution, if we must name one.

The organization of this book

The structure of this book reflects our main interest in questioning and disrupting the borders and boundaries so commonly used to describe and frame society in Punjab. We do not focus on religion, caste and gender as categories of identity in order to apply an intersectional analysis. Instead, we posit that caste and gender are constitutive of the sites and relations which articulate, manage and sustain religious followings and acts. Put simply, we argue that caste and gender are connate of what comes to be known as 'religious'. Our exploration therefore spans shrines, spiritual figures and institutions in an attempt to scaffold the criss-crossing and multiple dimensions of each. Rather than considering a particular shrine, spiritual figure or religious movement, Chapters 3 to 6 each explore a different element of a number of empirical cases. Prominent shrines across our fieldwork chapters are: Data Sahib and Mian Mir in Lahore, Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar, Naina Devi in Himachal Pradesh, Murad Shah in Nakodar and Nanakana Sahib in Sheikhpura District. *Sant/pir* movements of concern are the Radhasoamis, the Nanaksar Sants, the Dera Ballan Sants and the Ahmadis. The spiritual figures who feature prominently are the Kirmani Pirs of Shergarh and Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh of Sirsa. From the literary tradition we draw on

Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan as well as Waris Shah, Bulleh Shah and Piro. Whilst each of these sites, figures and movements have been multiply written about, we do not offer comprehensive historical or narrative hagiographies in relation to them. Rather, in the movement across chapters they play a role in revealing the gender/caste matrix in relation to institutional power.

In Chapter 3, we explore the role of the *Pir*, *Sant*, *Baba*, *Faqir*, *Bhagat*, *Sheikh*, *Saain* and *Mahapursh*, all labels for what we conflate in the English term 'spiritual figure'. Those with a theological bent may argue with our cross-pollination of those normatively thought of as leaders in a particular tradition. The conflation of Allah and Bhagwan may seem naïve to those with an eye for religious classification and distinction. Our response is that the rituals of obeisance and the demands that devotees place on these spiritual figures are common regardless of the language of the *mantra/zikr* (meditative saying) that is offered in return. A more salient set of distinctions is between the sober and intoxicated paths to enlightenment which again criss-cross formal religious boundaries, but for our purposes are significant as it maps on to the possibilities for *dalit* and women's empowerment. The intoxicated path offers a space for expression of border crossing, which reaches its limit on those rare occasions where a spiritual figure is a woman or a *dalit* such that the exclusionary processes so well scrutinized in the literature on colonial reform show their hydra-like ability to repeat in the contemporary.

From the individual to the institutional, in Chapter 4, we start from the premise that the common shrine became a *mandir*, *gurdwara* and *mosque* in the long Partition of the twentieth century. This may irk those for whom the only and prime place for prayer are these institutions of God, and we might agree if prayer was the only activity that are deemed as devotion. Our fieldwork shows that shrines are microcosms of social time with a role in all life-cycle rituals and a particular intensity at the festivals of the *urs/gurpurab/utsav*, which we logically summarize in the term *mela* (fair). It is this time when the rituals of marriage (such as the lighting of *divas*, laying of the *chaadar* [ceremonial sheet], the provision of *langar* [communally distributed food], petitioning, exchange, *mehndi* (hand adornment), rose water, dancing, music and a multiple myriad forms of celebration) merge with those of the shrine. These are women-centred practices and thus shrines are sites where gender segregation is lax if at all present. Exclusion from *mosques* for women and from *mandirs* for *dalits* is a principle rather than an empirical statement. *Gurdwaras* which are supposedly open, certainly operate forms of gender/caste exclusion. Our research indicates that the most controlled and patrolled spaces in relation to religious uniformity are also sites where

the performative ritual function of authority is most intensely enacted. Our juxtaposition of various shrines and spiritual figures from across the dividing lines of Punjab may seem confusing and dizzying to the reader, but this is a purposeful disorientation out of communal thinking. Our examples traverse East and West Punjab and various religious traditions to jolt the reader into an act of imagining a common spiritual culture. This is not to evoke the comfort of a nostalgic yearning for a lost age of religious tolerance and cohabitation, but rather it centres the persistence of exclusion along the axes of gender and caste, which, if overcome, intimates the potentiality of another type of commons.

In Chapter 5, we turn our attention to that which has circumvented, avoided or occasionally subverted the forces of homogeneity which convert shrines into *mosques/mandirs* and spiritual figures into Brahmins and Imams. Binaries of multiplicity versus singularity, heterogeneity versus homogenization, are useful heuristic tools but do not accurately reflect the diversity of shrine and spiritual movements that are under consideration. Rather there is a continuum from those places and figures who are closely aligned with the project of religion-making and those that retain a more independent and ambiguous position. We consider a number of such shrine sites, where a *gurdwara* has been built over a sacred horse footprint or where the stories of the local *pir* have become gradually Islamicized, even while devotees maintain their heterodox practices. As in the previous chapters, we note how *dalit* spaces retain an eclectic relationship to the mainstream religious traditions combining *pir*, *bhakti* and *guru* worship at a single site. Nearer the other end of the spectrum, we note how women-oriented spiritual movements such as the Brahma Kumaris and Al-Huda veer towards a more Brahminized or Islamist rationale, to legitimize the space they have created. This is a tenuous task given they are subjected to critique or exclusion precisely on the grounds of gender. The theme of violence recurs across all of the chapters, thus far discussed, which is a depressing reality for those who are excluded from the ever-tightening definition of normative religion. We note that this is based in contingency rather than theological disagreement as Ahmadis are attacked and Ismailis are not; Nirankaris are attacked and Namdharis are not. The political vicissitudes and machinations which lead to one group being the target of violent approbation and another not are beyond the scope of this book, but exposing the hypocrisy of the framing adds further weight to the gender–caste nexus which we forward.

In Chapter 6, we construct an analytical scaffold which brings together the shrine, spiritual figure and movement with the institutions of the state. Traversing precolonial, colonial and contemporary Punjab we are somewhat

cavalier in resurrecting the vernacular terms *sarkar* (official), *darbar* (court) and *vilayet* (jurisdiction) by mirroring their use in everyday parley, rather than abandoning them in the Persian archive.⁷ Our conceptual requirement is to collapse the distinction between politician, bureaucrat, employee and spiritual figure in the context of the deeply imbricated relationship between state and religion in South Asia. The first half of this chapter indicates the symbiotic relationships between institutions of the postcolonial state and spiritual figures/sacred sites. In the blurring of the boundaries between these two domains the masculinist, high caste/class features of prominent *pir/sant* politicians are made plain. The dominance of the religious/political framework means that even those movements that involved *dalit sants* or operate outside of mainstream concoctions of religious propriety paradoxically become incorporated. The pronouncement of a new religion in 2010 by the Ballan *sants* is one such case study and the bureaucratization of the Murad Shah shrine in Nakodar is a second. The story of this former shrine also gives voice, as is done in each chapter, to a *dalit* interlocutor who demarcates the process by which state legitimacy involves 'purification' of a spiritual figure's past and practices.

In concluding this book, we do not attempt a summary but rather present this as an epilogue by returning to some of the themes touched upon in our conceptual chapter but framing this within the hyper-nationalism of contemporary Indian and Pakistani nationalism. Our only additional consideration is the emergence of online spiritual activities which, whilst not prominent during our initial fieldwork, has become, at least in East Punjab, an arena demanding comment. Religious minorities, women and *dalits* are the target of the shrill new political climate in India and Pakistan, and whilst we retain optimism about the potential for resistance, the task remains mammoth. To conceptualize religion beyond identity is to analyse the gamut of cross-cutting and overlapping idioms, acts, texts, symbols and performances which direct our attention towards the practices of devotion and piety not definable by dominant markers of religion or religious identity. The glossary of terms will alert the reader to some of the terminology which in some cases represents the scaffolding while in other cases speaks to different temporal, contextual and ideological times. Thus we shy away from the use of 'Hindu,' 'Muslim,' 'Sikh,' etc. as terms which point towards essential characteristics and qualities. Genealogies and practices of reproduction and change at sites of piety provide insights into how the realm of the popular streams alongside broader currents of power, social structure, dominance, resistance and social change. Our exploration of selected shrines and figures is an attempt to envisage a picture of 'religion' which challenges the borders and boundaries of

religious and communal categories, nationalism and the theological framework which have limited our understandings of contemporary society. In many ways, this is not a book about religion, but instead is a book about religion-making and religion-breaking as a dynamic process of authority and its inversions and subversions. Our methodological approach towards the traversing of borders and boundaries through gender and caste provides a lens through which to view how society persists and resists despite and through the registers of religion.

Conceptual pilgrimage

Introduction

Religion as a political force has become such a determining factor in the trajectories of India and Pakistan that in the twenty-first century, religion is in power in both countries.¹ Violence against and manufactured hostility towards religious minorities and the increasing polarization around religious identities are symptomatic of the ways in which normative classifications of populations have become embedded in the logic of governance. This has only enhanced the myopic vision of Indian and Pakistani societies as irreducibly religious. Media discourse too, in terms of news and popular culture is solely focused on reproducing normative categories of religion; academic writing is almost entirely concerned with the politicized nature of religious groups and organizations such as the RSS or Jamaat-e-Islami. Across these two seemingly oppositional and mutually exclusive majoritarian religious framings, the everyday practices of people, in carrying out their devotional practices in multiple, myriad and overlapping ways, caught in the interstices of major religious labels, slip out of view. Invisibility leads to dismissal, through a classification as 'folk' religion, 'cults' or 'sects'. With a historical teleology as evidence, these spiritual movements and groups are expected to disappear from the social just as they have been erased from the realms and purview of modern nation states' obsession with fixity, categorization and regularization. Even where these cultures are brought into an analytical frame, it is often in a spirit of voyeurism or a benign contrast to what is seen as 'fundamentalism', in search of a kind of tolerant plurality that can somehow soften the harsh binaries of modern boundary marking.

Narration is itself an act of entry into the dominant discursive terrain, and the question of whether the 'subaltern can speak' is answered in the inability for popular religious practice to be described in any other manner than as a residue

of normative religious identity-making. This can be seen in the acutely familiar conflation of Hindu-India and Muslim-Pakistan. The social worlds which exist outside of the equation *religion = nation* are left unacknowledged, within the mainstream, and viewed as implicitly marginal to formal processes. Our contention here is that the margins constitute the mainstream, even as excluded and ostracized subjects, and therefore our tools for analysis must not merely go beyond the existing terminologies and signifiers, but additionally should read against them. This is not a light analytical project. Three conceptual and methodological ruptures are therefore required to create the space for discussing the empirical material in this book.

The first is to analyse 'religion' as being constituted and driven by gender and caste, not merely with the view to exposing hegemonic dominant caste, masculinist patriarchy for religious organization and structure, but to view the role and agency that *dalits* and women exert in their practices in the face of broader exclusionary forces. There is much to understand about society within the acts of obeisance from the margins. Why is it that the study of religion in South Asia has been so long eclipsed by the tendency towards powerful constituencies? The lack of attention to categories and institutions as reflections of male, patriarchal, dominant caste authority is a striking absence. In a more forceful manner we wish to emphasize that evocation of the term Sikh or Muslim or Hindu is often a shorthand for referring to patriarchal, dominant caste normativity, rather than a benign religious categorization. The structuring effect of normative gender and caste forces is not only worthy of exploration in empirical terms but more critically and politically cogently it is a framing for the analytical exercise of understanding how religion operates in contemporary India/Pakistan.

The second rupture required is in the common application of methodological nationalism when considering the social in South Asia. The omnipresence of virulent nationalism in the region of Punjab, the border between two warring countries, has loomed large in delimiting the scope for considering or conceptualizing beyond borders. Academic language has not managed to move beyond the terminologies that have accompanied the national borders' inception and maintenance. The imperative for not blindly adopting 'border thinking', whilst recognizing the multiple ways in which it persists at all levels of analysis, is a key strategy of this book. Like religion itself, nationalism constantly places itself at the centre of meaning, production and identity marking. We have purposefully avoided naming places in terms of their national locations, as a technique for sidestepping the hegemonic framing of nationalism.

The third and final rupture is to approach religion from the vantage point of people, practices and rituals rather than history, theology and texts. This bifurcation is, of course, a point of much debate in religious studies (see Henriksen 2016), and we are conscious of how religious categories relate to the 'shared' spiritual poetry of the region and the role of texts and identities in the proliferation and increasing presence of *deras* and other sites of religious following. However, we also recognize how theology, as supported by institutions, the state and hegemonic social forces, is often used to denigrate the practices of women and *dalits* as not being worthy of inclusion in formal or 'proper' religion. Our interests here lie in how practices often belie or elide the forces of religious institutionalization, whilst recognizing that there is a certain inevitability in the imbricated relationship between practice and text, communal organizing and formal religion.

The problem of 'religion': Eurocentrism, colonialism and capitalism

The predictions made by the 'founding fathers' of the sociology of religion, for whom the significance of religion would inevitably unravel and be undermined by the forces of capitalism, have simply not reigned true. Instead, the secularization thesis has been trumped by the fact that religion is at the forefront of contemporary social and political change. Even one of the most prominent successors of the field, Peter Berger, made a complete reversal from his 1967 proclamation of the secularization thesis in his 1999 admission to counter-secularization or desecularization. This is the most obvious case of where a theoretical premise has been challenged and even altered by the empirical and material world. These academic quarrels remain within a mould of universalist theorizations of religion which seem rather hollow when imposed on postcolonial societies. Colonial proliferation of the category of religion has resulted in countless misnomers of how religious experience and process can be understood outside of 'The West'. The problem of religion therefore is not about whether or not its influence is on the rise or decline, a rather parochial concern, but rather about how to situate it within broader social, political and economic histories. While Enlightenment principles appear in discourse to instil rationality and scientific reason as an anti-religious ethos, in practice colonial and postcolonial regimes have fully utilized religion, as a means of achieving social categorization, for political control. While this has become

a distinctive feature of the colonial state's manufacturing or 'invention' of 'traditions' (Ranger and Hobsbawm 1983), the conscious promotion of religious institutions and religiosity by the colonial state, at the point of high empire, does not present a full picture and indeed thwarts any potentials for agency. Even those studies which have analysed the creation of colonial and postcolonial elites and institutions miss the mark by depicting them as simply mimicking the language of colonial/European command, authority and universalism rather than articulating or even altering its terms of expression altogether (Nandy 1983; Cohn 1996; Chakrabarty 2000).

The predominance of historical and theological approaches to the study of religion in South Asia and Punjab presents certain limitations to the exploration of non-hegemonic or unacknowledged perspectives in the archive of the present. History is indeed important as an exercise in narrative construction, as it offers an understanding of how and why theological frameworks have come into being. Research into the colonial construction of religion is well known, most poignantly highlighted in Denzil Ibbetson's nineteenth-century rendition of the lack of conviction for religious identities in Punjab when he stated:

It would hardly be expected that any difficulty or uncertainty should be felt in classing the natives of the Province under their respective religions ... how far they still profess the creed in which they were brought up, how far they really believe in what they still profess, and what name should be given to their faith, if any ... for distinctions of faith, being attended by no deep spiritual conviction, are marked by a laxity and catholicity of practice which would be impossible to a bigot or an enthusiast.

Ibbetson 1883: 101

Ibbetson's frankness in revealing his inability to find religion in Punjab, as a series of discrete categories and practices codifiable for the colonial register, hinges on a hierarchy of imperialist thought in which Christianity is at the pinnacle and those without verifiable religion at the bottom (Mandair 2016). This lack of *real religion* would create 'bigots and enthusiasts' in the shape of social reformers and ultimately the solidification of categories of religious identity, through separate electorates, social reform and new mobilizations. Colonial elites in collaboration with their colonial masters reform their practices to fit into a model of religion, in which sacred text, rituals and crucially, a theology in which God's existence can be proven, are essential elements. Imposing this 'religion' on the 'laxity and catholicity' of the masses entails control of women's bodies/rituals and exclusion/incorporation of caste

groups. Emergent scholarship of the postcolonial takes religious difference as a given; therefore comparative religions become the edifice upon which the discourse of 'world religions' is placed. European hegemony through the emergence of 'world religions' and a Christian-centric discipline of religious studies is not merely an outcome of free-flowing tides of history (Masuzawa 2005). 'World religions' as a conscious project of classification and as an outcome of European intellectual history offer very little in analysing the contemporary social world in motion. Thus, categorization must not be left to the labelling logic of religion but instead requires a mode of enquiry which recognizes the fraught and problematic terrain of religious studies in light of this history of European knowledge production vis-à-vis colonization. For social scientists, it would be erroneous not to consider the vested nature of political institutions at all levels in the project of religion-making, in which European imperial expansionism played its role. However, for us the task at hand is to find ways of speaking at odds with European universalism but without employing its tools and categories in doing so. This should, in many ways, unsettle the hegemonies within the study of religion and society. The possibility that religion may have existed within differing registers of identity formation and followings can be explored only when the framing of 'world religions' and its accompanying logics is disrupted.

A central point of contention within the sociology of religion is the significance and predictions for the future of religion in the development of capitalism. Directing us back towards the universalizing European tradition within the sociology of religion, the Weberian position has occupied centre stage which can largely be explained for by an antagonism towards what he characterized as 'naïve historical materialism' (Weber 1950). Having the benefit of temporal advantage which followed, rather than preceded, Marx's writings, one of Weber's central tenets in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is that the spirit of capitalism in Europe existed before and hence predated the advent of capitalism, thus arguing that historical materialism as a method and concept was flawed by this very 'fact'. Religious appeal in relation to the superstructure is reduced by Weber in a single stroke of dismissal and, in the process, he too dismisses the agency of societies beyond the purview of this era of (Western) European particularism. If we take the aforementioned critique of the foundational Eurocentrism of the sociology of religion, then the querying of Weberian suppositions in the study of 'Other' societies opens possibilities and potentials for decolonizing the study of religion and in moving away from border thinking (Mignolo 2000; Bhabra 2007).

Marx's widely cited quote from *Contribution to Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843) has come to be a core reference in the sociology of religion for his location of religion within the oppressive structures of capitalist society:

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusion about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions.

1843²

The illusory nature of religion as an 'opium of the people' is a requirement of oppressive capitalist conditions in order for the system of exploitation to sustain itself. However, the extent to which 'the people' he identifies are of 'Other' societies remains another illusory dimension of this statement, not freeing this position from the burden of Eurocentrism. Students and scholars of religion would all be familiar with the above quote. For our purposes, historical sociology and political economy have problematized the religion question in ways most useful to our study here by scrutinizing Marx's telescopic lens with which he attempted to theorize the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP). Through colonial secondary sources, Marx depicted India as having a prevalence of subsistence agricultural production; isolation of rural communities from one another; and extractive urban-based 'oriental despotism' which shaped feudal relations and modes of production:

There are, besides, eternal truths, such as Freedom, Justice, etc., that are common to all states of society. But Communism abolishes eternal truths, *it abolishes all religion*, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in contradiction to all past historical experience [our emphasis].

Manifesto of the Communist Party, Chapter II 1848³

What Marx thought about religion in terms of its function⁴ within capitalist societies and its future seems less germane than who he included in his notion of 'the masses' or 'the people'.⁵ Were they the proletariat in industrializing societies who were the 'working classes' expressed in 'the sigh of the oppressed'? Or did he also include the subsistence producers who were being exploited by the feudal system of 'oriental despotism' which Marx predicted would ultimately be brought into the capitalist system through the spread of colonialism? If religion was the opium of the people in Marx's time, we argue that religion now is the amphetamine of contemporary times with violent,

rather than sedating, effects. Particularly in Punjab, we would go even further in arguing that religion is a 'class A' narcotic which has many dealers and consumers but which sees no means for controlling its circulation. In fact, the state partakes in its circulation and thus religion is an opiate which is openly available and constitutes the system rather than existing outside of it as a sigh or cry of oppression.

The colonial encounter with religion and its shaping of postcolonial continuities of hegemonic forms of domination and 'just rule', in other instances, have overstated the line drawn between colonizer and colonized, for instance, through masculinity and its effeminizing effects (Nandy 1983). However, what is often overlooked is the embedded and embodied dimensions of the relationship between colonizer/colonized and authority figure/devotee within the lens of religious interpretation. The result of this oversight is that the possibilities for agency remain with the eye of the observer: the administrator, the sociologist, the anthropologist. Even in those cases where the colonized devotee expresses agency it is on the ground set by the colonizer. In Homi Bhabha's (1994) salient and witty account of the rejection of the Bible and the communion in colonial Benares on the grounds that the ceremony requires 'eating the body' of Christ, something a vegetarian Hindu could not do, the terms of the relationships are already established between colonizer as Christian and colonized as Hindu. Malcolm Darling (1880–1969), Indian Civil Service (ICS) officer and colonial sociologist of Punjab, further illustrates this embeddedness in his analysis of a 'new pir', Pir Ahmed Shah, who he discovered on his journey from Lahore to Attari:

'Pirs don't fly, but their disciples make them fly' said one of my companions, quoting a sceptical Persian proverb, and in more serious vein he added that a holy man is revered by all whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. The feeling for religion is the sacred thread that all India wears. But it is sometimes badly twisted.

1925: 81

Within this cynically judgemental account of the popularity and obeisance being given to the new *pir*, one can identify the dynamics at play between the 'native' companion providing insights on the naivety of the devotees as well as the evocation of the large categories of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh which were during Darling's time, in the making. Common to Bhabha and Darling is the centrality of a Brahminized account of the 'feeling for religion,' though diametrically different in their perspective, they share a lack of attention to the patriarchal underpinnings of their stories. Colonial narratives offer poignant

examples of the ways in which identifiable religion is instated through the male/Brahmin figure while simultaneously undermining women's/*dalit* devotional multiplicity as 'twisted'. What is unspoken here is that devotees' acts of obeisance continued beyond the purview of the colonial lens, just as it continues to do so in the contemporary. Our contention is that this is only surprising if the mechanism of religion-making is obfuscated.

The making and breaking of 'religion': Gender/caste society

The study of religion is plagued by approaches which conflate identities with practices, thus creating closures rather than openings for analysis (Barth 1994; Smart 1996). For instance, partition studies as a field has been primarily concerned with the communalization of religious identities at the cost of attempting to understand the society or societies in which religion has been played out (Pandey 2001; Khan 2007; Talbot and Singh 2009); though gender has not been ignored by others within this corpus (Das 1995; Menon and Bhasin 1998; Butalia 2000; Didur 2006; Virdee 2013; Misri 2014) the issue of caste remains a lacuna (Kaur 2008). In line with postcolonial approaches, we address religion as a question or series of questions rather than a normative classification or set of categories (Mandair 2016). Our point of entry in the literature on religion in South Asia is a sub-discipline specifically focused upon critiques of religious boundaries. However, what has been missing within the questioning of religious boundaries is a critical analysis of the social borders and cleavages which construct and uphold them. Our main contention is that gender and caste are key structural and structuring aspects of the formation of religion identity. While a number of interventions have been critical of the closures of religious identities by highlighting the problematic position of the concept of 'religion' in South Asia (Gottschalk 2000; Suthren Hirst and Zavos 2005), its entanglements with the colonial project's use of it as a tool for domination and social control (King 1999; Van der veer 2001; Masuzawa 2005) or through explorations of 'common', 'shared' traditions which counter the rationale of religious distinction and difference (Sikand 2003; Assayag 2004; Orsini 2015, 2017), scant attention has been paid to the axes of gender and caste which we argue are foundational to boundary-making and -breaking, through processes of exclusion and co-option (Malhotra 2002).

Even the concept of pluralism through 'lived' religion (Ahmed and Reifeld 2004; Pinault 2008) has provided a functional, yet somewhat superficial, means

for peering across boundaries with limited applicability to the stratified and differentiated societies that are being spoken about. Conflicts around resources, kinship and genealogy, caste-based violence and women's assertions in the face of patriarchal codes are generally absent in the contemporary analysis of religion. In contrast, ideas of pluralism, localities built through shrines and the role of piety as a force of community resilience are concepts of the social that have wide utility. Pluralism, for example, is useful for understanding social cohesion, the continuing popularity of living *pirs*, *faqirs* and *sants* at the borders of religious identities and the practical benefits that arise from such affiliations (Vaudeville 1983; Ewing 1997). Studies of particular shrines such as Baba Farid in Pakpattan (Eaton 1982), Madho Lal Hussain in Lahore (Wolf 2006), Sehwan Sharif (Frembgen 2011) and Haider Shaykh in Malerkotla (Bigelow 2010) and our work on the Golden Temple (Purewal and Kalra 2016) have each similarly pointed to the localized histories embedded at such sites which simultaneously exist under the radar of state monitoring bodies and appeal across formal religious boundaries.⁶ Others have preferred to utilize studies of specific communities to show how local configurations respond to the imposition of macro-narratives forcing people to 'fit in' within amassing nationalizing categories despite distinctive traditions which defy the logic of categorization (Mayaram 1997; Gottschalk 2000; Sila-Khan 2004; Khan 2007; Ramey 2008). All of these attempts, in their own ways, have challenged the boundary assumptions surrounding religious categories. However, only a few have brought caste into the setting (Mayaram 1997) and/or gender (Ahmed 2002) to the fore which has led to a divide between scholarship on religion and broader studies of society. This is all the more puzzling given the formulation of South Asia as quintessentially spiritual/religious.

The gender/caste absence points to a wider problem in the study of social groups in South Asia that stems from the conflation of religion with identity. Affirmation of a ritual or practice comes through a process of recognition which seems to inevitably appellate religion. Srinivas' (1952) study of the Coorgs is a prime example of how the systematic study of a group in terms of beliefs, customs and rituals (i.e. anthropology/ethnography) produces a reified sense of identity and identification. In reviewing this contribution to the sociology of religion in India, Beteille, rather uncritically, sums up Srinivas' contribution as 'a field view of Hinduism' (1992: 1867). This is despite Beteille's acute observations of the failings of approach and method within the sociology of religion, noting it falls short of providing opportunities to study 'other' societies without utilizing the tools of 'objectivity' or 'rationality'. Yet even the ethnographic method as deployed

by Srinivas, in its attempt to interpret meanings associated with people's acts of devotion and belief, at the point of analysis, is reduced to a singular religious identity. Nonetheless, the porousness of religious classifications has been found by researchers who have estimated that a substantial proportion of the Indian population still retains multiple religious identification (Nandy 1983; Sikand 2003). Asserting a singular religious identity can be a decision of convenience as well as of caution in not wanting to cause undue offense to the perceived sacredness of religious identities by applying a deconstructivist logic to sites of belief which have come to constitute and construct contemporary society in postcolonial India. However, this belies the violence of classification in the first place and thus only provides an alibi for avoiding the thorny terrain of social division and conflict.

In the specific milieu of Punjab, Harjot Oberoi's work is perhaps one of the most incisive contributions to the broader religious and area studies literature. Rereading 'tradition' through a Foucauldian method of discourse analysis, Oberoi attempts to open historical archives to the possibilities for considering pluralism of practices in the face of the fixity of constructed identities. He asserts that:

It is all very well for historians to think, speak and write about Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, but they rarely pause to consider if such clear-cut categories actually found expression in the consciousness, actions, and cultural performances of the actors they describe ... I was constantly struck by the brittleness of our textbook classifications. There simply wasn't any one-to-one correspondence between the categories which were supposed to govern religious behaviour on the one hand, and the way in which people actually experienced their everyday lives on the other.

1994: 1–2

Oberoi's 'enchanted universe' speaks to the demotic practices which he had outlined in his earlier studies on the veneration of Sakhi Sarwar and on popular saints, goddesses and village sacred sites (1987, 1992). Evidence from the colonial archive illuminated the disjuncture between practice and the nineteenth-century emerging normative enclosures of Sikh (Khalsa) identity. Our contemporary ethnography is indebted to Oberoi's path-breaking work as much as it is a departure from its schema. Firstly, the deconstructivist project, despite appearing to be untrue to the category sought to un-scaffold (Sikh identity), proceeded to uphold the terminology of its very framing. While the Singh Sabha movement is worthy of critique for the making and construction of modern Sikh identity, the caste and gender dimensions of this were left unexplored or rather ignored. Instead, the hegemonic urban-educated, *khatri*

(dominant caste), male Sikh leadership were assumed to be normatively constitutive of authority and institutionalization. Foucauldian analysis indeed lends itself to a lack of attention to agency. However, the double-bind of history and Foucauldian deconstructivism within Oberoi's method limit the possibilities for reading the demotic against the logic of religious categorization. A similar omission of the caste and gender dimensions of religion-making can be found in Mandair's (2016) *Religion and the Specter of the West* where the Derridean conceptualization otherwise provides the tools for such an analysis but which remains unavailed. Thus, understanding subaltern societies in this process of religion-making, not readily accessible in the available written archives, within these studies was not at all explored.

Any attempt to interrogate the constructed nature of religious identities and practices, if we understand them to have not only been shaped by the colonial register but also through the evolving nature of feudal, patriarchal social relations, should be unsettling rather than merely deconstructivist. Ethnographies of religious practice have been perhaps most notorious for this evasion. The anthropology of popular religion in South Asia has, by and large, preferred instead to package the complex meanings of human experience and ritual practice through worship, sacrifice and women's devotion within the same regimes and labels (e.g. popular Hinduism, Muslim and Hindus). This can, in part, explain for the absence of the critique of anthropology which *a priori* privileges and applies the categories to describe or explain their respective universes. Their broader contribution has thus been one of differently angled inscription of categories rather than unsettlement (Fuller 1992; Assayag 2004). On the other end of the spectrum, where an outright challenge to the logic of categorization has been posed, this has been met by vehement opposition from voices highly invested in the identities being deconstructed (Oberoi 1994; Doniger 2009).⁷ While the openness of the Sikh tradition beyond the limits of *Khalsa* identity was identified by Oberoi (1994), his deconstructive exercise was interpreted as a critique of formal Sikh identity *writ large*. The risk of dismantling the edifice from the top-down is to attract ire from the elite and identity-invested communities subject to this deconstruction. We argue that not only is deconstruction in its own right a partial, incomplete and problematic project, but, in the case of Oberoi's deconstruction, conflates the urban, *khatri* elite perspective with other boundary crossing acts, namely 'folk' rituals and cultural forms which constituted a more socially multifarious kind of boundary crossing. Thus, Oberoi's 'enchanted universe' which is produced out of the deconstruction of formalizing Sikh processes is somewhat flawed in that it is

hinged on a critique of a dominant which lacks any attention to gender and caste in its uncovering of agency by devotees who constitute other, in particular, subaltern social worlds.

Conversely, Doniger's (2009) study tends to the margins extensively, as a view from below, as well as the spaces in-between, but attracted opprobrium for placing these within the classification 'Hindu'. Our intention here is indeed to focus upon the margins, but not as religious spaces within religion, but rather through the matrix of caste/gender. In this way the negotiations that exist between heteropraxy and institutionalization are revealed through exclusion (usually of women) and adaptation (often by caste groups) across the various empirical examples presented in this book.

A historical contribution which resonates with our project but based in the archive is Anshu Malhotra's *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities* (2002) which unravels the Arya Samaj's use of gender and caste norms amongst the urban middle classes in early twentieth-century colonial Punjab. In doing so, she outlines the trajectory of grooming women's participation and performativity in evolving cultures of class and caste in the making of Arya Samaj ideals. The recognition of the constitutive dynamics of gender and caste here is notable, though, like Oberoi's project, it still remains within the sphere of urban, educated, dominant castes. This is perhaps too obvious of a critique to make, and Malhotra (2017) indeed redresses the upper-caste focus in her subsequent exploration of the nineteenth-century figure Piro, whose poetry reflects her as low caste (*sudra*) and a courtesan/prostitute (*vesva*). However, rather than allowing for Piro's symbolism and poetry to speak beyond the labels of categorization, indeed to render them identity-less, the metanarrative of *bhakti* is applied as a means of containing the critical implications. In the realms of recovery of women's history, the appellation *bhakti* is problematic, but offers a potentially progressive space for expression. However, when Malhotra (2017: 279–324) ventures into postcolonial India, searching for Piro, she has already been incorporated as *mata* (mother) and tamed by the practices and veneration of the Gulabdasis in post-Partition East Punjab/Haryana. The contemporary context of Hindutva India then rather effortlessly incorporates *bhakti* into its fold as it does the plethora of other labelled and unlabelled groups and sites which can be made to fall within a Hindu-ism. The persistence of the use of metanarratives, as Malhotra's exemplifies, is a solution to explaining empirical phenomenon that evoke ambiguity and undecidability rather than fixity and certainty. Oberoi, Mandair and Malhotra equally share in a communal version of the past, albeit within differently deconstructive modes, as they ultimately

extract Sikh, Hindu and Bhakti identities out of the melange that is colonial Punjab. These accounts are unable to identify the social which was by necessity religiously mixed even within the crude labels and thus present valuable alibis for the current boundaries of India and Pakistan.

A Punjabi religion?

The deified dead, local festivals (*melas*), and popular spiritual figures, despite their consignment to the refuse of modernity, survived the efforts of colonial reformers and postcolonial institutions. Roger Ballard (1999) draws on Juergensmeyer (1982) to utilize a typology of '*panthic* [group], *kismet* [fate], *dharmic* [faith] and *qaumic* [nation]' to encapsulate the spectrum of practices in Punjab for their linkages and responses to broader processes of identity, community-building and devotional practices. Ballard's insightful and polemical piece argues that the transformations of Punjabi religion through social reform and its criticisms have enabled a range of different types of mobilizations, thus altering the character of Punjabi religion towards identification with the major traditions. This notion of 'Punjabi religion' is a provocative one, as it momentarily dismisses the provenance of the religious categories of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim. In fact, Ballard goes a step further than Oberoi by not centring his frame upon any one of these singular categories. Whilst we are sympathetic to utilizing vernacular categories, their juxtaposition with modernity is to exert epistemological and methodological alterity, rather than to serve as anthropological nativism. This is clearly exemplified in the way that the categories of *panth*, *kismet*, *dharm* and *qaum* have all been encompassed into metanarratives of religion at various junctures.⁸ The more profound limitation is that 'Punjabi religion', like any other formation, pays no attention to gender and caste in a theoretical or empirical manner.

When 'the myth of Punjab as a casteless society' (Ram 2007) is removed, the particularity of the social structure in Punjab becomes opaque. Punjabi religion, therefore, falls somewhat flat in the persistence of caste despite the multiple challenges from Buddhism, the Nath Panth, Islam, Sikhism and then the various reform movements in the twentieth century, from communism to Ad Dharm. Brahminical caste hierarchies found in other parts of South Asia can be seen to have given way to the dominant caste thesis which positions *jats* (landholders) as the dominant group.⁹ While this framework is partially valid, our fieldwork across Punjab in both India and Pakistan would extend

the dominant caste thesis to include other groups such as Sayyids, Khatri and Mahajans who have amassed economic, social and cultural capital through positions in state institutions, spiritual authority in shrines and/or entry into business and trade. Nowhere is this more evident than in West Punjab where the absence of land reform and feudal followings around shrines have buttressed castes such as Sayyids with spiritual and material power.¹⁰ Thus, when we turn to understanding the present context and forces at play, neither does the 'essence' of caste in Punjab sit neatly with Inden's (1990) critique of orientalism (Indology), the sociology of caste (Madan 1971; Dumont 1980), nor does it match Srinivas' (1952) Sanskritization thesis which assumes a dynamic of 'acting up' demonstrating mimicry of formally sanctioned, upper caste rituals and performance.

The metanarrative of egalitarianism, which hides under the umbrella of scriptural and philosophical referentiality, offers little explanation for how and why caste and gender discrimination persist in Punjab. Sikh and Muslim religious rejection of caste does not belie the recognition of its function as the occupational division of labour in village life and of urban spatial-economic segregation (Kaur 1986). The distinction between caste as occupational class society (i.e. ownership and relationship to the means of production) and caste as untouchability (vis-à-vis purity/pollution) is referenced as the central distinguishing factor to the Punjab model. Nonetheless empirical studies have consistently found the purity/pollution matrix is practiced systematically in Punjab, despite the replacement of *jajmani* [bartered/bonded labour] relations with waged and contractual labour (Jodhka 2002). While in Pakistan caste is simultaneously spoken of disparagingly as a remnant of 'Hindu' practices and thus a problem of 'another nation' (Gazdar 2007), its prevalence through discrimination against Christians is an articulation rather than a structural change (Kamran and Purewal 2015). Despite these prevalent prejudices, public discourses on caste on both sides of the border perform a well-versed proposition that it may be present and practiced in the form of social relations but that it is not of the Brahminical form in enforcing strict codes and thus somehow less discriminatory.¹¹ Indeed, the attempts to pursue religious escape from untouchability or caste oppression have been well documented (Juergensmeyer 1982) but, as has been noted and which we will demonstrate, caste injustice haunts those who attempt to 'convert' out into other religious framings (Ram 2004a, 2012).¹² A point well illustrated with respect to *dalit* Christians. Rajkumar (2010) posits that *dalit* theology has two elements – 'liberative social vision' and 'identity affirmation' (41) – and in order to be effective has to appeal and mobilize non-Christian *dalits*. Liberation and

identity affirmation are not opposite but do stand in tension when one aspect is a religious formation that is based on caste exclusion in the first place (as was the case with the Christian Church in its first endeavours in the subcontinent). Caste, when aligned with religion, presents another possibility or an illusory hope for salvation from the social and material world.

The metanarrative of egalitarianism within religion also pervades discourse on gender in Punjab. This is the terrain of the social which is often left unexplored due to the assertion of pluralism, egalitarianism or even of secularism which provide alibis for the failure of religion to tackle gender and caste discrimination. The Arya Samaj, in its initial early twentieth-century incarnation, perhaps in a competitive move within the era of *Ad Dharm* mobilization, vocally stated a commitment to ending gender discrimination. The Sikh tradition, on a more sustained level, makes great claims about women's equal roles in religious practices (Jakobsh 2003).¹³ A spurious distinction between Punjabi culture and Sikh/Muslim/Hindu religion is drawn in which the structure of normative gender roles is seen as more restrictive in the social than in the religious (Drury 1991). Consequently, the lack of change in society is argued to be because women/*dalits* are not religious enough or are not engaging in 'proper' rituals, rather than due to the limitations of the discourse. This is perhaps because an ideology of egalitarianism (one focused on the oppressed) incorporates women's practices – within limits – through explicitly patriarchal rituals, such as praying/sacrificing at a shrine for a boy child. But more importantly, the embedded patriarchal and paternalistic associations between religious authority and (female) devotees place women in the same position of structural subordination as in broader social relations. Liminal spaces in shrines arise from rituals that mimic those of the celebrations of marriage (such as the lighting of *divas*, laying of the *chaadar*, the provision of *langar*, petitioning, exchange, *mehndi*, rose water, dancing, music and a multiple myriad forms of celebration) in which women have agency (socially and spiritually) but are framed through the essential necessity of marriage as the primary mechanism for social reproduction. Shrines are spaces for devotees from the marginal classes, women, disabled or maimed people, the desperate and those without recourse to other causes. They embody hope and, most crucially, aspiration. What is hoped for through prayer and ritual? A son, a job, a cure are all desires that enable a better position in feudal-capitalist-patriarchal social relations, a heteronormative desire that corrects the catharsis for the disciplining of the mother-in-law operating as spokesperson for the maintenance and reproduction of the patriarchal system. Entry into the formal religious system for women and *dalits* is supposed to

offer salvation but instead transposes to another set of hierarchies in which the measure of 'proper' religiosity rests primarily in the control of women's bodies (Ahmed 2002).

The critique of religion as inherently patriarchal and casteist is a byline for the broader unpacking of religious practices from the margins (Chakraborty 2003). With an understanding of religious practice and authority as performative and constructed, if we follow the feminist critiques of religion by recognizing gender and patriarchy as social constructs (Welch 1985; Kwok 2005; Woodhead 2007; Hawthorne 2013), an analysis which interrogates how gender is navigated and performed through religious practice as well as how women are represented or absent from the spaces and texts is required. Just as the Indian state has made use of positive discrimination (through reservations for *dalits* and women) as one of the cornerstones of India's postcolonial equality legislation, so has the Pakistani state set quotas for minorities and women. Whilst this has not resulted in a shifting of the social order, such moves by the state reflect how gender and caste feature within public policy. Nonetheless, *dalits* are still systematically discriminated against and whilst issues of purity and pollution are less prominent, inter-caste marriage and economic parity remain out of sight. The intersection of religion and so-called 'backward status' by the Indian state in Article 15 of the Constitution (prohibition of discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, gender or place of birth) has seen Sikhs and Muslims remain outside of the formal anti-caste legislation, meaning that the overlapping of religion and caste that marked the colonial period continues within postcolonial discourse. This demand for recognizing the caste/gender question is mirrored in religious institutions, though in a paradoxical manner, as can be seen in the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) elections which require quotas for women and for *dalits*, even though Sikhism and the state do not recognize caste within this group. What remains pertinent and stark amongst these complex contradictions is continuing caste and gender violence. Shrines and popular devotion do not directly impinge upon the casteist and sexist social structure of Punjab but do provide a space for women and *dalits* to express agency, rather than being acted upon, even if in a highly circumscribed way.

Against the grain of bordering and methodological nationalism

The border between India and Pakistan is relatively young. Some celebrated its seventieth birthday in 2017 in the marking of the birth of two nations, while

others continue to mourn it as a symbol of trauma, violence, rupture and loss for the region. The India–Pakistan geopolitical border that cuts through the region of Punjab, with its accompanying bordering discourses, provides a methodological opportunity to explore the question of religion across Indian and Pakistani Punjab.¹⁴ Unfortunately, this opportunity has not been availed by contemporary scholarship.¹⁵ Very few researchers have even attempted to conceptualize Punjab as a social whole; even when they do, the labels of Muslim Punjab or Indian Punjab seep through (Alvi 2007). The language of political science, which utilizes its own universal concepts and categories, has experimented with this in drawing out a comparative method of state formation (Jalal 1995; Oldenburg 2003), still maintaining the idea of ‘South Asia’ but relying on the two-nation theory to provide the units of analysis. Little is gleaned about forces at play beyond formal state-making. Clearly, as we have found in the writing of this book, it is impossible to write in an academic style without resorting to geographical or national demarcations. However, we also recognize that when literature, in the form of poetry, as an articulation of a Punjabi-philosophical-poetic tradition is considered, a significant counter-narrative to communalism emerges (Murphy 2018). By highlighting alternative worlds and resistances outside of categories and labels (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh) and the limited geographical bounds of Punjab, poetry, as circulated in popular culture, remains an important corrective source (Mir 2006; Gaur 2009).¹⁶

Indeed, one of the key tasks of this book is to examine sites, figures and institutions as a means of questioning the boundary formations that enable the knowledge production embedded in them. This requires an explicit debunking of border thinking. There are two dimensions to this process. The first is the inevitable outcome of methodological nationalism in which the Islamic republic and the secular republic enforce some notion of analytical bias in relationship to religion. This is increasingly converging in the Hindutva phase of Indian nationalism as it did in the General Zia phase of Pakistani nationalism (1978–1988). The second is in relation to the pragmatics of travel across the border and the skills required in religio-linguistic terms to handle the material. It is not possible for scholars to easily cross the India–Pakistan border which, coupled with the mutual inaccessibility of the Persian script with that of the Gurmukhi script, also lends itself to endeavours which are narrow in their construction.

Exploring sites in Punjab across the two-nation boundaries compels an interrogation of competing religious discourses; dynamics of state constructions of secularism/minorities/majoritarianism; and trajectories of institutionalizing

processes. For example, despite the election of the Hindu nationalist/majoritarian BJP in India, the notion of fundamentalism is still more commonly used to characterize Pakistan's 'problem of religion'. As our empirical material reflects, sites of piety across the region of Punjab offer a spectrum of practices and performances which require a concerted, empirically driven approach in order to go beyond and beneath such characterizations and macro-narratives. The book will pose a means for conceptualizing popular traditions which often supersede, transcend and even defy *de facto* categories or labels, thus making a delineation between religious category and religious practice. The dynamic between those sites that become recognized as religious centres and these demotic practices offers a framework that pushes beyond that of studies of popular religion. Our intention is therefore to chart out a conceptual terrain for reading piety, practice and performance in Punjab without *a priori* privileging colonial agency in the making of the blueprint for the increasingly discredited labels of fixity. In doing so, our intention is to make a contribution to the body of knowledge by developing an understanding of popular religion in a dynamic relationship with contemporary institutionalized religion, which is historically rooted, reflective and evolving. We ultimately challenge the fixity of borders which demarcate the popular and the institutionalized question the very purpose and clarity of this distinction.

Our research takes the India–Pakistan border across Punjab as a paradigmatic starting point from which to undo, challenge and rearticulate notions of religious division that have permeated studies of these nation-states. This is a counter-intuitive position as this border was the site of violent pangs at the departure of British colonial power and has subsequently been configured by conflict and war, ostensibly in the name of religious division. All issues, be they related to gender, caste, economics, politics or culture, seem to inevitably be related to or narrated through the prism of religion. It appears as a light-refracting schema which not only reduces all colours to a ray of singularity, but intensifies it to a great, destructive potential. Partition violence notwithstanding, Sikh militancy and the Taliban insurgency all mark this region in deeply traumatic terms in relation to religion. Arguably, the urgent need is to articulate the shape and contours of religious identity and ideology that can be mobilized or manipulated to produce such calls to religion. Our contention is that this as a short-term requirement does not address the long-term structural underpinnings of religion itself. Our own experience of carrying out research in Punjab across the India–Pakistan border coincided with many moments of intense violence, but was

tempered by the continuity of practices that elided and exceeded the boundaries of extant religious identities.¹⁷

The myopic focus to date upon the 1947 partition of Punjab and its antecedent histories and state-building trajectories has eclipsed the potentials for more rigorous insights into the social due to the 'categorical difference' (Gottschalk 2000) employed so extensively in the sizeable literature of Partition studies. We posit this work has loosely utilized religious markers in representing the region's history as one of communalism, recovery and even nostalgia (Khan 2007; Talbot and Singh 2009). It is here that we refer to Anzaldúa's (1987) interrogation of hegemonic historical accounts which, she argues, have failed to create sufficient dissonance with dominant macro-narratives. This can be seen in the renditions and commemorations of Partition in which religious labels, categories and hence communities feature prominently. Anzaldúa argues that borderlands present possibilities to be sites of social and political agency, epistemologically intersectional reorientations and creative responses to domination through localized linguistic, cultural and historical articulations. While the concept of the borderland may be useful in order to approach the region of Punjab, which we have argued elsewhere in other terms (Kalra and Purewal 1999; Purewal 2003), our proposition here is that since religion was, in effect, a key site of colonization, then that knowledge production can be decolonized only if we critically approach the border as a site of ongoing bordering, and look more introspectively to sites and processes where those bordering processes are in motion. The border is thus not merely the Radcliffe Line or India-Pakistan rivalry but is found increasingly at the centre of all aspects of society, politics and economy (Balibar 2002), yet it is not as fixed as it appears, either in practice or in meaning (Bauder 2011). Borders, according to Victor Konrad (2015), are quite simply always in motion and have always been in motion. Thus, the making and unmaking of borders is just a matter of time (Davies 2011). Accordingly, borders, viewed as either object or process, are assemblages born in motion, conducted in motion and created in motion (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Yet, our images and constructs of borders, and ultimately our theories about how borders work, are still in reaction to the visible, often linear, and generally institutionalized lines, fences and walls that are the manifestations of borders, the agencies and processes that permeate them, and the statist positions that create them. This constitutes border thinking which, we argue, is an impeding factor to our understanding of how society has evolved and continues to do so.

One outcome of border thinking is the nostalgia with which pre-Partition Punjab is remembered. *Punjabiyyat*, or the idea of Punjab, possesses a supposed unifying sense of regional belonging across geopolitical and religious borders (Virdee 2018). The possibility to refer to *Punjabiyyat* in terms of collective belonging or unity requires a sophisticated level of myth-making. This is offered through language, literary culture, music and history. Myths, according to Barthes (2000), provide an extraordinary way to see the ordinary. They also provide a means by which to construct discourses which, as Barthes (2000) argues, justify and sustain inequitable and otherwise unjustifiable material and social conditions. Thus, *Punjabiyyat* is a metanarrative of identity which speaks of communal harmony, language, belonging and literary tradition which sugarcoats the highly stratified and unequal social and material relations of feudalism, patriarchy and capitalism. While the sphere of culture which *Punjabiyyat* draws from is worthy of attention, our contention is that within this mythological idea of Punjab there is no space for radical, introspective analysis of the social, not least of gender and caste exclusions and hierarchies. It is no wonder that Malhotra and Mir's (2012) compiled volume of seminal pieces on Punjab does not even pay lip service to the social exclusions implicit in and underlying what is otherwise viewed as Punjab's 'shared' past. *Punjabiyyat* can only be deployed as a critical tool if it provides the means for expressions of resistance to exploitation and oppression (Kalra 2014). In the face of violence and atrocities against women, *dalits* and Christians in Punjab, the project of *Punjabiyyat*, without such critique, can only reproduce and articulate 'the colonial matrix of power' within contemporary border thinking (Quijano 2007). Thus, the challenge is not merely to identify new terminologies or vocabularies in order to grapple with borders in motion, but to decolonize knowledge from localized positionalities to unsettle the fixity which categories assign. In recognizing that such fixity stems from the historical violences and silences of domination and hegemony, we argue that the logic of religious categorization requires not only deconstruction but decolonization (Mignolo 2000; Quijano 2007). The contemporary nature of our project also questions the limits of decolonization, as this should not be reduced to an exercise of simply attributing the problem of religion to the bequeathment of the colonial masters. The postcolonial states of India and Pakistan have built upon the worst elements of colonial practice to produce the casteist and sexist/misogynistic social structure through which radicalized religious identities form. In presenting fieldwork from the margins, our critique of border thinking is equally an exposure of the institutional and legal frames that bolster bounded identity.

Openness and closure across practices, sites and texts

With respect to our two main analytical thrusts, *to analyse religion through gender and caste* and *to go against the grain of methodological nationalism*, an analysis of practices, sites and texts in the contemporary context of Punjab across India and Pakistan enables a view which is not bound by or loyal to state/dominant forces' religious categories. While we have accentuated the limits of understanding 'religion' through categories and boundaries, a path that has been paved by others (Pandey 1990; Asad 1993; Fitzgerald 2000, 2007; Gottschalk 2000, 2012), our explorations have found that there continues to be a lack of conceptual attentiveness to practices which, in our view, present opportunities as social texts for understanding contemporary society. In the Punjab context, the denial of agency outside of the religious categories to the populations being represented is a key gap in the study of religion in the region. Following De Certeau's (1984) distinction between tactics and strategies in engaging with a cultural field, we endeavour to directly address the aforementioned closures, by exploring sites and figures of piety as representing openings for analysis in our exploration of religion, in the face of conceptual and ideological closures. Mandair's (2016) exploration of the postcoloniality of religion shows how attempts to create closure by reformists across the emerging religious communities during the 1920s. This arose out of a desire to assert a dominant interpretation of religious identities in staking claims to an identifiable self-projection of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim in relation to their proximate 'others' within the colonial regime of representation. The *Sikh Rehat Maryada's* edict in forbidding certain practices officially deemed by the SGPC as representing acts existing outside of Sikh-ism is a prime example of this performance of authority through religion-making:

Not believing in [...] magic, spells, incantation, omens, auspicious times, days and occasions, influence of stars, horoscopic dispositions, *Shradh* (ritual serving of food to priests for the salvation of ancestor on appointed days as per the lunar calendar), Ancestor worship, *khiah* (ritual serving of food to priests – Brahmins – on the lunar anniversaries of death of an ancestor), *pind* (offering of funeral barley cakes to the deceased's relatives), *patal* (ritual donating of food in the belief that that would satisfy the hunger of a departed soul), *diva* (the ceremony of keeping an oil lamp lit for 360 days after the death, in the belief that that lights the path of the deceased), ritual funeral acts, *hom* (lighting of ritual fire and pouring intermittently clarified butter, food grains etc. into it for propitiating gods for the fulfilment of a purpose), *jag* (religious ceremony involving presentation of oblations), [...] veneration of any graves, of monuments erected

to honour the memory of a deceased person or of cremation sites, idolatry and such like superstitious observances.

SGPC 1945

Such closure was not only concerned with curbing popular practices, which were often viewed as problematic in relation to other factors, but was also driven by ambitions to be recognized within the domain of European (colonial) onto-theological rationality (Mandair 2016: 212). Resulting institutionalizing processes and reformist movements present a disciplining attempt upon heteropraxy which is one strand within our exploration of the popular. What is missed within ontotheological reasoning is the possibility that *people continued to engage in such practices either in the face of or despite such institutionalizing process and exerted autonomy and agency in partaking in such acts*.¹⁸ The Sikh *Rehat Maryada*'s banning of rituals belies the existence of an alternative spiritual-textual tradition which has been tamed by the generic term 'Punjabi literature' (Shackle 2012). In contemporary West Punjab, these writings have been absorbed into a Punjabi-Sufi genre and in the East they are separated from sacred writing and conceived of as secular.¹⁹ Nonetheless, in relation to performative cultures at shrines, the textual tradition, most notably encapsulated by Waris Shah's eighteenth-century text *Heer-Ranjha* but also Bulleh Shah in the same time period and Piro in the nineteenth century, is a fundamental element in the expression of women/*dalit*/marginalized perspectives.²⁰ Mir (2010) points to the circulation of the epic love story/tragedy of *Heer-Ranjha* and how its veneration and performance in Punjabi shows its distinctive place as a text of piety and devotion beyond religious boundaries. However, while the lens of literary historicism frames the sustenance of vernacular culture, despite the colonial project's imposition on language, the phenomenological realm of practices and sites reveals their contemporary circulation. Throughout this book the epic poem [*qissa*] of *Heer Ranjha* crops up to symbolize a border space: between spatial, geopolitical and historical time zones, across East and West Punjab, and traversing religion.²¹ The poetry that is integrated into this text serves to support the disruption of religious boundaries through an articulation of gender/caste critique. Partially, it also provides a historical resource as counter-narrative to colonial historiographies' domination of understanding of religious categorization; however, this is not the primary aim of its usage in this book. The spiritual poetry of Punjab from Farid, to Nanak to Mian Mohammed Baksh, provides us with a language taken from the past to offer alternative narratives to communalism, but with our emphasis on the contemporary this is a project which can only be indicated by the material presented in the following chapters.

Where the Punjabi-philosophical-poetic tradition offers possibilities for textual liberation, dominant, normative vocabularies in academia, state discourse and the media hinder expression of alternative worlds and resistances outside of the labels of Muslim, Hindu, Sikh (Murphy 2018).²² We note a predominant lean towards language and terms steeped in this universalism, most clearly evident within the framing of functionalism, which is fixated on the closures of labelling in categories of difference. ‘Language games’ (Wittgenstein 1965) implicit within such categories are, we argue, at the heart of inherently flawed border thinking. *A priori* notions of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim are the most obvious markers of categories of difference which, even when being analytically queried, continue to be deployed. Naming practices of bodies, streets, buildings, places and objects are all part of the terrain of border thinking and its strategic use of language. The conflation of religion and caste was a pivotal force of mobilization and hence naming practices. *Dalits* became the target for being renamed and for renaming themselves in the twentieth century, which attracted violence from anti-conversion forces seeking to maintain their respective demographic numbers (Osuri 2013). The term ‘*dalit*’ meaning ‘broken’, is one of collective self-identification, emerging out of a politics of recognition in order to point out the structural nature of caste oppression and discrimination in India. This term has no resonance in Pakistan where caste is neither officially recognized for its un-Islamic associations nor has any collective space to articulate this other than through the formal religious terrain. The naming of the oppressed saw a number of social and religious reform movements which attempted to create a stamp of self-identification, which the state categories of SC (Scheduled Caste) and ST (Scheduled Tribe) could not. Most notable of these in the Punjab was the Ad Dharm movement in the early twentieth century; the Ravidassia movement which culminated in a distinctive religious identity in the early twenty-first century; and Ambedkar’s move for conversion to Buddhism during the 1950s (Ram 2004a). Gandhi’s patronising term *Harijan* (Beloved of God), as a term for untouchables, is matched by the word *Mussali* (those of the prayer mat) for those that became Muslim. In the case of those that became Sikh, the term *Mazbi Sikh* (religiously Sikh) was applied. These appellations continue into post-Partition India and Pakistan, where those who had remained *Ad Dharm* (or outside of any religious affiliation) would upon conversion become Muslim Sheikhs. In India, state-led appellations such as ‘Scheduled Caste’ or ‘Scheduled Tribe’ would stand as administrative terminology continuing from the colonial, whilst in Pakistan, *Mazbi Sikhs*, *Valmikis* and those without religion became

Christian. This variety of naming and its reduction is critical in the way in which we represent our data in the coming chapters. Whilst we are unable to avoid hegemonic categorization we are also immediately aware of the multiplicity and politics inherent in such naming.

Bordering occurs not only in practices, but also on bodies and places. The possibility of altering someone else's name in an exertion of power or that someone would feel need to alter their name to escape a label in order to seek cover and protection, points to how dominance and hegemony operate in caste society. Scott (1990) highlights this process to illustrate the nature of public and private transcripts under hegemonic regimes:

The hidden transcript of the dominant is similarly an artefact of the exercise of power ... The masks may get thicker or thinner, they may be crude or subtle, depending on the nature of the audience and the interests involved, but they are nevertheless performances, as are all social actions.

28

Urbanization has presented the possibilities that many of those that migrated and settled in Punjab's cities were able to change surname and profession. In that way, adopting the names 'Qureshi', 'Sheikh' and even 'Sayyid' became a way of escaping their previous caste affiliation. Though in no way representative, the migration that was forced by Partition was enabling for those who could move in relation to their caste profession. As we have written elsewhere (Purewal 2011; Kalra 2015), this was not the case for those that lost their professions in their entirety, such as the Rababis, though it enabled a move upward a rung or two in the social order. This was not the case for rural to rural migration at Partition. Even urbanization in the twentieth century in Punjab did not necessarily lead to forms of social emancipation. The case of those who worked in villages with removal of dead animals (considered the most polluted form of work) when coming to the city became involved in the cleaning of faeces from urban households. Paradoxically, the status of those *dalits* was even lower to those who remained in the village. In addition, the fact that women's names are in any case tied to patriarchal prerogative on their bodies means that their subjectivity or agency is never considered worthy of recovery.

While the change of names of countless places after Partition has and continues to take place, it is not merely the names which are deemed as signifiers of categorical belonging but more importantly who and what is included in the naming practice. It is here that our approach towards shrines and shrine cultures comes into focus. In contrast to the *maseet* [mosque] or the caste-barring *mandir*, the shrine is perceived as a place that is open to women and

men regardless of affiliation, caste, status or social standing. The shrine is thus an archetypical antithesis to the controlled space of the *mosque*, temple and *gurdwara*, where male guardians in the shape of the *mullah*, *pandit* and *gyani* restrict access and attempt to control activities. In colonial modernity, this took the shape of restricting women's practice (Malhotra 2002). In twenty-first-century postcolonial India and Pakistan, it takes the shape of restricting access. In Auqaf- and SGPC-managed shrines, restriction takes different forms. Due to unwritten and unspoken ritual restrictions on women to gain access to or perform rites during menstruation, this has led to a convention that women are not allowed into most tombs; to carry the *beerh* [holy book] to the *sachkhand* [true resting place]; or to perform *kirtan* [hymns] in the Harmandir. The question of restrictions in relation to caste is more difficult to formulate in relation to issues of accessibility and restriction in managed shrines, as urban anonymity creates openness. Nonetheless, in terms of who sits on management committees and who has access to shrine resources, there is a prevalent ordering of caste hierarchy which represents powerful closures. Naming convention provides us with an abstract example of the empirical analysis which is to follow, where practices and identities are enmeshed in an oscillation between orthodox and heterodox, ellipsed by gender and caste.

Synopsis

Human agency is key to this interpretative framework, drawing on, but not confined to, a Gramscian tradition where hegemony is present and looming but never all-encompassing or all-pervasive. As a consequence, our primary attention to the contemporary social field offers methodological and conceptual possibilities to analyse 'what people do', rather than 'what they say they do' in accordance with and performing obedience to such restrictions (De Certeau 1984). Thus, the point at which formal religion-making is taking place is also the nexus at which religion-breaking erupts. Shrines enable us to locate the persistence of practices in multiple sites, upon and through which multiple discourses criss-cross, and whilst the lens of communalism pervades in historical/textual constructions, the 'significance' for contemporary devotees is much more closely associated with a spiritual power's ability to impede and transform the material. Thus, a critical view of how structures and hierarchies of gender and caste operate in terms of social organization characterizes Punjab as a stratified rather than an enchanted universe, where the social is brought to

the fore. Religion is distinctive for providing the narratives and rituals which are spun around the social (gender and caste) in the ordering of society. Religion in this view is constructed and bounded through a matrix of gender/caste, in which male, high caste, heteronormative positionality produces closure around a tradition, whether it is named as Hindu, Sikh or Muslim. Each of these subject positions is in turn formed on the basis of an exclusion or incorporation of its binary, so women, *dalits* and non-normative sexuality become the objects by which the religious tradition sets its boundaries. There is a spectrum that ranges from violent exclusion, through to incorporation, and ultimately to subsumption in the relationship between patriarchal, casteist institutions and *dalit*/women devotees. Spiritual figures and sacred spaces illuminate these processes in practice, as this is the terrain in which religion is produced, challenged, stretched and morphed.

Practices of devotion are constantly changing and quickly passed into made and remade traditions. In our ethnographic analysis of shrines across Punjab, it is the commonality of practices of devotees which is striking, given the communal historical record, but perhaps not when the lens turns towards the subaltern. Even where popular practice is a prominent part of analysis, it is often narrated discursively into a normative religious tradition.²³ This merely repeats the modern requirement for any practice to become religious through entry into historical time and that which is not able to be incorporated rendered as superstition, fable or myth. Our perspective does not contest processes of incorporation or the desire of groups to represent themselves within the dominant categories of religion, but rather that this is neither teleological nor linear. Just as practices are narrated into hegemonic notions of what constitutes religion, this is not the only process at play. In a resonance with Gramscian potentials to resist and overthrow the hegemony of the ruling elites over institutions, devotees are constantly shaping the discursive terrain, not only in giving their 'consent' or submission through devotion but also in enacting and articulating their agency. As a result, there is a renewal of popular forms and activities of worship which are not necessarily able to function as acts of revolutionary change or resistance, but instead continue in the marginal places and interstices of the hegemonic traditions.

Bordering logics

Introduction

Bullah, I know not who I am
 Nor am I the believer in the Mosque ...
 Nor am I intrinsic in the pure/impure ...
 Nor am I Arab, nor from Lahore
 Nor am I the Indian from the City of Nagaur
 Nor a Hindu, nor a Peshawari Turk

Rabbi Shergill's (2006) translated rendition of eighteenth-century poet/*pir*,
 Bulleh Shah's text *Bullah ke Jaana Main Kaun*¹

South Asia has often been identified in religious terms with the figure of the 'God man' or *Guru*, the individual spiritual leader in whose wake traditions rise and wane. This individualized figure is also a reflection of the multiplicity of deities, from Kali to Jhoole Lal to Gugga, who take on supernatural but simultaneously a recognizably human form. The contrast implicit in this categorization is to the institutionalized and lawfully codified forms of religion that have developed in Christianity and Islam respectively. A more kaleidoscopic and candid looking glass reveals that Christ and Mohammad, with their respective honorifics 'Jesus Christ, Our Lord' and 'The Prophet, Peace Be Upon Him', as formal mandates, can equally be viewed as humans with supra-human qualities, who might act therein as the loci of a devotional worship outside of formal regulations of religious law and lore.² In this chapter, we oscillate between the *deified individual* and the *individual deified*, partly as a way of dealing with the stark gender/caste asymmetries which exist in relation to living spiritual figures (largely male and high caste) and devotees (across the spectrum of society, though with disproportionate representation of women and marginal castes) which maps onto the principle of masculinized God/feminized followers. By employing the concept of deification, this returns (or at least attempts to return) agency to the

people who are engaged in the moulding of spiritual figures. Active participation in the creation of the spiritual figure rather than passive acceptance of a preformed powerful totem is a critical move we illustrate in this chapter.

The normative partitioned classification of spiritual figures on both sides of the India–Pakistan border would note a lack of *Pirs* in the East and a smattering of *Sants* and *Babas* in the West. A conception of Muslim holy men and Hindu/Sikh holy men, sitting in their own bubbles separated by geography and theology, offers a classificatory regime that only reinforces borders, rather than reflecting a distinction in the deification practices which produce the *Pir*, *Sant*, *Baba*, *Faqir*, *Bhagat*, *Sheikh*, *Saain* and *Mahapursh*. Meanwhile, fluidity across categorically defined borders has been recognized as an ongoing feature of both devotees' practices and of the appeal of spiritual figures (Kent and Kassam 2013; Dobe 2015). Just as the opening quote from Rabbi Shergill's rendition of the popular text associated with eighteenth-century poet/*pir* Bulleh Shah indicates, these various names of spiritual figures are not able to answer the question, 'Who knows what I am?' From this viewpoint, spiritual figures of whatever hue are generally indistinguishable in terms of the activities at their shrines/*deras* and the kinds of devotion they generate. Division arises from the bordering signs and symbols which enclose and produce singular identity. Charismatic spirituality is often pivotal to their appeal, but how this is achieved and at what level it operates in relation to formal institutional structures vary widely. This multiplicity does not, however, reduce and map onto theological distinctions between Qadri and Advanta or Naqshbandi and Khalsa. Rather there is a fluid continuum that makes any classificatory regime only partially applicable. This perspective finds some resonance in the devotional landscape that Waris Shah in 1766 describes in the epic poem '*Heer*'. The following quote contains the designation of about forty different groups, mixing *pir*, *sant*, *guru* and *bhagat* with caste, deity and kin groups:

From Mahdev the *panth* of Jog was made, Dev Dutt is the Guru of the Sandasis ...
The Vairaag all come from Ramanand, the Dharam Jot is the Guru of the Udasis ...
Brahma of the Brahmins, Ram is the Hindus, Bishan and Mahesh of the Shub Rasis,
The Purest of the pure is the Nanak Dasis and Shah Makhan is the foundation of the Abbasis ...
Like the Sayyids are the inspired of the Jalalis and Adse Karni of the Kehke Kasiyan ...
Haji Nosha is of the Noshahis and Bhagat Kabir of the Jolahi's,
Dastagir is of the Qadri order and Farid of the Chisti Abassis. Nam Dev is the Guru of the Chhibs and Lukhman of the blacksmiths and wood workers,
Khwaja Khizr of the Minas and Naqshbandh of the Moghuls and Chughtais, Sakhi Sarvar of the drumbeaters, Laal Baig of the sweepers.

Qissa, Heer Waris Shah, Stanza, 350, Punjabi Sath
2006: 150, translated by authors³

The one commonality across the spiritual figures mentioned in the above stanza is that all are male. Our attempt to redress the absence of women is to include a discussion in this book of goddesses which may ostensibly seem all too removed from the specific examples of human pirs and sants, but does, in fact, make sense in the landscape that Waris Shah describes, wherein the mystical (human figures) and the mythical (gods/goddesses) overlap by necessity.⁴ This is consistent with our perspective of working through and around borders and boundaries.

Those with a classificatory fixation may argue that all of Waris' figures can be efficiently integrated into an approximate Muslim/Hindu binary and this correlates with most of the research on spiritual figures in South Asia, where religion is routinely framed as a singular identity and constituted in relation to its other (see Marriot 1955). Even where the conceptual architecture allows for overlapping, hybrid and fuzzy boundaries, what is lacking is an analysis of how the production of this binary is structured and deconstructed through caste and gender. This is not simply a matter of tracking, describing and counting representation of women, men and different caste groups within followings of spiritual figures.⁵ Rather, what is necessary to explicate is how the borders between religious traditions, and as a consequence India and Pakistan, are maintained and broken down in terms of spiritual figures. It could be argued that the empirical reality of religious life in Punjab lends itself to an analysis in which bifurcation is a norm, with Sikh, Muslim and Hindu as the prevailing language and structure of discourse. A caste/gender perspective requires looking to the margins of society and those arenas of non-hegemonic cultural life which have been overlooked by serious academic discussion.⁶ Punjabi popular music is one such site where lyrics are found in which an ephemeral yet spiritually contiguous sense of Punjab is evoked, a porosity which in other settings might be considered too political or even seditious. For example, the song '*Jogiyan*',⁷ written and performed by Babbu Maan, venerates two *Jogis*/'*babas*' (Bulleh Shah, Kasur of the eighteenth century and Murad Shah, Nakodar of the twentieth century) with the omnipresence of Baba Nanak (fifteenth/sixteenth centuries).⁸ Through Bulleh Shah's redolent calling out to the *jogi* (or '*jogiya*'), spiritual sites in the East and West become momentarily accessible through a lyrical and musical border crossing. The *saain* becomes connected with the place (Kasur and Nakodar) while the *jogi* is able to wander through the musings of the song, all of which is juxtaposed onto the same spiritual canvas or map:

Kise da saain vase Nakodar
Kise da vase kasoor, Jogiyaan
Kise da vasda nerhe nerhe
Kise da vasda door, Jogiyaan
Baba Nanak saah 'ch vasda ae oye
Maana Nanak saah 'ch vasda
Chato peher saroor Jogiyaan,
 Someone's *saain* (beloved/master) is settled in Nakodar
 Someone's *saain* is settled in Kasur, Oh *Jogi*
 Someone's is very near
 Someone's is far, Oh *Jogi*
 Baba Nanak lives in every breath
 I believe Nanak lives in every breath
 From the sky to the feet in ecstasy, Oh *Jogi*.

Babbu Maan (2016), *Jogiyaan*, Swag Music, India (translation by authors)

Such border crossings are also only possible in what is commonly perceived as the relatively benign 'shared' space of poetry, music and popular performance. Other forms of transversal practice face the colossal impediment of methodological nationalism which closes borders while enabling a logic of containing the potential for uncontainability.

Charisma and its bordering logics

Classificatory bordering logics are continually at play when labels are applied to living deified individuals. When establishing the rationale for border thinking, there are nomenclatures of distinction which can divide and can be mapped onto the geography of Indian and Pakistani Punjab. Thus, in East Punjab, there are *babas* and *sants* which come in a diverse range of shapes, outlooks (theologies) and forms. The multiplicity of *pirs* in West Punjab fractures along the lines of affiliation (or not) to a Sufi *silsila* (order), whilst the *sants* and *babas* of East Punjab often display an overt religious eclecticism, such as saying they are beyond an attachment to a particular religious tradition. Some historical antecedent to this counter-classificatory assertion was laid out by the Ad Dharm movement of the 1920s, a mobilization by *dalit* castes to resist the division of religious identity labels in the pursuit of *dalit* self-identification. As such, Ad Dharmi still indicates an identity beyond religious categorization that draws upon Sufi, Bhakti and other reference points that lean towards

liberation theology of the oppressed (see Juergensmeyer 1982; Ram 2004a). In contrast, the *pirs* of West Punjab, a group often ensconced with social, economic and political privilege, when based in a formal setting, will also place themselves within a Sufi ecosystem.⁹ Faqirs or wandering *malangs* provide a visible acknowledgement of the marginal in the Sufi tradition but nonetheless these characters exist at the interstices of Sufi formality. The *babas/sants* of East Punjab and the *pirs* of West Punjab have emerged out of a common moral and textual spiritual landscape. With this comes a co-existence of hegemony/ dominance and challenge/resistance through social relations and the religious practices that mediate society.

Perhaps the first point of commonality of these spiritual figures can be found in the classical religious studies trope of charisma, defined by Weber (1950) as 'a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities' (358). Though superficially appealing, as this is certainly one way of thinking about *pirs/sants*, there are a number of shortcomings of the Weberian formulation of charisma in relation to our research.¹⁰ First, emphasis on the 'individual personality' implies that agency flows from the individual possessing spiritual authority to the masses in a mimicry of the hierarchical relationship with power stemming downwards from God. We argue that, if charisma is considered relationally, then it is a negotiated relationship in which devotees are as central to the creation of charisma as the individual. The nearest word to charisma is *barkha* or *darshan*, which relates to the blessing from the spiritual figure. But what happens to charisma, when *darshan* also refers to clay figures or when *barkha* flows from the stone of a grave, adorned by acts of obeisance? This is not a functionalist approach towards charisma in which the recognition of authority is a central tenet of the framing. Even where the bond is perceived as an embodied and deeply affective one, the central assumption is that the devotee is giving up something in relation to the making of the relationship. Devotees visit spiritual figures for a range of purposes, not least for seeking advice about personal or family troubles or health-seeking behaviour to address ailments. It is here that the sharp end of Durkheimian functionalism rings loud in the context of heightened pressures on the family unit to deliver social security and virtually non-existent public health systems. The belief in the evil eye as a curse provokes a desire for miracles, which can be delivered by spiritual figures, who can read 'verses of cure' from either the *Quran* or a Sanskrit text and perform other therapeutic acts upon eager devotees. However, to read acts of prostration,

of alms giving, and petitioning as an indication of singular choices, loyalty or reliance on only one spiritual figure only makes sense within Weber's Hegelian framing of the religious question in his proposition of charisma.¹¹ Rather, we would argue that the spiritual terrain of contemporary Punjab is a crowded market place of *babas* and shrines which are part of a discursive landscape of effective and affective ranking.¹² Devotees' affiliation is dependent on securing some benefit, not in an entirely rationalized and instrumental economy, but neither through a wholesale relenting to subjugation to the charismatic persona.

Another problematic implication of the Weberian analytic scaffold is that charismatic authority is profoundly gendered, and it is the masculine individual who is the legitimate holder of authority ('by virtue that *he* is set apart from ordinary *men*', our emphasis). In this respect, Weber's notion of charismatic authority not only mirrors patriarchy's model of legitimated, hierarchal power which inspires loyalty, obeisance and obedience from followers (as patriarchy does for the patriarch) but it also views the *ordinary* in polar opposition to the *exceptional*, creating therefore a relational distance between devotees and the spiritual leader. While Weber does state that charismatic leadership is based not only on human characteristics but also on the relationship between the spiritual figure/leader and followers, not enough is made of this to unsettle the underlying normativity wherein hierarchies remain, in conceptual terms, largely intact. While recognizing that this interplay between devotees and spiritual figures has been acknowledged by others as a mutually constituting set of dynamics (Vaudeville 1983; Gold 2012), our contribution is to make more explicit how gender and caste frame these relationships, in the outcomes and forms, of both spiritual leadership and following (Figure 1).

Charisma certainly plays a significant role in the attraction of people to living spiritual figures; however, the power of patriarchy and caste privilege also has a significant role to play, as shown by Martin (2016) in his ethnography of a West Punjabi village. In this case, the local landlord transformed his material and caste status to perform the role of spiritual figure, but his entire display was one of piety without recourse to privilege. This type of performance was subject to a strident critique by the *kammi/dalit* workers who maintained his fields. Piety in the service of personal gain or to maintain a hierarchy is immediately subject to dissent which ultimately impinges on loyalty and affiliation, regardless of ascribed charisma. Our intention is to utilize the concept of charisma cautiously teasing out the hierarchies implicit in its Weberian sense. The unfolding of the



Figure 1 A *faqir* and female devotees, Mian Mir, Lahore.

Photo Courtesy of Zoya Mirza

place of spiritual figures in the cycle of religious formation and unnamed rituals is both through assertion of an individual's charisma and the response in relation to ongoing power. In that sense the least helpful part of the notion of charisma in the Punjab context is in relation to its institutional form. The charismatic power that is drawn from either inheritance by figurative or biological offspring

of a *pir/sant* or from state power is almost always open to challenge and contestation. The shrines which will be discussed in the next chapters and most of the examples that are given in this chapter, in relation to living spiritual figures, are those that are drawing from some form of lineage, either through kin or in connection with a shrine. It is only when considering examples of those who are outside of the formal structures of a tradition that the ideas of lineage and hierarchy are themselves revealed as fractious and fraught, but even then, with the predominance of male figures, the rules and protocols of patriarchy remain persistent.

The study of religion, even when attempting to deconstruct institutions and formal processes, still reflects the Western sociological episteme which emerged out of the European Enlightenment and its imperial economic, political and intellectual endeavours, within which Weber sits rather comfortably as a 'founding father'. The critique of such concept-metaphors is made by Hawthorne (2013) who cautions that even a focus on a politics of the margins at the intersections of the study of 'religion', 'gender' and 'postcoloniality' is not necessarily free from being implicated in colonial knowledge production or imperialist ideologies. Taking on this word of caution, we endeavour to analyse spiritual figures against the grain of the hierarchies which are imbued in Weberian reason, but recognize the limits of this approach. We extend our scope of the politics of the margins to also examine border thinking as episteme and the structuring of devotion through gender and caste. This entails, in many senses, a sociology of the sociology of charisma in order to consider how it operates within, against and outside of hierarchies of devotion and power.

Malleable boundaries

Going beyond a singular religious identity in the activities of spiritual figures is highlighted in the idea of *uncontainability* which, in this context, refers to their potentiality to cross, subvert and break, even if liminally, the outline of religious boundaries. An engagement with devotees which is expansive and able to cross the domains of the sacred and secular is another aspect of this idea of uncontainability (Copeman and Ikegame 2012: 37). In some senses, the particularity of the codes of naming within traditions such as *Pir*-Muslim, *Guru*-Sikh and *Mahant*-Hindu are transcended in relation to common devotional deeds, such as lighting a *diva* (clay-lamp) or making a *mannat* (votive). There is a spectrum to be taken into account here: from those who transcend the

boundary only as a means of retaining a core tradition (through an appeal to a universal or transcendental principle, for example, in the reference points of a *Naqshbandi Sufi* or *Sikh Sant*) and those for whom their devotion is the transcendence of any formal boundary. This interview with a *pir* illustrates the former kind of discourse:

Khurram: When it comes to religious discourse, talking of our maker, we do not look at who is speaking [a Sikh or Muslim], we see what they say and how it adds to our knowledge of the maker.

Interview, Shergarh 2009

This appeal to the universal here is in terms of knowledge, but crucially also in relation to overcoming the stratified hierarchy between social groups. At the broadest level, and even here the boundary is porous, the spiritual figure is distinct from the circumscribed religious characters of the *qazi/mullah* and *pandit*, upheld as scholars of the textual tradition. The landscape of the formal textual and normative ritual practices such as *Sharia*, *Quran* and *roza* relating to Islamic authority structures, and *Veda*, *Dharma*, *Shastras*, referring to Brahminical authority, is deployed by these figures, but its use is eclectic. The spiritual figure in their unbound discourse is able to transcend these and, in doing so, appeals to those who are marginal (through gender and caste) and/or otherwise excluded from authority structures and normative rituals by virtue of being a woman or *dalit*. The same *pir* continues:

Khurram: My father, after all the Sikhs and Hindus left, went to these people [*Ad Dharmi*] and he made them Muslim. Everyone said that they eat carrion and that they are dirty and he was discouraged from talking to them ... He sent me to a Christian school and the family was also like 'he [your son] is going to become a *Churha* [*dalit*]' ... This is all wrong.

Interview, Shergarh, March 2009

This interview recalls a period in the 1950s, in a rural part of West Punjab. Two aspects of this narrative are worth considering in more detail: firstly, the anti-caste sentiment which is prevalent in the *sant/pir* tradition across the North of the subcontinent is being mobilized in relation to Khurram's father's 'conversion' of *dalits* to Islam. However, given the long historical tradition of poetic anti-caste invocation in the Punjab, why is it that actual social change in terms of incorporation is said here to have taken place only in the 1950s? One possible argument in relation to this conundrum, of appealing to the marginalized in relation to an unachieved liberation, is that challenging caste

hierarchy by *sants/pirs* has generally always been aimed to expose the hypocrisy of the pious rather than to transform social relations. However, the social does seem to occupy a central place in these writings, in the context of another interview with a *pir*, again in West Punjab; Bulleh Shah was evoked:

Challo othhe chaliye jithhe saare anne, na koi meri zaat pehchaane, na koi mainoon manne'

Let's go to that place where all are blind, none will recognise me by caste or status.

Interview with *pir*, Shergarh 2009¹³

The utopian place here is also evoked by Ravidass, self-proclaimed in his poetry as a *chamar* (*dalit*) where he talks of *Begumpura* the place without pain or grief. Novetzke (2008) in a detailed analysis of the fourteenth-century Sant Namdev pithily notes how certain figures, movements and texts come to be 'situated within the ontology of the demotic and "subaltern" ... doing the representational work for "the powerless, disenfranchised, and excluded"' (6). In the simplest way this can be in relation to the figures' own caste status, such as that of Kabir, Ravidass, Piro or Namdev; it may also be in relation to the texts and poetry they have inspired such as that cited to Bullah in the previous quote and prominently by Nanak. Living *pirs* and *sants* evoke these historical figures¹⁴ when appealing to artisans and *dalits*, drawing on their hagiography as well as poetry to offer a vision which, at its most socially conservative point, offers salvation in the afterlife, and, at its most generous zenith, provides solace for the conditions of exploitation under which the marginal and precarious live.¹⁵ Arguably, the emphasis on human agency offered by this philosophical-poetical tradition could lead to far more radical outcomes presenting innumerable potentials to alter the social structures of exclusion and marginalization.¹⁶ However, our critical stance towards this failure to achieve such transformatory outcomes emerges out of an understanding that spiritual figures tend to represent a continuum rather than rupture between spiritual salvation and the social, regardless of the radical potential in the poetic discourse.¹⁷

Transcending boundaries

The figures who transcend boundaries, rather than adopting a universalist perspective for a particular agenda, can be loosely placed into the *yogi/jogi*

or *malang* tradition whose understanding and actions fall outside of and thus show a critique of conformity with everyday norms and conventions of society. As a rejection of the apparatus of bordering logics embedded in these social conventions, these can be invariably described as heterodox, outside of the law (*beshara*) or 'free', and appear in the literature in myriad forms (Hausner 2007).¹⁸ *Malang, faqir, jogi, nath, qalandar, malamati, majdhub and jalali* are just some of the terms that are applied (Frembgen 2008). There is a philosophical dimension to these orders which emphasize being outside of the norms of society as a means of generating spiritual power. The most developed and coherent iteration of this in the East Punjab context is of the Aghori, as those who live mostly in graveyards and, in caricature, carry a stick and use a human skull as a drinking utensil and are perhaps the most extreme end of the Nath tradition that follow Goraknath.¹⁹ An alternative name for this group is Kapalini, so-named in relation to the carrying of the skull, described as an individual: 'with a skull and staff, living on alms, announcing his deed (as he begs), and eating little food' (Lorenzen 1991: 13). In Punjab, the *Kanphate*, literally meaning 'split ear' *jogis*, fall into the broader Nath tradition. They are the most prevalent character representing freedom from social norms in popular culture. The generic term we will use is *malangs*, reflecting our fieldwork, rather than any particular historically identified group.²⁰ The commonality of these groups is in renunciation of worldly pursuits, indicating a departure from other forms of popular religion in which sacred spaces, spiritual and moral authority, and followers are necessary (see Figure 2). Eschewing devotees is, of course, a guaranteed method for attracting them and whilst a '*malang* theology', if such a term is appropriate to describe a wide variety of groups and activities, does not require followers; certainly alms are a means to survival.

One sect of *malangs* are ostensibly followers of the Nath Panth tradition, whose rooting in Punjab is found in Tilla Jogiyan (West Punjab). These wandering ascetics, wearing only loin cloths, carrying sticks and food bowls, and often adorned with chains and beads, are marked by their attire, but are now in this form rare in East Punjab, yet have significant presence in Pakistan. Wandering in groups (*jamaats*) from shrine to shrine they are a notable presence at the major Sufi *melas*. A rare interview with a *malang* took place at a shrine in 2009 at the Miyani Sahib graveyard in Lahore, the largest in Pakistan. Completely bald, with his ears pierced in the style of the *Kanphata jogi*, a white *tilak* (straight line) on his forehead, wearing a loin cloth, with numerous bangles on his arms was warming himself by a log fire during the conversation:



Figure 2 The myriad life of a shrine, Mian Mir, Lahore.

Photo courtesy of Zoya Mirza

I: Where is the centre of your tradition?

Jogi: Tilla Jogian in Putohar.

I: So you are a Nath?

Jogi: I am a *Jogi* follower of my Pir. This thing you call a *tikka* (pointing to the mark on his forehead). This is an *Alif*; it stands for Allah. I was like you and then I had a dream and became like this.

Miyani Sahib Graveyard, Lahore 2008

This man was perhaps in his early thirties, though his age was difficult to tell. Wandering *malangs*, as he would be called, are itinerant ascetics that are elusive and difficult to interview, as they are often reluctant to talk to people in straightforward language. This in itself is seen as an act of piety, to be *malamati* (literally, of bad sense), but also to be out of mind. This is often a result of imbibing large amounts of the intoxicants *bhang* or *hashish*. *Malangs* are a feature at all of the large fairs that take place at the time of the *urs*/death anniversary of a spiritual figure in West Punjab. In another interview at the *urs/mela* of Daud Bandegi in Shergarh, a *malang* revealed: 'We have over 200 *deras* [shrines] where we stay in

between the big *melas*' (Interview, Shergarh 2009). Unlike the *pirs* and *sants* who narrate themselves from the universal to the particular, these wandering ascetics could traverse the borders of India and Pakistan and wander unnoticed into any shrine. Their unbounded selves are only publicly marked by gender, where the presence of women was noted only in the more permanent tent structures at the Shah Hussain *mela* in Lahore.

Even with a textual, originary tradition and colonial ethnography, the followers of Gorakhnath did not find a space to become a religion in the cauldron of colonial modernity, though given the castigation of the marginal this is also not surprising (Briggs 1938). Indeed, their contemporary customs maintain alterity. The Naths adopt a relative ease in terms of their mixing of cultural metaphors and languages. The *dera* in Amritsar, where this interview took place, has a board in Gurmukhi on the outside which states: *Dargah* (shrine), Siddh Pir Bava²¹ Hajir Nath ji ('the foundation of this *jogi* place, by Jogi Seva Nath, whose Guru/Pir is Tirlok Nath') on 18 *Phagan*, year 2002. The caretaker of the shrine was from Patiala, and this *dera* was one of his resting places marking his itinerant lifestyle. He was adorned with a splendid pink turban and two thick gold-coloured earrings, a wispy beard, and he spoke a mixture of Hindustani and Punjabi:²²

The King of Abal Bhakara was passing this place on his way to do Hajj. A Sant lived here called Baba Hajir Nath. They met each other, and the Sant showed the King Mecca/Medina ... He said 'I want to become your *chela* [disciple]'; he said 'you are a Muslim and I am a Hindu, this will cause trouble ...' The land he came from is now beyond Pakistan or somewhere ... The King asked the Nath again, 'this does not matter; I want to become your *chela*'. So he then kept the King for 12 years under the ground and he gave him the name Mrittak Nath. He then travelled to Karnatik ... to the Kumbh mela there ... I have been here for the last ten years ... there are two types of *jogi*: those from birth and those that gain *faqar* or *faqiri* through their *seva* and devotion ... there are three *deras* in Amritsar, near Tarn Taran and Bhatinda, everywhere ... Jawala Ji, there is a Gorakh *tappi* there ... '*Hindu de guru, Mussalmanan de pir, Baba Adam de faqir*' [The Hindus have their *guru*, the Muslims their *pir*, the Humans (literally, Baba Adam, the first Human) have the *faqir*.

Interview, *malang* in Amritsar 2009

This interview intimates the contextual movement of identity: in the story the Nath identifies as Hindu in contrast to the Muslim *pir*, but on representing their tradition, a distinction is drawn and again a reference made to the

universal appeal of the *jogi*. This engagement is one that is similar to that of the *pir* in the previous interview, but in the context of this tradition, the relationship with *dalits* is much more clearly signalled as a rationale for that appeal. One of the songs of Laal Baig/Bala Shah whose followers hail from the *dalit* community of Valmiki devotees echoes much of the sentiment of the Nath:

In one of the *Bala* songs, it is sung that the followers of Ram and Rahim will hide themselves (*Ram te Rahim kian chhap chhap jana*) in fear, and when the sun dips down, *Bala* will send them to hell (*sava neze te din avega, hade dosakh pana*). Meanwhile, for the followers of *Bala*, paradise (*bihisht*) will be offered ... In the law of the *Shahis*, the followers of *Bala* will not fast on *Ashtami*, nor will they go to Mecca (*Shahi nun farmana, na mein vartan Ashtimi, na tur Makke jana*). All other traditions fall short of the perfect faith of Kalak Das, an exemplary *Chuhra* (*Chuhre Kalak as da mazhab hai tamam*).

Prashad 2000: 70

These narratives (especially that of the Nath interviewed in Amritsar) do rely on an evocation of 'Pakistan' as a Muslim place and, thus in contrast with the Muslim king, the Nath became a Hindu and the *malang* in Myani sahib was keen to emphasize Allah on his forehead. Even Ram and Rahim are opposites to be overcome in the song of *Bala*. These narrations rely on binaries and, even where contradictory or defiant, indicate the irrepressible forces of modern boundary marking.²³ This is not a totalizing process and should not belie the ongoing ways in which the wandering ascetic still evokes an 'outside' to the constructed closed space of political religious identity. Perhaps the *urs/mela* (death anniversary celebrations) of Shah Hussain, the renowned sixteenth-century poet whose shrine is in Baghbanpura, Lahore, indicates continuities of *malang* practice. The *mela* is still known as *Chiraagan da mela* ('the festival of lights') and one of the prominent ritual activities is to contribute to the large fire pit, which continuously burns through the festivities. The following interview took place in 2009, in a political context in which sectarian and communal violence was at its height, but it reflects the core transcendental theme of love (see Orsini 2006). This excerpt begins with mention of a man dressed in red which, when translated into Punjabi, is '*Laal*' and thus a play on the word 'beloved'. Red is often worn by *malangs* at this and other *melas*. A *faqir/jogi* and a male *jat* (landed caste) – both self-ascribed – commented on the meanings and symbols of the *mela*:

Faqir: I've been here at Shah Hussain for the last twenty years.

Interviewer: Are these people around here all your followers?

Faqir: (Nods and then points to the shrine ...)

Jat: We all follow him [pointing to shrine]. We are all God's people. If we want anything, it is up to him to give it. In any case it is all his (Shah Hussain). It's his wedding, his courtyard, it's his time. Everyone is sat here under his rule (as his slave), waiting for him, for his *ishq* [love] in his *pyaar* [love] We do the *langar* [free food]. The *sarkar* [spiritual figure] said to us to do it and we do it.

Interviewer: Are there other Lahoris here?

Jat and *Faqir*: There are people from all over Pakistan, from Gujranwala, Karachi ...

Jat: All those who are Madho Lal's lovers, they are all here.

Faqir: Some have come from Multan, from Karachi. Some have come from India.

Interviewer: From India?

Jat: *Hanji*, those who are *Madho ke Mastane* [intoxicated followers of Madho], they have come.

Just as the *Jogi* in Babbu Maan's song is crossing space and time, so geography again is something to be overcome, here through the love of the ultimate lover: Shah Hussain who is encased in his tomb with his beloved Madho. The importance of an affective relationship with the living spiritual figure or, as in the above case, with the tomb/shrine of that figure, cannot be under-estimated. Whilst this relates to love, in other cases, such as with the *malang*, it might generate curiosity or even fear. These various emotional states generate the motivation for a range of devotional actions which can be described simply as ecstatic. The now departed *malang*, Noorie Boorie, who was resident on the outskirts of Lahore and was so emaciated at the time of our fieldwork in 2010 that he had to be carried on a bed, wore only a loin cloth but was enlarged by his five-foot-long dread locks and a wispy salt and pepper beard. The annual *mela* at his *dera* was a three-day festival of Qawwali music and one of the main calls for devotion from the *malang* to the audience was to dance. In the mid-day heat of March, over a thousand people were dancing at our visit to the shrine, including young and old, men and women.²⁴ In a society where since the early 1970s public forms of dancing have been effectively banned, this scene was, to say the least, anachronistic (Purewal and Kalra 2010). Despite our initial incomprehension on further reflection, the scene at Noori Boorie and at other *melas* (notably at Bari Imam) indicate the extent to which the metaphysical boundaries broken in the *malang* tradition can in certain conditions translate into social contexts.

In particular, young women dancing in a public space would otherwise not be conceivable. The ecstatic tradition, whilst found in a prominent manner in the *mela* or a Thursday evening, stands at one end of a range at the other end of which are those *sants/pirs* who articulate a more sober route to spiritual enlightenment.

Defending/defining the spiritual figure

Whether of the sober or ecstatic variety or somewhere in between, these traditions are maintained despite the numerous ways in which modernist thinkers (ranging from religious reformists to communists) have thought that they would merge into the major traditions or disappear in a puff of secular magic. Perhaps the most profound criticism of the spiritual figure tradition, from within religious discourse, comes from the idea that no intermediary is required in a relationship with God; most prominently this comes from a strand in Islamic thought, but most forcefully and pervasively from the Protestant reform as it arrived in colonial Punjab. Often, reformist ideas have pointed to exactly those figures from the past to demonstrate a fall from true spirituality to a debased concern with materialism so readily visible in contemporary *sants* of super-wealth (Ram Dev) or politically powerful *pirs* (Gilanis of Multan). A critique of spiritual figures in their various hues is also present strongly in the poetry of Kabir and Guru Nanak, who are critical of the idea of the path to enlightenment coming from asceticism (in the Siddh/Nath tradition) or from meaningless rituals (of Brahminism), but this does not necessarily intimate the removal of the intermediary. This stands in sharp contrast to the idea of the renouncer found in the Brahminical tradition or of the hierarchical path to spiritual enlightenment, given as stages in some Sufi discourse (Schimmel 1975). An account of this field by Najm Hosain Syed would conjoin Guru Nanak's account of the householder with the Chisti Sufis, given the presence of Baba Farid in the *Ad Granth*. The popular Sikh slogan '*Kirt Karna, Wand Chakna, Naam Japna*', which translates crudely as 'work hard, share your earnings and recite the name of God', is a materialist perspective on the path to enlightenment. Guru Nanak's hagiography, in which he had a family (two sons) and, when settled in Kartarpur, engages in his spiritual work alongside householder duties, again provides an exemplary model. Similarly, the Chisti tradition of Sufism emphasizes a material engagement with the world as part of the path to salvation (Ernst and Lawrence 2002). This does not mean that

the social is beyond criticism or that the age is not one of difficulties, but Guru Nanak gives the Lotus flower as an example, in the often-sung *shabad Bimal Majhar*:²⁵

Bimal majhār basas nirmal jal paḍman jāval re.

Paḍman jāva jal ras sangat̄ sang dokh nahī re. ||1||

The lotus and the slimy algae are found, in the pure, immaculate waters,

The lotus flower lives together with the algae and the water, but remains unharmed.

Ad Granth, p. 990²⁶

The implication is that living in the social world, which is full of vice, you can still maintain the beauty of the flower. Central to this perspective is that the agency of the devotee is paramount in determining how they live and for the potential for them to obtain enlightenment like any other individual (regardless of caste and gender). This utopian perspective matches with Syed's Marxist-inflected interpretations.²⁷

The ideal and role of the *sant* is a consistent refrain throughout the *Ad Granth*, but given the weight of criticism requires maintenance. As the title of this paid-for supplement in the *Ajit*, the largest selling Punjabi (Gurmukhi) newspaper, of 1st February 2010 (13) articulates: 'The praise of the Sants! What is the path of the Sant?' The treatise then analyses the manifold instances of praise for sants that occur in the *Ad Granth*, compiled 300 years in the past. The advert opens with this stanza attributed to the fifth Guru Arjan:

Jinaa Saas Giraas N Visarai Har Naamaan Man Manth ||

Dhhann S Saeer Naanakaa Pooran Soer Santh ||1||

Who with every breath and morsel of theirs, forget not God's Name and within whose mind is this spell, they alone are the blessed and they alone are the perfect saints, O Nanak.

Ad Granth, Shabad 784, p. 319

The newspaper article is authored by Bhai Tejinder Singh Jindu, a *sant* from the Nanaksar tradition, a reformist movement of the nineteenth century. No specific individual is mentioned in the article. Instead, the rarity of a true *sant* and the precise characteristics and qualities required to be considered worthy of *sant* status are also stated. These qualities are seen as being central to bringing people close to *Gurbani* and to engage in service for the public rather than engaging in slanderous talk about others. This is not a strategy without precedence; the *Ad Granth* contains 678 references to *sants*, almost all of which

cite their role in achieving spiritual enlightenment. There is also a powerful defence, again attributed to Guru Arjan, of the tradition:

[Gond 5th Guru]

Santh Kaa Leeaa Dharath Bidhaaro ||

Santh Kaa Nindhak Akaas Thae Ttaaro ||

Santh Kai Oopar Dhaee Prabh Haathh ||

Santh Kee Nindhaa Karahu N Koe ||

Jo Nindhai This Kaa Pathan Hoe ||

One who is cursed by the Saints, is thrown down on the ground.

The slanderer of the Saints is thrown down from the skies.

God gives His hand to shelter the Saints.

Let no one slander the Saints.

Whoever slanders them, will be destroyed.

Ad Granth, Shabad: 2354: 867²⁸

This kind of justification of the spiritual figure was also found in an interview with Khurram, one of the senior *pirs* at the shrine of Daud Bandegi Kirmani in Shergarh, Okara:

Khurram: Just like Mian Mohammed Baksh²⁹ says: ‘Without the Murshid (*pir*, spiritual guide) you won’t find the way no matter how much effort we do. Just like without the General you cannot break the fort, says, Mohammed Baksh:

Bin murshid rah hath nay aane bhaven so so kariye heele

Mantar baaj Mohommed baksha laang nay jaande keele

There are bad people, but that does not mean you abandon the system, if you read wrong things, you do not give up on education, or if a Doctor is fraudulent, does that mean you stop looking for a cure?

Interview Shergarh 2009

This valuation of practice as one that can vary between a good and bad *pir/sant* is in some senses a rationalization of the power of the *guru/sant/pir* in contrast to that of the *ulema/Brahmin*. This has a philosophical base in the *pir/sant* poetic tradition, where book knowledge is pitted against the experiential. An interview with a *pir* resonates with Bulleh Shah’s often cited prose:

Parrh parrh ved kitabon

Kadee apne aap noon parriya nay (Bulleh Shah)

You read the Ved and the Religious Books

You’ve never read yourself.

Interview, Pir, Lahore 2009³⁰

In a similar vein, in the daily ritualized morning prayer, Japji Sahib, Sikhs recite Guru Nanak's words:

Aklī paṛh̄ kai bujh̄iai aklī kīch̄ai d̄ān.

Nānak ākh̄ai rāhu ehu hor galān̄ saiṭān. ||1||

If sense came by reading; why would the wise give it up

There is only one path, says Nanak, all else is the devil ||1||

*Ad Granth: 1245*³¹

The emphasis on reflection and good action is central to these messages and distinguishes the spiritual leader from the scholar. In the Islamic tradition, as an ideal, the Sufi and Scholar have often been one and the same. In the Sikh tradition, Guru Gobind Singh, as the figure of emulation, is the Soldier (*sipahi*), Saint (*sant*) and Scholar, in which religious and worldly knowledge are intimately linked and tied to righteous action. A parallel is found in the Sufi context where 'leadership was thus based on voluntaristic recognition and authority constituted by inner restraint and personal responsibility rather than external, rule-bound discipline' (Werbner and Basu 1998: 14). The distinction of note here is between rule-bound religion, which is promoted by the *ulema* (Islamic scholars) and institutional religious authority with the charismatic power of the individual spiritual figure. As Werbner and Basu further remark: 'the saint's charisma—and his achievement of subjective autonomy and freedom—is the product of his perceived (and projected) self-denial and self-mastery, of love and generosity' (15–16). However, this charismatic individual power is subject to questioning, exposure and even abuse as we have illustrated in the previous cases. Indeed, the idea of the corrupt individual was at the heart of the Akalis' claims against the *mahants* in the 1920s and, in the context of newly postcolonial Pakistan with the Ayub government in the 1950s, when it came to the nationalization of shrines. It is the fall from grace that is given as the justification for the state taking over shrine control; as Ibad notes: 'though the original Sufis were seen as pious, their teachings had come into corruption and so the current *Muttwalis* or *Sajjda Nashins* were only interested in the income from the shrine rather than the spiritual uplift of the people' (2014: 44). The Auqaf and Religious Affairs department, when initiated in Pakistan in 1960, had an administrator who was called Chief Administrator and *Muttwali* (an honorific for shrine caretaker) a title that recognized both traditional and postcolonial authority. This combination also enabled the modern *ulema* to mobilize their textual inspired Islam over the experiential-based Sufi form. Shrine *sevadars* (voluntary labour) then became Auqaf employees, with the state as the ultimate religious authority.

In these large-scale shifts and changes, devotees seem to disappear as a consequence of their structurally subordinate role in the hierarchical system of *pir-murid*, *guru-shiksha*, god-man. In our fieldwork, we noted a more ambivalent relationship: on the one hand, the *pir/sants* were often contemptuous of their followers in relation to the requests they made. This is demonstrated in this example from another of the Shergarh Pirs, who are quite considerable in number:

Pir Asad: People ask me the strangest things like: 'Give my *majh* (water buffalo) a male offspring' or 'my *majh* (water buffalo) is ill. Can you make it better?' or 'Pray for my *shanaakti* (identity) card'; or they want me to dispel of an evil spirit by giving a '*phook*' (breath) via a mobile phone.'

Interview, Shergarh 2009

On the other hand there was a sense that their followers were more able to question and challenge them and this was their own shortcoming in relation to their duties as *pirs*:

Pir Asad: Things have changed so much. Now people test us [the *pirs*] and see if we pass or fail, before they become our followers. Before, we would decide who was worthy of following us, now they test us!

Interviewer: Why do you think those changes have come about?

Pir Sahib: Many, many reasons. People have become educated in the wrong ways. They don't respect because of *who* we are. They want to see *what* we can do for them ... Maybe we also are at fault, our family have gone to Lahore. They don't care to look after their followers ... It is not easy being a Pir. It is a lot of effort to keep people with you.

Interview, Shergarh 2009

Two issues worth exploring in detail emerge from these interviews. Firstly, the broad areas which attract a follower to a spiritual figure and secondly the issue of exclusivity that is implied in the spiritual figure-devotee relationship. Wealth (personal and collective), health (physical and mental) and spiritual wellbeing (in relation to *jinn*s/bad spirits and *bhooth*/ghosts) are the three areas of social life in which a *baba* might be consulted or petitioned in relation to mobilizing the power of Allah/*Har*. Vows made, habits changed, penance undertaken are all devotees' action in relation to the fulfilment of these desires. Amulets given, food blessed, *mantras* whispered, prayer offered are all aspects of the spiritual figure's role in this relationship. The 'test' that Pir Sahib in the previous extract referred to is always present as these desires, if left unfulfilled, can lead to disillusionment and moving on to another *baba* or shrine. The material aspects of changing

someone's life do not only need to take place in the realm of prayer: if a *pir/sant* has gained political influence and power this can be distributed and shared amongst their followers. In return and perhaps most potently in a democratic system, the followers offer votes as their *daan*, or gift, to the spiritual figure as illustrated by the case of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh in the next section.

Pir Asad's account notes a decline in a certain kind of loyalty of belief but notably does not mention that devotees have always had a variety of choices to where they can give their allegiance. The landholding castes in particular have always patronized multiple shrines with their grain. In the Shergarh area, where we carried out fieldwork at the shrine of Daud Bandegi, the resident *pirs* told us that the everyday head-count of devotee-visitors was far greater at Shah Hujra Muqim, another shrine a few kilometres from Shergarh. Some members of the Watu family, large landholders in the area, told of how their elders would visit the haveli of Bhuman Shah, which was a large Udaasi Akhara (though now in a state of ruin) again perhaps 40 kilometres from Daud Bandegi. In the undivided Punjab, spiritual figures would be in competition for devotees and it is perhaps the biopolitical implications of colonial modernity that motivated a tighter relationship between fluid praxis and fixed identity. This is reflected in the development of registers of devotees and their contribution to a shrine; indeed the Shergarh Pirs had their own *munshi* (accountant) who kept a record of donations and villages under the shrine's influence. In postcolonial Pakistan the increasing role of the state in classifying populations and providing material welfare through health systems (however paucе) and technological change (however limited in their reach) has circumscribed the sphere in which the *pir/sant* has influence. This has led to what we might euphemistically call 'modern' *pirs* who turn away from the material towards the psychological. The upper middle classes of Lahore, who will resort to medicine for health and whose financial stakes are less meagre, still turn to spiritual figures for their solace. An interview with Pir Furrukh, who was also a teacher in a Lahore college, but would hold special spiritual healing sessions in his drawing room in an elite colony, is telling:

Furrukh: These people have everything: servants, money, the best from everywhere, but they are not happy, not satisfied ... why? They have forgotten that they need to feed the spirit as well as their bellies ... I just offer them the path ... this is not about religion.

Interview, Lahore 2009

Though our interview involved a long detour involving border crossings from Shaivism through to Tao, our research assistant later informed us that Furrukh

offers prayers from the *Quran*, usually charges about two thousand rupees for a half an hour meeting and is in high demand. Though Asad and Furrukh offer their services in substantially different social environments, their actual actions in relation to giving an amulet (*taweez*) or offering a recitation of a saying (*mantra*) were similar for material or spiritual matters.³² These shifting boundaries are to some extent still contained within the system of *piri-muridi*, whereas in some cases the encounter with the modern leads to conflict and violence.

Contestation and conflict

The heads and other *Sant-Mahants* of *deras* [in East Punjab] skillfully use the religious sentiments of the masses for their personal interests. These *dera* leaders make the writings of earlier saints part of their sermons, moulding them according to their needs (224–225) ... By taking advantage of this situation, the managers of *deras* often succeed in presenting themselves as God's angels. That is why the activism of many *deras* gives birth to superstitions. Thus, nowadays, the common man is caught in the web of superstition.

Lal 2009: 227

The name Pir *Bhaanday* [crocery] Shah is so obviously cooked up, yet the simple people of Kala Paar never questioned the crook who fed this pious story. What with the state of knowledge and reasoning even of so called educated persons in this sorry land [Pakistan], it is hard to expect these simple villagers to ask a more crucial question regarding the context of time period for the saint' [author comments in square brackets].

Salman Rashid, Opinion, *The Daily Times*, 12 December 2007: 8³³

The role of *sants* has come under a great deal of scrutiny following the 2017 arrest of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, a case we will consider in some detail later. However, it is worth considering the broader current contestation as it mirrors, perhaps predictably, colonial debates.³⁴ Our emphasis on marginality in terms of caste and gender of the devotees that *sants/pirs* attract is premised on their exclusion from authorized religious establishments. Thus, women cannot enter mosques and *dalits* cannot enter certain *mandirs*. Modernist and leftist critiques which question the rationality of these kinds of linkages to spirituality, rather than to a politics which can change material conditions, are often well meaning, but when arising out of an elitist criticism, rather than a politics of solidarity, is questionable. The comments on East and West Punjab given in the

extracts above – one from a journalist and the other an article drawing on media coverage – illustrate a prevalent theme of ‘false consciousness’ of ‘the uneducated masses’ being unable to decipher the ‘false’ nature of exploitative *babas* and *sants*. The devotee is ‘simple’ and duped by the manipulative spiritual figure. These perspectives are very common amongst the educated, English-/Urdu-speaking, urban middle class of India and Pakistan, but this does not mean that these groups do not have their own ‘spiritual leaders’ as our previous example of Furrukh illustrated. Similarly, a whole range of ‘new age’ *gurus* have established themselves offering a range of services (often via the internet), looking very similar to counselling and psychiatric treatment in the West, but with an explicit connection to a spiritual metanarrative (Khandelwal 2012). These criticisms parallel those of the good/bad *sant* that we have previously explored, but with a more pernicious characteristic in their layering of class/caste prejudices.

Our own positionality, as members of the dominant castes of Punjab, means that we are cautious of condoning or condemning the *sant/pir* tradition, whilst recognizing that at some level the institutions created by these figures offer material support and spiritual guidance to marginal and oppressed groups.³⁵ It is also clear that, at least at the level of rhetoric, the *sant/pir* offers salvation that does not rely on the gendered and caste-based hierarchy, yet that does not mean gender and caste hierarchies and relations are annihilated.³⁶ The complex array is perhaps best examined through a high-profile example: that of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh. In August 2017, the leader of the Dera Sacha Sauda (DSS) (‘true bargain’), Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, was found guilty by an Indian court of rape against two of his female followers, with another forty-six cases of sexual assault and two of murder still pending. The court announcement resulted in widespread rioting and the death of thirty-eight people in the state of Haryana where the headquarters of the organization was based. This was not the first time that Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh had attracted controversy. Ten years earlier he was at the centre of a ‘religious’ controversy, in which videos of him dressed in the assumed style of the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, were released to the media. The outcome of which was a number of apologies from the Dera to the Akal Takht, the institutionalized Sikh central religious authority, who in any case rejected these and issued an edict of excommunication, urging Sikhs to keep away from the Dera (Copeman 2012).³⁷ These actions led to a number of academic articles (Baixas 2007; Jodhka 2008; Ram 2008) and a great deal of media interest in what has been called the ‘Dera’ phenomena in Punjab. What is of interest here is the persona and appearance that Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh adopted in the context of the huge significance of *sants* and *pirs* in the region.

The Dera Sacha Sauda takes its eponym from the hagiography of Guru Nanak and is also the name of a *gurdwara* associated with Guru Nanak's life in West Punjab in the Nankana Sahib district.³⁸ However, the origin of the Dera Sacha Sauda, as a split-off from the Radhasoami Satsang, is deeply embedded in the *sant* traditions of nineteenth-century North India. This 'new religious movement' was founded in Agra in the 1860s by Shiv Dayal Singh and has been extensively documented in its own publications and in academic discourse (most notably Juergensmeyer's *Radhasoami Reality* 1991).³⁹ Through numerous *sants*, the movement spread throughout North India; by the 1930s there were over twenty branches with two large centres in Agra and Beas in the Punjab. The Beas branch is of concern here, as this was established in 1884 by Jaimal Singh and his successor Sawan Singh, who was the spiritual Guru of Khaima Mal or Mastana Shah Balochistani, as he is known by the followers of Dera Sacha Sauda. In the 1920s he began to serve with Sawan Singh and in 1948 he established Dera Sacha Sauda in Sirsa, distinct from the Radhasoami *dera* (Kaushal 1998). In fact, splitting and re-forming of subgroups with new abodes is one of the key features of spiritual figures in Punjab (and elsewhere). Decentralization and fragmentation, sometimes with referents to the lineage but equally in relation to a new vision or insight, can be found in all of the major *sant/pir* movements. Just as the Radhasoami movement split at the time of the death of one spiritual leader, so the Dera Sacha Sauda followed the same pattern, with groups forming other bases and organizations. In 1990, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh was appointed as the leader of the Sirsa Dera.

From what can be gleaned from news reports and online interviews, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh came from a rural family of landlords in Rajasthan who were followers of the *dera* and became close to Shah Satnam Singh, who was the leader following Mastana Shah. It seems that at the age of twenty-three in 1990 when he was named as successor, he was given the name Maharaza Gurmeet Ram Rahim, which translates as King (Sikh, Hindu and Muslim name), to which he later added the name '*Insaan*' ('human'). This taking of the surname '*Insaan*', as a signal of transcending the division between religion and caste (though clearly not gender) is a common trope amongst *sants/pirs* in caste-/communal-ridden North India. All commentators, academic and media alike, agree that this *dera*, like many others, attracted the majority of followers from economically marginal and *dalit* backgrounds: '*dalit* assertion can be seen being manifested through the potent agency of Dera culture in Punjab ... The dense following of Dera Sacha Sauda in Malwa is a case in point' (Ram 2016: 187). The argument Ronki Ram is articulating

is that the persistent exclusion from economic, political and social power has its cultural manifestation in the growth of *deras* as sites of alternative cultural praxis and ultimately political power. There is, however, a strong caveat required and perhaps a need for a more granular analysis of the ways in which these spiritual figures operate and the broader culture of *deras* as promoting a sense of empowerment. Ram Rahim himself comes from a *jat* background and his organizational structure did not seem to include any *dalits*, even though there were clearly many in the ranks of devotees. Perhaps a clearer case of empowerment can be found in the Ravidassia movement which, as we will return to in subsequent chapters, has an explicit agenda of *dalit* empowerment and has living *gurus* (Sant Naranjan Dass) but draws much of its broader momentum from a non-living ultimate *guru* (Ravidass). In that sense, it is not as concerned with the charismatic power of the living individual. In contrast the machinations of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh can be seen much more clearly as one of exploitation and continuation of hierarchies. If the majority of *deras* follow the format of a dominant caste leader appealing to the marginal sections of society, there are also shrines in which *dalits* (East Punjab) and Christians (West Punjab) are spiritual leaders. In Marraka village, now part of Greater Lahore, there is a shrine cared for by Pappu Masih. The grave itself has taken on the form of a Sufi shrine, with a green covering with the name 'Allah' on it, but with the addition of a cross on the entrance (Figure 3). In an interview, Pappu tells us about the shrine:

This is the old centre of the village. My *baba* (grandfather) was here and my *abba* (father) and now I am here. Some ask 'who was in the tomb?' and make a fuss; some say he was Christian, some a Muslim ... His name was Baba Gurbaksh and his father was Baba Mehar Das. My family is buried here: Chinu Sai, Mai Derwishi and Baba Sohan Das are buried there, and Baba Mehar Das is buried here also ... We have been doing this *sewa* since my *baba's* time. His name was Partap Singh ... The rest go to the Church, but we mostly stay here, we go to the Church sometime ... We used to live on the side. The *Sardars* had given us a place ... everyone knew we were the poor people. Our elders used to eat *maal dangar* (carrion) ... our *dada* used to live here ... then we did the duty with this dervish ... there are four *kirpans* kept here, you know that this is the reality of this place [whispering]. ...

Interview, Marraka village, 2009

A shrine with this level of multiplicity is relatively rare in present-day West Punjab, as some of the prominent sites of the *sants* and the *Naths* have gone



Figure 3 Marraka village, Pappu Masih, shrine caretaker and son of Baba Suba Masih.⁴⁰

Photo courtesy of authors

to ruin. The *dera* of Gopal Das, the leader of a relatively well-known *sant* movement in the nineteenth century, is now in ruin, as is the Tilla Jogian in Putohar (Malhotra 2017). In East Punjab, the Sufi shrines like the Bairagi/Nath *deras* in the West were also left in ruin, but have in the last twenty years become places where *dalit* castes and others can lay claim to a spiritual space, without an institutional authority to govern the narrative. The movement from Sufi Pir to Ravidass Sant has been brilliantly documented in Ajay Bhardwaj's film *Kitte Mile Ve Mahi* (Where the twain shall we meet, 2005),⁴¹ in which the caretakers at a number of shrines in the Jalandhar, Doaba region make an explicit link between the Chisti Sufis and Ravidass, for example:

Caretaker: Our *pir* Bada, Guru Mole Shah came to village Mir (near Phagware) and our Dada Guru came to Phillaur. Our Pir Murshid is here and we follow them ... He lived in Pakistan and then he came here. Our Baba Guru whose name is Brahm Das. Pir Mole Shah died in Pakistan ... this starts from the Chisti, the light, and then it is passed down to Ravidass and then into our Pir Gurus.

Devotee: All of this is Brahm Das' doing. He didn't want to have any money or land. He just wanted to do something for this land ... he is Ravidass come

again and if people don't want to understand, then so what ... and the rest, well Dr Baba's (Ambedkar) ideas don't work here. They do in other countries, but not here ... Punjab's heart is not clean. That's why there is so much trouble here.

Kitte Mile Ve Mahi, 2005

The persistence of caste inequality and discrimination is referenced here. Similarly, in the shrine in Marraka, Pappu Masih further remarked:

Keeping the shrine in this way and with this name had not been easy and we were told of the ways in which people would question why they were there, as they were Christians and the buried man was a Sikh. They come to us and tell us we should leave this place or become like them.

Interview, Marraka, 2009

The feeling of suspicion was prominent in our interview, where Pappu did not wish to discuss the shrine with our ostensibly Muslim companions. An air of threat is something that emerges when *dalits* take up space even at the marginal site of a shrine. Dominant caste exertions of power and *dalit* resistance in any form, even in the taking up of space, whether literal or symbolic, resonate with Scott's (1990) conceptualization of the hidden and public transcripts. Scott highlights how the public display of power is projected while subordinate groups respond and resist in the face of hegemony, even in the most inverted, mocking, private displays of subterfuge in order to maintain or obtain material gain. While this represents a critique of power, through an often secret discourse which takes place 'under the nose' or 'behind the backs' of the dominant, the art of not being governed, as he has argued elsewhere (Scott 2009), becomes as much a part of the public transcript as of the hidden. Scott further notes how even the use of names (as religious signifiers imbued with the bordering logic of colonial modernity) is a means of both assertion and manipulation:

How are we to interpret the fact that lower caste men in the pluralistic culture of the Punjab are likely to use any of several names, depending upon whom they were speaking to? Confronted with a Hindu, they called themselves Ram Chand, with a Sikh they called themselves Ram Singh, and with a Christian John Samuel. The frustrated British census takers wrote of the 'fickleness' of the lower castes with respect to religion, but it is not hard to recognize the evasive adoption of protective cover.

Scott 1990: 32

Evidently this type of naming still responds to and plays with formal religious categories and perhaps shows the limitation of Scott's knowledge of the social

context as Punjab is replete with names that carry no religious connotation, though they are marked by gender; such as Bhola, Pappu, Lalla, Pappa, Shama, Tara, Neelum, Rakho and Chhabo. These are all examples of names in which the religious/caste identity is not present. These do not speak to power in the way that the hidden script does; rather they subvert the formal relationship in which naming becomes the basis for communal division, in a similar way to Hujwiri becoming *Data* and Fareed becoming Ganj-e-Shakar ('sweetness unlimited').

This subversion is necessary because even in the taking of a name, if a rupture occurs, it can be seen as an assertion with violent consequences. A *chamar* as a Muslim and as a beef seller can be lynched, whereas performing as a Hindu might offer an escape, but this is not easily navigable in the volatile politics of Hindutva. *Dalit* avowal as a public transcript may serve to mobilize a wider population deemed powerless, which can again result in conflict. If shrine cultures of the type depicted by Ajay Bhardwaj's films reflect a certain form of *dalit* presence, they are tolerated only to the extent that it does not disturb wider social relations.

Bhure Shah, known as Gurmail Singh, was born in 1970 to a Mazbi Sikh household and worked, like many of his compatriots, for most of his life as a waged labourer in rural Muktsar. In 1995, after a series of events that confirmed his status as someone who could give the gift of children via blessed apples and cotton seed, he set up a small weekly gathering at which people would come to him for healing, much in the tradition of *sants/pirs* in Punjab. Bhure Shah became very popular in a short period of time and he had devotees coming from all over the North Indian states. His popularity rose dramatically, and his shrine grew as the numbers of devotees multiplied into the thousands. As Bhure Shah's popularity rose he was patronized by the local/political elite and at its peak employed about seventy people to provide *langar* who also lived there. In 2002, he was arrested under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including murder, kidnapping and fraud. This was reported in *The Tribune* English language newspaper and *The Times of India* as another case of a fraudulent *baba*, fooling a gullible public and more sinisterly, but ultimately to discredit him totally, being in cahoots with a sympathizer of the Pakistan intelligence agency, the ISI. In contrast, the analysis of the situation offered by Singh and Singh (2017), from interviews carried out with Gurmail Singh and other people in the village, offers a narrative in which the public transcript reflected the fact that the local dominant caste-political nexus supported Bhure Shah, until he started to exert an independent influence over the social structure. An extensive quote illustrates the point:

Later on, Bhure Shah started the tradition of *langar* at his *dera*. He employed some agricultural labourers (who invariably were *dalits*) of the village at the *dera*. He also offered them higher wages or even about double of the wages paid by landowners. They have to perform the assigned duties at the *dera* such as to serve the *langar*, tea, water, etc. A resident of the village narrated that the then landowners paid wages of 60 rupees to a labourer per day. Bhure Shah, however, offered them 100 rupees per day ... Bhure Shah gave the large amount of donation to two *dalit* communities, that is, Balmiki/Mazbis and Chamars to construct their separate religious places in the name of their icons: one is Balmik Mandir and Ravidass Gurdwara ... These institutions are not only the space of *dalit* religious practices but also a symbol of their cultural assertion and protestation against the dominance and discrimination faced by them from the mainstream people.

Singh and Singh 2017: 155–156

Ultimately, Gurmail Singh was convicted and spent a few years in jail. Upon his return to the village, the condition of the waged labourers had returned to its abysmal state. Though Bhure Shah was still running the shrine, he stopped participating in any public rallies or functions. Despite his services being used by the political elite in search of a *dalit* vote bank, a complete halt was put on his attempts to alter the economic role of *dalits* in the village by the local land-owning elite.

The violence with which this kind of *dalit* rejoinder is met with also finds resonance in the 2009 killing of Sant Ramananda, the second in command at the Ravidass, Sach Khand Dera, in Ballan in Vienna. Though this has been represented in terms of Sikh militants protesting against 'heterodox' activities, specifically in relationship to the *Ad Granth*, or in terms of Sikh fundamentalists protesting about a Sikh sect,⁴² it has been rarely reported as an act of caste violence in the face of *dalit* assertion (as an exception, see Williams 2009).⁴³ Religion has become a way of articulating and masking caste in Punjab which only becomes fully exposed at the point of conflict.⁴⁴ The structure and maintenance of caste require ongoing violence. When it reaches this kind of intensity, it can and tends to result in a reaction and response, which falls into the cycle of religion formation. As Ronki Ram notes:

In the case of Ravidassia Dharm, the social life of the *dalit* community got intensified in the aftermath of the murder of Sant Ramanand of Dera Ballan at a Ravidass temple in Vienna on 24 May 2009. Within less than a year, Ravidassia Dharm [Religion] emerged in Punjab.

2017: 75

Proclaiming a religious identity as a way of marking a space for the denigrated is a strategy that Indian elites adopted in the face of Christian colonists' demands for a coherent theology, backed with the power of the coercive state. The implications for Ravidassis will be considered in Chapter 6 but what is of note is that the process involves the same kind of boundary marking, not in relation to caste, but certainly in relation to gender, addressed in the section that follows. So while the Ballan Sants are highly conscious of caste discrimination, there have not been any Ravidassi women *sants* prominent in the call for a new religion. Indeed, in the very few instances where women *sants/pirs* have evolved, the maintenance of patriarchy leads to them being either ignored or incorporated by men.

Gendered absences

While there are rare examples of women who have shrines devoted to them – *Sati* stones and Bibi Pakdaman (Kalra and Ibad 2019) being the exception rather than the rule – there is a paradoxical prevalence of female Gods, such as Seetla Mata and Durga, examples which will be considered in the next chapter. When considering living women spiritual figures, the revival of Sufi shrines in East Punjab has had the effect of giving expression to caste and gender marginality. Where the space for living *sants* from *dalit* or female backgrounds seems to have diminished with their proximity to formal religion, the Sufi space, left behind and largely abandoned, has opened up new possibilities. This is neatly exemplified in the story of Channi Shah, who in the interview is dressed in a pink headscarf, with a nose ring, has no teeth and is sitting in front of a large *huka* (waterpipe). Her life story is translated here from the documentary *Kitte Mil Ve Mahi* (2005) by Ajay Bhardwaj:

Devotee: Our Guru was Pritam Das who is from near Jalandhar and when he died, this woman Channi Shah took over his seat (*gadhi*). She is our *gur-Bhain* (sister). We see his spirit in her. She has taken on the *seva* and you can ask her.

Channi Shah: The Sant used to come to Haripur and we didn't even give him any respect. Then we met the *Sant* and he said to me come to the *mela* and we said to him we are poor people, we do daily labour, what hope do we have? I was getting 70 Rs a month from a pension and I went to get it and bought cloth and then went to Talwan and saw the *mela* of the *Sant*. Then we went there and met the *sant*. Then we would go every year to the *mela*, but he moved around and finally came to settle at this place (Hoshiarpur).

When he came here he asked us to do *seva* for him. Then we started serving him. We thought I only need 2 *rotis*, if they are here (at the shrine) or at home, what's the difference? I was on my own, so I started doing *seva* and a year passed and he gave me a *chunni*. He was not well, he stayed on the bed mostly and I did a lot of *seva* for him. So I don't know if I looked after him badly or well, but he gave me the *chunni* as he got ready to leave this earth. Then the *sangat* made me what I am. I didn't realise he was going to give me the *gadhi* and it was not even in my thinking when I was doing the *seva*, we did it for our own enthusiasm.

Female Devotee: I've been a devotee from my childhood. Our family lives in Pakistan a place called Chichavatnee. My father was a follower of Baba Brahm Das and he knew the *Granth* of Balmik, Ramayan and the *Birs* of darbar sahib, we were studying and we wanted to learn *Japji Sahib* and we became *akhand Patti*, not for business ... we just did it as *seva*, in the village. We would go and do the *raul* [reading of a section of the *Ad Granthi*] and at the time of the *bhog* [completion of ritual] the *mahaanpursh* [great sage] would give us 10–15 Rs and we would give it to the *bir*. We told our family this is how we are going to live ... we stayed at home for about 20 years and then we met Bhagat Shah Saain and he told me that we are with you and don't worry ... We then went to Nakodar to the *bibi* there ... now we've been here for the last nine years ... I have three children. I've educated them and they are all married but I waited 20 years to get on my way ... no one stopped me from doing my *faqiri*, not my in-laws, or brother and sisters or my children ... we are an *Ad Dharm* family.

Channi Shah: I got married in Alipur, my husband was in the military ... he died ... I had a father-in-law and no mother-in-law and then other people died and people told me to leave ... then I had to leave so I came back to my parents' home. People told me not to live here, but I said I would stay and I would do daily labour or work on cutting crops during harvest season. That's how I passed my time and then I got entangled with these *Sants* ... then I sacrificed myself to them ... now I can talk. In those days I couldn't do anything ... our parents used to do dyeing work, and they loved us a lot but they've gone. But since childhood I've never seen a happy moment ... none of my family come here. I don't have any relations with my old family ... I didn't have a mom and so my *dadi* and *baba* looked after us ... so it was just time-pass. Now we just pass through the good and bad ... it's all just time ... I've been at this dera for about 20 years now ...

Ajay Bhardwaj: The people who come here, are they *Ad Dharmi*?

Channi Shah: All of the people who do *seva* are all from that background
 My only power is to give the truth of the *sarkar*. Whoever is *dukhi* (in pain), all I can do is to tell the *maalik* to look after those who are truethe only people who come to the *faqir* have problems, all we do is pass on the message, they are the one who can do anything ... who ever comes we give them tea or *roti* what elseour responsibility is just to tell the *maalik*
Kitte Mil Ve Mahi, 2005, author translation

This long extract reflects the paucity of female subjects who fall into the *sant* tradition. Channi Shah's story reveals the compound violences that caste and patriarchal hierarchies exert on *dalit* women. Channi Shah's sense of loss, belonging and place are shaped by the ways in which women's agency is continually circuited through patriarchal social relations. Those who are estranged from patriarchy's dictates or fall outside of its remit must find alternative roles of *seva* (service) and sacrifice. As a *dalit* woman, Channi Shah is tied to the economic and social structures but, through the *gadhi* (spiritual inheritance), it could be said that her role has been reinstated through *seva* and the gendered emotional labour required to serve the community of *dalit* devotees. What will happen to Channi Shah? It is not likely that she will be embroiled in local politics, or attract the attention of caste violence, unless she adopts a stance such as that of Gurmail Singh mentioned earlier: in proclaiming a challenge towards social and economic relations, threatening to destabilize the dominant caste/gender order. Historical examples are equally rare to that of Channi Shah and in some senses only re-enforce the way in which gender correlates with the *sant* tradition. The nineteenth-century Piro is perhaps the nearest figure in the archive to Channi Shah.

Piro is affiliated with the *dera* of the Gulabdasis, a group organized around a founding spiritual figure, Gulab Das, located in the village Chatian Wala in the Kasur district. We know of this woman poet/saint through her writings and the remnants of the tomb in which she is buried alongside Gulab Das, the erstwhile and elective head of this nineteenth-century *sant* movement, that continues in present-day Haryana. Piro is significant in gender and caste terms, as in her poetry she represents herself as a '*Sudra Vesva*', as someone from the lowest caste (*sudra*) and courtesan/prostitute (*vesva*). This can be read as a reflection of her social standing, but it can also be read as a rhetorical device within her poetry, akin to Guru Nanak or other poets using the words *das* (servant) or *dhadi* (minstrel) to describe themselves. However, the poetical narrative that Piro offers takes us out of this literary analysis and provides a broad context for a women's actual biography in which the trials she

has gone through lead her to her saviour and lover, Gulab Das.⁴⁵ What is peculiar to Piro is that her narrative challenges the social bind of gender and that of a low caste woman, *vesva sudra*, as her eponym, even though the arc is one of self-annihilation in front of her *guru*. This seamless play between the social and spiritual, material and immaterial is inescapable in her poetry and enfolds the use of meta categories (such as 'Turk') which simultaneously stand as binaries in the poetry, as well as referring to social conditions.⁴⁶

After Partition, Piro's tomb in Pakistan went into disrepair and is no longer a site of pilgrimage. Partition allows for the erasure of Piro, just as the ambivalence in her relationships becomes much more difficult to digest in the contemporary religious landscape of East Punjab/India. In an otherwise insightful recovery, Malhotra (2017) offers Bhakti as the metanarrative within which to place the ghost of Piro, as this formulation provides a protective umbrella of the imagined lived 'religion' of undivided Punjab made sufficiently safe for her memory to be revived. Indeed, the contemporary sites which take Gulab Das as their spiritual leader place Piro into the relationship of ultimate devotee or 'mother' when she has any relevance at all. As Malhotra notes: 'clearly distance from Chatianwala has also bred amnesia about her. More significantly the liturgical and ritual practices of the Gulabdasis, not to mention their effort at propaganda, have not seen fit to perpetuate her name or her close association with the guru' (2017: 321). This somewhat benign reading belies the ways in which gender and caste structure the realm of possibility for a woman *sant* in postcolonial India and Pakistan. In Hinduizing and Islamizing social contexts, the acknowledgement of a gendered *dalit* identity is increasingly inconceivable and thus Piro can exist only once cleansed of these elements.

Communal boundary crossing evokes another female spiritual figure from the archive, Lal Ded (Beloved Grandmother) also known as Laila, Lalita, Lali, Laleshwari and Mai Lal, who has resonance in Kashmir through her poetry and sayings which overlap written and oral cultures since the fourteenth century, a time which is ascribed to her lifetime. The legions of stories that surround her place her in the mystical tradition of wandering ascetics, most infamously because she was said to walk around naked. Her hagiography places her within the Shaivite and Sufi traditions, with contemporary political configurations of religion placing her in either, rather than both, categories. There is no shrine or physical site connected to her in the valley of Kashmir, yet her boundary crossing activities enable her to be owned and disowned by all. In analysing the changing narratives about Lal, Durre Ahmed notes a shift from the 1960s when

she occupied the space between 'Kashmiri Savism and Islamic Sufism' to one where she is argued to being one or the other. What is at play is 'a sort of syzgy, fixed in such a way that the common features dominate to an extent that makes boundaries impossible to discern' (2002: 169). Nonetheless, by marking Laila as a naked woman in the hagiographies, gender is overcome in contemporary debates about whether she was a Hindu or Muslim by way of a foil that implies the only way she could enter into a tradition is by being clothed.⁴⁷ Thus it is in the negation of her femininity that access to the space of religion is enabled. Despite there being no shrine to Lal Ded, her presence in Kashmir is through the collection of poetry or *Vaak's*, as the metre is referred to in Kashmiri, attributed to her. Her appearance in the colonial record is instructive in terms of the privileging of a literary figure, placed into the relatively benign position of 'granny':

There are few countries in which so many wise saws and proverbial sayings are current as in Kashmīr, and none of these have greater repute than those attributed by universal consent to Lal Ded or 'Granny Lal', as she is called nowadays. There is not a Kāshmirī, Hindū or Musalmān, who has not some of these ready on the tip of his tongue, and who does not reverence her memory.

Sir George Grierson 1920: 1

These sayings in the vernacular fit into the broader tradition of *sant* poetry, as Ahmed (2002) states: 'it is important to note that these verses live on in the oral tradition of the Kashmiri language and have a stature similar to the poetry of Meera, Kabir, Bulleh Shah, Baba Farid, Guru Nanak and other great mystical poet/saints of the subcontinent' (158). But the main distinction, which is critical and essential, is that no shrines have been built in Lal Ded's name and she is not the object of veneration and worship in the way that other spiritual figures have attained status.

In the shift from precolonial figures, such as Lal Ded and Piro who are outside of the fold of normative religious categorization, to the colonial reformed women who supported the singular representation of religious identity, to the postcolonial chaste and pure figure of a women with spiritual charisma, the social inequalities which mark a deeply patriarchal society have not been disturbed. Equally women's popular practices at shrines and in relation to a variety of rituals have also continued, despite the efforts of reformers. A more peculiar conundrum, at least in East Punjab, is the centrality of goddess worship, in a social context where sex selection in the shape of son preference and low levels of economic agency shape gender relations. Women-

centred festivals and women's customs, rituals and popular performance simultaneously affirm and challenge the patriarchal ideologies which shape social relations (Purewal and Kalra 2010). However, by maintaining material ambiguity, the ephemeral sense of the goddess is maintained alongside the patriarchal and socially defined woman: a point we will return to in the following chapters.

Synopsis

Raṭe seī jē mukḥ na moṛān̄nīḥ jin̄hī siñāṭā s̄āī.

ḥar jḥar pavḍe kacḥe birhī jin̄hā kār na āī. ||1||

Dḥanī vihūnā pāt patambar bhāhī seṭī jāle.

Dḥūrī vich ludandṛī sohān̄ Nānak tai sah nāle. ||2||

Those who don't turn their face from the *sant/pir* become imbued with love
Those who don't know how to, whose desire for oneness is weak, fall by the
wayside

Without the true wealth of the loved, the false wealth of silks shall burn

Imbued with love, even rolling in the dust I look beautiful, oh Nanak.

Ad Granth: 1425⁴⁸

This *shabad* was performed in 2009 in Lahore by Bhai Ghulam Mohammed Chand, a representative of the *rababi* tradition that arguably died with him when he passed away in 2015. We have written elsewhere about Bhai Chand, but his relevance here is because this *shabad* turned into an exegesis on the role of the *sant/pir* (Purewal 2011; Kalra 2015). This musical poetical journey begins with Guru Arjan, then to Kabir via Bhai Gurdas to Baba Farid with a detour of Bhai Nand Lal to end with Guru Arjan. In itself this textual journey is highly potent, but the rationale is provided by Kabir, in the lucidly titled poem '*Banaras ka Thug*' (the Thug of Benares), a forceful text that calls out the hypocrisy of the Brahminical religious establishment in Benares, with the refrain, '*Aise Sant Na mo ko bhaavehi*' ('these types of spiritual men are not pleasing to me'). Examples of hypocrisy are then brought from Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal to indicate how *sants/pirs* who say one thing but do another, who appear radiant but have dark hearts. The *shabad* ends with a positive affirmation of the type of spiritual figure that is of value to a devotee: the ability to inspire devotional love rather than unthought repetitive ritual is central to this overall performative education.

The key agent that brings this anti-ritual interpretation and opens up the divine, in theoretical terms, to cross boundaries is Bhai Chand (Kalra 2015). It is these interpreters of the poetry that bring the words into the contemporary that are perhaps one of the reasons behind the sustained appeal of *pirs/sants* over the thousand years that these verses traverse. The presence of this philosophical-poetical tradition intermingles in our analysis to indicate an undercurrent of radical potential, that whilst not socially realized does provide a resource for resistance. In this chapter we have attempted to explore the opaque nature of the spiritual figure in Punjab, which extends the conceptualization far beyond any traditional notion of charisma by charting out a spectrum of devotion which maps onto the hierarchies of power and material control. This includes the social and material grounded-ness of the appeal for followers of spiritual figures (*babas, pirs* and *sants*) and the appeal to exit from and renounce all connections with social and material relations (*malangs, yogis/yoginis* and *faqirs*) in order to contain, rather than extract, the potentials for power. When the lens of analysis looks towards devotees rather than focusing solely on the spiritual figure's appeal or charisma, then the agency in the making of spiritual figures can be situated as a significant, not by-standing, part of a dynamic process. The Weberian framing of charisma indicates that acts of obeisance or petitioning spiritual figures reveal an effective, rather than affective, relationship between devotee and charismatic spiritual figures. Instead, we argue that it is not only the spiritual landscape of contemporary Punjab but the hierarchical, unequal and contested nature of social and material relations which make Punjab a fertile place for the proliferation of *babas* and shrines. Rather than characterizing this as false consciousness, we prefer to highlight the strategic navigation of choices by devotees as containing elements of assertion and agency, meanwhile understanding the contours of the hegemonic. Thus, the religious question, embedded within colonial modernity's omnipresent layerings in Punjab, outlines the modes of dominance as well as providing the infrastructure for at least some of the strategies of resistance taking place.

What we found most striking in our fieldwork across this spectrum was how prominent the idea of uncontainability was and how deep its potential threats are. Aligned to this threat is that spiritual transformation becomes potentially transformative (and thus threatening to the current order) when attached to changes in material circumstances. As highlighted above, spiritual figures utilize a myriad of existing texts, reference points, personas, practices and discourses which present countless potentials to go beyond singular religious identities and to counter bordering logics. Their ability to cross or subvert the outline of

religious (as well as social) boundaries rationalizes both the appeal and limits of their praxis and these two elements appeal to the disciplining functions of authority and formality. This is met by strategies of encompassing by the religious establishment through Sufism and Bhakti and violent exclusion as with Ahmadis and *dalits*.⁴⁹ Responses to individual spiritual figures along the spectrum of accommodation and expulsion find a parallel in the shrines that are set up to the deified dead as we will explore in the next chapter.



Sacred spaces and their limits

Introduction

Kee karda, kee karda

Koy puchko dilbar kee karda

Ikse ghar vich vasdeya, hasdeya, nay hunda vich parda

Kee karda, kee karda

Vich maseet namaaz guzaare, buthkhana ja varda

Koy puch ka dilbar kee karda

What does he do, what does he do?

Will someone ask the beloved what is he up to?

Living happily in one house. There should be no secrets.

What does he do, what does he do?

All night praying in the mosque. At dawn he enters the Mandir.

What does he do, what does he do?

Bulleh Shah, in Saqib 2012: 58

Multiple discourses criss-cross at sacred sites in Punjab amidst and often against the grain of the pervasive and overriding currents of communalism and nationalism. Practices of devotion, while continually changing, can quickly solidify into made and remade traditions. Recognition of the agency of devotees in the making of spiritual authority is paramount to a meaningful understanding of the material and mythical landscape. Though couched in the language and aesthetics of spirituality, the customarily instrumental approach of contemporary devotees can be noted in the recurring expression of desire for spiritual powers to impede, intervene in and transform material conditions. In our ethnographic analysis of shrines across Punjab, it is the commonality of such practices of devotees across a wide and disparate range of sites that are most striking, given the communally written history, which would suggest a contrary record of the present. All sacred space, by the twenty-first century, has more or less been disaggregated and known

by the nouns *mandir*, *gurdwara*, temple and *mosque*, with discrete practice and communal membership. Even where popular practice (as opposed to institutional, formal or 'bounded religion') is a prominent part of an academic analysis, it is often narrated discursively into a normative religious tradition (see Bigelow 2010). Studies of this type simply repeat the process by which any ritual or site becomes a religious entity through entry into teleological, historical time, that which baffles incorporation strategies, on the other hand, becomes rendered as superstition, fable or myth, and at its most extreme, 'folk religion' or 'cult'. Attention to the distinction between (bounded) religion and boundary-crossing praxis does not, however, necessarily provide a means to escape the traps of modernity and its requirements for (religious) categories. Processes of incorporation, or the desire of groups to represent themselves in the dominant categories of religion, through non-teleological or nonlinear narratives, are also rife. Just as multifarious ritualized actions are narrated into hegemonic notions of what constitutes 'religion'; this is not, however, the only option available. There is a simultaneous renewal of popular forms and activities of worship that are not necessarily able to function as acts of resistance in the face of normative religious categorization, but, rather, find cover in marginal places at the interstices of hegemonic narrations of tradition.

Sacralized sites are produced and reproduced through an array of techniques which debunk attempts to enforce a linear, teleological theory of the development of shrines in South Asia. As pointed out in the previous chapter, bordering logics shape and structure the ways in which piety is rationalized. Even the vocabulary and language that is used to define, analyze and situate different expressions of piety represent a bordering rationality. The streamlining of indigenous narrations of piety into categories and compartmentalized practices is perhaps the most identifiable example of this. As sites of worship to *devis*, *sants* and *pirs* grow in prominence and size, their local hagiographies, often multiply narrated through performative traditions and poetry, become singularly defined utilizing technologies of the modern state. Shrine stories become a *history* that is indelibly connected to an authorized discourse by either institutions associated with the state or the state itself in its regional or national forms. These pristine accounts are reproduced through print technology and disseminated, increasingly so, online. The study of shrines in South Asia, and particularly in Punjab, has reproduced and reinforced a conjoinment between theology, religious identity and sacred space, even where such signified closure hides more than it reveals. The disconnect between local/multiple and authorized/streamlined narrations persists within the various ways in which shrines are viewed, a kaleidoscope we will explore in this chapter. Looking across the India–Pakistan border, whether it is a study of *Data Sahib* (Strothmann 2016), Vaishno Devi (Tewari 1988) or the Harmandir (K. Singh

2000), the tendency is to interpret these as being representative and critical to the reproduction of a particular kind of community inflected by hegemonic qualities – Muslim (male), Hindu (Brahmin) and Sikh (*jat*, male) – in demonstrating a gravitation towards singular authority over multiplicity. Even where a site may be more ambivalent, in that manifold narratives exist concurrently, such as Hajji Rattan (Bouillier and Sila-Khan 2009), the analyst can only articulate difference and distinction in terms of theologies and ritual that map back on to religious classification. The outcome of this kind of procedure is a methodological religious essentialism, akin to methodological nationalism.¹ We posit that ‘border crossing’ as a starting point necessitates acknowledging the construction of religious boundaries but also demands paying attention to commonalities and overlaps which act as subversion, critique and sometimes a breaking of the boundary itself. This is not merely to say that Hindu and Muslim mix in figures such as Gugga Pir; rather, these categories themselves are broken in a gender/caste critique.

Our ontological foundation is therefore one of methodological border crossing² across India and Pakistan, represented by our consideration of shrines scattered across the region of Punjab: a space whose geopolitical boundaries are transcended through and by shrines which not only belie the logic of religious classification and methodological nationalism, but which fall outside of recognized national or regional geopolitical spatial boundaries. Indeed, the very act of crossing, as an acknowledgement of its vitality and shape, can reify the border itself. Thus, border crossing is not merely a matter of physical crossing but of symbolic transgression, a critical crossing which engages the bordering logics – or ideological and suppositional premises – of the border. Our choice of shrines thus lends itself to a questioning of not only the nationalized reconfiguration of the region since 1947, but also of how earlier and subsequent mechanisms of reformism and nationalism have grafted themselves upon practices and religious identity-markers. Thus, our panoramic view of shrines does not limit itself to any clearly demarcated spatial notion of Punjab (nor does it adopt an imperious approach otherwise implicated with Punjab in Pakistan, in particular) but instead extends its purview to sites in Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Upper Sindh, a cultural zone that is simultaneously reflective of a regional set of practices and performances of shrine culture while being anything but singularly definable. This Punjab is replete with sites and traditions of obeisance to figures who represent radical opposition to ‘communalism’ (such as Bulleh Shah, Nanak, Piro), as well as sites which continue to attract worshippers and pilgrims for their ‘bending’ of gender conventions through lore and demotic devotional practices (such as Madho Lal Hussain or Nath *deras*). Borders are also crossed through representational

dynamics which overtly challenge or resist formalizing attempts to separate or estrange worshippers from sites (i.e. exclusive labelling of sites by institutional authority or other characterizations). The tomb shrine of Mian Mir in Lahore shows border crossing is one of the cornerstones of its spiritual and devotional attractions for Sikh '*yatris*' (pilgrims).

Writing about shrines and shrine practices across borders requires a perspective that does not attribute discourse about specific acts, such as lighting a clay lamp, to an overarching religious tradition, or insist on marking devotees with labels of identity. Rather, we note from our fieldwork a recurring comment by devotees that 'this is just the way "we" do it'. As we will show, the 'do' is iterative of de Certeau's (1984) notion of tactics employed by ordinary people in everyday acts of resistance in the face of repressive modern society. The 'we' here is crucial, as the putative assignment of an identity at the moment of iteration belies its reduction to Hindu/Sikh/Muslim as it simultaneously restricts the many ways in which a ritual can be interpreted. Thus the number of interpretations within what is boundedly considered a religious tradition may be greater than those found across the boundary. In other words, that which constitutes the diversity out of which a tradition is framed may itself be greater than that which constitutes the boundary itself. For example, and as we will explore in detail in this chapter, the rituals accompanying death in relation to burying and burning are often used to draw a distinction between Muslim and Hindu, yet the multiplicity of death practices in Punjab do not map back on to this primary division. Similarly, the giving of a *ladoo* (sweet rice) as an offering (*mannat*) at a shrine can be multiply interpreted by Muslims and Hindus in terms of theology (see Figure 4), but the overlap in terms of common desire for a son, good health, employment, etc. do not map back onto any discursively set theological schema.

So, while the multiple narrations of common rituals offered by Bigelow (2010) in her reputed ethnography of Haider Shaikh provide evidence for our argument, her language betrays an analytical casing in which singular religious identity prefigures practice. Thus, her interpretation of the Muslim-Sufi shrine of Haider Shaikh interpolates it as a *shared* space for Sikhs and Muslims in Malerkotla. Common rituals and practices of devotion have to be first bifurcated before they can come together as shared. This initial binary production relies on an outside authority figure, which in this case is the academic historian, but in other contexts could be the Sufi *pir*. The role of this figure is to authenticate the power of the site through recourse to Islamic (his)tory, and this is external to the devotees, who then come to share in the spiritual power. This is an example of what we conceptualize as religious feudalism, an ordering in which



Figure 4 *Ladoo* (sweets) left as *mannats* outside the tomb of Mian Mir, Lahore.

Photo courtesy of Zoya Mirza

spiritual figures are at the top of a hierarchy dispensing goods to peasants and/or devotees. Inverting this hierarchy momentarily, our perspective views devotees as co-producers of the site, which educes a 'commons' in two senses. Firstly, the question of ownership, rather than prefigured, is contingent on a relationship with some authority that has some form of control over the management of a shrine, which since the colonial period has been held by institutions of the state in various forms. Devotees' practices often challenge the ideological baggage that comes with this authorizing discourse precisely on the grounds of their ownership of the shrine. This then indicates the second sense of the commons which refers an ownership without entitlement that challenges the shrine as an outside object. This arises from the intimate relationship between devotee and shrine and is at the base of gendered relations via votive and ritual practices.

Our problem with ideas of 'shared', 'cross-roads' 'confluences' and 'meetings' without reference to a political or moral economy is that there is an implication of these as benign. Whereas to some extent they are predicated on the ownership of a shrine being uncontested, there are many cases where 'shared' spaces are the source of a violent disputation.³ The Shaheed Ganj Gurdwara/Mosque

controversy in 1920s Lahore (Nijhawan 2006) and the continuing Sunni/Shia altercation over the Bibi Pak Daman shrine (Kalra and Ibad 2019) in the same city indicate an un-sharing or divergent roads. This is not indicative of perennial communal distinction but rather a consequence of the framing of the issue, in which a form of myopia restricts understanding the universal from the particular. Division or commonality come to occupy the same epistemic ground and thus are only distinguished by political contingency and social vicissitudes. Academic perspectives that do not take into account the boundary-making logic of colonial modernity continue to ignore, overlook or undermine the agency of devotee practice in subverting, softening and occasionally challenging boundaries in the making and sustenance of shrines. In critically addressing the issue of ownership, we argue that the term 'commons' is useful because it indicates something that is not clearly owned nor unambiguously under the ownership of an individual, collective or the state. Again, this countering of religious feudalism with the practices of devotees serves as an indication of the radical potential and actual social function of shrine spaces.

This chapter begins by looking at the multifarious ways in which space becomes sacred and ultimately takes on the shape of a place within a particular tradition. Conventional communal divisions between graves and goddesses are questioned in the light of shrine ritual and material practices. Techniques of control along a continuum from incorporation to exclusion mark the multifaceted relationship between state and shrine and these are examined in some detail in the next section. The chapter concludes by demonstrating how gender and caste rupture the steady 'progress' towards singular religious identification implicit in much of the academic discourse on religion in South Asia.

Sacralizing space

The study of shrines in South Asia has remained mainly concerned with sites which have identifiable historical trajectories, predominantly through textual sources and living/deceased figures but occasionally through oral narratives.⁴ In this methodology, the starting point is to identify a shrine as an embodiment of the metaphysics and practices of Bhakti or Sufism, in other words an expression of a theology that is hierarchically delivered to the devotees. In the Islamic case, the symbolic marker of this space is arguably the *Quran*, in oral or written form, inscribed in cloth or in calligraphy (Qureshi 1996). Though this universal cosmology appeals to those interested in theology, it rarely provides substantive

meaning to spaces which are marked as sacred by a green cloth with the etched or embroidered number 786. As we will illustrate, this may also be one of several markers of equally competing theologies for the universal. This approach to shrines in the South Asian environment, as markers of sacred space, requires a certain amount of revisionism (see, for example, Damrel 2013). From the humblest collection of stones adorned by a flag to graveyards with multitudinal stages of shrine development, the tens of thousands of sites (or through time likely hundreds of thousands) do not enter into the narrative of 'History' and 'Theology'. Such an erasure or omission is due to the fact that these shrines do not come with a neatly identifiable hagiography, nor do they have a set of literary works in the shape of *tazkira*, or poetry (*qissas*) with which to identify the inhabitants of the tombs. Where a reliance on oral tradition is manifest, the possibility of alternative traditions and mosaics of stories (as is the case in the miracles attributed to the shrine) arise.

Whilst living and writing their poetry and gathering their devotees, the *pir/sant* is often placed, when described in religious, media or academic discourse, within one of the major traditions, even when they may espouse a universal perspective.⁵ In contemporary West Punjab this is more marked by the dominance of Sufi *pirs* as the main spiritual figures, whereas there is more fluidity in East Punjab due to the additional presence of *sants*. Nonetheless, once their spiritual energy has passed into the bricks and mortar of a shrine, their ideology and names become more diffuse and they become closer to devotees than their lineage may imply. A clear example of this process is Shaykh Syed 'Alī al-Hujwīrī, an eleventh-century Sufi figure, the author of the *Kashf-Al-Mahjoob*, commonly known as *Data Sahib* (the giver). His shrine, *Data Darbar* (the court of the giver), is a prominent site in contemporary Lahore occupying a large tract of land opposite the Bhatti gate on the outskirts of the walled city. The eponym '*Data*' is also applied to Murad Shah, a twenty-first-century *Khatri*-*Bhalla*-turned Sufi, whose shrine is in the rural area of Nakodar, approximately 25 kilometres from the nearest urban centre of Jalandhar, in stark contrast to the metropolis of Lahore which is home to *Data Darbar*. This comparison – one that ruptures history, contemporary geography and religious boundaries – is indicative of the role that popular appellation plays in the face of narratives of institutionalized power. Ali Hujwiri is reputed to be a thousand-year-old Sufi. His name appears in hundreds of books in Urdu and English devoted to Sufism in South Asia, and *Kashf-Al-Mahjoob* has been translated into English, Urdu, Punjabi and Sindhi. *Data Sahib* of Lahore has been described (perhaps over-enthusiastically) as the most popular shrine in Pakistan in terms of visitor numbers, which run into the millions on an

annual basis, and the shrine certainly generates the most revenue for the Punjab Auqaf department, the government body that manages it (Strothmann 2016). In contrast, the *Data Sahib* of Nakodar is a distinctly post-Partition shrine. It has a website (since 2010), a numerically large community of followers and an annual *mela*, with its main claim to fame being the custodianship of Gurdas Maan, the doyenne of Punjabi popular music. This comparison may seem fallacious (and for some disrespectful) but is only possible by acknowledging that shrines of all shapes and sizes are, to some extent, *created* by their devotees. It is here that the inversion of the feudal religious hierarchy becomes recognized in practice. The shrine as commons is subject to the same processes that were discussed in the previous chapter in relation to naming. Just as the common names of Punjabis diffuse so as to not carry a specific religious label, so shrine naming also follows a similar pattern. *Data Sahib*, *Darbar Sahib* and *Lalla vallah* refer to sacred places but give no indication of religious identity: one example of the way in which these sacred spaces cross established religious boundaries. Underpinning this is a certain kind of openness for devotees in relation to devotion but which is simultaneously subject to the same forces of closure that pervade our discussion of religion in Punjab. In other words, shrines are places that display a radical openness in relation to social boundaries but are simultaneously subject to the same homogenizing forces instigated by colonial modernity, continuing to the present day.

As will be outlined in Chapter 5, the constitution of a shrine space is for our purposes crucially positioned in relation to openness and closure as encapsulated by the boundaries of religion, caste and gender. The ubiquity of sites and spaces for devotion from the *thaan/thhey* (raised ground) in a village to the elaborate structures of Uch Sharif indicates the eclectic and varied ways in which devotees engage in worship.⁶ This agnostic attitude towards sites of veneration is neatly summarized by lyricist Inderjit Hassanpuri in the popular 1979 song recorded by Chitra Singh, *Charkha Mera Rangla*:⁷

Sau sau pir manavan naale thaan thaan mathe tekha
Vai mai tainoon yaar karaan jad charke val dekha
 I devote myself to a hundred *pirs* and prostrate from place to place
 I remember you when I see the spinning wheel turning.

Popular veneration of *pirs* seeps into a general sacralization of spaces associated with sacred/secular power. Though unable to transcend the divide between the classification of Hindu and Muslim, Diane Coccarri's unpublished PhD thesis on the *Bir Babas* of Benares offers a set of vignettes which describe the theological

distinction but intimate practical overlap of *bir* and *pirs*, even down to the homophonic play in the multiplicities of North Indian vernaculars:

The rural 'Hindu' worldview treats both Islamic and non-Islamic deified dead in a consistent manner; in fact, the Islamic figures are often described as 'Muslim Deities' ('*musalmani devata*'). The nature of the oral traditions of these Islamic figures and their tomb-centered worship parallels the cult of the *Birs* in many ways, and there is little doubt that there has been a great deal of interaction among these traditions.

Coccarri 1986: 25

What is essential here is the commonality of venerating the dead, whether recently deceased or those whose names have passed into the generic term '*bir*' (brave) or *pir*. While formal religious membership marks the boundaries of shrine discourse, the rationales for their existence are congruent. At the most basic level, in the settlement of villages that takes place at a steady pace in late medieval Punjab, the founding elder of a village might be interned under a tree or on a high ground (*thhey/thaan*) and this marks the spot for a shrine, the origins of which can be lost, but the generic memory of which remains in the appellation of '*vadka*', '*vadera*' [elder] or '*baba*'. These sites find expression in the biography/ethnography, '*Mera Pind*' – '*My Village*' by Giani Gurdit Singh, which traces the life of his village, Mithwal (Sangrur), in an abstracted time, but sometime in the early 1950s when the green revolution is just coming to Punjab and electricity has not yet arrived. His description of village devotional life is apt:

The people of my village have so many things considered worthy of devotion. These could be large or small ... Every caste has its own tomb or grave, belonging to their elders. Every well is a symbol of the God of water and every Pipal tree a sign of the god Brahma. Actually every place that gives something to the village is considered worthy of worship.

Singh 1965: 68

Ironically, Ditt Singh was recording this in the anthropological mode in envisioning an idyllic lost past, but neatly sums up ongoing practices. In his fieldwork in rural West Punjab, Lukas Werth (1998) notes how rural shrines serve to give a connection to the divine and therefore a specific importance to the otherwise generic village form. At their most prominent, spiritual figures who appear in the written historical record, the authorized dead, will have ornate shrines that have developed into large complexes, such as that of Baba Farid or Mian Mir, but these are *exceptions* rather than the norm.

The popular and, generally speaking, low-key dimensions of particular connections to the divine form a discernible, yet unassuming, expression in the region's shrine culture. Most of these practices remain under the radar of institutionalized scrutiny, and this centres upon the devotee who often eclipses the agency of the spiritual figure. The first conscious recollection of this process was in our 1989 family visit to Nakodar in East Punjab, when a female elder in the extended family took us to pay respects at the tomb of the person credited to have brought prosperity to the area. The tomb, which was referred to as a *samadhi* and had no adornment of a flag, 786 or a *chaadar* (cloth covering) was situated in an isolated position in the middle of fields of crops. Without any overt symbols signifying Sufi shrines and Islamic reference points, apart from the grave itself, it was not immediately obvious who this specific *pir* was or had been. We were acutely aware of the significance of the obeisance to him in a post-Partition village which had a large outmigration in 1947 of Muslims of various trades and castes and the arrival of Sikh *jats* and others whose identity labels situated them on the east side of the newly forming border. Not remembering or knowing his full name, the female elder referred to him simply as 'Khwaja Ji', simultaneously indicating his otherness as a generic Muslim and his synchronicity through the honorific 'ji' in the act of paying respects. She explained that he was a Muslim who had brought good fortune through his blessings and that it was their duty as the new inhabitants of the village to continue to look after the site. She (a woman of the dominant *jat* caste) swept the area around the small shrine space, bowed in respect and instructed us to do the same so that we too could gain the blessings of 'Khwaja Ji' as our local *pir* in a village our own family had settled in, only after 1947, from West Punjab. Her obeisance to *Khwaja Ji* was an early indication to us, even before the oral histories and revisions of Partition historiography would begin over a decade later in the early 2000s, that this owned, common, expression of piety had escaped the hegemonic bordering logic. This recollection of 1989 also signals that, even at the height of anti-state Khalistan sentiments in the face of state repression when religious identity was becoming increasingly demarcated, bordering logics did not curb all such localized expressions and practices.

In 2003, on our first trip to Sahiwal in West Punjab, our host requested us to pay respects to his deceased parents and so we attended the family's graveyard and lit a small earthen lamp at their gravestones, which were covered with a plain green cloth. This ritual was his weekly routine and, as he offered a brief prayer, we also folded our hands in respect. This is significant

because it is precisely the site of the graveyard that is the pre-eminent site of worship for Muslims in South Asia; as Damrel pithily remarks: ‘for nearly a millennium, these communities ... have created, visited, guarded and shared a revered landscape ...of grave-centred sacred spaces’ (2013: 17). Whilst this understanding is developed entirely within an Islamic theological scape, it forefronts the role of the devotee in shrine culture. Indeed, the diverse naming of tombs, from *Kabar*, to *Marrhi* to *Samadhi* and then the movement to the space of the graveyard, the *Kabar-stan*, and the place of cremation, the *shamshan ghat*, coalesce in the figure of the *malang* and *aghorī* as described in the previous chapter. Perhaps the most pertinent example in this regard is the Miyani Sahib graveyard in Lahore, where the interview with a *malang* discussed in the previous chapter took place. Miyani Sahib is host to a myriad of shrines and is most full of life on the eleventh day of the lunar month as fireworks are set off and many mini-*melas* take place. These are ostensibly in celebration of Ghaus Pak, Abdul Qadir Gilani, whose common name is ‘*Giyarveen valla Pir – the Pir of the 11th day*’, and is reputed to have visited Punjab from Baghdad, where his tomb resides. The numerous shrines in the graveyard are therefore to a variety of spiritual figures who are linked through affiliation to the Qadri Silsila which begins with Gilani and the eleventh day of the lunar month is a collective gathering and celebration. Miyani Sahib is a shrine *writ large*: illicit drinking and consumption of *bhang* and cannabis is open, where there are few other public sites in Lahore for this kind of activity. It provides living quarters for the *malangs* and wandering dervishes who spend their lives in travel between shrines. It is an exceptional site by virtue of its size and function but equally it is exemplary of the broader shrine cultures of Punjab.

In colonial parlance ‘shrine’ was used mainly to indicate the sacred space of a *mussalman* spiritual leader, emphasizing and evidencing the split between the Hindu (burning the dead) and the Muslim (burying the dead). Indeed, the Punjabi spiritual literary tradition is awash with references to the distinction in marking death between Turk and Hindu. Everyday at the Harmandir, the *Asa Di Var*, a compilation of the Guru’s poetic compositions, is sung from the early hours of the morning to dawn. One of the refrains attributed to Guru Nanak illustrates the importance of death rituals:

Mitī musalmān kī peṛai pāi kumhīār.
Ghar bhānde itā kiā jalḍī kare pukār.
Jal jal rovai bapurī jhar jhar pavēh angīār. [Hindu funeral pyre].
Nānak jin kartai kāraṅ kiā so jāṅai kartār. ||2||

The mud [body] of the Muslim's grave becomes clay for the potter's [creator's] wheel.⁸

Pots and bricks [new bodies] are fashioned from it, and it cries out as it bakes

Burning coals fray and fall, the pitiful clay weeps as it burns and burns

O Nanak, the creator who created the creation; that creator knows ||2||

Ad Granth, p. 466⁹

The level of abstraction offered in Guru Nanak's poetry is matched by a provocative directness in a rendition of Bulleh Shah, which has found its popularity in a Qawwali by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, *meri bukal vich chor*:¹⁰

Mussalman savaiyaan (sarhne) ton Hindu darde gor

Dovon ese de vich marde iho dohaan dee khor

Mere bukkal de vich chor

Kithe Ram Das kithe Fateh Muhammad iho kadeemee shor

The thief in my shawl

The Muslims are afraid of fire

And the Hindus dread the grave

Both of them die in this enmity [Both of them die and end up as refuse]

The thief in my shawl

Ramdas here and Fateh Muhammad there

An ancient quarrel

That suddenly came to an end

When someone else emerged

The thief in my shawl.

Bulleh Shah in Saqib 2012: 66

This polarized split, though referring to distinct rituals and distinct names, is also a rhetorical device in order to invoke a third position. Yet it is not an accurate portrayal of the various burial forms in existence in medieval and even contemporary Punjab. The burial of the dead was not something that first arrived with Islam in the Punjab, but rather this had been a long-standing practice of *dalits*, some groups in the burial of foetuses and children, and in the world of the Nath *yogis*. As an interview with a Nath *yogi* illustrates:

*Hindu ko jalaya, Mussalman ko lamba kar ke sulaiya, teesra panth nath ji ka aya,
jo ke baite baite hi samaya'*

The Hindu is burnt, the Muslim is put to sleep in a lying position, the third panth of the Nath has come, who are buried in a sitting position.

Interview, Amritsar 2009

In this interview the binary is evoked only to be overcome by the Nath *panth*.¹¹ From a gender/caste angle *dalits* would also bury their dead in the course of being denied entry into the caste structure and hence denied access to death rites. In a radical reading, 'Muslim' in this poetry could be read as '*dalit*' (fearing the fire of the Brahmin) as the Hindu fears the grave, where purity ends. The social reality of burial indicates that the bifurcation between Hindu and Muslim in these texts, which is read as evidence by historians of precolonial division, can be better understood as a literary device in which ostensible binaries are presented to represent a structure that needs overcoming, presenting a third way as a critique. This poetry is nonetheless materialized in the twentieth-century shrine that marks the death site of Guru Nanak, at Kartarpur in West Punjab on the historic banks of the Ravi River. The hagiography tells of a discord amongst Guru Nanak's followers over whether to bury or cremate him. During the course of the quarrel, the body disappears, only to be mysteriously and miraculously replaced by flowers. Half of these were then cremated and the other half buried. Within the *gurdwara* complex in Kartarpur, which was given its current form by the Pakistani government in the late 1990s, there are two separate sites that refer to burial and cremation, as well as a *gurdwara* (with the installation of the *Ad Granth*).

Death itself is not the only way in which a sacred space is marked: even though all of the Sikh Gurus' death sites have *gurdwaras*, in some cases the places of birth are equally sacralized. Perhaps more significant is the fact that sites of visitation or where communities are said to have been established are also validated with the honorific of 'historical' *gurdwara*. For example, the Harmandir (or Golden Temple) is known and venerated as the site where Guru Ram Das founded a community, rather than marking the spot where he died. The inherent question which emerges is the rationale for the sacralization of the site. In this case, Harmandir Sahib is venerated for being the site of the founding of a community with the focal point being the *Ad Granth* within the main Harmandir as the 'living *guru*'. However, there are dozens of other installations of the *Ad Granth* throughout the Golden Temple complex, each marking different stories and historiographies contributing to the site's simultaneous status as a local shrine and a more widely symbolic one (see Purewal and Kalra 2015). If the Golden Temple contains elements of both localism and iconic symbolism, then the rationale for sacralization is worthy of pursuing at the five seats of religious authority in Sikhism, recognized in the twentieth century each with their own rationale for being a sacred site, but encompassed by the term *takht* [authority]. Thus the five *takhts* are:

<u>Takht – site of religious authority</u>	<u>Rationale of the shrine</u>
Akal Takht	Site of Guru Hargobind's court
Keshgarh Sahib	Site of the founding of the <i>Khalsa</i>
Damdama Sahib	Where the <i>Ad Granth</i> was compiled by Guru Gobind Singh
Patna Sahib	Birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh
Hazoor Sahib	Deathplace of Guru Gobind Singh

The ritual sacralization of sites once again indicates the way in which the materiality of shrine cultures rarely maps on to the articulated message of the spiritual figure. Indeed, where Farid, Nanak and Kabir were offering caste and gender parity in their writings, this did not translate into the practices of the *pirs* and *Brahmins* who ultimately controlled the shrines devoted to them. Indeed, colonial modernity struck the final nail in the coffin of the radical potential of these philosopher-poets and placed their works in the mould of an eternal political theology: the Hindu–Muslim divide. This was further accentuated by Partition and postcolonial nationalisms, which have been routed through and hinged upon this foundational binary. In offering this argument in relation to closure around singular religious identity, there is also the recognition that this can never be totalizing. Perhaps the most conspicuous aspect of the continuities in *baba* and shrine worship is the potential to offer an alternative site of power and authority.

Shrine *shakti* and its control

Shrines, just like spiritual figures, are deemed powerful in the material world, and visiting them (*darshan*, literally 'being seen') creates a sense of blessing or divine grace (*barkha*). Etymologically a distinct theological baggage comes with the terms *darshan* and *barkha*, but these immediately dissolve at the point of interaction with the shrine. Expressed material needs (such as a job, good health, a son) and the rituals of laying a cloth, offerings of flowers and food, or tying a thread are common activities. Taking an object that is blessed through physical contact with the tomb, and therefore imbued with the power to transform circumstances, is another practice. These are not established in any textual source (though they are much debated) and they are not fixed. The powerful ephemeral quality (Bellamy 2011) of shrine cultures and the ambiguity of religious identity that emerges from material practices is something that is

challenged by alternative religious interpretation in demanding control in view of the contesting authority: the state (feudal, colonial and postcolonial). From circumscribing the power of the *pir/sant*, to provision of endowments/grants, to incorporation into bureaucratic, institutional forms, the state has attempted to manage and harness the power of the shrine: a more detailed account of which will be given in the next chapter.

For present purposes, it is the discursive framing through which the heterogeneity of shrine space and the ambiguity of identity becomes fixed (through a range of technologies and discursive practices) that is of concern. Three strategies are deployed in this regard: first, the tying-in of an embedded spiritual figure into the hagiography of the pan-religious community; second, the homogenization of shrine structures and of ritual practice; and third, a change in the role of the *pir/sant* in relation to state power. Each of these is to some extent unified by an overarching process of incorporation, in which the independent power of sites and *sants/pirs* is accommodated and controlled. Alongside this, the restriction and exclusion of women and *dalits* – as purification – also is crucial to the construction of a pristine religious singularity.

One of the most significant shifts in shrine identity, over time, has been from being a local nexus of criss-crossing hagiographies to becoming narrativized into a singular example of a collective overarching identity. Baba Farid at Pakpattan is said to have spread Islam amongst the pastoralists of the region (Eaton 1982); Nankana Sahib is the birthplace of the ostensible originator of the Sikh faith (Mann 2012); and Naina Devi is one of the fifty-two Shakti *peeths* (temple) that offer a narrative for a unified Indian Hinduism.¹² This latter example is most pertinent, as the shrine at Naina Devi which consists of two black stones representing the eyes (*naina*) of the goddess, was founded in the twentieth century and prior to this, goat sacrifice to the hill Goddess Naina was carried out in the home of the resident *Brahmin* families (Rose 1919). The contestation over Naina Devi is interesting because it is also said to be the place where Guru Gobind Singh did a one-year meditation in honour of the goddess (Durga). The version that links multiple sites to a pan-Indian Hinduism follows from a Sanskrit legend in which Parvati/Sati, who was Shiva's consort, burned herself alive to recover Shiva's honour from an insult by another god. Shiva picked up her corpse and began his cosmic dance, which would lead to the end of the Universe. Thus the other gods pleaded with Vishnu to intervene, which he did by disintegrating Sati's body into fifty-one pieces that then became fifty-one temples that spread from Baluchistan to Assam, and from the Himalayas to South India. Thus the shrine of the Goddess Hingula, in Baluchistan (Pakistan),

which was looked after by the Zikri sect (heterodox Muslims) as there is also a gravestone there to Bibi Nani. This was until the late twentieth century, when it was taken over by a 'Hindu committee' (Schaflechner 2018). We will return to goddesses in the next chapter, but of present attention is the narrativization of the multimodal particular into a singular, generic pan-Hinduism. Our research demonstrates how streamlining and institutionalization have run alongside an ongoing popular and informal heteropraxy. There is an incorporation of anti-Brahminical movements, of which *devi* worship in the north of the subcontinent is an example in which animal sacrifice was a normative aspect (Doniger 2009). Durga as the ultimate goddess in this milieu is also an imposition on to multifarious hagiographies at shrines across the region, such as the previously mentioned Naina Devi but also Chintpurni, Jawala Mukhi and, in Kashmir, Vaishno Devi. This latter shrine may indicate the significance of reform movements, as the shrine itself is to the vegetarian, Vaishno Devi, who has no connection with a goddess from mythology. However in post-Partition India, this represents the antithesis to the animal sacrificing Durga Puja and offers a link into modern Hindu subjectivity.

Shrines perform contradictory functions by, on the one hand, collapsing multiplicity into a singular 'tradition' or identity in the creation of community while, on the other hand, charting out new modes of piety through a breaking away from larger traditions in representing regeneration and change. This is not a model for understanding how shrines are made or remade, but instead, is a useful means by which to read the narratives of shrines as constituting, rather than sitting outside of, these processes.

Guru Nanak and the various shrines attributed to his lifetime are particularly telling for this discussion as the figure of Nanak and the feeling of ownership of him in terms of identity, sites and practices span the functions of managing singularity/multiplicity and institutionalization/change. As previously mentioned in this chapter, the site of Guru Nanak's death at Kartarpur was subject to a strategic rationalization to contain spaces for different means of veneration for different communities of visitors, with the *gurdwara*, tomb, and *pooja* sites all existing within the shrine complex. Thus, a figure who is simultaneously credited to be the founder of the Sikh religion, in its bounded sense, is also considered to be one who is breaking free from established conventions (Singh 1992). Disavowal of ritual and superstition is a prominent feature in the writings and stories attributed to Nanak. From the Janamsakhis, there is a story of Guru Nanak visiting Hardwar where he is said to have seen pilgrims throwing water towards the sun and the east as an offering to dead ancestors. Upon hearing this, Nanak

is said to have thrown water in the opposite direction towards the west. When confronted, he is said to have replied that he was watering his fields in Punjab. When a priest asked how the water would reach his fields, he is said to have replied that if this water cannot reach his fields, which are 400 miles away, how would it reach their ancestors who were not in this world? The Janamsaakhis are replete with such moral stories about Nanak's staunchly anti-ritual stance.¹³ Despite this, the copious shrines attributed to his life are borne out of and sustained by rituals which venerate him. Nanak's deconstruction of blind faith, superstition and ritual practice has resulted in both an embracing of singularity through a closure of religious identity, through the requirements of modernity and its institutionalizing and formalizing mechanisms, and textual justification for an embrace of multiplicity. This does not require the identity label of 'Sikh' for someone to be a believer or follower of Nanak's teachings in the rejection of singularity.

The pursuit of a singular framing of religious tradition behind the categories 'Hindu', 'Sikh' and 'Muslim' has taken an almost zealous vigour in the post-independence landscape of divided Punjab and nowhere is this more visible in the shifting shape of shrine architecture. Large minarets next to the shrine of Bulleh Shah; the building of a *sarovar* (pool/pond) at the birthplace of Guru Nanak at Nankana Sahib and the integration of the Devi tradition into a pan-Indian Hinduism are all examples of spaces that are increasingly being situated within a singular tradition. Given that the hagiography of Bulleh Shah relates to how no *mullah* was willing to read the prayers and bury him and no graveyard in the old city of Kasur was willing to host his body, the large mosque that overshadows his tomb and the enforced cessation of music/dance at prayer time bear witness to the forces of the Auqaf department and Punjab state. The birthplace of Guru Nanak, named Nankana Sahib as an honorific, contains a number of architecturally simple shrines, the most prominent of which is considered his birthplace. Since 2008, the site has seen considerable renovation presumably to make it more appealing to *yatris* (pilgrims), including the construction of a bathing tank for the performance of ritual bathing. These examples illustrate the desire to homogenize and normatize heterogeneity and diversity, driven by a rejection and fear of heteropraxy. This rejection and fear has driven the incorporation or justification of heteropraxy at many sites through the installation of formal religious authority either within or proximate to the shrine site. For shrines to become mosques, *mandirs* and *gurdwaras*, a number of schemes can be deployed, most prominently the addition of a minaret or a *baoli* (pond for bathing) to indicate a place for prayer and ritual ablution. Even where these distinctions are

made to the architecture, the obsession with marble furnishing in the imposition of a separate or overarching religious identity nonetheless sustains a common culture of ostentatious display. The renovations at *Data Sahib* and the Golden Temple follow a similar pattern of covering up all floor space with marble and a marginalization and streamlining of activities that fall outside of a normative script, which while contested is nonetheless formatted in the mode set by colonial modernity. In the Akali Bunga, on the outskirts of the Golden Temple complex, white lime scale is blotted over frescos with images of Krishna and the *gopis* and other gods on display. These frescos are still on display, though in a decaying fashion in the Bal Lila Gurdwara at Nankana Sahib, where the zealous desire to disavow connections with other traditions is not so well managed and the distance from the SGPC both geographically and institutionally is a key factor.

This process of controlling extends from the shrine to the caretaker or *muttwali/mahant* who comes into custodianship after the original spiritual figure has died. In the early colonial landscape of Punjab, shrines were exclusively under the management of these keepers. These may have had lineage in respect to the family of the *pir/sant/guru* (Daud Kirmani and the Sodhis of Kartarpur) or they may have become custodians as part of service to the *pir/sant* (Sultan Bahu). The custodianship of shrines has not been limited to any one background such as Sayyids, Arains, Bedis, Udasis or Sodhis, for example. However, these hereditary groups were, of course, patronized by all of the precolonial rulers, and it is only in the twentieth century with the formation and tightening of religious boundaries around Hindu, Muslim and Sikh that spaces start to take on different forms of demarcation. This is not to argue that the shrine keepers themselves did not proclaim distinction along the lines of Hindu or Turk (Lawrence and Gilmartin 2000). Rather, this did not impact on the eclectic and sundry habits of the devotees. The discrediting of these hereditary figures is well worn through the literature on colonial Punjab. *Mahants* and *muttwalis* became the main source of the decline of the 'true' religion, using shrines for their personal gain and not for the good of the followers of the faith. This is deeply enshrined in the mobilizations by the Akali Dal to take control of Nankana Sahib (the birthplace of Guru Nanak), in which hundreds were killed and injured in the 1920s. This episode has hitherto been viewed primarily through a 'Sikh' lens, yet Ibad (2019) shows how influential the Sikh mobilization and the Gurdwaras Act was for the enactment of legislation nationalizing shrines in postcolonial Pakistan. The debates about the Auqaf Bill of 1951–1952 specifically mention how the Sikh Gurdwara Act enabled that community to remove the hereditary caretakers and bring these institutions in line with religious teaching.

According to Malik (1996), the main motivation for the Pakistani state in nationalizing shrines was to extract financial resources and to break up the considerable influence of the Sufi *pirs*, by replacing them with government officials.¹⁴ By the time of our fieldwork the Auqaf controlled an estimation of between 550 and 600 shrines.¹⁵ The displacement of a spiritually endowed charismatic leader was part of a broader state project to promote a reformist ideal of a direct relation with God that would render the *pir's* role superfluous. Particularly in the Zia era (1979–1988), state takeover of shrines was justified as part of the project of Islamization, a project firmly embedded in the ideology of colonial reformism.¹⁶ There are two aspects to consider here. First, the nationalization of the shrines, whilst taking away formal running of a shrine, did not dissuade or disavow the role of the *pir*. On the other hand, unlike the Gurdwara Reform Movement, which did effectively take control of the large shrines away from the *mahant*, the Auqaf Board actually operated through a set of compromises which retained some role for the *pir* or *muttwali*.¹⁷ For example, the keys to the *Behishti Darwaza* (the Gate of Heaven), which is only opened once a year at the *urs* of Baba Farid, are in the possession of the *muttwali*, and he opens the door only upon payment of a sizeable sum of money, which was 70 lakh¹⁸ rupees in 2010 at the time of our fieldwork. This reflects the types of arrangements made with hereditary keepers at the time of nationalization of the shrines. But they also reflect the ritual limits of the state. Thus, it would not appear appropriate for someone who was not from Baba Farid's family line to open the sacred gateway, as the state's role (via the Auqaf department) is something that is constantly criticized by devotees.

It may be too bold a statement to make that, in colonial Punjab, shrines with devotees from all backgrounds became identified with a singular religious tradition through the rubric of legal apparatus, social reformers and traditional spiritual figures making particular claims on the state. The legal apparatus and role of social reform movements have been examined in detail in the extant literature.¹⁹ Practices such as healing, through consumption of a sacralized plant; ecstatic dancing; consumption of *bhang* (drink containing marijuana) and general consumption of narcotics were all activities that were considered un-religious and in need of control. The reformist movements such as the Arya Samaj, Singh Sabhas and Ahrar movements, whilst mostly concerned with the formation of singular religious traditions emerging out of the heterodoxy and heteropraxy of Punjabi popular spiritual practices, saw shrines as being ripe for reform due to being the places where women's ritual and embodied practices were publicly displayed. As we have written previously, policing of women's

rituals serves the function of affirming and preserving religious boundaries. Restrictions and barring of women's expressive participation at shrines embody the broader question around how 'proper' religion required 'proper' women (Malhotra 2002; Purewal and Kalra 2010). The continual exclusion along gender lines, not only from the inner sanctum of a shrine but in terms of segregated zones (for example, the lower portion in *Data Sahib* and the upper level at Shah Jamal), belies the casual mixing of genders in the courtyard of spaces like that of the shrine of Mian Mir, also in the same city of Lahore. Gender is used advisedly here, because shrines remain the refuge of *Hijras*, *Khwaja Sara* (transgender people), who are able to occupy these spaces, often with a tacit sense of acceptance, though not without a navigation of the broader exclusionary sexual politics. As would be expected, not all shrines adopt the same codes of acceptance of non-heteronormativity.

Whilst it is colonial legislation that prevents women from dancing at shrines ('Music in Muslim Shrines Act 1942'),²⁰ it is the postcolonial institutions of the Auqaf Board that have implemented other forms of segregation, though ironically not the banning of women from dancing, which still takes place. There are very small numbers of women dancing, alongside men within the tolerated mixed shrine space, at death anniversaries of major spiritual figures. Our own fieldwork at Mian Mir and Bari Imam bears witness to women still dancing during the *urs*. We have also indicated the much greater freedom at *malang deras* and shrines. During our fieldwork, we visited Nankana Sahib on numerous occasions during the auspicious time of *gurpurabs* (*guru* celebration days) as well as during quiet mid-week periods. The *gurpurab* times of April (Vaisakhi) and November (Guru Nanak's birth anniversary) are when there is a *mela*-like atmosphere not only at the *Janam Asthan* (birthplace) complex but also in the town as a whole. It is clear from our fieldwork at Nankana Sahib, that dancing to the *dhol* during the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak was at least a part of the festivities, as this still takes place outside the precincts of the *gurdwara*, though entirely by men. Any dancing would not be allowed to happen at the *gurpurabs* (in East Punjab), where the *dhol* has become secularized and attached solely with the *bhangra* dance form, symbiotic in the association of Punjab with India (Gera-Roy 2010). Nankana Sahib in Pakistan is sufficiently distanced from the formal sites of religious authority that dancing and the maintenance of frescos to gods and goddesses is still possible. Inevitably it is the Auqaf board that comes to the aid of those wishing to purify and control religious practice at Nankana. During the *mela* season, Auqaf employees are posted at the entrance in what might be seen as a performance of the policing of a minority shrine amidst the

threat of religious violence, but can also be a method by which 'Muslim' believers in Nanak are restricted from gaining access. We can reasonably propose that this policing of access is meant to enforce the singularity of identity (i.e. that only Sikhs can enter) and to discipline the heteropraxy and multiplicity (i.e. that non-Sikh identifying devotees cannot have access). During other times of the year, significantly, such security is relaxed and non-Sikhs are commonly known to be allowed to visit the shrine. We recalled a number of visitors during non-*gurparab* times who did not fit the identity marker of 'Sikh' by any means, including a woman in *burkha* paying respects to the *Ad Granth* after which she tied a cloth ribbon to a tree, in the courtyard, as a votive. The shrine is known as a place where women seeking pregnancy, or more specifically a son, may pay their respects in expressing their desire or wish. This example indicates that the act of paying respects also disrupts the boundaries which would otherwise demarcate the crude labels of 'Sikh' or 'Muslim' or, in the case of Sindhi followers of Nanak (as Nanakpanthis) who are undoubtedly the largest group of pilgrims to the site. The enactment of policing and security during the *gurpurab/mela* times can be best understood, therefore, within our framing of the disciplining of multiplicity into singularity. It is here that the singular identity of 'Sikh' is juxtaposed most starkly against the backdrop of a rural West Punjab in Pakistan where a populace of Sikhs was erased at the time of Partition, either through migration or through the concealment of overt Sikh symbolisms. However, it is neither the iconic status of the shrine nor the influx of pilgrims each year in April and November which is of particular interest to us here. Instead, the ongoing obeisance to Nanak which continued and continues, despite the methodological nationalism of the past seventy years, provides further evidence for the continuing salience of the disruptive power of shrine culture.

*Pirnis*²¹ and pariahs²²

Incorporation and accommodation are modes of address for the power inherent in popular religious practices centred on shrines and spiritual figures, but these remain masculine and generally upper caste. Principles of exclusion and containment are at play when we look at the empirical reality of the paucity of shrines devoted to women or *dalits*. In West Punjab, there are a number of shrines devoted to Bibi Pak Daman, a completely generic epithet translated as the pure or virtuous woman, just like Data Gunj Baksh and Ganj-e-Shakar. In a clever play on this theme, though not stated as such, one of Bellamy's (2011) book

chapters is titled: 'Four Virtuous Women', and, rather than being a hagiography of figures located in the distant past, it is an introduction to the lives of four key respondents, who each have different contemporary relationships to the shrines at Hussain Tekri, the shrine at the heart of her study. Suvorova makes a compelling case in relation to the possible sources of deification of women:

The cult of seven righteous women, popular in the Northwest of the subcontinent, was also of an esoteric nature. They were known by different names: Pak Damaniyan in Lahore, Haft 'Afifa in Thatta, Bibi Nahzan in Qalat and Sathbhain Asthan in Sukkur. The rituals of veneration of this group of seven were connected with the occult function of virginity and went back to the rite of initiation to womanhood.

2004: 22–23²³

Though primarily concerned with the Islamicate tradition, the importance of fertility in shrine worship is well documented.²⁴ Historical scholarship influenced by feminist and subaltern approaches has also revealed figures such as Piro (Malhotra 2017) and Lal Ded (Ahmed 2002) who, in their own right, have been immensely significant for enhancing our knowledge of particular periods of history, despite the fact that these figures do not constitute an alternative or parallel mode of piety in which gender relations are substantively altered. The examples of women who have become deified with their own shrine, following and poetry are so few that they do not offer an exception to the rule of patriarchal devotional worship, the normative environment which dominates the Punjab. This point is also well made in relation to the fact that *pirs* and *sants* in their poetry generally take on the female voice and represent a better valuation of gender/caste roles without offering a criticism of the system that produces these divisions. Brahminical hierarchies and gendered divisions are not barriers to achieving enlightenment in the Punjabi spiritual tradition, but this has not led to a social revolution. Even where social movements such as the *Khalsa* or *Ad Dharm* articulated and struggled against injustice, gender relations have rarely altered.

Arguably, the Bibi Pak Daman shrines occupy the same space as that of Goddess worship in that they are paradoxically sources of devotion in a deeply patriarchal society.²⁵ Possibly, every village in East Punjab has a shrine to Seetla Mata (Seetla Mother) who is the curer of small pox and other disease (Bhatti 2000). She is presented as an incarnation of Durga, who is the pre-eminent goddess in the Punjab, prominently in the form of an individual riding a lion, thus called '*Sherawali*'. The heterogeneous shrines in various shapes and forms

summate in the chant '*Jai Mata Di*' ('long live the mother'), which in a similar manner to other epithets does not evoke any particular tradition but of course indicates the core figure of social reproduction. The female form deified in the shape of Durga (often with many arms, weapons and riding on a lion) sits within a culture that has long exhibited patriarchal hegemony and misogyny at times of crises. The long-standing practice of sex selection is an example of systemic devaluing of women and the violence committed against women during Partition is paradigmatic of an undercurrent of misogyny (Purewal 2010). In this milieu, the worship of the mother can be seen as a collective, cathartic alleviation of guilt for men and perhaps the hope for a better lot for those women devotees. However, this may be to miss the work that goddesses play in upholding structural hierarchies in the hope of a liberated afterlife. Devi worship is therefore a way of containing the '*shakti*' or power of the feminine principle, rather than its celebration or enunciation.²⁶

Indeed, it is the principle of exclusion that operates most clearly when it comes to masculinized shrine culture and with differing inflection when it comes to caste. As Durga worshipping practices are largely maintained by 'Other Backward Castes – OBC' and 'Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes – SC/ST' (in the Indian constitutional parlance), our own surveys at two Gugga Pir shrines in Patiala revealed that the overwhelming majority of the devotees were from *dalit* backgrounds.²⁷ These shrines, however, are not directly affiliated with any particular caste community, whereas Valmiki is a figure who symbolically coalesces a caste (*dalit*) community. Credited to have been the author of one of the many Ramayanas (Richman 1991), referred to as the *Valmiki Ramayana*, the figure of Valmiki simultaneously is situated at the centre of 'Hindu' or 'Hinduism' while clearly sitting outside of it as an untouchable (Leslie 2003). The bordering logics which have made Harmandir Sahib and Durgiana Mandir iconic in the twentieth century have relegated the Valmiki site at Ram Tirat to the margins of any Hindu sacred geography. The site, which is approximately ten kilometres from the centre of Amritsar, however, is by no means marginal for Valmikis. According to some interpretations, it is revered as the birthplace of Luv and Kush (who together become Lahore) and where Sita took refuge during Ram's period of exile to Lanka. The site is relatively barren, decentralized and spatially dispersed, though like Durgiana Mandir and Harmandir Sahib, it has a *sarovar* (sacred pond) which depressingly and predictably, due to its marginal status as a site, was empty during our fieldwork in 2010. Durgiana Mandir which, along with the Wagah Border ceremony and Harmandir Sahib, is marketed by tour companies as the 'Golden Triangle' for those visiting Amritsar,

expresses this bordering logic succinctly. One interviewee, when asked about the relationship of Durgiana Mandir (a 1920s Arya Samaj creation) to the Ram Tirat site stated: 'that place is for Valmikis. Why would anyone else go there?' (Interview, Amritsar 2010). The caste separation implicit in this recognition of Valmiki and Valmikis as *dalits* shows, as earlier argued, how caste ruptures any steady 'progress' towards singular religious identification and also how the sacred status of a site is filtered through the social. While the Durgiana Mandir as a twentieth-century construction represents a sacred site within close proximity of and as an Arya Samaj response to the sixteenth-century Harmandir, it has equally served the purpose of excluding 'other' sacred histories and socialities, namely the Valmikis. Despite the Durgiana Mandir complex presenting iconography of Valmiki within the constellation of idols and representations as the narrator of the story of Ram, Sita, Luv and Kush, this is a strategic incorporation which simultaneously includes while it excludes. In many ways, the inability of the figure and veneration of Valmiki to penetrate or disrupt the hegemonic narrative of 'Hindu' sites, or any other sites for that matter, indicates how significant caste is to the make-up and practices at shrine sites. Valmikis remain a community marked by a label which not only implies sweeper or *dalit*/untouchable in terms of the labour and social structure, but also in terms of the demarcation of sacredness within a continually evolving devotee mapping of such sites.

Synopsis

By using a panoramic lens across a myriad of sites, we have noted several features of shrines as sacred spaces. The multiple narratives circulating within and about each shrine reveal the dynamics that exist around practices, protocol and orations of 'tradition'. Just as the five sites where various events occurred in the lives of the *Gurus* became 'Takhts', or seats of authority, this does not reflect the assorted reasons for their significance to an individual devotee or even the collective of followers. Thus, the end story of 'authority' and the official status of the site, as the only story of the site, should be approached with caution. We have been drawn to the multiple ways in which spaces become sacred and ultimately take on the shape of a place within a particular tradition. Conventional communal divisions between graves and goddesses are questioned in light of shrine ritual and material practices. Techniques of control along a continuum

from incorporation to exclusion mark the multifaceted relationship between shrines, their devotees, and broader social and political contexts within which they exist. In the next chapter we delve deeper into questions of incorporation, adaptation and exclusion marking the terrain of shrines as one of openness as well as closure.



Openness and closure

Introduction

Choti janyu Hindpana yeh bat na koi
Nari ka kij hia tis dono nahi
Ling much ko kat key eh Turak banahi
Nair kya banavso tanh dono nahi
Banyo Sikh banaut ke lak kachha payo
Nari kach na pai le tis kae karens
 Hinduness as top knot and sacred thread is not important!
 What of the woman who has neither?
 The Turk is made of snipping the moustache and penis!
 What of the women's body that has neither?
 A Sikh is made by covering his loins
 What of the woman who wears no underwear?
 What will become of her?

Piro in Malhotra 2017: 107 for the transliteration. Author's translation

Academic studies on reform movements in colonial Punjab illuminate the ways in which fluid religious identities became fixed into a mould of 'Hindu', 'Sikh' and 'Muslim'. Formulaically, there is a requirement of a recognizable 'other', either an opposition group or a set of practices against which the tradition can define itself. So the Singh Sabha against the Arya Samaj and the Deobandis against Sufi forms of devotion are apt examples of the identity-making process (Van der Linden 2008). Arguably the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Deobandi (as well as countless other) movements each succeeded in getting their vision articulated through the state and through ideological institutions, thus normative categories found circulation and acceptance. But the techniques and technologies of colonial modernity also influenced the multitude of *pirs* and *sants* in the religious marketplace, without such figures necessarily ending up

in any specific religious categorization. This lacunae is partly due to the analysis of social reform movements in colonial Punjab, which even when attempting to look across different traditions offers little by way of gleaning insight into the contours of the relationship between authority and society, especially at the margins. Instead, the agency of the societies is replaced with the moral language of the British colonial authorities, with little reference to women and *dalits* who were the main subjects and objects of the Punjabi social reform movements (Van der Linden 2008). Where the clamour of the colonial authorities and the elite writers of the reform movements is hegemonic, it is no wonder that the voice of one such as a *shudra veshva*, as Piro describes herself, is drowned and suppressed. The poem that opens this chapter is an incisive critique of the reformists, laying a simple question at the boundary-making practices, instantly revealing their masculinism and therefore questioning their 'true' devotion. This critique of religion as a boundary-making exercise is a running theme at the margins and interstices.

We look to those in-between in this chapter, whilst recognizing the ways in which the British and postcolonial states engage with shrines and *sant/pir*-led movements. The primary apparatus through which colonial knowledge and spiritual figure/shrine come to know each other is social control, but this is never totalizing. Rather, we will demonstrate through examining shrines and movements led by spiritual figures, that the manoeuvres and strategies that *sants/pirs* and their devotees construct in the face of abstract bureaucratic forces maintain a localized, intimate sacrality as highlighted in the previous chapter. Ranging from incorporation to marginality, various shrines in the Punjab have maintained some distance from the forces of homogeneity, and various spiritual figures have retained independence from the singularity of religious definition. As may be expected, these examples emerge at the cusps of gender and caste, where erasure of sites and violent encounter mark attempts at boundary crossings.

Shrines behind the veil

Ruptures in the representation of a singular religious identity occur in small ways, rather than as an overt verification of heterogeneity. A shrine's life before becoming a *gurdwara*, *mandir* or *mosque* is often hidden from view or slowly pushed to the precipice where narratives change and memories are forgotten. Nonetheless even in those cases where a *gurdwara* has come under SGPC control and hereditary figures have been side-lined, this process has not managed to

completely efface local histories. Where the presence of an *Ad Granth* marks a *gurdwara* in very similar ways that a minaret marks a mosque, the underlying shrine culture still finds a place amidst these overt markers of a single religion. There is a shrine related to Guru Gobind Singh which is on the tarmac roadway to Anandpur Sahib, in which the hagiography relates to the Guru requesting a place to stay and, rather than being shown hospitality by the local villagers, was told to rest on the *bhatta* (burning kiln for baking bricks). The *Guru* on horseback went to the kiln and, as the horse's hoof touched the burning coals, they immediately cooled. Chaudhary Nihang Khan, the owner of the *bhatta* who, at the time, was in his *qila* (fortified encampment), was informed about this event. He rushed to the site and to his astonishment saw Guru Gobind Singh sitting on the *bhatta*. The Chaudhary bowed his head in front of the *Guru* and asked for pardon.¹ The site at which this episode is said to have taken place is Kotla Nihang Khan, a village at that time predominantly populated by Pathans who were given a sword and dagger by Guru Gobind Singh after his visit. In 1947, with the departure of these villagers, the artefacts were given to the *gurdwara*. What is interesting about this site is that though there is a bright yellow sign board that relates this story in Punjabi and English, the main hall which houses the *Ad Granth* and which is built upon a standard twentieth-century design gives no indication of the *bhatta* (kiln), despite the fact that the *gurdwara* is called 'Bhatta Sahib'. On further enquiry, on the side of the *gurdwara* there is a closed-off glass cabinet with a heading written in Gurmukhi: 'The foot print of the Tenth Father's horse, Neela, is below.' A black tar-like substance with footprints in it is presented behind the glass below the brass sign. An independent scholar, Gurmukh Singh, under the guidance of Professor Harbans Singh at Punjabi University in Patiala, produced a volume, *Historical Sikh Shrines*, published in 2000, in which the story is related without any mention of the 'miracle' of the cooling kiln, even though it is implied: 'Gurdwara established on this site only in the beginning of the twentieth century is named Bhatta Sahib although no trace of the original brick kiln remains. The construction of the Gurdwara building was commenced in 1910 and completed in 1923 by Sant Jiwan Singh' (2000: 165).² In our visit to this site in 2009, there was no indication of where to find the evidence of the *bhatta*, but, rather, the signs for viewing the weaponry were more prominent. While this may appear as a story of omission or an attempt to brush over non-streamlined sections of the hagiography, we argue that this selective sacralization of relics and physical spots, within the site, is consciously done and reflects a contradiction between the erasure of non-institutionalized, and arguably what could potentially be uncontrollable, forms of ritual (such as

the miracle of the cooling kiln), alongside the propping up of sanctioned, objects of devotion (such as the display of weaponry near to the *Ad Granth*).

Just as the SGPC attempts to hide the popular from the public gaze, the Auqaf, through the literature it has produced on shrine histories attempts to subvert narratives that localize rather than Islamicize. Pir Makki is a shrine in Lahore popularly known in terms of ritual lore as the first stopping place before visiting *Data Sahib*. The main attempt at glossing over local rites comes in the etymology of the name. Older devotees refer to the word 'makki' in relation to the offering of *makai da dana* (corn kernel) at the shrine, as this was deemed the preferred food of the *pir*, who is interned there. This intimate relationship with the *pir* is seen as misleading by an independent scholar, Sheikh Parvaiz Amin Naqshbandi, much in the vein of Gurmukh Singh, who makes the claim that the name 'Makki' comes from the fact that the *pir* visited Mecca (colloquially pronounced 'makka') before coming to Lahore, rather than the preference for a food. This contestation over the origins of a shrine or its rituals is fairly common and fits in well with the slow Arabization of many shrines. But what is perhaps of more interest is that the author petitions the Auqaf: 'it is my humble request to the authorities concerned, that is, Auqaf Department to get these misconceptions arisen amongst the people finished once for all lest they may go astray' (1998: 112). This may seem an unusual petition, given that the Auqaf literature available on the shrine actually makes the point that the name is derived from a visit to Mecca. The sacrament of giving corn, at the time of our fieldwork, was restricted providing evidence that the formal space of the shrine had already succumbed to this narrative. However, other forms of contestation had arisen in its wake. The shrine is located next to the graveyard of a well-known family of Pehlwan of Lahore (wrestler families), who have had a wrestling centre (*akhara*) in the vicinity since at least Moghul times (Frembgen and Rollier 2014; Talbot and Kamran 2016). They manage the shrine on behalf of the Auqaf, whilst any *pirs* who come to offer advice are kept under their watch.³ Like many other shrine spaces in urban centres, gender segregation has become the norm and singing/dancing only on Thursday evenings. Yet, despite all of these machinations under the auspices of the Auqaf, in collaboration with the local *pehlwans*, the popular practices of lighting a *diva*, placing a *chaadar* and praying for material change continue unabated. It is noteworthy that in response to a question about the nature of these ceremonies, a paid Auqaf official remarked: 'This is not Islam, it is a mix and borrows from Hindus and Sikhs' (Interview, Lahore, 2008). This continuity of popular devotion does not end by simply changing the origins of a name from 'corn kernel' to 'Mecca'

as a panacea. Rather, this merely carries the contention to another level. For example, the erstwhile journalist and commentator Salman Rashid remarks: 'you want to create a saint? Just name him Makki Shah – from Mecca – and you get a ready-made saint.'⁴ The well-known modernist English newspaper columnist and travel writer Salman Rashid, who opens the section 'Contestation and Conflict' in Chapter 3, has spent much of his career debunking what he sees as the myths that surround the creation of shrines in Pakistan. Rather than extending agency to rite performers, he is disparaging of 'superstition' and 'gullibility'. Whereas *Makki* as 'Mecca' may seem more palatable to the Auqaf than *Makki* as 'corn kernel', the popular finds its most strident critics in those who demand a modern, secularized vision, in which religion is personalized, and shrines fade as echoes of a magical past. This kind of standpoint finds much resonance with Salafi criticisms of shrine cultures which abound in much contemporary Islamic discourse (Pinault 2008).

These distinctions which map on to Deobandi vs Barelvi; Modern vs Tradition; Sufi vs Fundamentalist in the Islamicate context become more fuzzy in lived piety. Perhaps more ominously it is giving too much credence to the Auqaf department, which suffers from the same moribund status of many government institutions, to articulate and implement an ideological agenda.⁵ This is best exemplified by another Lahore shrine, *Ghora Shah* (the 'shrine of the horse') which is ostensibly the burial site of Syed Jhoolan Shah (*pir* of the swing). The antiquarian Horace Arthur Rose and the inimitable Denzil Ibbetson, colonial ethnographers/administrators, haunt many of the pages of contemporary books on religion in Punjab. Here is their understanding of this shrine in 1919:

Ghore Shah whose real name was Baha-ud-Din, a Bukhari Sayyid, a grandson of Sa'id Usman of Uch, was affected with palsy and so was known as the Jhoolan Shah or 'Shah who shakes like a swing'. He was credited with having been born a *wali* [beloved of God] and before the age of 5 displayed such horsemanship that he is called Ghore Shah, and any disciple who presented him with a horse got what he desired. Even the present of a toy horse had the same effect. But his display of saintly power at such an early age brought down upon him his father's curse and under it he died at the age of 5 in 1594. A fair is held at his tomb to which toy horses in thousands are presented.

Rose 1919: 617⁶

This appearance of a shrine, in the colonial record, has often been used to verify historicity or actuality, and our citation is not to repeat that strategy. Rather, as can be more broadly noted, colonial narratives are often lifted verbatim into the

Auqaf literature (Malik 1996; Ewing 1997).⁷ However, unlike Pir Makki where rituals have been changed, Jhoolan Shah remains a site where small horse-shaped votives, consumption of marijuana and a range of performances take place each evening. Whereas the night culture is primarily male, on Thursday evenings, there is a gender-mixed crowd of devotees and no restriction on praying by the tomb. The shrine is also the site of a surreal, abstract documentary by Farhan Maqsood, called *The Horse Saint* (Kaavian Films 2011) which captures the marginal lives that reside and worship around the shrine. This point is illustrated by an interview with one of the women who sells clay horses, amongst many others, outside of the shrine:

We make them, bake them and bring them here to sell. We do it to eat. When we sell them we can afford to give our children food. People come here to ask for peace. When they feel they get what they want or to ask for what they want, they take the horse as an offering.

The Horse Saint 2011

In our interviews at the shrine, a middle-aged man who was the paid Auqaf custodian stated:

His real name is Hazrat Sayyid Makhdoom Bahuddin Jhoolan Shah Bukhari Suharwardy [a version of which is given above the entrance to the shrine, but ends with Baba Ghora Shah] also known as Ghore Shah and the area is also known as Ghore Shah ... in the Tazkira-e-Lahore it says that *sarkar* liked horses and this is why people bring clay horses here as a votive ...some people have even brought live horses here ... this was taken over by the Auqaf in 1984 ... doctors, solicitors, engineers – all the people of the city come here.

Interview, Lahore 2009

One of the devotees who was dancing in an impersonation of a horse alongside a clarinettist and two *dhol* players offered the following:

This is Jhoolan Shah's shrine and he loved horses so we also call this place Ghore Shah. Just as he would shake his body, we come here and offer that devotion to him ... I do not know these long names. I cannot read the signs on the graves, but our bond and love is all that matters.

Interview, Lahore 2009

The different approaches of the Auqaf department to different shrines in these two cases reflect the tenacity of popular piety but also the relative incapacity or incompetence of the state to deliver ideological agendas beyond rhetoric.

Mainstream marginality

Prominent shrines ultimately come under the control of institutions that are either in the hands of the state (Auqaf Department), controlled through local state legislation (Hindu Shrine Acts of various kinds), or managed through national legislation (the Sikh Gurdwaras Act). Given the porous and overlapping nature of the bureaucracy–politics nexus, these shrines are also part of the political texture of India and Pakistan, a point explored in more detail in the next chapter. However, this would not be the complete story as many shrines have also aligned themselves with the modern, state/national project without the necessity of nationalization or incorporation into the pivotal institutions of authority. This is inevitable given that the Auqaf and SGPC only control a numerically small number of sites. The SGPC has direct control over eighty-five *gurdwaras* and influence over a further hundred or so in India, which is a small number compared to the estimated total of 15,000 *gurdwaras*.⁸ The Auqaf has direct control over five to six hundred shrines amongst estimates of ten thousand or more.⁹ These numerically small numbers do not, at least in the case of the SGPC, represent the level of influence of the organization. For *gurdwaras*, at least, the majority of these would now have some normative features in relation to the installation of the *Ad Granth* and standardization of ritual practice, even whilst maintaining local distinctions. Of course the narratives that provide a *gurdwara*'s appeal beyond the generic use for life rituals are linked to visitations, miracles or fables. As we have shown thus far, where there is a desire to homogenize and produce closure around singular religious identities, there is also the counter-current.

Binaries of multiple versus singular, heterogeneity versus homogenization, are useful in light of broader trends, but are only two ends of a spectrum. Perhaps more prominent are those shrines and spiritual figures who attempt to maintain an ambiguous position to these polar opposites. The Nanaksar Sants and Golra Pirs are examples of those who remain independent of the formal institutions of the SGPC and Auqaf but are also attached to the idea(l) of a singular religious identity but with more fuzzy boundaries, sufficient for the maintenance of popular devotion. The Nanaksar Sants were founded by Bhai Nand Singh (1870–1943), a celibate and recluse who preached the words of Guru Nanak and spoke of his visions and visitations in relation to the Guru. The actual establishment of an institution and complex at Nanaksar was carried out by Sant Isher Singh, who was anointed as Nand Singh's spiritual successor in 1943 and stayed as head of the organization until 1963. The group espouses a life of celibacy, vegetarianism and asceticism for those who manage *gurdwaras* and carry out work for the

organization. Sant Isher Singh gained his reputation for giving *amrit* [initiation into the Khalsa ceremony]¹⁰ to thousands of devotees and for an absolute belief in the *Ad Granth*. Whilst a successor was named after his death in 1963, the organization split with disagreements over the titular leader; however, rather than disintegration, the Nanaksar Sant tradition spread throughout the Malwa region of Punjab, with probably about thirty or more *gurdwaras* to their name. Even though they do not fall under the auspices of the SGPC in any direct manner, they are part of the Sant Parampara or those *sants* that are closely affiliated to the committee. Yet, a visit to the main centre of Nanaksar in Jagraon reveals a veneration of Sant Isher Singh, which matches that of the independent spiritual figures discussed in Chapter 3. The rooms in which the Sant lived are open to public *darshan*, and the Cadillac that the Sant was driven in is boldly displayed behind a glass cabinet. This kind of veneration involving ritualized objects is precisely the irritation that gave rise to reformist agitation in the early part of the twentieth century, yet has produced accommodation rather than erasure. There are a number of reasons for this: first, the Nanaksar Sant tradition assuages a conflictual relationship with the SGPC and second, and perhaps more importantly, the fact that they support the Akali Dal in political terms provides them with political protection: The relationship between *pir/sant* and politician is taken up in more detail in the next chapter.

Just as the Nanaksar shrines remain outside of the formal management of the SGPC, the site of Golra Sharif near Rawalpindi is out of the Auqaf Board's purview. This type of relationship did not arise without a struggle. Pir Mehar Ali Shah (1859–1937), the founder of Golra Sharif, was patronized by the British through land grants, and the creation of a railway station in Golra in 1882 added further prominence to the shrine. Mehar Ali's subsequent successors, Babuji and Lallaji, indicated continuity with precolonial naming of spiritual figures, in that Babu and Lalla do not indicate religious identity, but this did not belie their activities in the emergent Muslim public sphere. From Mehar Ali's time, this line of Pirs has been famous for poetry and the patronizing of *qawwali*, concurrent with being vehemently opposed to the followers of Mirza Ghulam Mohammed, another nineteenth-century reformist. Opposition to this group, currently known as Ahmadis, is in its hard-lined version, more often associated with reformists who are equally opposed to music and other such activities. The Golra Pirs were early supporters of the Muslim League and argued the case for the formation of Pakistan. Loyalty to the political establishment did not, however, help them when the Auqaf board nationalized the shrine in 1961. Babuji, the *pir* at the time, questioned the decision in the courts and in 1964 managed to retrieve the shrine. This is a relatively rare case, but also indicates the shifting political power

in Pakistan from Karachi to the newly formed capital, Islamabad, which is near the shrine.¹¹ The shrine's popularity in postcolonial Pakistan has seen a gradual process of Islamization, with its present head *pir's* name well reflecting this: Syed Ghulam Qutb-ul-Haq Gilani who, though not a poet, still maintains the daily musical performances.¹² The close relationship maintained between the *pirs* and the political-military establishment would again arguably orient the site towards a more austere version of Sufism (Naqshbandi). However, our interviews and fieldwork at the shrine reveal the devotees' rationale for being there as much the same as elsewhere. Indeed, on Thursdays due to the large numbers of devotees, other *pirs* and fortune tellers are present at the shrine offering devotees amulets, astrology readings and other charms. Thus, it is evident that the Nanaksar and Golra examples provide an indication of the extent to which shrines, whether managed by an institution with an ideological agenda of homogeneity or under the control of a living *sant/pir*, have become predominantly identified within a singular religious tradition. This has not led to the erasure of all heterodox ritual as the reformists of colonial modernity may have desired but sit in a compromise with postcolonial Punjabi society's hegemonic (masculine, dominant caste) modes of articulation, perhaps another continuity that would not have been imagined by the secular nationalist reformers of the colonial era either.

Questions of control at Nanaksar and Golra shrines reflect the desire of the political-bureaucratic elite to capture potential opposition or to maintain alliances and capture vote banks. This does not apply when it comes to movements that are led by women or *dalits*. This is not to say that these voters are not important at least in democratic moments, but rather where women are prominent in ideological terms or leadership, a more fraught relationship is established. This is well illustrated by two movements that were prominent during our fieldwork: the Brahma Kumaris in India and Al-Huda in Pakistan, which are organizations headed by charismatic women leaders. Our interaction with the Brahma Kumaris was through their presence in Chandigarh and Al-Huda was present amongst the university students during our period in Lahore. The Brahma Kumari movement in particular is of comparative interest, because it began life in much the same way as any of the other *sant* movements previously discussed. In the late 1930s, a wealthy Sindh businessman, Lekhraj, had visions and established himself as a spiritual leader, with one key innovation, that women should play an equal role in the path to enlightenment. Though in the 1930s these ideas were relatively ubiquitous across secular and religious movements (for example, even Mawdudi of the Jamaat-i-Islami recognized the need for women's education), Lekhraj put his money into his ideology. Utilizing the full technology of colonial modernity, Lekhraj established the Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishva Vidyalaya,

the Brahma Kumaris Spiritual University, with an all-women body of trustees. This in itself was not so radical, but his followers were expected to renounce sex and embrace celibacy, something expected for male *sanyasis* [renouncers]. Though abstinence was theoretically available for women, it was not a custom. In small town Hyderabad, this led to a genuine clash with patriarchal social norms as Babb (1984) notes: ‘the ostensible reason for all the uproar focused on one of Lekhraj’s most important teachings, celibacy. Husbands returned from long stays abroad only to discover that their wives had made vows of chastity and wished to transform their homes into “temples” (404). This vow in itself was a foundational challenge to the patriarchal structure of the family and Lekhraj was personally held responsible. The opposition was so potent, that the movement had to move to Karachi, where a prominent female disciple, Saraswati, set up a *dera* with about 300 women followers. After Partition, the group set up its headquarters at Mount Abu, in Rajasthan, where it is located today. In the 1960s, the idea of women’s liberation and the management of the group by a series of women leaders in parallel with Lekhraj, now Brahma Baba, led to an exponential growth. According to their own statistics in 2017, there were three thousand branches, with all the ones in India being led by a woman. Whilst celibacy is at the heart of the Brahma Kumaris doctrine, it lends itself to other aspects of purity, such as vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol and other narcotics, and an attitude towards purity that is Brahminical. Indeed, all of those who have become part of the group name themselves as ‘spiritually Brahmin’ (McKendry Smith 2016). The major and quite radical move from normative Brahminism is that women *per se* are not impure and that reproduction does not determine caste status. Nonetheless, the goal remains to become ‘Brahmin’ and there is little evidence from the existing research into the group that *dalit* women are present in any number, if at all. At some level, this is in contrast to Piro’s vision in which all identity was transcended for her *guru* and in which being ‘impure’ was the moment of liberation. But, it also indicates the limitation of thinking religion in South Asia in liberation terms through the sole lens of gender. At no point has the Brahma Kumari movement come into conflict with the state or religious institutional authorities and even though the group has a ‘political’ wing, none of its members seem to step into the political arena as we have seen with figures such as Gurmeet Ram Rahim.

Where the Brahma Kumaris emerge out of a well-worn route of spiritual figurehood, the Al-Huda school movement in Pakistan is more directly related to the space opened up by Islamist organizations in relation to women’s empowerment through piety (Mahmood 2011). Drawing inspiration from Mawdudi’s vision of women’s education, Al-Huda was founded by Farhat

Hashmi, a PhD in Islamic studies from Glasgow University. The first school was opened in 1994 in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, and by 2017 had a network of over twenty schools throughout urban Pakistan, the UK and North America. The education that is offered essentially mirrors that of formal Islamic education found in *madrassas*, with qualifications in Arabic and Islamic studies; the difference is that it is led by women and predominantly feature women from middle- and upper-middle-class urban backgrounds. The vision of the Muslim woman on offer is conservative and conformist, but with the caveat that women are active agents in this process. Al-Huda's vision is challenged on three levels: first by the male *ulema* who question Farhat Hashmi's credentials as a religious scholar; second by secular feminists who see her vision as one that creates divisions amongst women on the basis of religiosity; and finally by the families of the educated women, due to their questioning of Punjabi patriarchy (Ahmad 2013). These critiques mirror those made of the Brahma Kumaris. Indeed, despite ideological distinction, what is agreed upon by all of the participants in Al-Huda is that the individual charisma of Farhat Hashmi, a Syed woman, who holds patrilineal credentials for spiritual power, is essential;¹³ 'it was their belief that Farhat Hashmi possessed legitimate religious authority by virtue of possessing correct religious knowledge that gave their faith and their understanding of piety a concrete form' (Ahmad 2013: 273). Even though Al-Huda as an organization would eschew the idea of the *pir* as having a part in Islam, the form of the 'spiritual leader' dominates even in this case. Farhat Hashmi herself is not patronized by the political parties in Pakistan and even though Al-Huda is often tarnished with the label 'fundamentalist' and its students linked to militant activities, the schools themselves vigorously deny such involvement.¹⁴

The Al-Huda movement and the Brahma Kumaris are widely disparate in terms of theology, organizational praxis and reach, but they do share a common structural position in relation to the mainstream of institutional religion in their respective contexts. Neither fully incorporated nor totally independent, these groups are marginal to mainstream power but nonetheless subscribe to most of the tenets of orthodoxy. However, their social marginality, especially in the context of gender, means that they are never given the full legitimacy to which they may stake a claim. Whilst competing rights claims are a routine aspect of identity politics, the cleavages in the religious landscape inevitably fall along the axes of gender and caste. Women spiritual figures are always at risk of being discredited and delegitimized solely on the grounds of gender, whereas in other cases, it may be a point of theology or a discrepant ritual that

is the point of squabble. Ultimately, it is the structural disruption that renders any woman-led shrine or spiritual movement as outside of the mainstream, even whilst articulating and desiring that recognition.¹⁵ Within this framing contingency is an additional element, as a group that perceives itself as the masculine mainstream of a religious tradition, such as the Ahmadis, can end up being pronounced as heterodox.

Hinterland heteropraxy

Hitherto, the ubiquitous and pervasive influence of colonial modernity in the shape of reform movements and technologies of management has determined much of the discussion of this chapter. Even where shrines and spiritual figures maintain a distance and retain a degree of autonomy, singular religious identity creeps in through lore and ritual. Despite the manifold pressures towards homogeneity, there remain shrines that retain heterogeneity as we described with the living tradition at sites like Marraka in the previous chapter. *Lallan Walla* translates as 'being of the beloved' and is a generic shrine appellation which has been recorded in the colonial record across Punjab (Oberoi 1992) and is maintained to the present day. In the village Bhagrana, District Sirhind, the shrine to *Lallan* or Sakhi Sarwar was built by a *tehli* family (oil-pressing *dalit* community). They were ostensibly Muslims before Partition, but became Sikh during the Partition violence and until today maintain a pattern of devotion which is not reducible to either identity: a pertinent example of this fluidity is carrying the surname Singh and Kaur, yet burying their dead. The shrine in the village is a six-foot square, brick, roofed structure with a central tomb, covered in a green cloth: under which no one is buried. Images on the tiles that cover the tomb and the wall range from Krishna to Guru Nanak, and in one corner a lithograph of Sakhi Sarwar on horse back, the ostensible *pir* who is also known as *Lallan Walla*.¹⁶ There are thousands of shrines to *Lallan Walla* across East Punjab, and in those we came across in our fieldwork, a cacophony of symbols and figures was the norm.

A shrine structure, in which the sarcophagus is purely symbolic and which is flexible in terms of who is named as buried at the site, can be found in the phenomena of the *Panj Pir* in Punjab (but also *Panchpiry* or *Panchon Pir* in other parts of the subcontinent's Northern areas). Translated literally, this refers to the five *pirs* who span time and geography offering an alternative spatiality when thinking about the fixity and historicity of shrines. In the popular song Lal Shahbaz

Qalandar, Madan Gopal Singh, as part of the Chaar Yaar quartet, evokes five pirs; Nizam-uddin Auliya, Baba Farid, Moinuddin Chisti, Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki and Lal Shabaz himself.¹⁷ Other renderings of the song might replace one or the other with Data Ganj Baksh, Makhdoom Jahaaniyaan, etc. For our purposes these major figures from the Sufi tradition are paradoxically not as weighty as the numerical form of five spiritual figures, as these are interchangeable. For instance, in Benares, the five figures move out of solely the Islamicate tradition and are more closely attached to a *dalit* group, the *Dom* (who are in affinity with the Aghori, as they deal with dead bodies), for whom: Gazi Miyan, Amina Sati, Bhairon, Buhana and Bande are the *Paanj Pir* (Kaushik 1979). This is an innovative collective which includes a woman (*sati*), a deity (*Bhairon*) and two local figures, alongside the ubiquitous Ghazi Miyan, who has a large shrine in Benares. In our own fieldwork in Malwa, the *Panj Pir* would be part of a cacophony of spiritual figures in shrines ostensibly devoted to Gugga Pir.¹⁸

At the shrine of Gugga Pir on the Chandigarh-Patiala Road, the ten years since the start of our fieldwork has seen it grow from a simple, single-room structure with five grave markings (again with no one buried) and the ubiquitous picture of Gugga on a horse, to an elaborate multi-nodal structure with statues ranging from Gorak Nath to Shiva and Durga. This is a living shrine, in relation to its built architecture which ranges from small three-brick structures to large elaborate statues all in the same space. Figure 5 illustrates the next stage, where these small structures have been plastered and painted with slogans such as *jai baba* [long live the *baba*]. The final stage in Figure 6 is what attracted our attention to this site in the first place as there is a room with five concrete grave markings, each in the shape of a sarcophagus, but too small to indicate an actual grave and all of equal size and age. Alongside these five was a separate large tomb shape. Each of the concrete tombs was covered with a green cloth, embroidered in gold with the number 786 and one or two with Arabic writing consisting of *Ayaths* (couplets) from the *Quran*. Each grave is inscribed as follows: Jai Baba Rattan Haji Ji (Haji Rattan of Bhatinda)¹⁹ (largest grave with a red and green flag on the headstone); Jai Baba Lakh Data, Lallan Vala Pir (Sakhi Sarwar of Dear Ghazi Khan); Jai Baba Ali Sher, Mahad Chisti Sayyid Pir Ji (Saharanpur); Jai Baba Ather Sher Malerkotla Vale (Ather Shah, Malerkotla); and Jai Baba Nau Gaja Pir ji and Jai Baba Giyarvi Vala Pir ji (Nine Yard and Eleventh day of the month, referring to Ghaus Pak, Abdul Qadir Jilani).

Each of the graves has a slot in which clay lamps and steel trays with mini-incense can be placed. 'Jai' ('long live') is an appellation used generically with deities, deified dead and living spiritual figures. The indication given in brackets



Figure 5 Grave markings at a shrine of Gugga Pir, Chandigarh-Patiala Road.

Photo courtesy of authors



Figure 6 Grave tombstones at a shrine of Gugga Pir, Chandigarh-Patiala Road.

Photo courtesy of authors

above in no way reduces this process of naming to the single well-known site. Again, 'Nau Gaja pir' ('nine yard pir') refers to the height of the figure buried: *guz* is the Persian/Mogul measurement, the equivalent of a yard and *nau* is 'nine', hence 'nine-yard *pir*'. The analysis offered here and the connections being made to a wider set of classified traditions does not arise from conversations with devotees, who at this particular shrine are mainly drawn from a local factory. For them, the growth of the site is merely proof of the power of the spiritual figures being referenced, most suggestively Gugga Pir himself. The site also contains a bazaar of small shrines with statues ranging from Goraknath to Shiva. The point here is to emphasize that the symbolism of five transcends religious traditions and even as a naming device is not fixed.²⁰

What and who is creating the attraction to attend these shrines if they are not drawing from historically verifiable centres of spiritual or material power? If they are not structured into a hierarchy which is generally masculine and high caste, through which spiritual power is bequeathed from 'God' to the 'Saint' and then the 'devotees', is it possible for shrines to operate within alternative architectures? These shrines which host heteropraxy provide ample evidence for one of our general theses: that the kind of religion which retains popular support is created and exists alongside and outside of the formal authority-making institutions and processes. Even though the form of the *Panj Pir* can be traced to religious traditions in various ways, the choice of whose names are painted in handwriting on the tomb structures rests with the workers and devotees who take part in the construction of the site in the first place. The naming of known figures is an important aspect of this procedure but there is no pre-determined list or hierarchy out of which these sites of veneration emerge. This is a subalternity which is mimicking power structures but is not being tamed by them; a creativity that moulds whatever is available into sacred sites that are meaningful outside of normative modes of religion. Given the choice of sites, our previous examples can be described as 'anachronistic', 'unusual', 'strange' or 'out of the ordinary': terms used in academic discourse and which belie a normative view. Normativity of outlook is, however, challenged by popular wisdom. This couplet ascribed to both Ghulam Farid and Bulleh Shah, but equally and possibly to an unknown twentieth-century poet, comes to us through a rendition by Abida Parveen:²¹

People say to Majnu, your Laila is Dark to which he replies
 Your eyes cannot see
 The pages of the *Quran* are white, but the words on them are written in black ink.

Where there is so much possibility for making a shrine by representation of spiritual figures and gods with no connection to a particular space, there should perhaps be a much larger number of such shrines in existence.²² However, restrictions on the creation of shrines have two dimensions. The first relates to the devotee economy in capital and commitment. The second is the extent to which natural disaster, such as flooding, war and catastrophe, has epistemically stripped our material memory.

The political economy of devotion is well illustrated by a shrine in the graveyard in the once elite, but still upper-middle-class, suburb of Gulberg in Lahore which, when established in 1965, had no prominent graves or shrines. The man who managed the graveyard was from the community of *Doms*, as he described himself, and yet was also a Muslim and the caretaker of the yard. In our interview with him, at the graveyard, he expressed how worried he was about the graveyard, as more and more people were paying to have concrete sarcophagi built which meant that the space for new bodies in the yard was dramatically shrinking. The bodies of the 'ordinary' dead would come wrapped in a shroud and, once interned in the earth, it would take between six months and a year for the ground to be ready for another burial. The ephemeral nature of the buried human body stands somewhat in contrast to the concrete structures that mark many of the graves in the yard. Perhaps this process is a metonym from the shift in religious identities' ephemerality to fixity in concrete and stone. In this vein, the graveyard at the time of our fieldwork hosted a shrine. The growth of this space was described in an interview with the graveyard caretaker:

This man died in 1972, and he just had a normal grave with not much elaboration, but his family became wealthy and the sons loved their father. So their *pir*, who was a Naqshabandi, said that they should build a bigger grave to their father, so they did this and then by the 1980s they started to do a *langar* [free food] on their father's death anniversary here in the graveyard. They made the grave bigger and built a building around it and now every year there is a three day *Urs* here ... only *langar* and *zikr* [rhythmic repetition]. These Naqshbandis do not do *qawwali* and *dhol* [kettle drum].

Interview, Graveyard keeper, Lahore 2009

What this illustrates is that every grave is potentially a shrine and that every shrine starts off as a material marker of sacred space. This particular site draws its authority not only from the charisma of the buried person nor through the organizing of a *langar* and *mela* by his family, but also with an association to a Sufi order, the Naqshbandis. What is clear is that this is an entirely random and

contingent event, as even the graveyard custodian did not have any hagiography of the buried man. Our own efforts to trace the family, even at the time of the annual *urs*, were met with little success, as the devotees that came were attached to either a local Naqshbandi seminary or passers-by rather than with the family of the buried man.

Even when the materiality of the shrine structure (the bricks and mortar) is placed at the centre of thinking through identity/religion, we find that contingency and expediency erode expectations of stability and homogeneity. The original shrine at Kartarpur in District Narowal to mark Guru Nanak's death place was washed away as the banks of the River Ravi changed course, and it was rebuilt in the 1920s from a donation of 135,600 rupees by the Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh, a fact which is inscribed in marble at the entrance of the shrine. The location of Data Sahib's shrine has moved due to the repeated incursions of the mighty Ravi River. Due to the multitudinous nature of shrines, described as 'wild growth' (Suvorova 2004), there are often shifts in the nature of their status, as they go through cycles of popularity and decline. The case of Data Sahib is important because it became pre-eminent in postcolonial Lahore, which is not to say it was not a prominent site in the city, along with Mian Mir, but the largest and most boisterous site at least amongst those we interviewed was that of Madho Lal Hussain or Shah Hussain and his lover, Madho Lal. The site of the current tomb in which both men are buried is in Baghbanpura, and their annual death anniversary is known as *Chiragan da mela*. Up until the 1960s it was considered the largest *mela* of the city and its decline is in line with the heterodox narrative of the *pir/sant* and his Punjabi poetry, standing at odds with the emergent nationalism of the Pakistani state. Lahore's urbanization deprived the *mela* a large chunk of devotees from the cities' rural hinterland (Jaffer 2015). As Lahore became the pre-eminent commercial city of West Punjab, the traders who enter and leave the city arrive and depart with a visit to Data Sahib, cementing that relationship and the importance of the shrine.²³ Even though the Auqaf literature portrays Shah Hussain as a spiritual figure who converted Hindus to Islam, the fact that his shrine consists of two graves and his writings construct an openly sensual and loving relationship with Madho (Lal), a Brahmin boy, makes him much harder to contain within a singular Islamic theology (Sikand 2003; Suvorova 2004; Kugle 2011). In contrast, Hujwiri (Data Sahib) wrote a foundational Sufi text and was rather more attached to formal Islamic teachings. As Strothmann (2016) summarizes: 'being at last, such an "unproblematic" saint in terms of his ecumenical approach to diverse and at various times hotly debated topics within Sufism and Islam, it is now clear that one could hardly find a better saint for the political elite to identify

with' (69). This postcolonial emphasis is further augmented when taking into account the fact that the shrine is not mentioned in the colonial district gazetteers (though *Chiragan da mela* is) and is not even indicated on a 1909 British map of Lahore, whereas Shah Hussain, Bibi Pak Daman, Shah Jamal and Mian Mir are (Strothmann 2016: 75). The contingent and ephemeral nature of the shrine structure and its changing popularity over time only diminish the significance of the spiritual figure if a framing which privileges colonial modern epistemology is valorized. If devotees produced and enact veneration, then the location of the grave is less important than the significance of the spiritual figure and their hagiography. It is for this reason that we have returned to Data Sahib and Kartarpur, which are completely imbued with an Islamic and Sikh historicity, in a section on heteropraxy. A perspective that does not require a singular vision of religion is able to deal with orthodoxy and heteropraxy through the lens of devotion. Our analytical claim is that this arises because devotees are co-creators in a shrine's sacredness in relation with a number of other agents: in part, the legends of the spiritual figures, in part the site of the shrine, and, as we will consider in more detail in the next chapter, the power of the state.

Kartarpur and Data Sahib serve our larger argument that even at sites where there is a historicized narrative, by way of Persian text, colonial cartography, or where the saint has produced writing in a particular tradition, even in these cases, the popular voice universalizes the particular (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh). From this angle, difference and commonality oscillate at each site and through time. Whilst colonial modernity was foundational to the identification of a shrine with a religious category, there are ongoing technologies which continue to interpret shrines as representing singularity while disciplining and erasing heteropraxy. The outcome of this has been that shrines have come to serve the purposes of religious nationalism rather than reflect the heteropraxies out of which they by and large emerged from. Thus, through Baba Farid Punjab becomes a Muslim region, Nankana Sahib becomes the birthplace of Sikhism and the local *devi* shrines are linked in order to narrativize an all-India Hinduism. To achieve this, control of women's devotion ritual and restriction on *dalit* involvement is essential: as a shrine becomes more tightly woven into a status of representation, the control increases, as we have shown in some detail for the Golden Temple (Purewal and Kalra 2016). Nonetheless, across these sites popular piety continues unabated. The supplication and prayer (*aaarti*, *ardas*, *dua*) at the end of ceremonies follows a remarkably similar format which, in the context of translation, can be usefully flattened in English. In the following excerpt we creatively bring together the format of the supplication, crossing traditions:

In the name of the almighty, thanks for bringing us together in the presence of your exalted beloved [name of *pir/guru*]. We are here to ask for your blessings and to bring your grace onto us poor sinners/unknowing. *Ameen/Waheguru/Ram*

Please give blessings to Bhola for his donation of 50Rs to the langar
Praise and thanks for the birth of Pappu to Bibi Sheeda after taking a *mannat* 5 years ago

Please give your grace on Shinda to bring him back to health

If we have made any mistakes in today's sermon, they are all ours, anything that pleases you is due to your own grace. *Jai Mata Di*.

Though this narrative is distilled from across the shrines where we did fieldwork, the structural elements of the appeal are common: an opening invocation followed by praise of the shrine's spiritual resident, a list of those who have donated money and contributed to the *langar* (free, communal kitchen), followed by those who desire a public petitioning of their needs. It is this recognition of material benefit by the devotee, the public and the people that breathes life into the brick and marble of the shrine. Equally a recognition of the commonality of the *dua* [prayer] indicates why Punjabi spiritual practice is eclectic, as devotees are able to judge efficacy in the request they make. It is here that the inversion of the theological ordering from God to human is most evidently found. Shrines are subject to the people's scrutiny just as much as the gaze – as *darshan/barkha* – is the rationale for devotees' bonding.

Limits of heterodoxy

We just want to state that the religiosity performed in the space of the shrine is shared by the many segments of the society, belonging to local elites, outsiders, discriminated categories like women, transgender, religious minorities, powerful statesmen, low middle classes, high middle classes, landowners, beggars, etc.

Boivin 2015: 4

Though this statement refers to Sufi shrines in South Asia, this delineation of an openness that transcends borders of class, gender, sexuality, caste and religion is neatly encapsulated in the list, even though the authors ultimately create a border around a shrine's religious categorization. Further, there is a lack of empirical finesse to this visioning, from our viewpoint and from carrying out surveys at shrines in East and West Punjab, across the Indo-Pak border, the importance of marginal segments of society coveting shrine spaces cannot be flattened.²⁴ This

may be a facet of the sites at which we did research, but nonetheless, the simple fact that women cannot enter most mosques and *dalits* are excluded from the inner sanctum of many *mandirs* means that shrines inevitably attract those for whom the sites of formal religion uphold barriers.²⁵ This interview from the documentary *India Untouched* (2007, Dir. Stalin Kurup) demonstrates the way in which exclusion, rather than inclusion, can work in *gurdwaras*; in this example the *gurdwara* has two separate doors for serving *langar*:

Interviewer: Why do you have two doors here?

Devotee (D): For separating people.

Interviewer (I): Why?

D: Because of caste discrimination. Mazbi Sikhs can only use this door.

I: Are you a Mazbi (*dalit*) Sikh?

D: Yes.....

I: Why do some people take prashad from here and some from the other door?

Sevadar [food server]: The Mazbi Sikhs can only use that door. This door is for the *jat* (non-*dalit*) landlords.

India Untouched 2007

Some may argue that this physical separation is not the norm, but it is undisputable that there is a profound gender/caste divide in relation to the management of the shrines, a point that is taken up in more detail in the next chapter. It is sufficient to note here that a populace of women in large numbers at shrines in Punjab does not mean a disruption of the hierarchies that exist within the social context. Rather they are often repeated in religious institutional structures. The representation of women on committees at *gurdwaras* is negligible and their role in paid work of the Auqaf and SGPC is equally invisible.

In Appendix 1 we summarize our interview data at a range of shrines across the Indo-Pak border. What becomes clear from our findings is that the site of the shrine is one where genders and castes mix, but this does not mean that these are anti-caste, anti-homophobic or feminist sites, but only that they are open to *dalits* and gender non-conforming groups. Shrine spaces enable the marginal to have a place in which social categorization does not go away but can be elided. In relation to caste for example, this interview with the son of the *Gadhi Nashin* at the Noorie Boorie shrine in greater Lahore is pertinent:

Interviewer: What is the background of your family?

Respondent: We are Rajput but our current activity is that of a *kisai* (butcher).

Interview Lahore 2017

Though this interview was about the history of the shrine, the response is telling in as much as being a butcher still retains in contemporary Pakistan an association with (low) status. Our interviews across the board at shrines in West Punjab elicited a range of responses in relation to *biraderi* or caste membership signalling high status that misaligned with occupation. Daily wage labourers or rickshaw drivers would say they were from a Qureshi or Rajput background which would be out of sync with their material condition.²⁶ Some argue that this demonstrates the salience of class over caste in West Punjab (Gazdar 2007). Nonetheless, the persistence of endogamous marriages belies this assumption. Caste is also a way in which avowed ideological differences between Islam/Sikhism and Hinduism are evidenced with a naive distinction being posited between egalitarian Islam and hierarchical Punjabi society (Werbner 1989). This rhetorical position has almost no bearing on the everyday performance and perpetuation of caste in Pakistan (Usman and Amjad 2013). Indeed, one strand of Islamic/Sufi knowledge that reflects on the nature of the body, with the upper part as serving the higher functions and the lower the more basic functions, maps quite neatly, if equally problematically, onto the Varna system (Werbner 2003). Further, the contemporary nomenclature of *Suvarna* (of caste) and *Asuvarna* (out-caste) parallels the prominent bifurcation in rural West Punjab between landlord and *kammi* (worker). The *kammi* is unable to control their passions because of the work they do, whilst the landholder is in control of their emotions and able to reach a higher state of spiritual awareness because they provide food for the people (Martin 2016). Explicitly anti-caste religious ideologies available in some interpretations of Sikhism can be folded into a hierarchy that also mirrors caste. For example, Khalsa Sikhs can argue that those who do not adopt the five symbols and take *amrit* (initiation) are not of the same status as those who do and therefore set up a hierarchical distinction which is remarkably similar to Brahminical orderings and orthodoxy. Arguably there is no religious hindrance to anyone becoming spiritually pure or adopting the symbols or purity, but even here there are examples of exclusion, as another interview from the *India Untouched* documentary makes clear:

Respondent: I have tasted the *Amrit* (nectar) and become a Sikh (*Amrit shakeya*). But even now, I am stamped a Ravidasiya (*dalit*) Sikh. Though I can recite all the verses of the Guru Granth Sahib, they would still not count me as one of them. Sikhism has been captured by the *jats* (non-*dalits*) who say they're the majority. But the fact is they don't even form 10% of the Sikhs, whereas 70% of all Sikhs are *dalits*. The first five people our Guru gave *Amrit* to were from

the lower castes with the sole purpose of protecting the poor. Today we are being oppressed, not protected.

India Untouched 2007

Social blockages enable the religious discourse to be exclusive, whilst retaining its neutrality. Thus, Sufi shrines can restrict access to women to the central tomb and *gurdwaras* exclude non-*Amritdhari* (orthodox), and this exclusivity is justified in terms of religious purity and ritual ordering, but in essence operates as gender/caste exclusion. Yet, these are not the only shrines as the *Lallan Walla* and *Gugga* sites bear witness to ongoing struggles for space, but rather a space legitimizes itself in the mainstream by exclusion. *Dalit* spaces retain their own openness.

The nomenclature of caste over-determines religious identity in these cases. Thus, *dalits* become *Musallis*, *Kutanas* or *Muslim Sheikhs* when accepting the affiliation of a *pir*, or they become *Mazbi Sikh* or *Rangrettas* when a *sant* is involved. Christian and *chuhra* (a *dalit* caste) are almost synonymous in West Punjab, and this is subject to a purity/pollution matrix in the name of religion rather than caste. Religious discourse is used to justify the existing social order, but this is not its only use. In rural Punjab, the *kammis* invert the logic of the landholder, by referring to the *faqir* as a spiritual figure who has no material belongings and no attachments and is therefore closer to god, as he is not trapped in the material world (Martin 2016). Thus, the poor and the dispossessed can still lay claim to the terrain of spirituality as an articulation of opposition to their social conditions. They are empowered to do this with more conviction than petitioning the postcolonial state, with its formal mechanisms for outlawing caste and religious discrimination. This ability to articulate resistance in this form may be due to the popular renditioning of the Punjabi philosophico-literary tradition of Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussain, where worldly attachment and social hierarchies are represented as barriers to enlightenment. However, as we have previously stated, these expressions have not turned into an ideology of collective resistance and this may be because of the lacunae in this tradition with respect to gender, where women's exclusion became a principle object of reform.

Whilst *dalits* were given only menial roles in formal religious rites, they were nonetheless allowed to engage with their own *gods* in their own shrines. These activities of devotion provided further evidence of their impurity in relation to Brahmins. Women's exclusion cut across these caste-ordered divisions and the boundaries of the newly formulated formal religious traditions (so Sikh, Hindu and Muslim women would all be disciplined in relation to their attendance

and activities at shrines). This was not a totalizing force for closure, as shrines seem to incessantly retain an openness, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter. The shrine of Ahmed Sirhindi (1564–1624), Rauza Sharif, located in present-day Fategarh Sahib, is perhaps the best example of this. Sirhindi was an austere, Naqshabandi scholar who was concerned about the decline of Islam under Emperor Akbar and favoured differential treatment of non-Muslims and a revival of ‘true’ Islam in India. Though contested, he inspired many of the twentieth-century Muslim reformists who were vivid and expressive opponents of shrine cultures (Jaffer (2015)). With full knowledge of this background, we visited his shrine in 2008 out of curiosity and found an impressively maintained courtyard and a rather typical medieval graveyard with Sirhindi’s grave prominent. Additionally, we found multiple threads tied onto the railings that surrounded the tomb and perhaps most surprisingly a spiritual healer, donned with green turban and white robes, who was treating a group of women in the courtyard who were clearly possessed: one was lying in the ground, another was gesticulating, while the *pir* was praying. Physical embodiment and healing activity were something very common in other shrines, but seemed discordant at the tomb of this renowned figure.

Debates about the behaviour of devotees in shrines conducted amongst reformists in the colonial period, but continuing to the present day, are overly concerned with women’s bodily movements and appropriate performative rituals and protocols (Malhotra 2002). Specific rules for piety and ritual were established in various ways throughout the colonial twentieth century, most notably in the *Sikh Rehat Maryada* (Code of Conduct) (1931), which find their ultimate implementation in the establishment of postcolonial institutions such as the Auqaf. Anne Murphy’s (2012) luminous book *The Materiality of the Past* sheds light on the way in which certain objects in the Sikh tradition become validated as part of the dominant *Khalsa* narrative, whilst others are ignored. Our perspective adds to this debate by tracing the ways in which local piety through ritual and veneration of objects continued alongside and often despite the opposition of dominant narratives. These are inextricably linked, even though mutually exclusive in relation to their respective genealogies. In other words, women’s ritual practice was not confined to shrines, and all practices at shrines were not solely women focused. Control of the gendered body becomes the mode in which the religious (pure, controlled, scriptural) and the irreligious (contaminated, wild, praxis) come to be known. Excluding women from shrine spaces is formally similar to caste exclusion in temples following Brahminical notions of purity/pollution, but follows a different logic.

Exclusion of *dalits* and restrictions on women's practice are part of a wider attempt to continuously narrow and define in more restrictive terms what is considered devotional practice. A range of piety practices occur within shrines such as the playing of music, dancing and consumption of marijuana that are part of an ongoing struggle for control of the space. Shah Jamal is a shrine on the canal in Lahore in the middle of what has become an upper-middle-class housing colony.²⁷ On Thursday evenings there is a large gathering of *hashish* smokers, dancers and *dhol* (drum) players that perform at their most energetic between one and four AM. In 2016, due to complaints from local residents, the *dhol* playing was restricted to certain times and the all-night activities curtailed. This was at the orders of the district administration and implemented through the Auqaf department. Rather than challenge this encroachment on the shrines activities, the devotees simply moved to another site: Shah Kamal in Icchra, where the interned *pir* was said to be from the family of Shah Jamal and was therefore a legitimate venue for the ritual activities. What is of significance here is the way in which there is a creative curtailment of state intervention rather than direct confrontation. Thus the question remains whether shrines provide a hindrance to women and *dalits* in relation to articulating demands for their rights from the state. Do they only provide cathartic relief for the oppressed and assuaging of guilt for the oppressor? These questions are perhaps best addressed in relation to the violent response that shrine culture has attracted.

Since 2005, 305 people have been killed in bomb attacks on shrines in Pakistan. Another thousand or more have been injured.²⁸ This followed over two decades of sectarian killings in which mainly Shia shrines were attacked where the death toll ran into the thousands.²⁹ Just as with the violent response by high castes and their institutions to *dalit* assertion, the sectarian conflict in Pakistan delineates what is permissibly constituted within the normative frame of 'religion'. These boundaries are never static and while the Hindutva project is palpably targeting Muslims with violent persecution in India, other groups are also vulnerable to this violent enactment of bordering logic. Perhaps the most written about group that faces constant violence in West Punjab today is the Ahmadis. Since being declared 'non-Muslim' under the Second Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan in 1972 and Ordinance XX, their places of worship are not allowed to use the word *mosque*, and they have been subject to persecution. These *mosques* rendered as shrines are illustrative of the intrusive and pervasive role of the state in the management of religious violence.³⁰ The main source of conflict is the fact that their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), declared himself as the *mahdi*, or 'messiah' (the second coming of the prophet), a relatively common

conjecture made by others throughout the history of Islam (Dabashi 2017). However, in the ferment of colonial modernity, this was seen as an affront to the Deobandi and other schools of thought who believed in the finality of the Prophet Mohammed (see Qasmi 2014). In other words any proclamation to being a *mahdi* were seen as blasphemous. Both parties used the same methods of print culture and the legal system to try and discredit each other during the colonial period, but it took the Pakistani state to carry out the final logic of bounded religious identity formation: exclusion. By utilizing the Constitution, that most essential of totems for the modern nation-state, Ahmadis were effectively rendered into the ambiguous position of all religious minorities in the Islamic Republic. This has resulted in a litany of violence against this group. From desecration of gravestones and places of worship to exclusion from employment and everyday sociality, the Ahmadis are one of the most targeted groups in Pakistan. During our fieldwork, in May 2010, two Ahmadi places of worship were attacked, resulting in the deaths of ninety people and the injury of over a hundred. The attackers declared themselves as members of the Punjab wing of the Taliban, but in essence could have been any group that was seeking to propagate a hegemonic idea of being 'Muslim', something that has never been a prominent strand in that tradition. Ironically, the centre of pilgrimage for Ahmadis remains the town of Qaddian, where Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was born and is buried, which is now in East Punjab and therefore accessible only through a pilgrim visa. The poignancy here is that whereas heterodox Sikh groups are dealt with violently in East Punjab, the Ahmadis are relatively safe.³¹

What is clear from these examples is that political contingency, rather than radical differences of theology, often renders a group outside of the mainstream. Ismailis or followers of the Aga Khan, who have conventions and rites that would place them beyond the limits of normative Islam, nonetheless continue to exist in Pakistan with little interference by the state or mob violence. The difference between them and other groups is that they maintain a large degree of secrecy about the location of their places of workshop and do not allow outsiders insight into their rituals. To some extent, even the naming of their sacred spaces as *Jamaat Khanas* (Houses of the Collective) avoids a conflation with *mosque* or *mandir*. In contrast, the Ahmadis followed from the outset a mission of proselytizing and challenging the mainstream view of what it meant to be a Muslim (Qasmi 2014). It may be for this reason that the Sant Nirankaris, who emerged as an offshoot of the precolonial Nirankari Sant movement, were excommunicated by the Akal Takht in 1978. This followed a decade of violent killings and counter-attacks, between the Nirankari Sant followers (supported by

the Indian state) and Sikh separatists of various hues. The main rationale for the excommunication was over the issue of the Nirankari belief in a living *guru* and the use of that terminology. Just as the *Khatm-e-Nabuat* movement challenged the Ahmadis, so have the Sikh separatists challenged the Nirakanaris.³² However, an equally prominent group, the Namdharis (a *sant*-led movement that rose to prominence in colonial modernity, articulating a direct descendent from the time of Guru Gobind Singh, alleging that the Guru had named another successor, Baba Ram Singh, who then founded the Namdharis) have not been subject to disapprobation (Singh, J. 2013). This group maintains an ascetic stance outside of the fold of mainstream Sikhism, with their own *gurdwaras* and rituals, yet have not been attacked in the name of boundary maintenance. On the contrary, they are often eulogized due to their role in anti-colonial agitation and maintenance of a distinct tradition of Sikh *kirtan* (sacred music) performance.³³ In that sense there is no limit to how spiritual groups and movements can be rendered as outside of the mainstream and subject to discipline, just as this process constantly refashions what the mainstream is.³⁴ The limits of course rest in the caste/gender matrix, where the contingency that confuses, in other words why one group and not another, is more fraught. We have clearly argued that in situations where *dalits* and women are leaders the potential for disruption to the social structure means they are more likely to be subject to degrees of control that include violence. As we have already argued, border breaking in and of itself does not alter the social structure; it is only when patriarchy and Brahminism (caste hierarchy) are under threat that resistance is recognized and often with violent consequences.

Synopsis

As we have argued thus far, the inexorable religious nationalism coming out of the push for singularity stemming from the competing social reform movements can be seen in the postcolonial outcomes of colonial modernity. However, we do not wish to fall into the trap of reducing a gendered/class society to its elite protagonists, summed up in the view that the 'customs and institutions of a traditional society were secularised, the political spirit was still very much that of loyalty to the British' (Van der Linden 2008: 27). This perspective offers very little explanation about the textures of social and material relations through which conflict and incorporation were managed. The suggestion that customs and institutions were secularized in Punjab due to the

colonial encounter can only be understood as an overtly Eurocentric proposition (vis-à-vis 'an intellectual history' of reform due to colonialism) in which social legitimation of authority is secondary to the colonial command over the society. Our discussion so far has pointed to how this dialectic operates and how any discussion of religious authority in the making of singular religious categories and practice cannot ignore the agency and multiplicity of the masses, devotees, or margins, not least women and castes relegated from the archives.

Subaltern studies have alerted us to the marginal narratives and voices within the archive, seeking to unearth that which the logic of colonial control buried purposively or unintentionally. Applying this strategy to the postcolonial present, *babas* and sacred spaces are enfolded, incorporated and strategically distant from hegemonic discourses of religion-making. Along the axes of gender and caste, the radical potential that is available in the Punjabi poetic-philosophical tradition creates a discursive terrain that enables justification of devotee practices of all shades and hues. Negotiation, capitulation and expulsion are key methods in the relationship between institutional authority and spiritual figures/sacred spaces. In this chapter, the emphasis has been on the crevices and chinks in the portico of religious normativity. Our emphasis shifts in the next chapter to formal institutions and authority making, to reveal similar ruptures in what has hitherto been construed as a homogenizing force of singular religious identity.



Authority as religion-making and religion-breaking

Introduction

Piro kahe pukar ke sahb majbi raten
Majban ke sab kukre kya bole baten
Apne-apne majab ko dono parvesen ...
Na sukh vare Turak ke na Hindu chanune
 Piro loudly proclaims all religions are in darkness
 Barking dogs of religion what words can they say
 They each force [people] into one of their own religions
 No peace with the Turk and none with the Hindu.

Transliteration from Piro Premen in Malhotra
 2017: 108; Our translation

The crisp rebuttal of religious figures ('barking dogs') and their primary work of conversion to religion (away from devotion) attributed to Piro offers a pithy summary of the terrain to be covered in this chapter, where the question of institutional authority and challenges to it are scrutinized. If authority is the way in which a shrine or spiritual figure becomes deemed as attention-worthy or sanctioned by the devotees which they amass, there are a number of layers upon which this is constructed. Modern religion establishes ultimate power in the single figurehead of 'God', and thus a hierarchy which matches feudal social ordering and industrial capital's bureaucratic forms (Weber 1950). A living spiritual figure (*guru*, *bhagat*, *pir* or *sant*) is at the peak of the human hierarchy and, in their inevitable absence; material objects such as the grave, the sacralized text and the sacred object come to take their place. Sites of this type are so myriad in Punjab that they are not quantifiable. Yet, there are a number of locations that have emerged or waned out of this general pattern to become sites of venerable and long-term influence. Is this merely an

exercise in enumerative difference or of historical contingency? The silence at Nankana Sahib after Partition, when it went from being the most popular Sikh/Punjabi shrine visited by all of those who were devotees of Baba/Guru Nanak to becoming a hollow shell, was not due to a loss in its spiritual power, landholdings or status as the birthplace of Nanak, but as a result of political expediency's need for sacrifice. Ecology plays a similarly powerful role in displacing or uprooting a shrine. The changing course of the once powerful rivers of central Punjab has also resulted in the movements and shifts of shrines, most notably those along the River Ravi where Kartarpur, the last abode of Nanak, and Data Sahib, around the walled city of Lahore, have seen the physical movement of a shrine from ecological vicissitude.

If political expedience and ecological change cause ruptures, it is these examples that provide us with a general principle that it is only through a particular type of reassertion and reinvention that continuities are possible in the face of cataclysmic change. The tools and technologies of modernity, such as archaeology (the valuing of historical textual sources and the importance of linear time), provide fixity in the face of overwhelming persistent change. The consequence of this is the creation of a number of sites which are imbued with an authenticity that leads to influence. So, even where large endowments do not exist, such as Data Sahib, or where there is either no textual source to confirm an ancient site, such as Bari Imam, or where there is not an identifiable Goddess, such as Vaishno Devi, the possibility of creating a narrative of authenticity is sufficient with contingency to offer the stamp of authority. This does not require geographical fixity, when faced with ecological change: the river course change, the landslide and political machination can all be overcome by shifting sites and the re-establishment of a shrine. In previous chapters it has been the devotees who have consistently been foregrounded as the basis for authenticity, power and longevity. In this chapter, we take a closer look at the institutional forces at play and the systems of patronage from the local elite to the state, as these are more likely involved in the re-establishment of a major shrine. Living spiritual figures, shrines and religious movements are now considered in relation to the state or institutional command guaranteed by the state, often through the law. Some of these actors have appeared in previous chapters: the SGPC, Auqaf board and the ubiquitous 'committee'. It is the larger bureaucratic structure, as a way of organizing spiritual life in relation to a shifting political economy that informs much of our analysis.

The separation of the domains of politics and religion is a peculiar and analytically problematic bifurcation. This division arose and was given credence through the imperial spread of Europe. In its provincialization, many other

'sacred cows' of European universalism bow out of the frame and a more fluid and supple relationship between the sacred and secular is possible (Chakrabarty 2000). From a historical perspective, religion and politics, when placed in the broader charter of ethics and morality, are not separable in any absolute sense in any context. There are degrees of separation and if, at one extreme, Northern European social democracies have fully embraced the ideology of secular liberal individualism, at the other end, South Asia demonstrates an enmeshing of the domains of spirituality, patronage and institutional power in such an intricate manner that analytical disaggregation often renders the empirical subject unintelligible.¹ The intimate connection between the institutions of law and state power in the management of Sikh shrines embodied in the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925, for instance, provides a stark example of the ways in which religion (spiritual authority) and the state (temporal authority) are inseparable in Punjab. Nonetheless, contemporary conflicts, sometimes violent and visceral in nature, are often construed in terms of a binary division between the secular state and the religious institution, but this perspective hides more than it reveals. The Pakistani state, in its management of organizations that take the name of Islam to justify acts of violence, often adopts a stance which reflects this unhelpful bifurcation. For example, the attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in 2014 was met with an array of condemnation for the way in which the Taliban 'monsters' had attacked the nation.² Perhaps, even more telling, in the attack on the Data Sahib shrine in Lahore in 2010 in which fifty people were killed, the condemnation was presented in terms of an external ('non-Muslims', 'India', etc.) attack on the nation, even though the internal religious bifurcations of Sufi/Barelvi Islam versus Deobandi/Selafi Islam, were also played up in commentary.³

There are three themes in the academic literature which we will (re)address in this chapter. First is the bifurcation of spiritual and temporal power, played out in a separation of religion from the state or the sacred from the secular/profane. Second, we are conscious to avoid placing spiritual figures and shrines solely into a Eurocentric narrative in which the colonial state invents tradition in its myriad forms (Hobsbawm 1983; Cohn 1996) and native elites subverted an otherwise 'civilising' project through a recourse to religious nationalism. Thirdly we forward how spiritual figures and shrines are potential resources for women and *dalits* to attain agency in violently patriarchal and Brahminical social formations. Our first premise is the need for nuance in order to understand the factors at play across and within these dynamics of spiritual and temporal power. The dismissal or containment, from formal politics, of *pirs*, *mahants*, and other 'traditional' spiritual figures, has been possible through the ongoing bifurcation

of sacred and political power. Alavi (1990) presents the position that the local *pir* or *imam*'s status is marginal and 'lowly' unless they possess material resources and therefore political influence:

the position of small local *pirs* is similar, although there are many *pirs* who are local landlords in their own right. In their case *it is mainly their power as landlords rather than 'spiritual powers'* which underlies their capacity to act in the political area. Some such *pirs* have been prominent in Pakistan politics, aligning with one or another political party.

(1990: 25) [our emphasis].

This statement, by delineating spiritual and temporal power, encapsulates the endemic bifurcation earlier mentioned and the method of reproduction within historical accounts of formal political mobilization through vested, landed and other interests (Talbot 1996) or through the feudal structure's reliance on spiritual authority to provide social order (Gilmartin 1988a). This sectoral approach weighted towards a revisionist history comprising actors, agents and interests sheds little light on the overlapping contours of power and how they penetrate, constitute and embody themselves within authority itself and, of course, of resistance to these formations. Otherwise, it is the colonial state that produces these religious actors, and their resistance is an aberration to a modernizing/secularizing project. We propose an approach that cuts across different modes of authority and which brings the historical into conversation with the contemporary in order to consider a systems analysis of otherwise demarcated domains or zones of power. These large-scale machinations play out in the relationship between the spiritual figure and the politician, the shrine and the state, and the religious movement and political parties.⁴ Utilizing the Persian terms *sarkar* (senior official), *darbar* (court) and *vilayet* (jurisdiction) that entered Punjab via the Delhi Sultanate and Moghul empire, we demonstrate how various domains of authority have been constructed around different seats/bodies, settings and positions of power. We do not offer to trace the etymological journey of these terms from the medieval period to the present (though this is an interesting intellectual project); rather, their common usage in the realm of spirituality and shrine cultures alerted us to their potential as conceptual loci. These three terms enable us to loosely describe a court, the land over which it has jurisdiction, and its temporal leader as an outcome of the entangled secular/sacred authority of spirituality. British colonial governance attempted to disaggregate and disentangle this enmeshment into separate domains, the state and the shrine and finally the postcolonial states absorbed and nationalized; thus the state usurped religion. This is not a teleological account, or an attempt to decolonize that

particular record, which has hitherto only provided substantive nourishment for a communal narrative. Rather, by coalescing precolonial and contemporary understandings, a space is created for submerged voices and views to appear, particularly in relation to the gender/caste matrix, which we have hitherto presented.

Sarkar: Politician

If spiritual authority were solely derived from material power, then many capitalists and well-known political figures in twentieth-century South Asia would have large shrines devoted to them. This is not to say that political parties do not deify the political dead: the annual ceremony at the memorial of Indira Gandhi in New Delhi is attended by the Indian National Congress (INC) elite,⁵ and many more present themselves at Benazir Bhutto's annual death anniversary in Sindh where Pakistan People's Party stalwarts are most visible.⁶ Given the lack of shrines to women it is ironic that it is political leaders who overcome this gap. It is hard to say whether these sites will exist in another hundred years, but the first Punjab Assembly in 1921 certainly had a preponderance of those men with feudal landed inheritance and a genealogy attached to a shrine (Gilmartin 1988a). The commodification of land under the British and the granting of land for those who were loyal created a new feudal elite in which the nexus of sacred and spiritual power was exploited, one product of the historical entanglement between British colonial tactics of rule and evolving society formations (Dirks 2001). Khem Singh Bedi, a descendant of Guru Nanak and from a family of *jagirdars* [feudal land holders] during Ranjit Singh's period, was given the largest land grant in the entire colonial period of some 7800 acres (Sharma 1998). This was due to his loyalty to the British in quelling the rebellion at Gugera by Ahmad Khan Kharral in 1857.⁷ In this case, religious genealogy combined with state patronage to produce a figure of considerable influence in parallel with the well-known accounts of the *pirs* of Sindh (Ansari 1992). While the literature is replete with examples and narrativized accounts of the emergence of new classes of elites in colonial India, these were largely, at least in the Punjab, built upon existing feudal ties. The Chiefs' College in Lahore opened in 1886 and its name and philosophy was for the leading families and tribes in the province. It drew upon those who had been loyal in the British wars against Ranjit Singh's *darbar* (court) and those with long-standing land holdings. These 'Chiefs' from the heartland of Punjab had deep links with *sants* and *pirs* and were configured by this relation in precolonial Punjab.⁸

The Persian term ‘*Sarkar*’, which relates to the head of the courts administration, in other words the ‘authority’ (*sar*) that ‘does’ (*kar*), is a commonly used appellation for a spiritual figure, as they are the agent or doer of the *sache paatshah*, the true King (God), in parallel with the ruler of the material world. From the Suharwady *pirs* as rulers of Multan through to the blessings sought by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh from Mian Mir, there has been an ongoing relationship between spiritual and material leadership.⁹ While we note that *sarkar*, like all Persian nouns, is gender neutral in its referential, it is in the South Asian context applied only to men. It is this masculinist domain that the academic field has been dominated by a functionalist approach, most notably found in the work of Gilmartin (1988a) in which the *pirs* and *sants* provide stability and local order for the Mughal system (and subsequently the postcolonial Pakistani state) or a more neutral account, in which spiritual figures maintain a distance from material power (notably in Daud Bandegi’s sixteenth-century hagiography).¹⁰ Rather than this paramount perspective of the powerful, it is crucial to take into account a cultural Marxist perspective:¹¹ where spiritual figures can sometimes be seen as representing the voices, and the revolutionary potential, of the subaltern classes: Kabir, Ravidass, Nanak and Bulleh Shah are eminent in this regard (Gokhale-Turner 1981; Lorenzen 1991; Dass 2000; Wakankar 2005). By placing the sacred and secular relationship alongside a continuum of appeasement to conflict or submission to revolution, it seems pertinent not only to de-emphasize, though not entirely dismiss, colonial agency but to emphasize a layering in which a three-dimensional matrix of caste, class and gender is forefronted.

The span of piety and devotion across the sacred and secular spectrum accentuates the kaleidoscopic effect earlier discussed. Even making a sacred–secular distinction is often an elusive task. Indeed, it would be a list as long as one chapter if the visitations of politicians, princely figures and the elite of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial Punjab to various shrines were to be tabulated. The vitality of sacred power is perhaps less tangible in this respect than the ascent of secular power. It is the Persian chronicles of the Mughal Empire (secular power) that were of interest to colonial translators, not the tens of thousands of hagiographies of *sants/pirs* (sacred power). Indeed, the 1911 Delhi Durbar of King George V and Queen Mary was perhaps the final spectacle of feudal colonial power which overtly drew upon sacred power before the dominance of the modern state form.¹² Consisting almost entirely of Rajas and Maharajas of the over six hundred princely states, the bond of fidelity to the ‘Emperor of India’ was cast entirely in the tradition of hierarchical dues. However, no solely religious functionaries were invited; the *diwan* (head) of

Baba Farid's shrine did attend, in his capacity as the *jagirdar* of the estate, not the *gadhi nashin* [spiritual inheritor] of the historic shrine (Gilmartin 1988a). Where proximity to the state endears qualities of material authority for the spiritual figure, distance from the state can also be another way of increasing moral authority, which vacillates depending on political context. For example, Mehar Ali of Golra Sharif refused to attend the Delhi Durbar, reportedly seeing it as an affront to Islam to attend (Gilmartin 1988a), which was consistent with him refusing a land grant from the colonial state. However, in postcolonial Pakistan, the shrine at Golra Sharif became a discreet, yet public, meeting point for senior bureaucrats and army personnel under the blessings of the incumbent *gadhi nashin*. At one level the piety of the spiritual figure relies, in certain traditions, on a refusal of land as the *faqir* has no need for property. As Shah (2015) notes of Khwaja Chisti (1870–1917), when offered 250 acres by the British, he refused by stating that: 'we, the *derwishes*, [ascetics] have nothing to do with property' (Chishti 2010: 358, in Shah 2015: 242). This is somewhat ironic given the long patronage of the Mughal state to the Chisti shrines (Ernst and Lawrence 2002). Nonetheless, the discourse of opposition to power was available and some of their responses are not only witty, but also revealing of the ways in which the Chistis could outwit the colonial state. When Khwaja Sialwi, another pir of the Chisti *silsila* was approached by the colonial state with the offer of land in the canal colonies, he is said to have retorted: 'these lands are owned by many of my Muslim brothers. So, these are already mine. I thought that the government wants to allot me land in England' (Chishti 2005: 155, in Shah 2015: 243). A final example, again from the Chisti Pirs, gives some sense of how these figures understood and played on the idea of political power: another twentieth-century Chisti, Khwaja Diyā' al-Dīn named his dog 'George V', giving him the opportunity to insult the king every time he referred to his dog: 'Go! Give *lassi* (diluted curds) to George V; it's time to feed him, feed him with bread now' (Chishti 2005: 230, in Shah 2015: 244). These contentions over property and propriety are played out and played with and are key to the relationship between the spiritual figure and the secular authority.

In somewhat sharp contrast to the practices of the British ruling bureaucratic elite but perhaps equally symbolic, the postcolonial Punjabi politicians draw on *sants/pirs* for blessings as well as to influence devotees in their voting patterns. Gender and caste differentiated vote banks are also an essential aspect why a politician seeks the power of the *Sarkar* for electoral success, as shrines/*deras* are one of the few sites where women and *dalits* gather. Thus the secular ideology of democratic liberalism finds its realization in religious spaces at the

time of elections, while women and *dalits* are systematically excluded from the political process normally. Perversely, the politician combines the ecumenism of the devotees with the appeal to universalism of the *babas*, but with the singular aim of gaining votes. Thus, all *sants/pirs*, regardless of classification, but with substantial following, are open to visitation, and equally the politician makes an appeal to a universal – nationalism. The Hindutva era in India has threatened the normativity of visiting Sufi shrines, despite this having been an acceptable and even routine practice for Congress aspirants. There is a paradox at play here as the individual spiritual figure draws their religious legitimacy through a particular lineage and relationship with a tradition, but the politician is appealing to a broader constituency due to the vicissitudes of democratic demarcation of areas and voters. In postcolonial Punjab this is perversely resolved by association with feudal/modern political power: the political leader (pre-Hindutva) is ecumenical and accommodates all *pirs/sants*, regardless of their historical recourse to a religious lineage, and infuses them with the power of the modern state. This is the symbiotic nature of the relationship between politician and *pir/sant* and perhaps why figures such as Gurmeet Ram Rahim are able to traverse the spiritual and material domains with such ease, even if with fraught consequences. It is notable, however, that Gurmeet Ram Rahim, who amassed his following and consolidated his influence in the pre-Hindutva era did so within an environment of heightened formal religiosity.

To some extent, the postcolonial settlement sharpened the lines of potential conflict between politician and shrine custodian through incorporation of sacred institutions into the state's administration. It also arguably tipped the balance between *pir/sant* and politician in the favour of the latter. Nonetheless, the actual landscape of postcolonial Punjab sees politicians of all ideological shades paying obeisance at shrines and patronizing spiritual figures. The opening of the *urs* at Data Sahib is always attended by the Chief Minister of the province and countless Indian politicians have paid their respect at the Harmandir. For the shrines under Auqaf and SGPC control, the entrance of the politician is the literal arrival of the living authority figure, working through the institutional hierarchies of modern nation-state bureaucracies. The security cordons, the garlands of flowers and the distance maintained between the ordinary devotee and these elite figures seamlessly bleed into other public performance, such as political rallies, national celebrations and party gatherings. A simulacrum of the devotion of the ordinary shrine visitors adds further aura to the sacred site. In some matters hereditary *pirs/sants* are strikingly mute in their relations with the

postcolonial state than their historical practice indicates. As mentioned previously with the Chisti Pirs, an independent stance or even a movement such as the Akali Gurdwara agitations of the early 1920s could openly take place against the colonial state. The postcolonial incorporation, formally in the case of the Auqaf and informally in the case of the SGPC, meant that spiritual figures and shrines are subject to the will of the political masters rather than upholding autonomy by utilizing sacred power.¹³ It is inconceivable that the *Jathedar* [leader] of the *Akal Takht* would have any political allegiance outside of the Shiromani Akali Dal, effectively subjugating his authority to the politicians of that party. Similarly, the Religious Purpose Committee, which has the right to control Data Sahib, has a Chairman selected by the Chief Minister of Punjab and is by necessity someone from the ruling political party. As a further demonstration of the feudal character of politics in Punjab, Ishaq Dar, who was the Chair from 2015 to 2016, is also related by marriage to Nawaz Sharif, at that time, Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Given the domination of the politician–bureaucrat nexus, the role of traditional caretakers, such as *mahants*, *majawahrs*, *pirs* and *sants*, has been dramatically diminished. The archetypical and yet still fairly unique institution in this regard is the SGPC, which has direct control of eighty-five *gurdwaras* under the Gurdwaras Act of 1925. The Shiromani Akali Dal in political power patronizes and is supported by a network of *sants* and *babas*. These are not organized in any simple or cohesive manner. The Sant Samaj led by the Damdami Taksal¹⁴ are a variable group of over two hundred Sants with a strong connection to the SGPC and therefore by default to the Akali Dal. This does not mean that conflict does not arise between both organizations, but the Nanaksar *sants* and others with a close affiliation to *keshdhari Sikhi* [turbaned Sikh] also come under the gambit of the Sant Samaj with close ties to Sikh political power. This is fairly well illustrated by the news reporting and advertising in the largest circulation daily Punjabi (Gurmukhi) newspaper, the *Ajit*, which carries stories that cover life histories of *sants* (especially in their weekly supplement on religious matters), reportage on annual fairs at death anniversaries and pronouncement of loyalty or expression of gratitude to the Akali Dal and its leaders, for example:

Strongly felt thanks. S. Prakash Singh Badal, Chief Minister of Punjab and S. Sukhbir Singh Badal, Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab, for their progressive leadership and long term vision ... From: Jathedar Sant Baba Nihal Singh, Harian Velaan Vaale, Trustee, President and member of the College Organising Committee, Sri Guru Har Rai Sahib College for Women, Chabbewal.

(*Ajit*, 10/10/14, 3)

At the same time the political parties also patronize the events of the *sants* with messages of support, participation in ritual events and even funding, all of which increases during election periods. These activities do cross party lines: when the Indian National Congress (INC) was in power in Punjab, and this message in the *Ajit* is illustrative: ‘Sant Gurbachan Singh Kanblee Vaaleeayaan’s 9th death anniversary, special supplement’ in which there are messages from twenty-eight political leaders from across the spectrum. Captain Amarinder Singh of the INC, the then Chief Minister, offered this message: ‘now in the abode of the truthful, Sant Gurbachan Singh Kanblee Vaale was sound in his sayings and preaching. He spread the word of Sikhism in total faithfulness ... His leaving has left a great loss for the Sikh Panth ... We donate flowers on his 9th death anniversary’ (*Ajit*, 22/12/09, 9). This political role of the Sant is partly enabled by an ability to mobilize local communities for voting, but also for social causes. Arguably the most noteworthy in this regard is the Sant Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal.¹⁵ Known for his campaigning to clean the stream in which Guru Nanak was submerged to find enlightenment, he has moved on to general environment protection around Sultanpur Lodhi.

This symbiosis becomes synergy when the *pir/sant* becomes politician. Indeed, as Malik and Malik (2017) have demonstrated in their detailed analysis of *pir* families in politics in West Punjab from the period 1937 to 2013:

Interestingly, while 19 per cent of total rural Muslim constituencies in the 1920 and 1946 provincial elections were occupied by shrine families, the corresponding ratio still stands at 16 per cent for the National Assembly formed after 2013 elections.

2017: 1831

This quotation indicates the remarkable resilience and loyalty of the *pir* politicians, but rests on a number of factors. These are outlined by Malik and Malik (2017) as political expediency, military compromise, family alliances and political brokerage. Yet there is one aspect that is not emphasized in this otherwise excellent account: the relationship between the *pir* and devotees. As we have outlined in previous chapters, the question of agency is often missing in analysis of *pirs/sants* and power relations leading to an absencing of women and *dalits*. The question of devotees as voters is critical when trying to untangle the nexus of the *sarkar*. The *pirs* are loyal to their lineage and devotees, rather than to any political party; thus the continuity of political influence does not rest within one branch of the family, as there will generally be competition that is split between political parties. At the shrine of Daud Bandegi Kirmani, where there has been a member of the family in political

power since the time of independence, at each election family members have stood against each other, with one supporting the Pakistan Muslim League and the other the Pakistan People's Party (Malik and Malik 2017). Once the election is over, the *pir's* lineage prevails: the devotees are still able to access the resources that political power brings with it, which is primarily related to the judiciary and the market. Even though at the point of voting candidates are evaluated in terms of their ability to give access to the state, the issue of loyalty to the *pir* is not called into question. Thus the influence of education or migration or political challenge, all of which play a role in political choices, is mitigated by a conviction that there will be continuity after the business of elections is completed. This encapsulates the symbiosis of sacred and secular power.

Sarkar: Bureaucrat

In the broadest terms, *sarkar* as intermediary can refer to any person (though normally high caste and male) with some form of institutional power. In modern institutions bureaucrats hold this position: when it comes to the management of shrines under institutional control, the symbolic power vested in the sacred space is occasionally shared but most often contested (as seen with the case of Murad Shah later in this chapter). While the source of a shrine's appeal may relate to the birth, death or miraculous deed of a spiritual figure, the sites that are now considered iconic are not solely managed by the heirs or related custodians. Whilst *sarkar* would refer to the head agent and in this sense the living *sant/pir*, there are many other names to describe the hereditary heir of a shrine: *Sajjda Nashin* (hereditary caretaker); *Diwan* (court official); *Gadhi Nashin* (one who sits on the cushion); *maalik* (owner); *mahant* (respected one); *gyani* (knowledgeable one). These individuals were gradually usurped during the twentieth century through the creation of laws that gave the state either direct control over the major shrines through the Gurdwara Act in 1925, the establishment of the Auqaf Board in 1950, or indirectly through the management of charitable and endowed institutions. In this context, the years in which these pieces of legislation were introduced is arguably more significant than the texts themselves. In postcolonial India, local states became the ultimate jurisdiction in the management of large temples, with a variety of legislation enacted.¹⁶ The hereditary caretaker took on an increasingly symbolic role with personal legitimacy, derived from feudal patriarchy, being replaced with abstract bureaucratic authority. The rotating officers of the Auqaf/SGPC have

neither religious nor feudal authority in the context of the shrine, but do have the backing of the state, which inevitably opens a space for dispute.

In a detailed analysis of the management of the Data Sahib shrine in Lahore, Strothmann makes the forceful affirmation that insertion into the bureaucratic structure of the state has not resulted in an impersonal relationship with the shrine. Rather, the devotional element was retained, as this employee remarked: 'officially I work for the Auqaf, but in reality I work for Data Sahib' (2016: 156). What is interesting is that there is no religious qualification required to work at the shrine as a caretaker or manager of the committee, and it is thus a job sought after within the general valuation of government jobs. As we illustrated in the case of Makki Shah and Ghore Shah, not all Auqaf employees are so wedded to the rituals that take place within a shrine. However, these paid staff, whilst debating the validity of the shrine amongst themselves, have little influence over the devotees, who remain wedded to the traditions of worship in all its unbound forms. The Auqaf personnel, in a similar manner to those employed as religious functionaries at the SGPC *gurdwaras*, play a role as intermediaries between organization and day-to-day running of the institutions, but they do not manifest ideological control in the way that a living *sant* or *pir* can, even where they emulate a deep relationship to the site. They are also subject to critique in relation to the fact that they are paid employees rather than volunteers doing *seva* or service for the *sant/pir*. The critique of *pirs* and *sants* that led to the nationalization and institutionalization of shrines in the first place echoes in relation to complaints about the elected and selected figures of the Auqaf and SGPC.

In the shift from patriarchal, high caste, feudal structures of hereditary or patronage-based shrine control to a modern, masculinist, classist bureaucratic hierarchy, the status and role of the new caretakers are worthy of investigation in the context of the critiques of 'corruption' and obeisance from religious norms laid at the *sant/pir*. In 1983, Gobinder Singh carried out a survey of members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, published in the book *Religion and Politics in the Punjab*. This group of elected officials, who represent the '*Sangat*' [congregation] in relation to the management of historic *gurdwaras*, can be seen at one level as SGPC paid employees who also represent the replacement of shrine caretakers and hereditary keepers. In this research, Singh found that those who were elected were male, turban-wearing, local village leaders (mostly from the dominant caste) and with good knowledge of Sikhism, but little knowledge of other faiths, and an overwhelming perception that their jobs were a service to the community (Singh 1986). In 2009 we conducted a phone survey of SGPC members following a

similar format to the previous survey. At that juncture, the committee had a one-third quota of women and in 1999 had a female president, Bibi Jagir Kaur. We were interested in the extent to which the committee, almost seventy years after regular elections had started, was taking the shape of broader electoral politics in that they were becoming hereditary. In other words, elected officials were coming from the same family over generations. Despite the involvement of women, we found that these were either the wives or daughters of previously elected or current members of the committee. We did not find that being in a family where a committee member was already elected made a difference at the time of election, but the majority of members were part of the Akali Dal party. Therefore, being affiliated to the political party had more of an influence than being part of the committee. We were also interested in their self-perception about religious knowledge or the connection, if any, between religious knowledge and religious authority. Members were asked about their knowledge of the *Ad Granth*. Whilst a minority regarded themselves as highly knowledgeable, the majority responded by saying that they did the *nitnem* (the daily compulsory prayers as laid out in the *Sikh Rehat Maryada*). This is a shift from knowing to doing, which was both disruptive of the assumption of knowledge but also a representation of the continuing distinction between demonstrating piety (through knowledge) and embodying it. We also asked about knowledge of other religions and the popular *qissa* (epic poetry) culture of Punjab. In response, only one person admitted to knowledge of Hinduism and Islam, whilst about one-third had read *Heer Ranjha*. Equally interesting was that more than one-third of the sample said they had no knowledge of Sikh history. Their role, they stated in the qualitative element of the interview, was to draw people into daily prayer and away from what were seen as social problems, such as drugs and gambling, rather than encouraging 'religious knowledge'. To some extent this is a continuity with the role of the *sant/pir* in which the religious knowledge of the *ulema/clergy* is contrasted with an enabling and devotion-oriented praxis. However the more significant element of this new arrangement is the breakdown in boundaries between *pirs/sants*, the religious establishment, politicians and state employees. The enchanted universe once broken has reformed in unpredictable contortions in which certainty in relation to a particular place in the religious ordering is difficult to establish.

In May 2018, a historic Ahmadi shrine Baitul Mubarik in Sialkot was attacked by a five-hundred-strong mob. The attack encapsulates a number of elements of the violence and vulnerability that deemed minorities' or excluded groups'

experience in a milieu in which religious certainty is bolstered by virulent nationalism. Members of the Ahmadi community had taken up renovation of the shrine and, in response, the Sialkot municipal authorities pronounced the structure 'illegal' and proceeded to dismantle it. The authorities were joined by hundreds of men who razed the site. This violent episode at Sialkot points to the extremities shown towards intolerance of heteropraxy and the looming threat of mob rule. The municipal authorities were the initial perpetrators but were supported by the followers of the cleric-turned political leader of the *Tehreek-i-Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah* (TLYRA) Maulana Khadim Hussain Rizvi. What is perhaps most piqued about Rizvi is the fact that he was an employee of the Auqaf board, a religious functionary who was assigned Friday prayer reading at the mosque attached to the Pir Makki shrine, referred to in previous chapters. Rizvi was dismissed from his government employment due to his support for Mumtaz Qadri, the assassin of the former Governor of the Punjab, Salman Taseer. The process by which a follower of the Qadri Sufi order, which is perceived as supportive of shrine culture, became the assassin of a governor also points to the militant ideology of Rizvi. With the credentials required for such a posting, a *Hafiz-e-Quran* (some who has memorised the *Quran*) Sheikh-ul-Hadith, and a follower of Imam Ahmed Raza Khan Bareilvi, the nineteenth-century founder of the Bareilvi sect, Rizvi has been amassing significant popular support around the issue of blasphemy. The slogan circulated by supporters of Rizvi is therefore not surprising, nor are violent attacks on Ahmadi sites when religious discourse, the state and bordering logics collude: '*Hum sab kuch bardasht kar sakte hain magar apne aqa SAW ki shaan mein adni si baat bhi bardasht nahin kar sakte*' (We can tolerate anything but we won't tolerate anything said against the Prophet). To some extent, this is the kind of virulent reading of devotion which closes down the wider discourses/spaces within which shrine cultures can operate (offering openness and tolerance) by creating socio-cultural conditions that bar inclusivity. Inexorably, the intrusion of modern forms of bureaucratic control has led not to a secularizing social in which the sacred and secular separate into private and public. Rather, the outcome is the opposite of the bureaucratic intention of stability, in that unpredictability and fragility, often erupting in violence, are the more unfortunate norms. The meeting point of the feudal and bureaucratic is in the application of violent summative justice, with no recourse to mitigation or social control, a situation in which those minoritized and those already rendered powerless (women and *dalits*), whilst formally protected by the law are in practice subjected to the harshest punishment.

Darbar: State

A *sarkar*, whether political or bureaucratic, operates within a particular spatial topography encapsulated in the Persian term, *darbar*, which would translate as 'court'. The court of the King and the court of the spiritual figure are combined in the term *darbar*. As alluded to in the previous chapter, a '*Darbar Sahib*' referring to a shrine is a generic appellation signifying a devotee's perspective on a sacred space. This does not depend on the status of land endowment or lineage in official religious terms, but rather indicates the empathy and respect of the worshipper. *Dargah*, *mazaar*, *samadhi* and *marhi*, which are all synonyms for graves that become shrines, for some, could also be a '*darbar*'. Even though our focus is on the way in which a site may grow to the point where it is considered a *darbar* in terms of landholdings, cash flow and devotee numbers, in everyday description and iteration, slippage between these domains is the norm rather than the exception. We are adding another dimension here as the *darbar* in an even looser rendering can refer to the colonial/postcolonial state, with the Governor/Prime minister taking the role of the *sarkar*. Thus, the close relationship between the court of a shrine and the court of the state might be viewed as problematic in relation to maintaining the shrine's ethical authenticity. However, as the previous section indicates, the shrine itself somehow transcends the flux and flow of the activities of its custodians. Equally, the income from endowments ensures the maintenance of large, marble-laden structures and an endless supply of *langar* (food for devotees). Devotee perceptions of a shrine as a site that embodies heterogeneity and, in some senses stands outside of the concerns of the court of the state, may be partially an empowering strategy for women and *dalits*, who are able to create a connection with a shrine but not with the state. The machinations between shrine and state then operate on a level which generates contradictions which remain outside of the purview of the devotees.

Darbar as the court of the king and of the *sant/pir* in the plains of Punjab evokes a potential tussle for power in which at times there is consent, as in the *salaam* (greeting) of Daud Bandegi to Akbar, or contention, as in the travels of Dara Shikoh in his seeking of shelter with Guru Har Rai. It is not by accident that King George V used the term '*Durbar*' in the previously mentioned gathering of princes and rulers that took place in Delhi in 1910. These accounts are not meant to evidence historical fact, a troubling empiricism curdling the historiography of the Punjab, which, even in its most reflective moments,

has only been able to sour the communal record. Rather, they indicate the extent to which the state and the shrine were demarcated sites that were contested and competing sources of authority.¹⁷ This is also a highly gendered interpretation of the state/*darbar* which, as reflected in the literature, can only locate women's presence and agency against the masculine authority of the *darbar*. In our analysis, women (and *dalits*) emerge as entities and actors who challenge the courtesan depiction of women's gendered subject position within shrine spaces, whilst recognizing this is the only site where women as subjects are allowed visibility (Oldenburg 1990).

By employing the term *darbar*, not only is the vernacular evoked, but an attempt to circumvent a closed and preconceived notion of the 'state' with its implications of knowable borders and material concern is countered with an emphasis on the layering of power and shifting dynamics of regulation. In the separation of the sacred and secular brought about by modernity, the shrine can articulate a moral order divorced from the mundane problems of governance, whereas the state, seen as a corrupt institution, can only make recourse to law and order for its ethics. The moral authority of the shrine '*Darbar*' always usurps the state '*Durbar*'¹⁸ through the role of the *pir/sant* as political orator.

Furthermore, the nation-state demands an exclusive and singular allegiance, controlled through legal and bureaucratic procedure, which are linked by courts and officials to display its power. Patronage by the state and prayers from the *pir/sant* maintain such a relationship which seeks to contain the potentiality of the shrine as an alternative and potentially disruptive site of authority. As Eaton (1984) illustrates in his long history of temple desecration in India, it was only when local rulers became rebellious that the destruction of temples and alternative *darbars* took place. Equally, the Mughal court gave land and endowments to non-Muslim shrines, as did Maharaja Ranjit Singh to a range of different shrines, as a way of buying patronage. The paradigmatic and contentious case of eighteenth-century Mughal ruler Aurangzeb, who destroyed the Vishvanath Temple at Benares yet maintained a very close relationship with the *jogis* of Jakhbar, illustrates the pragmatic, yet strategic and spiritual, nature of state–shrine relations.¹⁹ The tension between the temporal vicissitudes of politics and their parties stands in contrast to the sacralizing of space that the shrine also represents, which is based on a transcendence (theoretically) or elision (practically) of certain kinds of social boundaries. It is perhaps the consensus on the openness of the shrine that contains the potential conflict between political parties. The annual *Jor Mela* at Fategarh Sahib has tents and stages devoted to all of the political parties. Each

leader will have at some point paid respects at the *gurdwara* and other shrines in the area, and, depending on which political party they belong to, may visit Rauza Sharif, the tomb of Ahmed Sirhindi. A cacophony of political insults and tirades against each other's parties dominates the noise-scape of the *mela*, meanwhile the actual martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's four sons, ostensibly the rationale for the gathering, falls into obeisance. Devotees may contest this state of affairs but this is a marker of ambivalence rather than resistance.²⁰

In the Punjab context, this ambivalence of devotees is reflected in the hagiography of Chisti shrines as we have previously noted in the dialogue with the British colonial state. In contrast the Suharwardy Sufis who held power in Multan were rulers and spiritual figures. Certainly a shrine can gain iconic status through a close relationship with the rulers (*darbar*), such that power once contested can be incorporated and shared.²¹ British colonial rule by and large maintained the grants that Ranjit Singh had established (Murphy 2012). But it was not only the state that donated land to the shrines. The initial donations at Nankana Sahib came from the local landowners and the extent of the territory under a shrine's control, its *vilayet*, has a material and spiritual portion. At one level this denies the deep political imbrication of certain shrines with state practices and as sites of alternative authority to the state. The Harmandir (Golden Temple) is perhaps the paradigmatic example of this, which from the fifth Guru onwards has played a role of an alternative site of power to whatever state has come into power in Punjab. From the raids of Afghans in the eighteenth century through to the Blue Star operation in 1984, the Harmandir has been perceived as a site of alternative influence. The Akal Takht, which is directly opposite and facing the Harmandir in the Golden Temple complex, is translated as the 'immortal seat of authority.' Yet the complex is also home to the SGPC which, since its inception, has been largely aligned to political and state power at the regional and national level. Similarly, the Lal Masjid [Red Mosque] in Islamabad became a site of intense conflict with the Pakistani state in 2007 and followers of Maulana Abdullah, who had previously been closely aligned with the military government. The shift in these relationships is usually accompanied by violence, an example we previously alluded to of the forty deaths at the protests following the prosecution of Gurmeet Ram Rahim in 2017. These cases clearly demonstrate the loci of power to be found in shrines and their spiritual figures, which politicians seek to control. If one narrative about Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale is to be believed in which he was brought into politics by Gyani Zail Singh (at the behest of Indira Gandhi) and then, once established, turned back on these same leaders, then political

machination and its limits are well demonstrated (Juergensmeyer 1987). The attack on the Golden Temple in 1984 and the Red Mosque in 2007 generated a public outcry that had long-term ramifications in terms of a spiral of violence and unrest. Thus the manipulation of these sites by political actors inevitably results in the mobilization of a wider public, but not in ways that are always anticipated. However, it is perhaps inevitable that a masculinized, dominant caste power elite would be blind to a public of devotees that consists of women and *dalits* such that where there is protest at an outrage, it is met with a response of surprise.

Vilayet: Estate

Whilst a *darbar* symbolically represents the pinnacle of power, the term *vilayet*, or the domain over which the spiritual figure has jurisdiction, comes in the shape of land grants, shrine buildings and monetary endowments and is the more tangible and material aspect of the relationship between sacred and secular power. This is also most straightforward in terms of the direction of prerogative, as it is the *Jagirdar/Raja* or landowner/state that donates these to the religious figure or institution in return for which they receive legitimacy/blessings. For politicians, these acts of donation are in the anticipation that the *pir/sant* will convert devotees into voters. As a shrine develops, its political economy is an essential aspect of its ability to sustain itself and those who become attached to it. Whilst the hereditary principle is a useful rule of thumb for understanding how shrines produce continuity and reproducibility, it is often contested and constrained. If inheritance were the only route to gaining validity, social reproduction amongst dominant castes would thus make it impossible for *dalit*-led shrines to appear and the proliferation of shrines and the multiple numbers declaring themselves to be a *sant/pir* would be relatively small. To spread the extent of their *vilayet*, the spiritual figures themselves would appoint *khilafas/chailas* (deputies) to carry on their work in other towns and places or in their own locality. Eaton's (1984) study of the shrine of Baba Farid provides ample evidence of the way in which shrines affiliated to the *baba* proliferated. These were not controlled by the descendants, who would keep hold of the main burial site, but would hold some form of affinity that was not in relation to material transfers. The Sikh Guru's lineage provides a good example of disputation over property, as all of the Gurus established new centres away from their families up to the fifth Guru, when one family remained dominant in the lineage. Thus,

Guru Angad, the second Guru, established his centre at Khadur Sahib away from Kartarpur and Dera Baba Nanak, as these sites connected with Guru Nanak were under the sway of his sons. Even when Amritsar was founded by Guru Amar Das and maintained until the time of the fifth Guru, Arjan, subsequent Sikh Gurus founded other places to avoid the general conflict of the times as well as antagonism over lineage. Shrines become loci of succession disputes and, while many contemporary *sant* movements such as the Nanaksar tradition or even the Kericho Waale *sants*, adopt successors through showing piety and *seva*, this does not hinder disagreements. At their most benign position, this merely results in one member of the family establishing another shrine in another area, but at its worst can result in violence. The death of Jagjit Singh in 2012, the spiritual leader of the Namdharis, led to a split in the movement with two of his nephews at the centre of the controversy. As Jagjit Singh did not publicly name a successor, violent clashes between the two groups began almost immediately. In 2016, Chand Kaur, the wife of Jagjit Singh, was murdered because of her support for one of the nephews. Though this is a particularly violent example in that it involved the murder of an elderly female figure, the extent of the *vilayet* at stake is also important to consider. The spiritual node of the Namdharis is at Bhaini Sahib a complex of about ten thousand acres of land on the outskirts of Ludhiana which, even at conservative estimates, would be valued in the crores [tens of millions] of rupees.

Disputation over hereditary rights is an unintentional but predictable consequence of the accumulation of land and wealth in shrines and the role of the state in rivalry resolution has accelerated in the postcolonial scenario. The Noori Boorie shrine on the outskirts of Lahore became under strife immediately with the death of the sitting spiritual figure, Jamat Ali, in 2010. His relatives quickly took charge of the site but this was contested by those who said they were anointed as *sevadars* by the *pir* himself. Ultimately, the shrine was given to the Auqaf board in 2017 and the settlement in relation to a management committee and allocation of budget is an ongoing negotiation. The point is that institutions of the state are able to offer the legal mechanism of ‘*waqf*’ in Pakistan or ‘trusteeship’ in India to counter individual petitions to property. *Waqf* has a long history in Islamic jurisprudence and was radically reformed under colonial legislation, such that it essentially became a way of keeping property from division, under customary or Islamic provision (Kozlowski 1985). Indeed, the nationalization of shrines and other religious sites in 1950s Pakistan effectively brought a different form of *waqf*/trusteeship into realization, with the state taking property rights from families.

It is notoriously difficult to get an accurate measure of the income of the Punjab Auqaf department, with every year the high court accepting a petition to force the government to make the overall figures public.²² What is indisputable is that shrines under Auqaf control are run very much along the lines of revenue maximizing enterprises. The various functions of shrines are outsourced for contract, from the shoe keepers to the providers of car-parking spaces. These contracts are open to tender, like other government contracts, and therefore subject to the same systems of patronage. The income from cash boxes, i.e. donations of devotees, is by far the largest proportion of the Auqaf department's income, followed by land leases and commercial renting. Despite this, the income does not feature on the Punjab Assembly's budget, where the Auqaf is seen as an item of expenditure, rather than income, with an allocated budget in 2017 of 190 million rupees. This is despite an estimated income of over 1 billion rupees.²³ Importantly, the idea that bureaucracy would do away with corruption and property claims is completely eschewed by the number of court cases over rent and land that are ongoing. This report from the English language daily newspaper in Pakistan, *The Nation*, is illustrative:

As many as 7050 acres of agricultural land, 4533 houses and 822 shops of the Punjab Auqaf department are under illegal occupation of over 6,300 people. In addition to this, the department employees have set up seven illegal colonies on over 400 *kanals* [1/8th of Acre] in Lahore, provincial minister for Auqaf Syed Zaem Hussain Qadri told *The Nation* in an interview here yesterday.

23 January 2017²⁴

It is quite revealing that the respondent expressing this level of misuse of land and property was the politically elected member of the ruling party in Punjab, who is in charge of the department that is of concern.

Alongside a discourse of mismanagement is the expansion of activities, due to the sizeable income generated by the shrines. Hospitals, dispensaries, libraries and guest houses are all attached to these sacred sites (Kalra, Ibad and Purewal 2013). In the case of the SGPC, it funds schools, medical and engineering colleges as well as hospitals and other welfare resources. The target for all of this activity are those who are considered to be in need of support, in other words those devotees who are considered marginal. However, the gender/caste make-up of these institutions indicates that this is a paternalistic process in which the resources of devotees (via their donations at shrines) help to create a parallel state which is self-serving. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the SGPC which as a nominally independent entity functions as a 'state within a state'. Its budget in 2017 was 10 billion rupees, which is similar to the accounts of one of the larger districts (of the twenty-two) in East Punjab. A

monthly magazine, *Gurdwara Gazette*, published in Punjabi (Gurmukhi) with an English section, provides an account of income and expenditure at the *gurdwaras* under the SGPC control. In a section entitled '*Hisab Kitab*' (Accounts), the main sources of income are from what is called '*daswand*', which is literally 'a tenth share' and refers to the edict in the *Rehat Maryada* that Sikhs should give 10 per cent of their income for religious causes. This parallels the *zakaat* incumbency on Muslims, but is never enforced in the SGPC case. What is of similar interest is that the modern classifications, Sections 85 and 87, are attached to the word '*daswand*' in the account records. Sections 85 and 87 refer to the Sikh Gurdwaras Act that defines those *gurdwaras* that are under the direct control of the SGPC, and those that are affiliated. In both cases, cash donations form the majority of the income in these April 2017 accounts, totalling some 99 crore rupees for the month. In other words, devotees provide the majority of the funding to an organization with an annual budget for 2017–2018 of 1,106 crore rupees. However, the expenditure in no way reflects the gender/caste make-up of devotees with salaried staff and officers taking 115 crores, a further 33 crores for educational institutions, and 30 crore for the *langar* at the Golden Temple. Seventy-three crores was the expenditure for '*dharam parchar*', 'promotion of religion.'²⁵ Half of the budget is allocated to the shrines outside of Punjab.

As the Auqaf department is a part of the local state it has less autonomy in its operations; however, it also operates in a manner which differentiates on the grounds of gender/caste through the lens of economy. As Strothmaan points out: 'the overall policy of the department can thus be summarised as running the majority of the rural and smaller shrines with a minimum of effort, while concentrating on the development of a few larger shrines to tap the full economic development' (2016: 131). The pre-eminent shrine from this perspective is Data Sahib, as it generates income far in excess of other shrines. Social and political engagement with Data Sahib in the contemporary period is similar to the attention that Baba Farid's shrine attracted from the colonial historian, as the land endowment and therefore the income to the shrine was a major factor in its status. Concentration in urban areas and in particular high-profile shrines means that those smaller, rural shrines, which are more likely to provide a refuge for women and marginal people, are neglected by the Auqaf. The social welfare activities that the Auqaf undertake are also located close to these iconic sites and thus in urban areas, where, no doubt from our experiences at Mian Mir and Data Sahib, poor women gain access to services they might not afford. However, it is precisely in the urban context that shrines have become more constricted and segregated due to the forces of religious homogeneity that we have outlined.

The democratic structure of the SGPC ensures, even if only nominally, a distribution of funds, as each member mobilizes around the local *gurdwaras* in their area and thus resources and development become a parallel discourse to that of state elections. Perhaps of more consequence than this democratic function is the fact that the SGPC is internally organized along the same bureaucratic, hierarchical lines as the local state. Employees have a grading structure and jobs are advertised and subject to general stipulations and guidelines in relation to employment law. Here quotas in relation to caste and gender are designed to ensure some form of representation; however, due to restrictions on women performing *kirtan* (see Kalra 2015) the opportunities are restricted by religious edict. Similarly, the number of *dalits* applying for SGPC jobs has declined since the declaration of a Ravidass religion.²⁶

In general terms the payment system has come under criticism as it is seen to be in opposition to the idea of *seva* or offering free labour for the running of *gurdwaras*. This parallels arguments made in relation to the Auqaf board where religious bureaucracies increasingly secularize functions that were once in the domain of ritual or service (Malik 1996). In the Auqaf structure there are numerous personnel employed under a myriad of categories, most notably for 'religious' matters, which actually may mean being a caretaker, but this comes under this heading of religious functionary (Ibad 2019). It is perhaps for this reason that these employees have an ambivalent relationship to much of the actual rituals carried out in the shrines as we demonstrated in relation to Pir Makki Shah and Ghora Shah and as we have illustrated in relation to the Golden Temple complex (see Purewal and Kalra 2015).

For the large shrines, land endowments have diminished in their importance, largely due to corruption in the allocation of these assets by the state and by the increasing importance of cash donations. It is likely that pilgrimage as tourism probably counts for much greater income for shrines. For example, in the 1980s, Vaishno Devi was a relatively minor temple compared to those of other *devis* in the region: Naina Devi, Chintpurni and Jawalamukhi (Rohe 2001).²⁷ Its increase in revenue began due to pilgrimage visitation, which rose dramatically in the 2000s, primarily as part of a burgeoning in religious tourism (Gupta and Raina 2008). Similarly, Nankana Sahib still has land holdings of 15,000 acres, which is given under lease to local farmers, the income of which goes to the Evacuee Trust Board to be distributed by the Pakistani Sikh Gurdwaras Parbandhak Committee. This is separate from the Auqaf board as that deals with revenue from shrines and tenders for services, such as shoe storage, moneybox management and car parking. However, the income from the annual Baisakhi

and birth anniversary celebrations generally exceeds that generated from land income.²⁸ The increasing importance of devotees to the revenue of shrines indicates a shift from large landholders and wealthy patrons in political economy terms. However, the close role of the state in providing the model for organization of these institutions means that gender/caste relations are maintained in favour of the dominant masculine.

Notably, the Auqaf and the Evacuee Trust boards between them also manage religious sites of minorities in Pakistan. Alongside debates regarding financial mismanagement, there is also the question of how the state responds to religious identity in relation to *dalit* communities. The caretaker of the Nila Gumbad Valmiki Temple/*mandir* near Anarkali in Lahore presented the situation of the site's status vis-à-vis the Pakistan state's interaction with *dalit* communities:

Caretaker: On Valmik Street, where this shrine is, there is a lot of *jedaad* [property] worth around 50–60 lakhs. It all belongs to the shrine on Valmik Street. We are Valmikis and are tending to the shrine. But if someone doesn't call themselves Valmiki, then how can they claim to own the shrine and the *jedaad*? ... Christians living near to Valmik Street are making moves to the Auqaf Board to take over this shrine. So this site is disputed. In Pakistan Valmikis have had to identify as either Hindu or Christian. They were given a choice by the state to become either Hindu or Christian so they are closer to Christianity because of the state. Do you understand? That is where the impetus is.

Interview, Lahore 2008

The row over the site, which the caretaker narrates here, encapsulates a number of cross-cutting issues. Firstly, the position of *dalits* in Pakistan has been subject to much manoeuvring and manipulation through categories of the state, forefronting a politics of recognition as religious minorities. Secondly, the crucial role that money and property play in the management of shrines is also an aspect of what kinds of religious discourses become deemed as legitimate and which do not. Formal religious categories inculcate the minority discourse in ways which force identification through the prism of religion in order to stake claims or rights from the state.

Religion-boundary-making

Where *sarkar*, *darbar* and *vilayet* are able to indicate the fuzzy boundaries between shrine/spiritual figure and the state, they remain wedded to masculinist

and predominantly high caste accounts of these domains. Just as the Valmiki temple in Lahore presents a problem for classification of *dalit* identity, subaltern struggles for space in the spiritual landscape have inevitably ended up mimicking religious authority through a format of mobilization and practice that is determined by the legal and institutional architecture erected by the state. Even though our thesis thus far questions the logic of borders, it would be naïve to ignore how the modern state has reinforced the cycles of religion-making that found their conception in colonial modernity. The academic literature on religion in colonial and postcolonial Punjab has been preoccupied with boundary marking and making as we have discussed previously. Thus far in this chapter it is the way in which shrines and spiritual figures are captured in the state's ideological and functional embrace that has been of concern. In the previous chapter we demonstrated how gender and caste break some of these boundaries, and popular expression of spiritual life is a contagion that incessantly interrupts, creating new sites and spaces. Reconsidering some of these *sant*/shrine spaces in light of the overlapping domains of the state and the spiritual illuminates the obverse in the continual pressure for conformity.

In precolonial Punjab the *qazi* (judge) was a legitimate source for Hindus and Muslims to resolve trade disputes (Goswamy and Grewal 1967) and the *sharia* (Islamic law), vernacularized as *Shara*, connoted an amorphous impression of justice and equitability. As Malhotra (2017: 48) aptly articulates: 'few have discussed the ambiguity that may accrue around a word incorporated in a language – Punjabi – used daily by people from all religious communities.'²⁹ We have discussed the way in which language effaces religious identity in relation to devotee practice, but when it comes to the state, there is a clear bifurcation of religious figures and terminology: *qazi*, *sharia*, *kaafir* and *Quran*, relating to Islamic authority structures, just as *pandit*, *veda*, *dharma* and *shastras* refer to Brahminical authority. The analytical mistake arises in assuming that when a devotee subjugates their authority to one or the other for specific transactional purposes, be they wedding planning (Brahmin) or financial resolution (*qazi*), this is the basis of affiliation. As we have already seen, the ecumenical and eclectic form of devotee piety means that a reduction to a singular religious identity has in the Punjab context resulted in violence. The legal framework established by the colonial state necessitated creation of a singular identity, often containing contestation through court proceedings. While this nominally closes down the space for a wider membership of religious communities – as once you have proclaimed being a Hindu it excludes being a Muslim – it also opens up the space for an assertion from marginal groups, or from those who have

been excluded from the discourse of religion altogether. The medieval *pir/sant* poets may have articulated an anti-caste discourse, but it is the colonial state that provides a mechanism for its debate and the postcolonial state the stage for its enactment.

The nation-state uses the instrument of the law and quantitative methodologies to define and create religious communities. This can have violent consequences, as in the cases of the Ahmadis/Sikhs (see Nijhawan 2016) or lead to concessions in relationship to minority status, as with Christians/Jains. This role in 'definition-making' is closely tied to the tools of modernity with the Census and 'recognition' by institutions as crucial steps in the formation of 'religion'. This calculus also disaggregates the state from the spiritual in the integrated terms *sarkar*, *darbar* and *vilayet*. Perhaps the principal instrument in this formation is the Indian and Pakistani Censuses which record religion in normative terms. Even though these categories developed through a series of iterations in the colonial period, contestation about their applicability ceased after independence. Mobilization for recognition by Sikhs and the Ad Dharmis in the colonial period has been matched by the proliferation of campaigns for caste recognition. Conversely in Pakistan, identity claims have sought to narrow the meaning of being Muslim.³⁰ The modality of religious identity in this discursive plane requires an appellant and a receiver of the proclamation, in this case the state, which is in stark contrast to taking an oath or an allegiance [*baith*] to a particular *pir* or to have *lagan* (attachment) with a *sant*. The key difference is that the *baith/lagan* is not a necessarily exclusive or bounded relationship relying, as it does, on a mix of affect and belief. On the other hand, acknowledgement by the modern nation-state instantiates endless debate and attempts at closed definitions, something that has beleaguered Sikhs since the 1925 Sikh Gurdwaras Act and Ahmadis since the same time period.³¹ To operate within the law demands a bounded, defined entity that seeks to exclude multiple attachments.³²

Perhaps the best contemporary example of this *longue durée* can be found in the declaration of Ravidass Dharm, or the Ravidass religion, in 2010 by the Sachkhand Dera at Ballan, Jalandhar, Punjab. Ravidass was a sixteenth-century poet-*sant* from a *dalit* background, who made explicit his opposition to caste hierarchy. His writings were included in the *Ad Granth* that became the loci of Sikh ritual practice in the eighteenth century and thus the close association of his followers with Sikhism, to some extent adopting many of the *keshdhari* and *amritdhari* symbolism. However, having this close relationship did not mean that the stigma of being a *dalit* group left the Ravidassis, and

their temples/*gurdwaras/deras* were maintained separately from the Sikh dominant castes. What triggered the call for a new religion was the violence carried out in Vienna in 2010 in the hand of militant Sikhs who murdered Sant Ramanand and injured Sant Niranjana Dass, the deputy and head, respectively, of the *dera*. This incident led to rioting centred in Jalandhar, the home region of the *dera*, with two further deaths and hundreds injured. As illustrated in previous chapters, *dalit* assertion is often met with violent repercussions and the attack on the Dera Ballan *sants* should be viewed in this context. Here the violence also acts as the impetus to seal the boundary between the recognized Sikh religion and the unrecognized Ravidassism, with the former excluding the latter.³³ The declaration of religion by the *dera* follows a well-worn format of *globalatinization* where the shape of the new religion, in mimicking the Protestant Church, sets an identifiable religious text, rituals and clergy. For the Ravidass Dharam, Ballan was declared as the sacred hub of the religion and a sacred book (*'Amrit bani Guru Ravidass ji'*) installed as the foci of ritual practice (Takhar 2014).

The Ballan Ravidass Dera did not emerge solely because of the violent incident in Vienna. Rather it has been an axis of *dalit* mobilization in Punjab since the 1920s. The *Ad Dharmi* movement revolved around two *deras*: one at Chak Hakim, near Phagwara and the other at Ballan where the seeds of a new 'religion' or 'reformist movement' of '*dalit* assertion' were sown. The main instigators of this were Mangoo Ram, a returnee from the United States and a member of the infamous Ghadar Party.³⁴ He worked alongside other educated members of the *chamar* caste, who had benefitted from the colonial industrialization of the leather industry and demand for goods from the increasingly military-oriented Punjab economy (Jurgensmeyer 1982). This small, educated group recognized the necessity of scriptures to unify a new identity, *Ad Dharm* (translated as the 'original religion', literally righteous path), in line with the idea of *dalits* as the *aad*, the 'first people of the land'. A number of books were published at the time, but Sant Isher Dass of Nandgarh, another *dera* in the Doaba area, compiled the one that emerged in Jalandhar. This final text called the *Ad Prakash* (first light) consisted of Ravidass' poetry along with that of Valmiki, Kabir and others. In many ways, the *Ad Dharmi* movement did not survive the vicissitudes of Partition (Jurgensmeyer 1982), and the many changes that were wrought by it. However, its legacy can be seen in the way in which the Dera Ballan has taken up the mantle of declaring a new religion. This has not been taken up universally. The *Ad Prakash* was more inclusive in supporting a broad *dalit* identity, whereas the

Ballan Dera has compiled a book solely consisting of Ravidass' poetry, which excludes other groups, most notably Valmikis, who come into the 'Scheduled caste' list in Punjab. In our fieldwork, the President of the 'Ravidass Gurdwara' (as he called it) in village Bhagrana was quite critical of the call for a new religion:

Ram Singh: Who do these people think they are declaring us as non-Sikhs? We have our own Ravidass Gurdwara here and have lived with the Sikhs in this village. There is no tension and now this is going to cause trouble. Also all of the other schedule castes are not happy about this ... they all come to the Gurdwara and they do not see it as separate.

Interview, Fategarh 2010

Ram Singh is reading the call for a new religion by the Ballan Dera in terms of an exclusion, 'non-Sikh' rather than a petition for a new religious space. This interview took place in 2010 and so the aftermath of the Vienna killings was quite prominent. In subsequent visits to the village, located in the Malwa region, the announcement of the religion did not seem to have any material impact on the Ravidass gurdwara.³⁵ This lack of adoption of the new religion is, however, not the main point; rather, this case illustrates that the logic of religion-making relies on boundary marking, and this is often initiated by violent conflict and the outcome in terms of 'religious' markers takes a similar form to that set by colonial reformers. Such movements have also failed to break the pattern of bordering logics as women have been by and large marginalized from formally partaking in these discussions, despite being ever present at all other levels. This also does not, however, mean that every spiritual movement leads to the same religious formula.

If we consider the case of the Radhasoami, a group that again emerges out of the cradle of colonial modernity, they have not pursued the route of a high-profile political presence, nor of declaring a new faith. As outlined in Chapter 3, the movement was founded in the mid-nineteenth century and developed throughout the North of India in the twentieth century, despite a number of centres and a multitude of *sants*, it still retained one figure head. The Radhasoamis' ability to retain independence is partly due to their broad social base, but also because of a philosophy that eschews formal religion, whilst keeping its trappings. As the website of the Radhasoami Satsang Beas states: '[this] is a philosophical organization based on the spiritual teachings of all religions and dedicated to a course of inner development under the guidance of a spiritual teacher.'³⁶ Thus the maintenance of a religious identity is acceptable whilst being part of this

‘philosophical organization’. Perhaps more potently, the Radhasoami Sants for the most part maintain a distance from formal political organizations and the media. They are, however, courted and give audience to all of the main political organizations at the time of elections.³⁷ There is nothing in the organizational philosophy or its setup which would make it not attract the kind of controversy of one of its offshoots, the Dera of Gurmeet Ram Rahim at Sirsa, which was detailed in Chapter 3. It is rather the active avoidance of the kind of notoriety and publicity garnered by Gurmeet in maintaining balance and equanimity with different political forces that has enabled Radhasoami to flourish as an organization. Yet in this case the question of caste/gender and the carving out of a space in the hierarchical social is not manifest; thus Radhasoami is able to operate under the political radar. In some senses this mirrors the situation of the Ismalis or Aga Khanis, as they are sometimes colloquially referred to, in their relationship to Pakistani society.

Religion-boundary-breaking

If postcolonial India and Pakistan demonstrate anything, it is the fact that a project of modernity was never singular, and the object of ‘citizen’-making was potentially not only *not* meant for women and *dalits* but also hinged on an exclusionary principle of hierarchy, authority and leadership.³⁸ By taking control of shrines, the Indian and Pakistani states may have been interested only in taking on control of a competitor elite (spiritual leaders), which in itself may have been imaginary given how they divided along Hindu and Muslim nationalized fault lines during Partition. The institutions and actions of the modern bureaucratic state have a tendency towards ‘converting’ the multitude to singular religious identity. Whether in terms of a secular or religious ideology, the political theology of the state creates the scaffold in which religious figures and their shrines operate.³⁹ Just as declaration of religion is a mode of placing a community into a response with the state, so registering a shrine under the various legal acts of the state related to trusts is a way of taking it out of the hands of a spiritual figure.⁴⁰

In our fieldwork, the shrines of Murad Shah and Vicky Saain on the outskirts of the town of Nakodar (population around 37,000, which lies 25 kilometres from Jalandhar and 50 kilometres from Ludhiana) have become landmarks in the regional spiritual geography. In the heart of the Doaba region, a *mandi* [market] town, Nakodar is the fulcrum of rural culture and a rapidly urbanizing

political economy. Ostensibly these are sites of boundary breaking and are attractive to women and *dalit* devotees. Yet the rapid growth of these shrines has led to both of them being incorporated into trusts, following the deaths of the spiritual leaders. We will narrate these spaces with the help of Bholla, a *dalit* respondent who was a *mirasi* (musician) attached to the spiritual figure who founded the site. Of primary interest is that the founder of the shrine was from a family of Khatri Bhallas, a business family that owned one-sixth of the land of Nakodar according to the District Gazetteer of Jalandhar (1935). Notably, Nakodar *tehsil* (administrative demarcation) was a Muslim majority area before Partition, which provides a context for the framing of what is now called a 'Sufi shrine'. Indeed, Murad Shah, who was born before Partition with the name Vidyasagar Bhalla, worked in Delhi for the Electricity Board when he took on '*faqiri*' (ascetic garb); indeed, the Bhalla family had the honorific '*zaildar*' attached to them, which was a colonial administrative term for the head of a collection, *zail*, of villages.

Bholla: When he told his family he had resigned from his job, they were angry: such a big job, so much money, you a *Zaildar* ... They came because of Sarkar Shere Shah, who was from Pakistan, where the big *dera* is. They had a big resting place there with Baba Murad Shah and when he had given his resignation from the job, they called him to their *dera*.

Interview, Nakodar 2014

This account is extended and narrativized on the website⁴¹ devoted to Murad Shah, which is run by the management committee that took over the shrine after the death of the *pir/sant*. It narrates how the young Vidyasagar in his twenties fell under the influence of Shere Shah, who was by all accounts a *faqir* who lived on the outskirts of the town on land owned by the Bhalla family and where there now stands the shrine to Murad Shah. This is said to have been sometime in the 1950s. What is of note in Bholla's account and also repeated on the website is the way in which Pakistan becomes the code for Muslim, now spatially distant rather than ritually, echoing Amin's critique of the relationship between popular remembrance and standardized accounts of history, 'in which a generalized Hindu/Musalman past is frequently fabricated in accounts other than the overtly historical' (2005). To some extent, this sidesteps the more important narration in which a religious account of piety and purity plays to create authenticity. The website narration creates an image of Murad Shah as one of devotion and piety within a Punjabi tradition of spirituality, for example: 'Baba Murad Shah ji always used to read the holy book *Heer* and keeps on

remembering his Master ... he always walked barefooted'. It is clear that the space left by departing Muslim *pirs* and *faqirs* was taken up by *dalits* as indicated in the previous chapter. A high caste case such as this indicates a wider empathy with the shrine culture, but in the chaste narrativization provided here also conversely removes the popular base. Returning to Bholla's account provides an alternative narrative:

There was a *jat* woman from Ladhraan [nearby village]. She was so attached [to Murad Shah]. Every Thursday she should come and sweep and give a donation. Murad Shah used to drink a lot [of alcohol] and she would give him a drink and a donation – Thursday to Thursday from Ladhraan Then *Data* [Murad Shah] would go rent a rickshaw, and take *qawwals* (musicians) with him as well as 5–7 dogs and 5–7 goats in his entourage. They would get to Ladhraan and go to that woman's house, then he would say: *Wah bey sah*, make some special moon-shine for me and you must make it yourself and give it as *prashad* [food offering] to your *Data*. Then the *qawwali* would start, people would start joining in, start giving money and they would sit for a long time ... then he died and then Laadi Shah Sarkar came.

Interview, Nakodar 2014

By presenting these two views on Murad Shah, our intention is not to discredit him in some modernist exposé, but rather to pitch the views of the management committee who have narrated the life story on the website against those of this devotee who has a long-standing relationship with the shrine and the *pir/sant*. In both cases, veneration is not at stake, but in one the terms are set by what is considered the actions of a 'religious' or pious figure and in the other the relationship is based on material and spiritual formations, with little consideration for formal notions of the religious. In 1960, Murad Shah died and the hagiography relates how the *gadhi* (spiritual inheritance) passed to his nephew Laadi Shah, who was only fourteen at the time. The development of the shrine complex at Nakodar, which is quite substantive, spread over an acre of land with a number of tombs and domes housing the graves of Murad Shah and Laddhi Shah started in earnest only in the twentieth century. It was Laadi Shah who oversaw this dramatic rise in popularity, as narrated by Bholla:

When we met Laadi Shah he was in his youth, such muscles, such a face, such a moustache ... when we saw him we touched his feet and told him we were *mirasis* [musician caste], he took us to the *darbar*, at that time it was not like

this, it was very simple, just a small elevation, a *kikkar* tree and a little shrine and mosque. We would sit there and sing *qawwali*. There was a huge pot of tea, we did not know where it came from but there was always tea available. Forty or fifty cups would come from it; the tea never ended. We used to get 5–10 Rs, everyday, he became close to our families. My elder brother was a wrestler and he set up a ring for him and fed him *ghee*. He would tell his followers to send us grain. He was truly an *avtar* [incarnation of God] and we did not even know it.

Interview, Nakodar 2014

The close relationship of musicians to *pirs/sants* has a long and complex history (see Kalra 2015). This narrative is fairly normative and is amusingly punctuated by a running story of tea closely related to miraculous events:

Bholla: The first *mela* was in Madali (10km from Nakodar) at the *darbar* of Ali Ahmed Sarkar. Laadi Shah would go there. One night there was a storm and his followers wanted to drink tea. He put his feet forward and made them into an oven, lit a fire and gave his followers tea. Think about it. What a great being he was. Ali Ahmed is not from this time. It is from the time of Pakistan. Even today the *mela* lasts for 8 days there.

Interview, Nakodar 2014

The growth of the shrine in Nakodar is part of a general revival in the Doaba region of ‘Muslim’ shrines, ironically without Muslims. Though Murad Shah is said to have ‘converted’, the style of *faqiri* adopted is not one that registers in relation to a singular religious category. Indeed, Bholla offered a philosophy centred on the family he was so closely acquainted with:

There is one *faqiri* of the book, one who is sent, one that always looks behind, one that lies down like a donkey. There are four types of *faqiri*. I will explain: One is the *faqiri* that is written in your fate, that is of Murad Shah. The other is of transformation, where you change your clothes, and you put on green or red clothes. The other is where you keep on looking behind you, where you take *bhang* and eat *dode* [narcotic], pick up a bowl and start wandering, and you always check who is following. One is when you lie down like a donkey after eating food from one house and then another and you eat so much that all you are good for is to lie down. How will you reach God? This is real *Faqiri*, when you leave your wealth, leave the houses, the land and then come to the path These people are givers not takers. This is the true *Faqiri* that comes from fate.

The close affiliation of Bholla to the shrine is also reflected in the rise of the shrine to prominence and his criticism of its takeover by a management committee on the death of Laadi Shah in 2008. The shrine itself had grown at an exponential rate: Bholla's wife, who interjected in the interview, affirmed: 'Nakodar is Makka Medina now', as a way of emphasizing the number of devotees who attend the shrine and perhaps more astutely the involvement of the local state. Upon the death of Laadi Shah in 2008, the renowned Punjabi folk singer Gurdas Maan set up a management committee and, with other local dignitaries, now manages the shrine. Whilst it was a group of individuals who took over the shrine, they are legally empowered to do so by state legislation. However, the justification is framed entirely within the hereditary bequeathment narrative in the hagiography given on the shrine's website:

Gurdas Maan ji became the most favourite disciple of Sai ji. In 2006 Sai ji took off his *pagri* (turban) at the fair and placed it on the head of Gurdas Maan ji. To give the *pagri* (turban/inheritance) thus to the *mureed* (disciple) means that the *guru* is offering his all to his disciple and is making him his very own for all times to come.

In our interview, Bholla's wife responded quite sharply to Gurdas Maan's role in the shrine:

Mirasan: He is not a *faqir*. There is no one sat on the *gadhi*. Who can take that power. Only the son of a lion can sit there.

Bholla: Those who are sat here (at Murad Shah) they are in the wrong. This is Vicky Saain's. They [Gurdas Maan and the committee] are making this into a *Mandir* [pointing to the shrine].

Interview, Nakodar 2014

This opposition to the institutionalization of the shrine and its removal from the hereditary spiritual figures echoes the institutionalization of *gurdwaras* that took place from 1925 onwards. In that process, *dalit* communities of musicians were excluded from the Golden Temple and other Sikh sites on the basis that they should either become *Amritdhari* Sikhs or resign from their duties at the shrine (see Kalra 2015). Bholla's contemporary lament of the takeover of Murad Shah similarly relates to a shift in the system of patronage in which his family's role diminished. For Bholla, the lack of a family member meant a loss of their importance in the shrine and ultimately to his own descent into alcoholism.

Yet the incorporation of the shrine into institutional religion-making was not, as is often the case, without contestation from the Bholla family. While Murad

Shah and Laadi Shah did not have offspring, Vicky Saain was Laadi Shah's elder brother's son. His relationship with his uncle was fairly fraught as explained by Bholla:

Well it's like this. Laadi Shah built this shrine and was discouraging Vicky Saain from sitting there. He would say: 'Boy this *faqiri* is not for you'. But he [Vicky] would not stop. Then he would disappear for days at a time and Gabbar Singh *Thanedar* would have to go and find him. Then one time, Vicky Saain organised his own *mela* and we had to go with *Data* and beat some sense into them, asking why were they doing this?

(Interview, Nakodar 2014)

Vicky Saain set up his own shrine in a field just off the outer ring road of Nakodar. When we visited in 2010, the small complex, adorned with lions, had a myriad of pictures and ornaments with references to Murad Shah, but at the centre was Vicky himself. In person and in his pictures, he was shown smoking a cigarette as he greets devotees. This shrine was said to be visited by local *dalit* communities and Vicky made no secret that he was the actual inheritor of the Murad Shah *gadhi*. During our fieldwork in 2014, Vicky Saain was alive and thus the contestations over entitlement were also very much alive in Nakodar (see Figure 7).



Figure 7 Inside the shrine of Vicky Saain in Nakodar.

Photo courtesy of authors

The recurring official narrative was of the conflicting positions between inheritance of legitimacy through bloodline and inheritance of authority through official status. Thus, the management committee's refusal to recognize Vicky Saain as the *sarkar* and inheritor of the *gadhi* offers a contemporary example of how material and spiritual authority of a *darbar* is subject to modern technologies of governance, audits and control which, when required, can discipline the *darbar* by removing elements of spiritual power which do not conform to the *shrine's* official status.

The perspective of a trinket seller outside of the Murad Shah shrine shows how rituals circulate within narratives of staking claims. In describing the protocol of the beginning of the *mela* each year since Laadi Shah's death, she orates the careful negotiation of recognition of bloodline (Vicky Saain) with the new bureaucratized status of the *darbar* (Murad Shah shrine), voiced by devotees:

First the *prashad* goes there (Vicky Saain's), from 'home'. That's how it begins. Then, it comes here (Murad Shah). The *mela* happens every year at both places. Then the flag is raised here. Several years ago, Vicky started holding the *mela* there. There never used to be a *mela* until after Laadi Shah passed away ... People believe in both of these places ... they feel the power in the shrine of Baba Murad Shah but many also believe that his living descendants carry the real spiritual power.

This example inverts the colonial/postcolonial notion of the 'invention of tradition' by considering how customs and rituals are not only continually subject to change but also that agency within these changes is not always identifiable as one of imposition from above. *Mirasis*, vendors and devotees express and exert influence through the shaping of popular discourse, obeisance and followings. It may, therefore, not seem surprising that after Vicky Saain's death in February 2018, the shrine has taken on much larger proportions concentrated around Vicky's tomb. While it is not clear whether a living *pir/sant* will take Vicky's place in the future, a committee has already been formed by his devotees to manage this site. Thus, the vying for and posturing over claims of spiritual power continue beyond the life of the living figure, pointedly displaying the pervading forces of institutionalization, authority and boundary-making, alongside incursions of boundary-breaking.

Synopsis

Plotting a careful journey through the minefield of state/religion relations in Punjab demands a starting point that does not simply reproduce normative classificatory regimes. Not solely as an academic exercise, but one in which subverting and morphing of religion, chopping the edifice with the axe of gender and the spear of caste, produces incoherence, but also insight. This is a necessary corrective to the violent exclusions and oppressive regimes of control: our perspective may not alter social relations but certainly should reveal alternative narratives and open up space for contestation. Breaking with the convention of teleological historiography, our framing of the analysis with the terms *darbar*, *sarkar* and *vilayet* attempts to evoke and give shape to a concatenation of those domains that colonial institutions and postcolonial authority sought to separate. Though we have described the techniques of separation and singularity, as procedure, it is the borders between the sacred and secular being undone and remade into new configurations and representations that is key. Rather than separate domains, the South Asian version enacts a knowing tampering with the boundaries of 'sacred' and 'secular', such that the rationalism of the bureaucratic state is morphed in order to account for miracles, spirits and magic. Partially this is incorporation but equally a harnessing of the power of the spiritual for manifest material gain and influence.

At the margins, this chapter has almost entirely been concerned with the masculine domain, the lure of power entrances and captures even those groups that have been historically excluded from the narrative of religion. *Dalit* quests for identity recognition in the domain of the religious are not new, but have found greater space in India as a route out of caste hierarchy. Women's voices in this state/religion matrix are mute: the gender line seems impervious to religion-making and while there is a growing literature on women as militant faith actors, there is little evidence of formal participation as priests or *ulema*. Even in the declaration of the new Ravidass religion no specific space was given to the issue of gender, whilst caste equality pervaded the narrative. Thus, the continuities from the coalesced domain of the sacred and secular to the creation of singular religious identity remain firmly within the patriarchal framing of power.



Devotion, hegemony and resistance at the margins

Introduction

A friend of ours, who had been active in leftist circles in Pakistan during the period of General Zia's rule, tells a joke in Punjabi that frames his own atheism:¹

When Karl Marx dies, the Angel *Gibrail* (Gabriel) is puzzled as to whether he should be sent to heaven or hell, so he asks God what to do. God says 'let him come and talk to me', so Marx is led into an audience with God who is sat high up on his throne. Gabriel leaves the two talking. A few hours pass and Gabriel is worried, so he opens a crack in the door to God's chamber to observe a strange scene, in which God and Marx are sitting on the floor opposite each other and chatting. Suddenly, God says: Don't stand there, Comrade *Gibrail*, come and join us!

The joke in many ways, when told, is pitched to the ears of left-leaning rationalists who find any serious discussion of religion sacrilegious. This humour is also cognizant of the tides of religiosity or religious thinking swaying in synchronistic tandem with materialist analyses of the conditions and injustices of society. Through our own interactions in the UK with our Punjabi comrades, we have been part of heated debates and discussions about whether or not religion should be discussed at all in political discourse. While this is a perennial issue beyond the shelf life of this book, our reading of those discussions, now through a gender/caste frame, would reflect how they were almost always all-male gatherings with the hegemony of a distinct dominant-caste political-leadership setting the agenda. In a parallel universe of political debate on religion, the women against fundamentalism (WAF) agenda, which took shape in the early 1990s after the Rushdie affair, similarly saw direct opposition to the rise of conservative and 'fundamentalist' religion. Couched in an emergent feminist analysis of the oppressive nature of organized religion deemed to control, oppress and dupe women into submission, WAF articulated much of the rationale secularism of the masculinist, dominant caste communists. The Iranian Revolution, the

Christian right in America and RSS women in India were all given as cases in point to highlight how conservative religious movements are inherently patriarchal in nature and utilize the language and ideologies of belief and reform to attract men and women away from liberal notions of equality and rights. These positions argue that religion can be nothing but false consciousness which, in a similar vein, denies agency to devotees for how they interpret the terms upon which they enter into the terrain of the sacred. Ours is not a wholesale critique of Marxism or feminism since sub-strands from within these traditions which centre agency in the subaltern classes, marginal women, *dalit* labour and inform our own analysis. If the Goddess of communism cannot come down from the throne and sit with the subaltern, then laughter at our opening eponym rings hollow.

A feminist, Gramscian Marxism conscious of gender, class and caste oppression, provides immense possibilities to break the aforementioned closures in bringing hegemony, resistance and agency into focus. Gramsci's (1971) discussion of popular culture, class struggle, and dominant class ideology shaped his notion of the 'war position' in which ... 'popular culture' or 'popular religion' were a part of 'life and the world' and, as such, could be a source of conflict with official conceptions of the social (326). Our study has utilized Gramsci's 'methodological criteria' rather explicitly in his schema for the study of subalternity through historical and contemporary dynamics of coercion and consent. He argued that such a methodology needs to analyse the configurations of hegemony across leadership, ideological and organizational resources, and the class formation of social groups.² These debates are implicit to some of the theoretical and conceptual points which we outlined in Chapter 2. What we note, however, is the closures between positions and an inability for such positions to refine themselves in order to keep up with the ravages of capitalism, which has arguably made religion the elephant in a shrinking room. Our empirical chapters are grafted onto this methodology in order to enable a critical understanding of spiritual figures, the state, shrines and 'the people' or devotees. In our analysis these configurations of hegemony highlighted so many examples of resistance and agency in which the 'relation of forces' shaped each context.

If popular and informal heteropraxy can be viewed as an act of resistance to streamlining and institutionalization, then there are a number of boundaries that are broken in the process. A significant element of this is the porous borders between *pirs/sants*, the religious establishment, politicians and state employees, all of whom appear to be a part of the dominant classes' ideological machinery. On the other hand, the enchanted universe, even as an idea or mythical

construct, once fractured by the forces of institutionalization, has reformed in unpredictable contortions in relation to corresponding positions in the religious ordering, which are often difficult to decipher. Meandering through the maze of popular religion, crossing national borders and traversing historical time, there seems little possibility of a summary or conclusion to this book. Our intention therefore is to revisit our three main conceptual innovations and to reiterate the way in which gender/caste operates as a tool of critique in relation to religious boundaries across India and Pakistan. Indeed, our central argument demonstrates the way in which gender/caste frames the creation and dissolution of religious boundaries. Brahminism, patriarchy and neoliberal capitalism form an unholy alliance in contemporary South Asia which finds its most potent expression in Hindutva.

Religion-making at large

Just as non-Western religion surprises the neoliberal, capitalist comfort zones in the West, it provides alibis for postcolonial elites to embrace a localized, autochthonous modernity, deftly avoiding the imbrication of colonialism that spreads hydra-like into the present. Violence and death are symbiotic of this relationship, and the body count that knocks on the door of piety and ritual should not be underestimated by the refrain 'God's will'. In South Asia, the issue of religion is over-determined, yet under-explored. In India in particular, it is as if the euphoria of independence, naming, constitutional framing and elite commitment to secularism would combine with the social hyper-diversity to render any kind of unifying project of religion impossible. The virulent power of Hindutva reflects a gross underestimation of religion-making (colonial) modernity. Indeed, it is neoliberalism in the wake of the 1990s economic dismantling of a developmental state (again mostly in name) which has allowed for the creation of the 'Hindu' political subject, which enthusiastically voted for the BJP in the 2014 and 2019 elections. The overwhelming tide that the BJP ran on was, of course, for a number of factors, but one that is underestimated, especially by commentators seeking simple socio-economic explanations, is the emergence of a Hindu subject, out of those who would previously espouse caste or linguistic or even regional identity (Rajagopal 2016; Dhawan 2017; Chadha 2018).

Though the tightening attempts to close down the space and possibilities for ambiguity between political Hinduism/Islam and actual lived practices and less bordered religious traditions are ubiquitous, our analytical frame views these

as points on a continuum. Our view of this continuum developed even further clarity after the 2014 Indian election about which liberal, secularists commented on the landslide victory of the BJP as an aberration rather than an outcome of centralizing hegemonic patterns of politics and religion. Indeed, the results of the 2019 election confirm the conflation of India with Hindu. From mainstream Hindu to Hindutva or from Sunni Islam to Islamism, a spectrum can be drawn when the formation of religious boundaries is the objective. If these are taken as discrete categories, the 'true' religion is tolerant and peaceful while the aberration is fundamentalist and violent. Thus, there is a bifurcation of fundamentalist/Hindutva/Takfiri on one end, and Sufi/Sant/Bhagat on the other.³ This, however, also stands as a metonym for a number of other, perhaps equally troubling, dichotomies such as those between modernity (fundamentalist) and tradition (shrine devotee), the individual (direct relationship with god) and the collective (mediated through shrine). When these are put on a sliding scale, rather than as opposites, there are many indeterminate points in the analysis. Our attempt has been to try and excavate those points with the tools of gender and caste. However, by placing extreme, mainstream and margin onto a sliding scale we are also alert to the direction of the vector.

The figure of the *Jogi/Yogi* has recurred in our narrative to symbolize marginality and, to some extent, the dispossessed crossing East and West Punjab as *malang* and Nath. Crucially these ascetics were rejected by the reformist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj were scathing about what they saw as 'cult' and 'superstitious' practice in contrast to their modernizing Hindu religion (Mayaram 2016). Through the twentieth century the Nath and the Aghori have almost dwindled to non-existence in East Punjab, whilst they have transformed into *jogis* in the West. This is perhaps the last group which would be candidates for the Hindutva agenda. Nonetheless, Yogi Adityanath, a politician in Uttar Pradesh since the late 1990s who has been the Chief Minister of the state since 2017, presents a chilling example of the process of modernization of religion in South Asia. Adityanath is the head of a Nath monastery, wears orange clothes and is an ascetic in terms of renunciation of a householder life. In parallel, his extreme views on Muslims are chilling, as this quote demonstrates: 'if [Muslims] kill one Hindu man, then we will kill 100 Muslim men.'⁴ These kinds of views are not uncommon amongst certain Islamist sects but are certainly not prevalent amongst those affiliated to the *malamati* or *malang* traditions previously talked about. There is, of course, a specific history to the emergence of Adityanath which relates back to the razing of the Ayodhya Mosque in 1992 and the

role that his monastery played in the initial disputation of the site, just after Partition (Jaffrelot 2013). More pertinently, Adityanath follows the same route of exclusion and control as the religious reformers that excluded Nath. Here, the target is Muslims, but this is profoundly gendered, as it is women's bodies that are supposedly in need of protecting and secluding. In another speech, Adityanath said Hindus should 'take' a hundred Muslim women for every Hindu woman 'taken' by a Muslim (Jaffrelot 2017: 59). Nor can it be ignored that Adityanath is from a high caste, taking on his present name when he joined the Goraknath monastery in Gorakhpur. Too much emphasis is placed on Adityanath as an individual aberration within the Indian polity, whereas, for us, his utterances clearly demonstrate how no space or tradition in contemporary South Asia is impervious to violent boundary-marking processes.

Academic writing has been preoccupied with how the colonial context created the religious categories of Sikh, Muslim and Hindu. However, their continuity, maintenance and enhancement into the twenty-first century have not been so well explored. Irruptions of colonial caricature are replete and consistent, from Modi's enunciations of Hindu past glory to the multiple hyper-masculine statues to various figures from Sikh history dotted across the Punjab countryside. The picture should be simpler in Pakistan, where religion is enshrined in the constitution. However, this has not settled matters, but rather encouraged an ever-narrowing definition of who a true Muslim is, a debate which begins in the nineteenth century but finds its way into the Pakistani constitution in 1972 with the exclusion of the Ahmadi population. This act opens the way for an endless set of exclusions to prove who is and who is not a pure and pious Muslim. Along the way, Shia's, Sufis and almost all Sunnis are open to being called Takfiri (apostates) and subject to random violence, thus the ever-tightening circle gives way to boundaries across which grenades are thrown and justification becomes sanctified.

Alongside political enunciation, the bureaucratic power of the postcolonial state has seeped into all walks of life, and even in its monstrousness and dysfunctionality has in some way intervened in the space of the religious, such that the parallel sphere of piety, in which hegemonic and dominant ideological formations are sidestepped, sometimes subverted, but somehow maintained, has in itself become marginal. The incorporation and narrativizing of almost every shrine based activity within a scaffold of proper and correct conduct or *shirk*/blasphemy/fraud have led to a patrolling of religious boundaries that the twentieth-century reformists could only have dreamt of. The nationalization of major shrines under the SGPC, Auqaf and local state arrangements (primarily

in India, though the Auqaf also comes under regional state control in Pakistan) has led to unprecedented re-writing of hagiographies, normativization of sacred spaces through Islamic architecture in West Punjab, and through the removal of sacred objects or their subservient disguised placement behind a copy of the *Ad Granth*.

Virtual border crossing

Shrines, spiritual figures and devotees are the main characters in this book and in our incessant pursuit of boundary morphing and breaking, the necessity of asserting practice and materiality has recurred. Overcoming borders requires a narrative which constructs them in the first place, makes them perhaps larger than they are, and augments their facticity to magnify the fissures. The fall of the Soviet Union led to arguments in the 1990s about the waning of the nation-state borders and the emergence of a unipolar, liberal democratic world. The events of 9/11 and the 'clash of civilizations' thesis ensured that borders became more heavily patrolled and policed than at any time during the 'Cold War'. Parallel to these securitized border controls, the digital revolution enhanced the ability of the state to monitor, patrol and discipline citizens, whilst allowing the free-market access to knowledge that made us all consumers. Amidst these seismic changes, the Indian and Pakistani states built an electric fence along their border, access spy satellites to monitor smuggling and built a free port at the Wagah border to ensure the flow of goods, but not of humans. One of the only routes to traverse this border is to apply for a pilgrimage visa in which Sikhs from India can visit Nankana Sahib; Ahmadis can visit Qadian; Pakistani *Chistis* can visit Ajmer Sharif in India; Indian *Chistis* can visit Baba Farid's tomb in Pakpattan; Hindus can visit the Katas Raj temples in Putohar, etc. These are visas for groups and are valid only for the city/town where the shrine is located and pilgrims are required to register their arrival at the local police station. Such barriers to pilgrimage are for many a proportionate price for the pleasure of the visitation. Indeed, the struggle for the *darshan/barkha* enhances its potency.

Given these circumstances the argument that 'freedom' and 'mobility' have been enhanced by the internet and social media may be met by incredulity. While there is a theoretical convergence between those who question the closed borders of religion from a postcolonial perspective and the perceived freedom of movement enabled by digital technologies, this has to be tempered by the

political hostility between India and Pakistan. In one of our visits to Panja Sahib, an historic *gurdwara* near Islamabad, and renowned for a stone bearing the reputed hand mark of Guru Nanak, we were accompanied by a young history lecturer, whose family had become Muslims in the twentieth century and had never been to the shrine. As we entered the complex, he used a social media application to video call his friend in Chandigarh to give him 'darshan' of the *gurdwara*. The squeals of joy and repetition of 'Waheguru' coming through the mobile phone as we wandered around was indicative of a border crossing of a different type from viewing one of the many video documentaries made about Panja Sahib. This took place in 2017, in the era of digital communication and social media which, in its current pervasiveness, entered Punjab only after our intense fieldwork period, though even at that time the ability to book an *Akhand Path* (continuous reading of the *Ad Granth*, usually taking around 60 hours) via credit card and online at one of the iconic shrines was available.⁵

To some extent our narrative account of Punjabi spirituality resonates with those who wish to make a distinction between religion online and online religions (Helland 2000). Where the former refers to bringing the representation of shrines and rituals to the digital format, the latter considerably alters the framing of religion. For Helland this is because 'people can act with unrestricted freedom and a high level of interactivity, a feature facilitated by the fact of being on the Internet' (Helland 2005: 1). From our perspective the internet merely enhances interactivity as devotees' role in the creation of spiritual figures and shrines already indicates an intense level of synergy. Rather, bringing religion online in the South Asian context enhances pilgrimage opportunities, for example websites such as 'Blessings on the Net' act as travel agents to organize physical tours of temples as well as the option of having a prayer said in the name of the payee (Han and Nasir 2015). Therefore, the meaningfulness of the virtual ritual is equivalent to that of being there in person, because it is the devotee who becomes central to making that meaning. So while it is germane to recognize that the hundreds and thousands of people using net services in India to perform *puja* are as committed to their devotional practice as those who make physical pilgrimages, this is only distinctive in relation to new technology if an *a priori* notion of 'proper' religious conduct is fore-fronted. In other words, the practice of *puja* at a shrine is considered authentic because of the power of the shrine, whereas if the devotee is fore-fronted, then whether material or virtual meaning is derived from the same source.

Individual expression finds its zenith in the multimedia virtual landscape in which the self can be fashioned multiply and variously (Turkle 2011). The

growing literature on religion online offers parallels to our perspective on devotee-centred practices. For example, Heidi Campbell (2010) remarks on how religious communities utilize technologies in ways which are 'active, creative and socially situated' (131), adapting the new tools to suit their needs. However, alongside much of this literature, the starting point is that the religious community is stable and able to adapt to newness without conventions and boundaries being challenged. Where devotees make religion in 'active and creative' ways, the adaptation of technology is not something of an addition to a stable form. Rather it reshapes practices and reimagines meanings of an already interactive and socially creative form. Building a shrine from bricks or through the use of web coding as acts of religion-making shares a common locus in the figure of the individual. Perhaps the collectivity of devotion as a social practice still remains to be theorized in the hyper-individuated world of social media.

The subaltern speaks

In the highly politicized religious terrain of contemporary India and Pakistan, autonomous spaces, alternative forms of piety, overlapping religious identities and heteropraxy appear to be giving way to formal, institutionalized and hegemonic forces. The options to choose to identify or not to identify with categories have been diminishing. Poetry and performative traditions remain one place where the critical position on religion is sustained. The following text, *main choorheetaree* (I am a sweeper/*dalit* woman), sung collectively at the Lahore-based Sangat meeting of Punjabi language activists is attributed to Bulleh Shah but not part of the popularly revisioned canon ascribed to him:

*Main choorheetaree haan, sachi sahib sarkaron
 Pairon nangi siron jhandooli aaya sunaiha paron
 Tarmarat kujh banda nahee kee laisaan sansaaron
 Pakraan chajli hiras udawaan chutha maal guzaron
 Main choorheetaree aan, sachi sahib sarkaron
 Kya choorhi, kya zaat chorhi di, har koi saathon nassay
 Kaar baigaar ker arthiya hona jaal par-saein wassay
 Ghundi mundi da bohl banaya bakhra liya deedaron
 Main choorheetaree aan, sachi sahib sarkaron
 Hindu Turk asaain na honday do jarmay taray jarmay
 Haraam halal pachata naahin dhohaan te nahin bharmay
 Bullah jhund mukh paya tun lahya sharam na rahi darbaaron*

Main choorheetaree aan, sachi sahib sarkaron

I am a *choorhi* (sweeper/*dalit* woman), of the true beloved's kingdom

Barefoot, with matted hair; a message came from a far

Dazed; there is nothing of worth, what to take from the world

Tossing greed in the air, I shun false wealth

I am a *choorhi*, of the true beloved's kingdom

What is a *choorhi*, what is it about our caste, everyone runs from us,

Underpaid, reduced to slavery, at the doorstep of the ruler,

Only a share was given to us from the heap of left-over morsels

I am a *choorhi*, of the true beloved's kingdom

We are neither Hindu not Turk, neither twice or thrice-born

Indifferent to *halal* and *haram* [pure and impure], we don't uphold either

When the Beloved's face was unveiled, O Bullah, there was fear of thrones no
more

I am a *choorhi*, of the true beloved's kingdom.

Bulleh Shah, Saqib 2012, translated by Sara Kazmi
and Hashim bin-Rashid⁶

The last three chapters of this book have been prefaced by an example of the Punjabi poetic-philosophical tradition which avows a critique of hierarchies. In this poem, the voice of a *dalit* woman articulates a criticism of formal religious boundaries and an affinity with a common spiritual figure (*sahib*) in a shared spiritual space (*darbar*). When this gendered voice emerges in the form of embodied devotees of women, however, religious reformers in colonial Punjab and their inheriting postcolonial institutions have sought to control and silence them while postcolonial politicians seek to erase them.

While the potential threat of violence for speaking, resisting and acting upon sources of individual or collective agency is always looming, the possibilities for new modes of resistance from within the social sphere cannot be dismissed. Scott (1990: 45) highlights this in the ways that 'dominant elites attempt to portray social action in the public transcript as, metaphorically, a parade, thus denying, by omission, the possibility of autonomous social action by subordinates.' The 'parade' could be interpreted in the Punjab context as the newly formed *dargah* or shrine which appears as a futile attempt by dominant forces to be 'subordinates' or subalterns performing piety. What is perhaps most pertinent in this argument is how such acts can at once be deemed as falsely conscious by rationalist critics while also be viewed as marginal and mute. Across these depictions, the subaltern remains powerless and the acts are relegated to the margins of exclusion, denying acknowledgement of any potential for disruption.

Reclamation of popular piety within more local or proximate sources of spiritual power can address forms of oppression, deprivation and exclusion. In a highly unequal society where hierarchies of caste, class and gender frame all social relations, any attempt to redress these rigidities seems highly worthy of attention and to be listened to. Conformity to the scripts of obeisance to social and religious categories falls in line with the management of this unequal society. As Scott further highlights in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 'when the script is rigid and the consequences of a mistake large, subordinate groups may experience their conformity as a species of manipulation. Insofar as the conformity is tactical it is surely manipulative' (1990: 33). We are not, however, arguing that the religious mode is a script or the only means for resistance or that it presents an idyllic mode free from communalizing manipulations. In fact, we would argue quite the contrary, and that is a question to be addressed beyond this book.

Our emphasis is on how different registers are being utilized to articulate acts of agency in resisting hegemonic social and political power. The example of Shital Sathe, a radical *dalit shahir* (poet) and cultural activist who was a former member of the troupe Kabir Kalamanch in Maharashtra and who was jailed under India's Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) for alleged association with Maoist/Naxalite groups, is a case in point (Ajotikar 2018). Sathe's own musical training was acquired through attending all night gatherings similar to the *jagraataan* (also mentioned about our experiences in Amritsar in our introduction). Sathe's mother worshipped *devis* and, as such, Sathe learned many *Aaradhi* (spiritual songs) from a young age. In her new troupe set up with husband Sachin Mali, 'Navayaan', they are working on a new initiative called Kalasangini drawing upon the Buddhist tradition of Dhammasangini.⁷ This politics of resistance framed around the anti-caste and liberational poetry of Kabir, Phule, Annabhau and Sathe and inspired by the writings of Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh and other figures is indecipherable if we view the spiritual backdrop as absent from local histories of critique and resistance.

Removed from the register of devotionalism but remaining with the power of the performative is the Bant Singh Project,⁸ which is dedicated to highlighting the activist life and revolutionary songs of Bant Singh, a *dalit* man who survived a horrific attack for daring to pursue his daughter's dominant-caste rapists. He was beaten by a dominant caste gang of men, wielding iron rods, who left him for dead in 2006. The Bant Singh Project's digital album and short film 'Word, Sound, Power' is a homage to the broader *dalit* struggle and of caste violence in Punjab. However, it remains within the sphere and language of resistance

through political and collective action in challenging injustice. As these two examples highlight, contemporary cultural production is a significant realm within which borders are constantly in motion and through which resistance is continually expressed. However, caste and gender, as well as the evocation (or evasion) of religious symbolism, remain an integral part to how these forms of resistance are voiced and strategized.

A young woman, *dalit* singer, Gurkanwal Bharti (whose stage name is Ginni Mahi),⁹ sings in a Punjabi folk style which is infused with lyrical references to Ambedkar and Sant/Guru Ravidass and which is clearly within a locally specific devotionalism of *doaba*. The genre which Ginni Mahi sings in could most easily be identified as *shabads* or devotional hymns, even with their strong beat and popular appeal. In one song, called 'Fan Baba Saab Di', she confidently states that '*Mai dhi Babasahib di, jine likheya si samvidhaan*' ('I am the daughter of Baba Sahib who wrote the Constitution') and in another song praises Guru Ravidass, identifying herself as a follower of Ravidassia. She crosses and transgresses various boundaries and borders in her musical production, not least in her selection of positive *dalit* figures and symbols and explicit evocation of equality and *dalit* consciousness in her lyrics. To deem all acts of piety and devotion as mere expressions of false consciousness or to figure subaltern voices as being audible only when expressed through recognizable forms of rebellion would be to accept the terms of hegemony. To achieve a Gramscian, caste-ending, feminist realization of these potentials means to, even momentarily, not judge the registers through which acts and practices occur but to consider the contexts out of which they emerge and how power and sociality are reproduced, maintained and resisted.

Appendix 1

Shrine	Type of data
Data Sahib	Interviews, ethnography, photos, video
Darbar Sahib – Harmandir	Interviews, surveys, ethnography, photos, videos
Mian Mir	Interviews, ethnography, photos, videos, mapping
Naina Devi	Interviews, surveys, photos
Baba Farid	Ethnography, photos, videos
Durgiana Mandir	Interviews, surveys, mapping
Bibi Pak Daman	Interviews, videos, photos
Golra Sharif	Interviews, videos, photos
Imam Bari	Interviews, videos, photos
Sultan Bahoo	Videos
Bulleh Shah	Interviews, videos, photos
Nankana sahib	Interviews, ethnography, videos, photos
Gugga Pir Patiala	Survey, interviews, videos, photos
Gugga Pir Patiala – Chandigarh Road	Interviews, videos, photos
Baba Murad Shah	Interviews, ethnography, photos

Glossary

The glossary is meant to be indicative of fields of enquiry rather than being definitive terms, and its primary purpose is to be an aid for those whose native tongues are not Punjabi, Urdu or Hindi.

Ad Granth 'original book' the Sikh scripture, also known as the *Guru Granth Sahib*
Akal Takht 'Throne of the eternal' seat of the temporal authority of the Guru located on the premises of the *Darbar Sahib, Harimandir*, Golden Temple, and where contemporary communal decisions are announced, by the head of the institution, known as the *jathedar*.

Amrit initiation into the Khalsa ceremony – by extension, *Amritdhari*

Barkha/Darshan blessing, literally vision, seeing

Bhagat 'devotee', someone who carries out *bhakti* or devotion. This refers to a wide range of poets also, some of whom are referred to in *Ad Granth*.

Bhakti loving devotion to a personal or impersonal divine

Chief Khalsa Diwan a reformist Sikh institution formed in 1902 in Amritsar

dalit 'broken'. A term of self-identification for untouchable, *harijan*, Scheduled Caste (SC) Scheduled Tribe (ST), *chamar, choorha*

Darbar court, referring to both sacred and secular sites, used interchangeably for Sufi, Sikh and Bhakti shrines. Persian term that entered Punjab via the Delhi Sultanate and Moghul empire

Dargah term for a tomb, grave or shrine of a holy person

Dera a shrine, but also in relation to sites; e.g. Sachkhand Dera/Dera Ballan

Dua an informal prayer (as opposed to the prescribed prayers, *namaz*), usually of/from the beloved

Faqir ascetics who renounce all relations and worldly possessions

Gurdwara 'guru's door', Sikh place of worship

Gurpurab days which commemorate significant events related to the lives of the Sikh gurus

Gurmukhi 'from the mouth of the guru,' script in which the compositions of the *gurus* were first written. It has become the script in which Punjabi is most written.

Jogi practitioners of ascetic *Shaivism*, which would involve shaving the head, wearing earrings and a loin cloth. A very influential group in precolonial Punjab.

Khalsa devout Sikh or community of Sikhs observing the five Ks: *kangha* (comb), *kara* (steel bangle), *kesh* (uncut hair, covered by a turban, and beard), *kirpan* (small sword) and *kuccha* (short trousers)

Langar 'community kitchen' attached to every shrine in Punjab, most formalized at *gurdwaras*

- Mahant** 'custodian' title traditionally used for custodians of shrines in precolonial Punjab.
- Mandir** a temple containing deities
- Maseet** a mosque. A Punjabi colloquial term for mosque
- Maulvi** a Sunni scholar, one who has attained competence in a field of Islamic learning
- Mela** fair associated with sacred and secular contexts
- Murid** the disciple of a Sufi *shaikh* or *pir*
- Murshid** *pir* spiritual guide
- Pir** 'spiritual figure' who spreads the message of a Sufi school or order
- Pirni** a female *pir*, the wife of a *pir* (also *piranh*)
- Qissa** epic love poem derived from the Persian poetic form
- Sarkar** senior official; Persian term that entered Punjab via the Delhi Sultanate and Moghul empire
- Shabad** 'word', verse(s) of poetry from the *Ad Granth*
- Shahmukhi** literally, from the mouth of the Shah/*pir*' script in which Punjabi was first written derived from the Persian script
- Sharia** Islamic canonical law
- Sufi** 'a Muslim mystic' usually worshipped at a tomb, *dargah*
- Ulema** a body of scholars who possess specialist knowledge of Islamic law
- Urs** 'wedding'; the death-day anniversary celebration held in honour of a deceased Sufi
- Varna** hierarchical four-tier system of caste
- Vilayet** jurisdiction. Persian term that entered Punjab via the Delhi Sultanate and Moghul empire
- Waqf** arrangements for land inheritance and property rights of shrines and religious property more generally

Notes

Chapter 1

- 1 We use the term '*dalit*', a term which entered into the lexicon of social categorization in India only in the latter half of the twentieth century. Dominant castes maintain the derogatory terms of *choorha* and *chamaar*, while the state's terms of recognition and reservation 'Scheduled Caste' (SC) and 'Scheduled Tribe' (ST) remain the predominant public terminologies. Parallel to this, such terms as *Harijan*, *Mazbi Sikh* and *Ravidassia* are used with differently inflected connotations. Thus, the terms are specific to the context and often relate to whether religious affiliation is being referred to or not.
- 2 Since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in India in 2014, it is even more inaccurate to call India a secular republic. Attacks on Muslims and *dalits* through mob lynchings, 'cow protection' vigilantism and 'Love *Jihad*' squads have seen a sharp turn towards an overt rejection of secularism (Sarkar 2018). This is not dissimilar from the cases, threats and allegations of blasphemy against Pakistan's Christian population to which the state upholds the constitutional articles 295-A, 295-B, 295-C and 298-B in Chapter XV of Pakistan's Penal Code. Both examples show how religious majoritarianism has evolved to reach similar points in both Pakistan and India. However, the differential proximity to the central government in which Punjab in Pakistan is a hegemon and Punjab in India is marginal is where their similarities end.
- 3 This book project comes out of a grant awarded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under the Religion and Society Programme from 2008 to 2010, which enabled an extended period of fieldwork between December 2007 and May 2010. Fieldwork continued beyond the period of funding, until 2017, during regular and subsequent visits to Punjab.
- 4 This issue of unfolding is an essential part of the methodology we deploy in that we do not offer historical or historicized narratives of the past; rather, the deep imprint of history on the presence is constantly exposed.
- 5 A former student, friend and colleague whose mother was from India and father from Pakistan was fortunate to have a Person of Indian Origin card as well as a Pakistani National identity card on the basis of being an American Citizen with family in both places. The Indian authorities revoked this in 2016, even though she had been travelling across the border with this documentation for the previous fifteen years.

- 6 See Appendix 1.
- 7 Fenech makes a persuasive case for the indigenization of these terms in the Punjab and at the very least their pervasive presence in literature (Fenech 2008).

Chapter 2

- 1 Though we are here referring to the Muslim League in Pakistan, they were replaced in 2018 by the Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (Pakistan Justice party) under the leadership of Imran Khan, though this party offers a vision of a modern Islamic republic which is not too distinct in policy terms from the Muslim League.
- 2 Online Version: Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 2000. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/df-jahrbucher/law-abs.htm> (accessed 12 February 2018: 8:53).
- 3 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm> (accessed 12 February 2018: 8:55).
- 4 Despite scathing critiques of functionalism by feminists, Marxists, interactionists and others critics of positivism and determinism, it continues to occupy centre stage within accounts of why and how religiosity has prevailed over the secularization thesis. Durkheim argued that religion has a rudimentary and tenacious tendency to survive other currents when he stated 'there is something eternal in religion that is destined to outlive the succession of particular symbols in which religious thought has clothed itself' (1995: 429). However, such an observation presents religion as a symbol in itself, which leaves open many questions about the relationship between religion and capitalism in terms of both originary theses and ideological framings. If religious thought can be said to be disguised within symbols, then the symbols have provided an infinite source for the sociological (as well as theological and anthropological) study of religion.
- 5 Marx was perhaps less dismissive of religion than is often recognized due to what we have observed as an excessively crude reading of superstructure and rationalist thinking by Marxists eager to embrace atheism as a response to the religion question. However, what Marx was arguing was that the capitalist mode of production required religion while the end of capitalism would result in the abolition of religion. The process of moving from a highly religious context of exploitative capitalist conditions to a religious-less context of communist equality would require a reflection on religion which many do not associate with differentiated processes. This may be due to the different modes and styles of analysis across Marx's publications which show the complexities of religion within society and which range from a firmly structuralist analysis of society and politics to more specific directives of revolutionary social and economic organization, as explicated in the doctrine *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx 2016).

- 6 Frembgen's (2008) beautifully illustrated poster art book, in which a pantheon of Sufis and *Pirs* are represented, features a lithograph on page 29 in which Pir Makki's shrine is represented with a popular image of Guru Gobind Singh. Popular devotion clearly requires aesthetic mastery rather than authenticity!
- 7 On Oberoi, see McLeod (1998) and on Doniger, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Another-book-on-Hinduism-by-Wendy-Doniger-under-attack/articleshow/31230610.cms> (accessed 14 June 2017).
- 8 For example, an analysis of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's (the leader of a Sikh separatist movement in the 1980s) speeches would reveal his use of all of these terms with absolutely no deviation from a narrow and singular conceptualization of Sikhism. See Sandhu (1999).
- 9 In East Punjab even if we look to the official state identification of stratification through the categories of Scheduled Caste (SC), Schedule Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Caste (OBC), the Indian census shows Punjab to have the highest proportion of Scheduled Castes and Tribes at 30.9 per cent of the total population, higher than any other state (Census of India 2011).
- 10 Attacks on Christians are well documented by human rights organizations as reflecting how communities are targeted on the basis of both being a religious minority and the stigma of low-caste status (Kamran and Purewal 2015).
- 11 See <https://tribune.com.pk/story/357765/pakistans-caste-system-the-untouchables-struggle/and> <http://www.atimes.com/article/prodded-sikhs-high-body-punjab-villages-start-tearing-caste-walls/> (accessed 14 June 2017).
- 12 Perhaps the most tragic case in this regard is of the poet Lal Singh Dil. From a *dalit* background, Dil first 'converted' to communism by joining the Naxalite movement in Punjab in the late 1960s. Finding caste discrimination amongst the comrades, he then 'converted' to Islam. However, on his death in 2007, his body was not buried, according to his wishes, but he was cremated at the *dalit* grounds in his home town of Samrala (see Dutt 2012).
- 13 In this respect, studies within theology and history such as N. G. K. Singh's (1993) notion of the feminine principle in scripture and Jakobsh's (2003) gendering of Sikh history represent re-readings of texts and archives through a lens seeking to recover a representation of women, though masculinity and caste remain unexplored and the prevailing larger label of 'Sikh' relatively unproblematicized.
- 14 Some argue that Partition was for Kashmir, Punjab and Bengal rather than for the new states of India and Pakistan. The continuing violence (and the Indian state's illegal abrogation of Article 370 at the time of the publication of this book) in Kashmir bears stark witness to the contemporary continuity of the events of 1947.
- 15 We recognize the very real difficulties for scholars to obtain visas to travel across the Indo-Pak border, let alone do research. Our own British and US passports offer us a privilege given by those who created the border in the first place.

- 16 These analyses have hitherto remained quite firmly within the world of history or literature and within those disciplinary frames quite narrow in relation to the contemporary.
- 17 Perhaps this was most noticeable in the Data Darbar attack of 2010, where thirty-seven people died and scores more were injured; nonetheless, within a few days people returned to the shrine as per their normal routines.
- 18 Our contention with Oberoi (1994) is that his focus on historical archival sources led him down a path of targeted deconstruction of the category 'Sikh' at a time when the Indian state was reaching its hiatus in violently quashing Khalistani/Sikh separatist sentiments.
- 19 The weekly Friday meeting of Sangat in Lahore, where readings are taken from the Punjabi philosophical-poetic tradition which has cleaved along the lines of Sikh, Sufi and Bhakti, is perhaps the only place where these texts are not read in a communalized manner. This knowledge base was, of course, much more prevalent before Partition and embodied by performative traditions (see Kalra 2015).
- 20 As we have already noted, but it is worth emphasizing again, the historical nature of the texts is in tension with their contemporary circulation and while we do not caveat this every time they are mentioned, nor do we use quotes, we recognize a potential misreading.
- 21 Though the story of Heer and Ranjha is best known through its rendition in the eighteenth century by Waris Shah, it is the figure of Heer in the poems of Bulleh Shah, from the same time period, that actually penetrates various borders of nation, musical genre and text. Bulleh Shah's poetry has been described as 'portable' in which his poetry can be interpreted as belonging to any of the major religious factions of Punjab (Rinehart 1999).
- 22 For example the words 'Sufi' and 'bhakti' as terms of classification are not found in the Punjabi poetic tradition, even though this is a label regularly applied to Bulleh Shah and others.
- 23 See Bigelow (2010) for a localized history of Malerkotla which is upheld as an example of harmony and as an exception to the rule of communal violence and antagonism. The markers of categorical difference (i.e. Muslim, Sikh) are also upheld in this text which, we argue, limits the analytical potentials to move viewing it as a matter of exceptionalism.

Chapter 3

- 1 These lyrics are taken from the video that accompanies the song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTxZy32Fv_0&list=RDpTxZy32Fv_0&start_radio=1 (accessed 28 June 2018). Phatphish Records, Delhi. We are using Rabbi Shergill's YouTube video rather than an authorized text on Bulleh Shah from the historical

- canon for a number of reasons. Firstly, we refer to this to indicate the contemporary circulation and consumption of texts that reference this ostensibly eighteenth-century poet. The YouTube link we use has had over 13 million views giving some credence to its popularity. Secondly, our conceptual and methodological approach purposefully disavows a historiography that attempts to locate Bulleh Shah, in either Sufi or Bhakti discourse. As Rinehart's (1999) thorough explanation of the historical debate about this issue hastily concludes Bulleh Shah is merely a 'portable' character muting the contemporary significance for disruption of religious boundaries. To emphasize this living potentiality our reference to texts is necessarily always within their contemporary renditions; those who desire textual authenticity may be disappointed.
- 2 Indeed, the destruction of places related to the Prophet in Mecca and Medina are testament to the twentieth-century efforts of the Saudi state to erase sites for deification.
 - 3 Our choice of this rendition of the multiple versions of Heer, ascribed to Waris Shah, is to again emphasize the context of its production. Panjabi Sath is a diasporic organization, based in the UK, that organizes poetry events and publishes contemporary poetry from across the East/West Punjabi border, reflecting its location in England. This version of Heer is derived from one of the many that are in contemporary circulation and, as with Bulleh Shah, our interest is not so much in textual authenticity, rather than in the imaginary it gives insight into. Our English translation is an act of interpretation that is equivalent to that undertaken by Rabbi Shergill in the song that opens this chapter.
 - 4 Waris Shah's tomb is also a shrine, where reciting and singing of Heer is still commonplace. For an ethnographic account of the site, see Rehman (2007).
 - 5 Though in relation to caste and gender, the research on spiritual figures is minimal to say the least. This is only changing as *dalit* writers themselves have started to write about their own experiences. Balbir Madhopuri's (2010) novel, *Changiya Rukh, Against the Night: An Autobiography*, is the seminal example, where the place of deities and spiritual figures outside of the Brahminical fold are myriad and multiple. The journal *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* is also beginning to fill this lacuna with examples of popular practices from across various communities.
 - 6 In 2004, one of the authors presented on the social commentary of Punjabi singer Gurdas Maan at a conference at Lyallpur Khalsa Jalandhar. The audience of esteemed (dominant caste, male) academics were outraged that a singer could be considered worthy of serious discussion in an academic setting.
 - 7 *Jogiyān* is available to view at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwPjKD58Ruc> (accessed 28 June 2018).
 - 8 The use of the term *Jogi* as in the rest of the text is a popular conceptualization which overlaps with the *Siddha* and Nath traditions where a *yogi/jogi* has an explicit link to *Shaivaite* philosophy (see White 2007). In the Punjab context this is complicated by the interaction with Islam and the reformist movements in

- Hinduism which essentially sees the *jogi* in Pakistan as synonymous with the *faqir/dervish* and in India as part of the Hindu pantheon.
- 9 This formulation of moving to the universal from the particular in the context of South Asian Islam is well expressed in Alhaq (1996).
 - 10 Weber's formulation of charisma has been conceptually developed in relation to *pirs* in Werbner and Basu (1998).
 - 11 See Mandair (2016; chapter 2) for a clear explication of the relationship of Hegel to the ordering of a religious hierarchy.
 - 12 In this sense, see Mellor and Shilling's (2014) notion of aesthetic charisma, as a function of the way in which corporate businesses use affect as a way of selling through emotion. The emphasis is again on the corporation, with consumers as relatively passive recipients.
 - 13 There is no textual source for this quote, but in the performative tradition, Abida Parveen's rendition of *tere ishq nachaiyaan* [Your love makes me dance], available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpfogedgsXw>, does cite this.
 - 14 Our use of the term 'evoke' here is purposeful as the poetry associated with these figures does not emerge out of a textually pure, historically verified lineage; rather this is a canon of attitude and perspective: one that is recognized by its stance on the marginal and its critique of religious authority.
 - 15 In relation to the actual work that shrines provide to artisans, for a more tangible form of 'solace' from marginality, see Khan, H. A. (2014).
 - 16 A more radical perspective, as articulated in the Punjab context by Najm Hosain Syed (1968), would argue that these poet-saints offer a road map for human agency in the context of structural exploitation. They reflect the ongoing human potential for revolution and change, rather than merely providing solace or an 'opium' for the masses.
 - 17 There is also the question of incorporation. Nanak as Guru Nanak the founder of Sikhism is enveloped in a set of religious institutions and ritual practice which tame the intensity of his poetic critique of formal religious authority. His critique of Brahmins and of *Mullahs* in the long poem '*Asa di War*' is a case in point.
 - 18 Hausner (2007) similarly points to the inherent opposition between being a renouncer and a householder in the lives of *yoginis*. In particular, she highlights how this is played out in the actions and practices of women renouncers who utilize 'tradition' as a means for both breaking free from 'traditional' structures and roles and choosing to participate in new communities where gendered roles are still in operation.
 - 19 We are indebted to Rajive McMullen for access to his unpublished work on the Nath tradition in Punjab: '*The Ear Rings of Immortality*' and '*Death, Desire and the Nath Yogis*' which was presented at the Panjab University seminar, 'Popular Religion in Punjab', 2009 in Chandigarh.
 - 20 *Malang* does have a particular connotation according to Frembgen (2008). However, this is motivated more by the desire for classification than any actual

- engagement with the group. They are notoriously difficult to interview and engage with.
- 21 'Bava' and 'Baba' are the same in meaning but the 'v' and 'b' are often interchangeable in colloquial Punjabi.
 - 22 This was February 2010 and in the next month on the 13th of March, crossing the border, we went to the mela at Shergarh, where a very similar looking character was mixing a bowl of *bhang*. I showed him a picture of the Nath from Amritsar, which the *malang* kissed and addressed as his brother.
 - 23 The most worrying and notable example being the Chief Minister of UP, Yogi Adityanath, who comes from a Nath monastery tradition.
 - 24 The YouTube clips of this shrine attract vitriolic comments criticizing the fact that women are dancing and that the *Pir* is swearing. Here is an example from 2010: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67Th0cDgLPY> (accessed 11 November 2011).
 - 25 These *shabads* or sung refrains from the *Ad Granth* are compiled in the *Amrit Kirtan*, a much shorter version than the full compilation of the *Ad Granth*.
 - 26 <http://www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani?Action=Page&g=1&h=1&r=1&t=1&p=0&k=0&Param=990> (accessed 4 August 2019)
 - 27 This perspective is gleaned from personal conversations and attendance at the weekly Sangat – a meeting of Punjabi language activists that meets in Lahore.
 - 28 Some argue that the *Guru* is the only saint or that the *Ad Granth* is the only *sant*, though the multiple uses of the word in the entire text certainly cannot be reduced to this perspective. <https://www.searchgurbani.com/guru-granth-sahib/ang-by-ang> (accessed 4 August 2019).
 - 29 Mian Mohammad Baksh was a spiritual figure from the shrine of Kharri Sharif and published a very popular book of stories, called *Saif-ul-Malook- Safar-e-Ishq*, commonly known as *Saif-ul-malook*. This was published in the late nineteenth century and Mian Mohammad died in 1909, and in literary terms is considered the last of the great Punjabi Sufi poets.
 - 30 Once again this is not found in any textual sources, but is available in the performative tradition, for example, by Saain Zahoor (available here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UD2s_qqaR70).
 - 31 <http://www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani?Action=Page&g=1&h=1&r=1&t=1&p=0&k=0&Param=1245> (accessed 4 August 2019).
 - 32 Another element in this mix is the advent of online spiritual services. These in some senses require very little connection to a shrine or lineage (though both are often referenced). It remains to be seen to what extent they will further diminish the role of shrine/lineage-based spiritual figures.
 - 33 Salman Rashid is a travel writer who has extensively documented 'DIY' shrines in a negative manner, applying 'rationality and reason' to expose their 'bogus' status. His writings can be found at: <http://odysseuslahori.blogspot.co.uk/> (accessed 11 December 2014).

- 34 As a small example, the prevalence and continuance of *sants* and living gurus have continued alongside the prominence of the *Ad Granth*. This has often been justified through the requirement of a guru to enable the transformation to *gurmukh*. *Naam* cannot be obtained through one's own efforts as this would allow the ego to think that it is by its self that enlightenment is being achieved. 'Grace' or 'favourable glance' would at first reading seem to require a teacher or spiritual guru. In this space, many have established themselves as *sants* within the Sikh tradition and gurus of overlapping and parallel traditions (Nirankari, Namdhari, etc.). Mandair immediately questions this interpretation by asking, 'Who was Nanak's Guru?' In response: 'Nanak's own preceptor, however, was not a human guru but an impersonal principle: The Word (*śabda*), which *Nāanak* also calls *satguru*' (2016: 374). This is an innovative move, not only in terms of disrupting the presence of human intercession within the Sikh tradition, but also because for the first guru to be the first he cannot have a previous human guru, thus breaking the cycle of repetition that produces a theological understanding of religion. Though theoretically sophisticated it does not interrupt the social necessity of a living spiritual figure as the empirical conditions in Punjab amply illustrate.
- 35 Ideally the role in welfare and material support offered by the shrine/*sant* should be undertaken by the state. However, we are not so naïve to not understand and be wary of state socialism that does not deliver.
- 36 We use the word 'annihilated' here to signal the more radical project in relation to caste offered by Dr Ambedkar in the book titled *The Annihilation of Caste* (1936).
- 37 Not only the DSS, but a host of *deras* have risen to prominence in Punjab in recent years (though the DSS is the most publicly visible of these) and persistent discrimination by Jat Sikhs against the low castes in rural Punjab is often posited as a key factor in the rise of *dera* membership in general (for example, see Lal 2009: 227). Whereas *dalits* in nearby Uttar Pradesh have political outfits like the BSP to represent their interests, so this line of thinking goes, Punjab has *deras* (see, for example, Baixas 2007: 4064). In an admirable attempt to find a religious discourse amongst the political mayhem, Copeman ultimately misrecognizes Gurmeet Ram Rahim in the quest for a theoretical sojourn on copying. The public discourse on *deras* emerges only in the 2000s as part of a cycle of disavowal and renewal that can be traced throughout the twentieth century. The only significant departure is the amplified voice of social media adding to the cacophony.
- 38 The story of *Sacha Sauda* is one multiply told and retold. At the age of twelve, Guru Nanak Dev Ji taught the world what the true bargain is by feeding the saints and the poor without wanting anything in return. When Guru Ji's father sent him to do some business, Guru Ji ran into some saints that had been hungry for days and he spent the money on feeding and clothing them. Upon returning from feeding the Saints, Guru Ji's father asked him about what business he had done. Guru Ji's reply was that he did '*sacha sauda*' (true deal or business), where he fed the hungry saints.

- 39 From our analytical perspective, Radhasoamis actually escape the label 'religion' as we outline in Chapter 5.
- 40 This ostensibly Sikh-looking man, though identifying as Christian, offers an example of how the turban as a signifier has become so attached to Sikhs. In Ajay Bhardwaj's film (2012) *Milange Baba Rattan De Mele Te*, this signification is markedly disturbed. Firstly, in the central figure of Machanda Khan whose name, despite being flashed on screen, is assumed by audiences (from the multiple screenings) to be Sikh. In another scene, an elderly Sikh man replaces his turban with a Chisti head covering, demonstrating the motility of the turban. See Kalra (2005).
- 41 This brilliant documentary traces the ways in which *dalits* have taken over and captured former Sufi shrine spaces, incorporating them into a seamless world in which Ghaus Pak and Ravidass have the same status and shared lineage.
- 42 See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/may/25/india-sikh-riots-killing-austria> (accessed 10 June 2017).
- 43 Some have even reported this as a conspiracy from within the *dera* by groups who did not want Ramanand to succeed Niranjana Das (who was also shot); see <http://panthic.org/articles/5296>.
- 44 The Asia Bibi blasphemy case is perhaps one of the best known recent examples in which a Christian woman, Asia Noreen, was convicted of blasphemy by a court in Sheikhpura after an incident in which she and a group of Muslim women who were harvesting berries engaged in an argument after the other women grew angry with her for drinking water from the same source. Asia was sentenced to death in 2010. Shahbaz Bhatti, the Christian Minorities Minister, and Salman Taseer, the Punjab governor, were both assassinated for advocating on her behalf.
- 45 Piro's writings and life have been analysed in detail by Anshu Malhotra in the book *Piro and the Gulabdasis* (2017). So while Malhotra's recognition of Piro as a *Sudra Vesva* immediately places her outside of formal religious categorization, nonetheless a religious conversion forms a central trope in the book. Interestingly, this parallels the debates on Lal Ded (Ahmed 2002) and indicates the limitations of the historical method. Indeed, the conversion narrative falls completely apart if attention is paid to the following *kafi* (couplet) though the ideology of Malhotra comes through in the English conversion: *Daso saheliyo meriyon ni, main te sach di rah puchhavniyan. Jis rah main pir faqir gaye main tan ose nun nit dhiyavniyan*. In the English, the words *pir faqir* are translated as 'holy men' where clearly any ambiguity in relation to a Muslim is lost. Or is Pir also a word that can be conveniently Hinduized, certainly a Hindutva fantasy? This is unfortunate, as the transformation that devotion and affiliation to a guru implies is, of course, non-sectarian and this is perhaps what Malhotra intends. However, by clinging to the notion of conversion there is a reliance on there being two stable entities, which are only stable in the gaze of the ontotheologically trained historian.

- 46 The word 'Turk' is used throughout Piro's poetry but always to represent the opposite to the freedom of Gulabdis. This is interpreted as freedom to do Bhakti, which in contemporary India is easily folded into a Hindu(tva) project.
- 47 At the heart of this is a narrative about religious conversion, where Lal goes from being a Brahmin to a Muslim. It is this contemporary reading which enables the tussle over placing Lal.
- 48 <http://www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani?Action=Page&g=1&h=1&r=1&t=1&p=0&k=0&Param=1425> (accessed 4 August 2019).
- 49 This is not the only way in which Sufism and Bhakti can be considered together, as there is also the possibility as seeing these as transcendent South Asian traditions, as is delineated in the book *Poetics and Politics of Sufism and Bhakti*, edited by Kavita Panjabi (2011).

Chapter 4

- 1 Studies of popular religion across the India–Pakistan border are restricted by lack of mobility for scholars and a general hostility by the Indian and Pakistani states in relation to research and exchanges of ideas between the two countries in general. These geographical and physical limitations are equally matched by a methodological nationalism in which the religio-national borders loom over any analysis. This is perhaps a greater task to overcome.
- 2 'Border crossing' is a useful concept, only in that it opens a conversation about the permeability of borders. Here the religious imagination maps an alternative Chisti or Sikh pilgrimage routing, in which India, Pakistan, Punjab, Sindh, Rajasthan are merely political inconveniences on a set of shrine tours. Indeed, the difficulty of crossing the border can be enfolded into a common narrative of piety in which sacrifice is directly proportional to potential blessing on achieving the *darshan* of the *guru/pir*. Thus the border is merely another obstacle for the 'true' devotee.
- 3 Of course the paradigmatic case here is the Babri Masjid controversy.
- 4 Therefore academic research has taken place on Ali Hujwiri, Data Sahib, the Harmandir (Golden Temple) and Baba Farid in Pakpattan. We are also examining these sites as the literature is dominated by them, however only to illustrate their contingent rather than iconic status.
- 5 Religious, media and academic discourse in practice overlaps, but up to the age of the internet consisted of multiple pamphlets, adverts and newspaper reports and PhDs in Indian universities. Websites have now started to be a much more important source of discourse about living and recently deceased spiritual figures. Our field research resulted in the collection of hundreds of newspaper clippings and multiple pamphlets picked up from shrines. However, as the writing progressed

- a lot of this material was transferred online, we assume by custodians and shrine care-takers.
- 6 Uch Sharif is the name of a city in Southern Punjab in the former princely state of Bahawalpur and home to a number of shrines which have retained their architecture from the fifteenth century, consisting in their most aesthetically pleasing of tiled domes and walls.
 - 7 Inderjit Hassanpuri himself is a phenomenal lyricist, with several books of poetry to his credit and a score of songs for Punjabi films. Born in Akal Garh, Ludhiana district in 1932, he died in 2009, having spent a life between Delhi and Bombay. He described his sensibility and craft in a radio interview on 17 January 2006: 'I have written all forms of cultural music, but mainly about workers, labourers and farmers, because no-one pays attention to them...their pains, problems, what troubles they face...' for example: For those who do not have a house there are hundreds of thousands like them, there are hundred thousand houses in God's name, but God does not live in any of them. Available online: <http://theseerat.com/march2013/article08.php> (accessed 12 May 2018).
 - 8 Here potter is making reference to the Semitic name for God, Isaiah 64:8 (New International Version): 'We are the clay, you are the potter'; *Quran* [55.14]: 'He created man from dry clay like earthen vessels.'
 - 9 <http://www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani?Action=Page&g=1&h=1&r=1&t=1&p=0&k=0&Param=466> (accessed 4 August 2019).
 - 10 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKeXSNJZblU> (accessed 16 February 2018).
 - 11 This would not be Guru Nanak's conclusion given his long discourse with the Siddh Naths in the *Ad Granth*. Bulleh Shah would perhaps be more sympathetic, yet Waris in Heer also gives short thrift to the Nath Panth.
 - 12 These various sites have all been linked to a fourteenth-century Sanskrit text, thus tying shrines from Baluchistan to Kanyakumari to Assam in a pan-Indian Hinduism; see Bhattacharyya (2009).
 - 13 A significant debate within Sikh studies began with the historical methodological zeal with which W.H. McLeod (1976) set out to examine the *Janamsakhis* as a factual record of the life of Guru Nanak and thus questioning the validity of the *Janamsakhis* as a means for understanding the 'concrete incidents' of his life. The thrust of the critique rests in the application of a theological orientalism to the *Janamsakhis* as a historical source (Grewal 1998; Mandair 2016).
 - 14 Political influence of spiritual figures will be taken up in more detail in the next chapter. Here it is sufficient to note that 'nationalization' of shrines did not hinder or restrain the continuing influence of *pir* families. In 2010, the Prime Minister of Pakistan was Syed Makhdoom Gilani, from a family of *pirs* from Sindh who have remained influential for the last 500 years, spanning the Moghul, colonial and postcolonial periods.

- 15 This estimation is necessary because the Auqaf are notoriously opaque with their statistics and finances.
- 16 Zia's government, however, did not totally dismiss Sufism. Instead it focused on the personal piety of Sufi saints and portrayed them as missionaries while dismissing Sufi shrines and practices, Ernst and Lawrence (2002).
- 17 The SGPC also works through a series of compromises with artefacts belonging to the Sikh Gurus. Many of these are in the possession of families descended from the Gurus and the SPGC has attempted to acquire these to place them in a museum or at the Golden Temple. Perhaps the most significant of these is the Kartarpur *Bir*, which is the oldest extant writing by the Gurus and is held by the Sodhi family, descendants of the fifth Guru Arjan, who allow visitors for *darshan* only once a year. See <https://www.thehindu.com/2004/08/30/stories/2004083005910900.htm> (accessed 13 July 2017).
- 18 One *lakh* is 100,000 rupees.
- 19 See Van der Linden (2008); Oberoi (1994); Jones (1976); Talbot (1991).
- 20 For the full law, see http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/56.html#_ftn1 (accessed 31 May 2018).
- 21 A term rarely used but used colloquially to denote either a female *pir* or the wife of a *pir*.
- 22 While we note that this term has a very specific meaning when attached to the context of South India and caste politics, our intention here is a play on gender and caste rather than an etymology of the terms.
- 23 Although much less researched this parallels the veneration of the *Panj Pir* throughout the same area (Snehi 2009).
- 24 As Harood Khalid (2016) has articulated so well in his popular travels in Pakistan, the question of fertility is closely related to shrine practices.
- 25 Irigaray's (1974, 1977) work opens up the space within and across the borders of East and West Punjab; India and Pakistan; and Hindu(ism) and the Semitic traditions. As a pioneer in critiquing the phallogocentric bias in the Semitic tradition and the idea(l) of male divinity, Irigaray asserts the 'feminine divine' as the corrective and the basis of human (white, European) creative renewal in the face of the violence of patriarchy. This resonated in the 1990s with formal measures for gender equality making inroads whilst cultural discrimination was maintained. Whilst her work has been hugely influential in creating the idea of a spiritual/religious space for Western women, it has been criticized for Eurocentrism and asserting the primacy of gendered difference and a universalized notion of woman. In her later work, she turned to the Goddess tradition within *tantra* and *Shaivism* as a practical realization of the idea of feminine divinity. Though this aspect of her work is less insightful, what it does do is offer an insight into how a critique of the Judeo-Christian tradition of masculinity can be turned into a valorization of the Goddess, whilst misogyny and patriarchy are maintained. The lack of female deities in the Semitic traditions

- becomes a way in which to make a distance from Islam (predominantly male figures of veneration) as well as to articulate a system in which harmony between genders, rather than gender rebellion or gender equality, is the aim.
- 26 It is worth turning to an earlier version of Irigaray in which she criticizes religion as masculinist. Ironically, June Campbell, in *Traveller in Space: In Search of Female Identity in Tibetan Buddhism* (1996), uses the work of Irigaray as the basis of her criticism of the role of women within contemporary Tibetan tantric Buddhism. Agreeing with Irigaray's critique of the place of women in traditional religion, as articulated in Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), Campbell states: 'This seems particularly true in the Tibetan system where the potential of wholeness in the female form, quite clearly represented in some of the more archaic Tantric images, is somehow never realised in the social sphere. I have argued that this is because the association of emptiness with the female links the female body to a concept of the transcendental, which means that the female body is exploited by the male in his quest for his own typology, while she herself has no adequate means to realise her own. The transcendental therefore becomes, as Irigaray understands it, "the arena of the (philosophical) subject split off from its ground"' (1996: 154). Campbell draws attention to the fact that while there is an emphasis in *tantric* Buddhism on honouring the female principle, for which there may be evidence of an earlier period in pre-Vedic India, the subsequent history has not always been so positive (153–157). One development has been that the predominantly monastic movement gradually eroded the vital participation of women into more formalized meditative rituals. Even so, as Campbell graphically depicts in her own experience of exploitation, women themselves could still be sexually manipulated by monks.
- 27 It is important to distinguish between these shrines as regular spaces for practice and the issue of possession which, as Erndl (1996) comments in the case of Sheranwali, cut across formal religion and caste boundaries but is prominent in relation to women. There is often a problematic analytic conflation between possession and shrine practices, as they often overlap in fieldwork.

Chapter 5

- 1 This hagiography is drawn from the leaflet given at the *gurdwara*. A PTC (private Punjabi television with ownership of the Badal family) documentary on the *gurdwara* made in 2017 makes no mention of the Pathans, referring only to the 'miracle' of the cooling kiln.
- 2 See Singh and Gaur (2009) *Sufism in Punjab: Mystics, Literature and Shrines* for an exposition on the communal nature of history writing in Punjab.
- 3 The political machinations here are fairly intricate. The *Pehlwan* family are particular favourites of the Pakistan Muslim League (N), because the party's leader

- and many times Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, is married to Begum Kalsoom, who is the granddaughter of the renowned wrestler of the subcontinent, Gama (see Talbot and Kamran 2016). She was elected in a by-election in 2017 in the area where the Pir Makki shrine is located.
- 4 See <https://tribune.com.pk/story/420250/how-a-saint-is-born/> (accessed 16 July 2018).
 - 5 Rozehnal (2012) argues that despite these various attempts, the Pakistan state has not completely incorporated Sufism into its ideology and institutions. Similarly, Werbner and Basu (1998) and Ewing (1997) contend that charismatic saintly authority has not been contained by the state's rational bureaucratic power. This 'outside of the state' argument is, of course, reliant on an anthropological, ahistorical conceit that the relationship between state and Sufi is only a modern entanglement.
 - 6 Note the language of this extract, the use of the word 'real', the presence of a date and the presence of an age for the child saint.
 - 7 Denzil Ibbetson's contributions to the authoritatively descriptive colonial lens in depicting society in Punjab according to observations, practices and phenomenon have been significant in the knowledge production of the region, some of which continues into the present.
 - 8 The number of *gurdwaras* is based on the SGPC's own estimations; see sgpc.net. The total number of *gurdwaras* is a crude calculation based on the estimates of number of villages in East Punjab (Census 2011).
 - 9 This figure is based on personal correspondence with Umber Ibad, author of *The Making of an Islamic Identity*, Umber Bin Ibad (2019), I.B. Tauris: London.
 - 10 *Amrit* is the baptism ceremony, initiated by Guru Gobind Singh, to bring Sikhs into the fold of the Khalsa, with associated symbols and rituals.
 - 11 See Malik and Malik (2017).
 - 12 See M. F. Khan (1998). On the Ahmadis in the context of the nineteenth century, see Valentine (2008). A particularly good example of a communal version of Ranjit Singh's era is Latif (1984).
 - 13 The surname Sayyid or Syed indicates kinship descent from the kind lineage of the Prophet Muhammed.
 - 14 See <https://dnd.com.pk/tashfeen-malik-lal-masjid-and-pakistan-media/102143> (accessed 21 June 2017).
 - 15 This is somewhat in contrast to Saba Mahmood's (2011) argumentation in relation to the structural relations but resonates with ideas of women's agency in the spiritual landscape.
 - 16 For a detailed discussion of Sakhi Sarwar, see Oberoi (1987). For a more contemporary rendering of the hagiography, see the film *Daani Jatti* (available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kk-V5TGQhyM>).

- 17 The Chaar Yaar consists of Madan Gopal Singh as vocals, Deepak Castellino on guitar/banjo, Amjad Khan on Tabla, Pritam Ghosal on sarod. These figures are drawn from a life performance at the Farcroft Pub in Birmingham 17 November 2016.
- 18 For information on Gugga Pir, see Bhatti (2000) and Murphy (2017).
- 19 This is, of course, a very interesting site, which has had quite a lot of research done on it and is also the subject of Ajay Bhardwaj's film *Milange Babe Rattan De Mele*. There is a *gurdwara* at this site bearing the name Haji Rattan as well as a shrine. See Bouillier, V., & Khan, D. S. (2009).
- 20 Five (*panj*) is central as a number in the Shia tradition with the emblem being the hand, to represent the *Panj tan* and in the Sikh tradition, the Khalsa order is entirely organized around the number five, with Guru Gobind Singh initially baptizing five men, across the *varnas* (caste classifications) and then the symbols of fraternity, the *panj kakkars*: comb, steel bangle, unshorn hair, long underwear and sword provide ample example. Other barriers to enlightenment are: lust, rage, greed, attachment, conceit. Even though all numbers are significant in Vedic thought, Brahminism connects these with specific acts against their caste and ideology. Thus, the *Panchamaha patakas* – Five unforgivable sins: 1. Murder of a Brahmin; 2. Stealing gold; 3. Consuming liquor; 4. Sleeping with the Guru's wife and 5. Forming a friendship with a person who committed one of the afore mentioned. These are described by Vyasa Maharshi in *Devi Bhagavatam* (Vijnanananda 1977).
- 21 Abida Parveen, *Aa was mandarey kol*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reHeXQ36A-s&list=RDreHeXQ36A-s&start_radio=1&t=0 (accessed 16 February 2018).
- 22 Some anthropologists would argue that wherever there is a picture of a God, in a house or on the corner of a street, then that is a shrine (Pinney 1992).
- 23 This role for shrines in relation to trade routes has been well explored by Snehi in Singh and Gaur (2009).
- 24 We carried out survey research in West Punjab at Bari Imam, Bulleh Shah and Mian Mir and in East Punjab at Durgiana Mandir, the Golden Temple and Naina Devi. Our results pointed to women and marginal labour (daily workers) as the prominent visitors to these sites. These were in no way sample surveys and, given the huge numbers of devotees at places like the Golden Temple, we would not wish to make such claims.
- 25 Village *gurdwaras* are often exclusive in who is allowed to sit on the committee (see Jodhka and Prakash 2003).
- 26 Qureshi indicates being from the tribe of the Prophet Muhammed and Rajput signals large landholdings or descent from Rajas or Kings.
- 27 Shah Jamal's hagiography is intimately related to dancing. It is said that the area where the shrine is now located was the property of a haughty princess who chased

- the *baba* from her house. He began to dance and in so doing brought down the walls of the castle. It is for this reason that the shrine is built on high ground and that dancing or *dhamaal* accompanied by the *dhol* (large kettle drum) is a central activity on Thursday night.
- 28 See <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2017/02/attack-shrines-pakistan-2005-170219181655660.html> (accessed 11 May 2017).
 - 29 See *Montero, David*, 'Shiite-Sunni conflict rises in Pakistan', *Christian Science Monitor*. ISSN 0882-7729. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0202/p01s02-wosc.html> (accessed 1 October 2016).
 - 30 There is a long history to this, which has perhaps not yet been sufficiently well theorized. In the Pakistan context, the arrival of General Musharraf in 1999 saw the almost total cessation of sectarian violence, which had plagued the country throughout the 1990s. It is inconceivable that this could have taken place if there was not already a role for military agencies in the initial promulgation of the violence.
 - 31 During the period of Sikh militancy, groups such as the Nirankaris and other *sant* movements were targeted. In 1987, Darshan Das, founder of the Sachkhand Nanak Dham, was shot dead by two militants in Southall, UK. These multiple formed *sant* movements, who would in previous times be considered *Nanak Panthis*, were targeted for 'anti-Sikh' activities.
 - 32 See Kamran (2015) in relation to *Khatm-e-Nabuat* in Pakistan.
 - 33 See Protopapas (2012) on the Namdharis.
 - 34 The most politically cogent and urgent example of this is Selafist groups such as Daesh, shifting the boundaries and definitions of being a 'Muslim' to the point where anyone not in their group or affiliated to them is effectively a 'non-Muslim' and therefore a target for violence (Siddiq 2011).

Chapter 6

- 1 In some senses this is also why this chapter revisits themes and events introduced previously as our own attempt at domain separation is heuristic.
- 2 The army chief at the time, General Raheel, reportedly used the phrase Taliban 'monsters' (see <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/16/pakistan-taliban-peshawar-massacre-attack>, accessed 24 June 2018).
- 3 See <https://www.dawn.com/news/868124> (accessed 24 June 2018).
- 4 As we are not focused on nor particularly interested in the national level of analysis, the issue of political parties is not considered in any detail. However, it is useful to note how religious movements such as that of Sufi Mohammed in Swat in the period 2008–2014 caused a huge problem for the Pakistani state. Equally the yoga movement of Baba Ramdev in India has provided a great deal of support for the BJP and its allies.

- 5 See <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Tributes-paid-to-Indira-Gandhi-on-32nd-death-anniversary/article16086071.ece> (accessed 10 July 2018).
- 6 See <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2016/12/27/9th-death-anniversary-of-shaheed-benazir-bhutto-today/> (accessed 10 July 2018).
- 7 Bedi also had a central role in the Singh Sabha movement.
- 8 While the literature is replete with examples and narrativized accounts of the invention of tradition in its myriad of forms (Hobsbawm 1983; Cohn 1996), this process of evolving 'customs' (what is done) and 'traditions' (performative gestures of enactment) need not apply such a myopic lens in so firmly centring European or British agency in encounters with South Asia.
- 9 Dumont (1980) is rightly discredited in his understandings of Kingship as subordinating Brahminism; nonetheless, he at least highlights the intimate relations between the two fields.
- 10 This hagiography comes from Ranking's translation of Badauni's sixteenth-century '*Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*', Vol II and III, by Abdul Qadir bin Mulik Shah Al-Badaoni (translated into English by George Ranking in 1894). Around AD 1570 the Mughal Emperor Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar while on his way to the Shrine of Baba Fareed in Pakpattan after hearing about sanctity and influence of Shaikh Daud Bandagi decided to pass through Shergarh to meet him. The Emperor sent Sherullah Kamboh (Shahbaz Khan), an important nobleman of the court, to the Khanqah in order to obtain permission for the meeting from the saint. Shaikh Daud, who was always reluctant to associate with those who possessed worldly power or wealth, sent Sherullah Kamboh back with the message that he (Shaikh Daud) always remembered the Emperor in his prayers and thus there was no need for him (the Emperor) to come physically in his presence for the purpose of prayer and benediction.
- 11 This view is most readily presented in the poetic tradition of Punjab and in the Sikh context most developed in the work of Kishan Singh (1978), most notably *Sikh Lehar* and in West Punjab, by Maqsood Saqib in the publication *Panchim* (see Suchet Publications, <http://www.puncham.com/default.asp>).
- 12 However, this was entirely symbolic as Trevithick (1990) highlights in the reaction of the Indian press to the King's visit.
- 13 Though arguably Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and Sufi Mohammad are in the tradition of those spiritual figures who resisted the colonial state in the name of religion.
- 14 This organization is also the home of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, whose political career was almost indistinguishable from his role as a *sant* and leader of the Damdami Takhsal. A reading of him in this light would shed a totally different perspective on the Khalistan movement.
- 15 Daljit Ami's documentary focuses very clearly on the role that *sants* play in carrying out social work in the absence of state provision or its corrupt implementation. See *Karsewa: A Different Story* (2004, Dir. Daljit Ami).

- 16 See the Himachal Pradesh Hindu Public Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments Act, 1984, by way of an example.
- 17 This is a counter to the oversimplified view articulated by Gilmartin in relation to Sufi shrines as the local conduits of the Mughal empire. A spectrum of dynamic and shifting relationships bear better witness to the historical record. The long Partition has meant that in contemporary scholarship on shrines in Pakistan, they are represented as powerful in relation to their role as intermediaries between the political order and the citizenry. This is most particularly evident in the evolving relations between the local Muslims and the Mughal court and subsequently the British state (Eaton 1982; Gilmartin 1988a; Frembgen 2008). This perspective belies the common usage of the term '*Darbar*', which as an act of the devotee can refer to any sacred place where an oath has been taken or where a certain relationship is recognized.
- 18 The spelling distinction here reflects the colonial spelling of *darbar* with the contemporary *darbar*.
- 19 Though it is beyond our remit, Aurangzeb's desire for mercury and immortality (Goswamy and Grewal 1967) works quite strongly against his 'supposed' Islamism. Indeed, the simple connection of the Afghan and Mughal rulers in terms of their patronage to Sufi shrines is quite poorly thought through: by the time of the Delhi Sultanate, the ruling elite of India had begun to develop significant relations with Sufi *silsilas*, particularly the *Chishtiya*, and recognized the moral authority of Sufi saints (Eaton 2000). As Moin (2014) demonstrates, Mughal rulers even deployed specific Sufi concepts and highlighted their relations with Sufi Saints for constructing a spiritual concept of royal sovereignty.
- 20 This is often contested by other Sikh voices; see <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/don-t-politicise-jor-mela-jathedar/338786.html> (accessed 14 June 2017).
- 21 In the case of Baba Farid's shrine, Eaton (1982, 1984) presents a neat history which shows that while Farid himself is seen as distant from the Delhi court, his inheritors go on to accept jobs, land grants and endowments from every subsequent ruler up to the present day.
- 22 Ibad (2019) provides detailed information up to 2006, as this was the period of his PhD.
- 23 This is an estimate based on Ibad's (2006) figure of 680 million. Also from various newspaper reports, for example: see <https://tribune.com.pk/story/721687/punjab-budget-2014-2015-auqaf-and-religious-affairs/> (accessed 14 July 2016).
- 24 <https://nation.com.pk/23-Jan-2017/7-050-acre-auqaf-land-4-533-houses-under-illegal-occupation> (accessed 13 February 2018).
- 25 See <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/why-the-shiromani-gurdwara-parbandhak-committee-thinks-gst-is-an-unfair-burden-4768621/> (accessed 13 February 2018).

- 26 From an interview with the SGPC general secretary, 2010.
- 27 Vaishno Devi is also particularly interesting as its name refers to abstinence from meat and alcohol. For a Goddess shrine in which traditionally animal sacrifice and other practices were considered a norm, the rise of Vaishno Devi coincides with the Hindutva project. The ultimate Goddess, Kali, still has alcohol donated at her mandir in Patiala, which is blessed and given to devotees. See <http://maakalidevimandirpatiala.com/> (accessed 1 March 2018).
- 28 Once again no accounts are published, but this information is gleaned from interviews with individuals involved in the Pakistan Gurdwaras' Committee.
- 29 Unfortunately Malhotra (2017) is unable to apply this same vernacularization to the other concepts deployed by Piro, or to religion itself, which would have allowed her to break the artificial divide set up in her otherwise poignant book, between Muslim/Hindu and Bhakti/Sufi. This is precisely the reason why the analysis, in surprisingly candid terms, often ends up in conundrums.
- 30 Only Sikhs have pressured the state in terms of recognition in relation to issues such as marriage. It was not until 2012 that The Anand Karaj Marriage (Amendment) Bill was introduced in India, which meant that marriages performed through the Anand Karaj ceremony could be registered under the Anand Marriage Act instead of the Hindu Marriage Act (2014). The Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Act was passed in Pakistan in 2018 in a similar vein to disaggregate Sikh marriage rites from the broader Muslim and Hindu state and legal categories.
- 31 W.H. McLeod's infamous book *Who Is a Sikh?* (1989) neatly sums up the precise dilemmas created by colonial modernity, and academic analysis has served this project in equal measure to critiquing it.
- 32 The attempt to define Islam in relation to the Ahmadi question ran precisely into this problem, one that is present since Akbar called all the ulema to engage in definition. However, the tools of contemporary law making were able to reach one conclusion in the 1950s and another in the 1970s when Ahmadis were declared non-Muslim; see Qazmi (2014).
- 33 Ravidass is referred to as Bhagat Ravidass (devotee) rather than Guru Ravidass (teacher) in the Sikh tradition, though this is obviously contested by the Ballan Sants. Religion is used as a proxy here for caste.
- 34 The Ghadar party was founded in California in 1913. The Ghadars were predominantly Punjabi migrants from relatively impoverished rural backgrounds who travelled to California in search of economic betterment. What is still most remarkable about the formation of the Ghadar party is the way in which migration and the experiences of hardship combined with racism developed a consciousness that transcended the particular. For some this took the shape of an anti-colonial nationalism, for others a Sikh consciousness and a radical politics that was rooted

- in a migrant and anti-colonial consciousness. Even though the party was banned in India in 1917, with many of its members executed, sent to exile or imprisoned, the inspiration it provided was manifest and multiple not least in the social conscious of Mangoo Ram (see Ramnath 2011).
- 35 This should not indicate that there has been no widespread change in the Ravidass *deras/gurdwaras* but no systematic research has been carried out in this regard.
 - 36 See <https://www.rssb.org/> (accessed 15 April 2017).
 - 37 See <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/dera-chiefs-play-gurus-to-tallest-of-politicians/articleshow/55736977.cms> (accessed 7 March 2018).
 - 38 Arguably, the category of 'Other Backward Castes' (OBCs) in India have become 'Hindu' in their resolute support for the BJP-RSS nexus represented by Modi.
 - 39 Iqtidar (2011) makes the cogent argument in relation to state-led secularism in South Asia that it will inevitably lead to a shift in the social. Whilst this has not happened, she does argue that Islamist groups have moved away from charismatic leaders and a focus on the magical universe to one in which the role and position of God is firmly rooted in the material. This, she argues, is a process of secularization, but not one that leads to irreligiosity.
 - 40 The registration of property in the name of a charitable organization which includes religious purpose was brought in by the colonial state as part of its broader regulation of land and capital. The Societies Registration Act 1860 and Charitable Endowments Act 1890 were the first legislation in this regard and were followed up by the Mussalman Waqf Act 1923 to take into account shrines (see Ibad 2019). Postcolonial Pakistan enacted a series of acts in relation to religious trusts that ultimately gave power to the Auqaf board. In India state governments were given the power to manage religious and charitable institutions, so there is a great deal of variety in terms of legislation, but in practice these laws give the state a role in the management of shrines (through representatives on management committees) and perhaps more importantly the state becomes the arbiter of any disputes over land and property. In East Punjab, the colonial laws still apply.
 - 41 See <http://bmsjn.com> (accessed 2 March 2018).

Chapter 7

- 1 Thanks to Waqas Butt for the original Punjabi. The translation is our own.
- 2 We were not able to offer an argument in relation to social class as the work on analysing postcolonial class relations in Punjab remains embryonic, especially as a cross-border exercise.

- 3 It is, of course, essential to note how this is a reversal of the dichotomy in relation to the way in which Islam in particular has been studied. As Roy (2006: 81) remarks: ‘There is undeniably a normative, monolithic and macro-perception of Islam’ in which the academic practice is to purge, transform and purify ‘the folkish “aberrations,” “anomalies,” “accretions,” or “denegrations”’.
- 4 See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/26/modis-man-flexes-muscular-hinduism-shock-election> (accessed 12 July 2017).
- 5 This leads to an arrangement of the reading of the *Ad Granth* in about fifty rooms around the periphery of the Golden Temple where only the *Ad Granth* and the reader are present, whilst those who have booked the recitation arrive towards the end of the two days. The cost for this activity at the time of our fieldwork was around five thousand rupees, and bookings at places like the Golden Temple were being taken two years in advance.
- 6 Bulleh Shah’s preceptor is the very well-known thirteenth-century mystic poet Rumi or Mevlana. Indeed, the opening verses to Chapter 3 ascribed to Bulleh Shah are clearly inspired by a Rumi couplet. In contrast to the Punjab, Rumi’s thoughts have found political expression in the writings of Ali Shari’ati, most notably in *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies: An Islamic Critique* (2015).
- 7 Rasika Ajotikar’s (2018) insightful interview with Shital Sathe provides a broader backdrop not only to Shital Sathe’s individual story but also about the Hindu nationalist, anti-dalit and anti-Communist environment in contemporary India in which she strategically produces and performs her creativity as an intervention. For an erudite exploration of the cultural politics of resistance through caste-ending movements in Maharashtra, see Rasika Ajotikar (2019).
- 8 <https://wordssoundpower.bandcamp.com/album/the-bant-singh-project>.
- 9 <https://youtu.be/mUGSxRoT8iI> (accessed 4 August 2019).

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