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The Present in Delhi's Pasts

Sunil Kumar


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READINGS

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First Edition

July 2002

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ISBN

Hb 81-88394-01-7

Pb 81-88394-00-9

Published by



Three Essays Press

4/5, Kalkaji Extension, New Delhi-11019 India

Phone: 623 4468, 643 9642

E-mail to: info@threeessays.com

Website: <http://www.threeessays.com/>

Typeset in Garamond

Printed at Param Offsetters, New Delhi

For Anjali, Shefali and Sikandar, companions in life;
Naresh and Suniti for guidance I will always cherish;
and the memory of the deeply missed Robin and Usha.

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CITATIONS

I am deeply grateful to the architect, Mr. Ashok Grover, for preparing the map for this volume.

All these essays were published earlier with different kinds of readers in mind. Some of the articles have been revised slightly but I have retained the narrative style of the original texts.

'Qutb and Modern Memory' was originally published in: *Partitions of Memory*, ed. Suvir Kaul, (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001): 140-182.

Slightly different versions of 'A Medieval Reservoir and Modern Urban Planning: Local Society and the *Hauz-i Rân*' were published in *Germinat: Journal of the Department of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of Delhi*, vol. 1 (1994): 157-166 and *The Archaeology and Anthropology of Landscape: Shaping your Landscape*, ed. Peter J. Ucko and Robert Layton, (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 159-74.

An earlier version of 'Making Sacred History or Everyone his/her own Historian: the pasts of the village of Saidlajab' was published in *The India Magazine of her People and Culture* vol. 13 no. 10 (Sept. 1993): 46-55.

A truncated version of 'Naming' appeared in *The-Hindustan Times Magazine*, Sept. 3, 1995.

INTRODUCTION

To think of Delhi today is to imagine a city with a geographical span almost the size of greater Chicago and a population nearly equal to New York, a city that was a capital, much like London, of a dominant political formation in north India for nearly a millenium. In much of the literature of the past and the present, Delhi seems to be almost coterminous with India; the making of the state and the city often appears inextricably intertwined. It takes considerable skill to actually disaggregate this history, to imagine a Delhi (leave alone a state) that was not always of this size.

In 1947 and independence, the modern capital of New Delhi occupied an extremely small area. For the better part, the plain of South Delhi was an agricultural tract. Walled medieval cities, the capitals of the Sultans of Delhi, large and small, only occupied a portion of the 'plain of Delhi'. There were also a plethora of villages in this tract of land, some with a history of residence much older than the medieval towns.

We are better informed today — if still rather simplistically — about the history of the walled cities of the rulers of Delhi. The rise and decline of dynasties paralleled the fate of their capitals. Lofty citadels ignored by succeeding dynasties crumbled into disrepair and became the haunt of pastoralists, palaces were reapportioned into dwellings of peasants, villages sprouted on old parade grounds and along city gates. Epitaphs of the medieval cities of Delhi seldom wandered from this script. Ozymandias-like, the ruins stood as testimony to the fate of proud rulers whose accomplishments lay in ruins.

Three essays in this volume (Chapters I-III) relate to areas in New Delhi that date from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, the period of the Delhi Sultans. They are about sites in South Delhi that I first visited in the 1970's as I developed my interests in medieval history during graduate study. My wife and I would cycle to these sites and spend hours wandering through the ruins. In the 1980's, as a teacher at St. Stephens and later the history department at Delhi University, I revisited these areas. I was now a father, leading adventurous 'expeditions' into the unknown, having a great time with my daughter and son. I was mixing pleasure with business. Many of the sites that I visited were in relatively obscure villages. I wondered if it was possible to interweave their histories in my classes, bring my subject more alive to a body of students falling fast asleep with a surfeit of lectures on Sultanate campaigns and Mughal revenue

administrative systems.

My interest in these areas continued through the decade and overlapped with my research on the Delhi Sultans. It was exhilarating to discover stray episodes relating to the early history of these sites even as I worked on a more recondite history of the Sultanate. My long interaction with these sites also gave me a chance to notice changes that they were undergoing and to reflect upon the interface between the past and the present. As it turned out, I was no longer just a medieval historian visiting old ruins but also a chronicler, noticing and recording developments that were apparent in these villages.

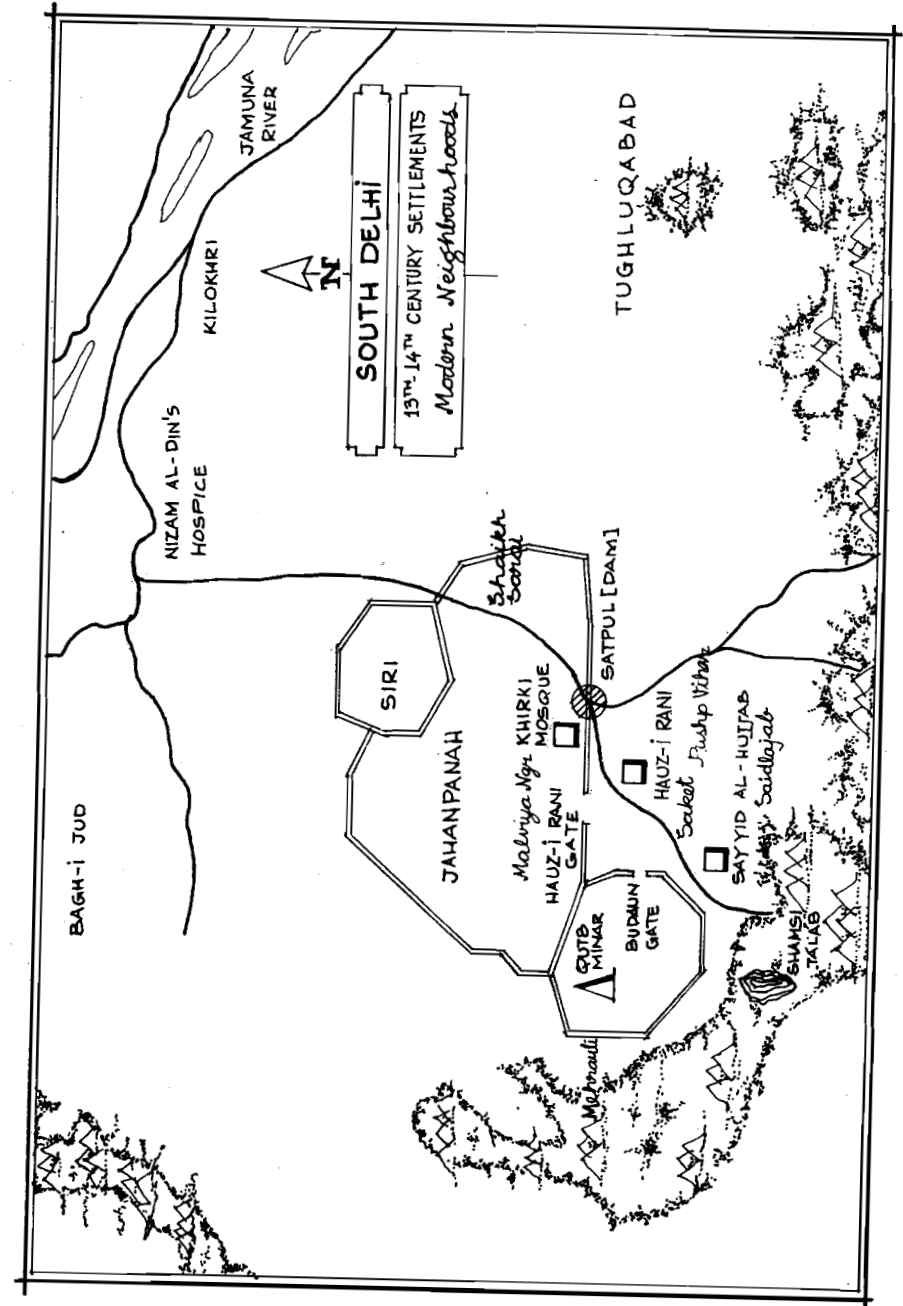
The 1980's, especially after the 1982 Asian Games, introduced a period of extraordinary change in New Delhi. These were, on the one hand, salutary signs of 'progress' brought about by efforts to modernise, develop municipal services and an appearance befitting the nation's capital. There was a complacent pride in the air even as the nation and its middle class seemed to be coming into its own at the end of the millenium. The tragic events of 1984 and 1992, however, underlined the presence of other, more xenophobic nationalistic currents that were also very much a parcel of the city's and the nation's drive towards modernity.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, years after independence, the nation seems to have renewed a search for its identity and its roots. History textbooks are subjects of debate and revision, Hindutva ideologues and globalism increasingly threaten the country's

THE PRESENT IN DELHI'S PASTS

pluralistic cultures. The pasts of the subcontinent are a threat to the manner in which some would want to shape its present. As I wandered through the medieval villages of New Delhi I was struck by the sheer longevity of documented human interaction that some of these sites had witnessed. Many of these places had seen continuous human habitation for a millenium. They had complex histories of demographic changes, shifting political associations and ideological formations. While these areas had experienced their share of violent transitions, their pasts were equally layered with years of peace. It was a rich heritage, but an embarrassing, dangerous one for a modern audience looking for simple, linear correlations between the past and the present to legitimate narrow, presentist interests.

The essays in this volume are about old monuments and villages in New Delhi, some of which few have ever heard about. Others are extremely well known. But underlying all these essays is the larger conundrum of how we need to face our pasts without erasing them. I hope the essays in this book will serve to communicate the urgency of this issue.



QUTB AND MODERN MEMORY¹

The Qutb *minâr* and mosque, Delhi's first *masjîd-i jāmi'* constructed in the last decade of the twelfth century, has drawn the attention of tourists, antiquarians and scholars over the years. The tall minaret with its elaborate balconies and intricate inscriptions has an element of what Gell called "magic".² How did people in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries construct something so enormous, so perfectly symmetrical, and yet so delicate? Our cultural sensibilities attuned to appreciate uniqueness, size, proportion and the investment of money and labour, savour the immensity and beauty of the structure and marvel at the accomplishment of mortals nearly a millenium ago. The reactions of visitors to the adjoining mosque, constructed out of the rubble of twenty-seven demolished temples, are, however, more ambivalent. The starkness of the mosque is relieved only by the redeployed temple spoils. Temple columns, Hindu and Jain iconic motifs, some complete and many defaced idols, are beautiful in themselves but clearly out of context within the environs

of the mosque. They appear to be spoils of war, the evidence of pillage and victory in a conflict fought in the distant past. Most visitors to the mosque today are unaware of the identity of the contestants nor are the events of the conflict any clearer. But since the presence of plundered material from "Hindu" temples within a "Muslim" mosque is unmistakable, the *masjid* confirms images of Islamic iconoclasm, and fanaticism. It resurrects memories of communal distinctions and strife which almost every Indian regards as a part of his country's social history. Unlike the minaret, the mosque impresses visitors with its images of destruction, power and might, but not "magic".

The manner in which visitors to the Qutb complex understand and interpret the structures at the site is not simply shaped by their cognitive understanding of what constitutes an object of "beauty". It is as much a product of their socialised, historicised, understanding of the intentions of the constructors, and the meanings they presume are encoded into the structure. This paper seeks to study the manner in which the Qutb complex is understood today, and the epistemological assumptions which have supported such a conclusion. As I discuss in my paper, a host of significations were attached to the mosque by its builders and detractors in the Middle Ages and many of these were reworked in the popular imagination in the early modern period. Yet, today, only one interpretation has survived through the ages.

Historians have played a major rôle in the construction of this

modern memory of the Qutb. They have written extensively on the Qutb itself, and on the political and religious conditions of the time when it was built. Their research on the Qutb, however, has not remained relegated to the pages of arcane tomes; it has received wide circulation in text books and the popular press. Daily, thousands of visitors are guided through the Qutb monuments by the descriptions and interpretations provided by the Archaeological Survey of India at the site of the mosque itself. These narratives were culled from the works of scholars on medieval architecture, Islam and Indian history. Together they constitute a text through which the experience of visitors to one of the major tourist spots in north India is refracted into authoritative knowledge about the character of Islamic piety and the nature of "Muslim rule" in medieval India. This paper enlarges on the complex relationship between scholastic interpretations and popular perceptions in the constitution of the Qutb complex as a statement of the "Might of Islam" in India. An interpretation which unfortunately consolidates the fractured communal realities of a post-partition subcontinent.

I. The Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'*, its builders, and its main features³

The Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'* underwent construction on three different occasions. The first mosque, 214 by 149 feet, was a relatively small rect-

angular structure, with a central courtyard surrounded by colonnaded arcades. The construction of the mosque was commenced in 587/1191-2 by Qutb al-Dīn Aī-Beg, and relied upon material derived from plundered temples. The temple spoils were used randomly, but very ingeniously, within the mosque. Column shafts, bases, and capitals, of different sizes and forms, with Hindu or Jain sculptures and iconic motifs, were placed one upon the other to attain a uniform height for the roof. The lack of concern for iconic symmetry, with Shaivite, Vaishnavite and Jain motifs placed cheek-by-jowl with each other, conveys the impression of destruction, a temper which is very much a part of the construction of the first mosque. The Archaeological Survey of India helps in the consolidation of this impression. Through its tourist literature it reminds visitors that the better portion of the mosque resides on the plinth of a demolished temple. Together with other evidence of redeployment of plundered material, the visitor is left to assume that the "iron pillar" of the Gupta period was another trophy of conquest placed within the centre of the mosque by Muslim invaders.⁴

Sometime later, perhaps in 595/1199, the huge arched screen was built in front of the west wall of the mosque. The east face of the screen was decorated with Arabic calligraphy, verses from the *Qur'ān* and the traditions of the Prophet, interspersed with floral and geometric patterns. Perhaps even more dramatically than the reused temple spoils, the screen carries evidence of the handiwork of native

artisans, who used familiar traditions of corbelled architecture to satisfy unusual stylistic requirements. It was around this time that work on the ground floor of the minaret was also completed. Although derived from the architectural precedents established in the Ghūrid minaret of Khwaja Siyah Push in Sistan, the *minār*, in Qutb al-Dīn's reign, was not very tall, and its girth lent it a rather squat appearance. Built out of red sandstone and inscribed with *Qur'ānic* inscriptions and eulogies of conquest it served as a memorial of victory and a vantage point to call the faithful to prayer.

The second phase of construction within the *masjid-i jāmi* occurred during the reign of Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish (607-33/1210-36) and was completed sometime around 627/1229-30. Although Iltutmish's additions nearly doubled the width, if not the depth, of the mosque, very little survives today of this construction. New courtyards were added to the north, south and the east, in a form which maintained the overall stylistic symmetry of the mosque. Hence the arches and the additions to the minaret harmonised with the preexisting architecture. Since these additions are largely in ruins today, the final impact of their size and grandeur, their dwarfing of the original *masjid*, is completely lost upon the modern audience. Only the extended minaret, towering over the environs with three additional storeys, provides a sense of the huge transformation that Iltutmish introduced in the architectural landscape of the *masjid-i jāmi*. Many historians tend to obscure this intervention by suggesting that rather than altering the

mosque, Iltutmish merely "completed" it.⁵

The changes in the mosque introduced during the third phase of construction, in the reign of 'Alâ' al-Dîn Khalajî (695-715/1296-1316), are also nearly lost today. But for one entrance hall, and an unfinished minaret, there is no visible trace of any Khalajî building activity within the mosque. Archaeological evidence, however, has clarified that 'Alâ' al-Dîn extended the mosque until it was twice the size of Iltutmish's, that the arches on its west wall towered over the older constructions, and if the girth of the unfinished *minâr* is any indication, it would also have been twice the size of the old. Other than the size, the entrance hall on the south wall, today called the "Alâ'î darwaza", stands as a testimony to the quality of construction during this period. Built out of red sandstone, the square silhouette of the "darwaza" is pierced with evenly spaced rectangular windows and doors. These are outlined with marble trimmings and epigraphs carrying *Qur'ânic* verses and statements commemorating the achievements of the Sultan. The modern visitor needs to imagine, if he or she can, a rite of passage from the bustling world of the medieval city of Delhi, through the ornate "Alâ'î darwaza" into the relative peace of the enormous Khalajî mosque, with huge arches decorated with *Qur'ânic* verses on the western wall, a new minaret under construction to balance and dwarf the old one. In sheer size and grandeur it would have been one of the most prepossessing mosques of its time in the world.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, scholars and archaeologists have studied this mosque and attempted to explain its significance to a lay audience. Their writings have over the years assumed "authoritative dimensions", until most visitors rely upon their guidance to consolidate their own opinions of the structure. The next section attempts to disaggregate this scholarship to understand how changing historical assumptions and research methodologies are reflected in the study of the Qutb monuments.

II. Reading the *masjid-i jâmi'* as the Might of Islam mosque

The *munsif* of Delhi, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, was the first scholar to make a detailed study of the epigraphs and architectural form of the Qutb complex in the 1840's. Many of his conclusions were summarised and developed in the reports of the Archaeological Survey of India written in the 1860's, and some years later in the *Epigraphica Indo-Moslemica*, a journal devoted to the study of Persian and Arabic inscriptions. Much of this information was recompiled in the 1920's in the report of the excavations and conservation efforts of the Archaeological Survey of India narrated by J.A. Page. This corpus of information provided the empirical data on the basis of which an early consensual opinion on the nature of the Qutb complex developed.⁶ The guides prepared at the turn of the century for English tourists to Delhi also relied upon these scholarly texts for

their information and interpretation.

The major subject of interest in the works of all these authors was the redeployment of Hindu and Jain temple material within the *masjid* structure. Their narrative and line drawings focused upon the details of this aspect of the congregational mosque: what was the extent of the original plinth of the temple upon which the mosque was built; how many temple pillars were in fact used in the making of the cloisters? Alternatively their attention was drawn to the fact that "Hindu" architectural styles continued to predominate within a "Muslim" mosque. They noted the absence of the true arch in the great screen of the mosque and the usage of a corbelled technique together with the *voussoir* by indigenous craftsmen to convey the impression of the "saracenic" arch. In a similar fashion these scholars also noted the inability of the "Hindu" craftsmen to construct domes; instead "domes" which once again followed the corbelled technique were used from despoiled temples. Their discussion of the minaret was again largely restricted to its stylistic origins: was it of a "Hindu" provenance, or did it have earlier *Ghûrid* and *Ghaznavid* antecedents?

Khan, Cunningham and Page's analysis suggested that in the usage of plundered temple material, which was defaced, inverted, or plastered over, the military commander, Quṭb al-Dīn Aī-Beg, made a statement of conquest and hegemony over an infidel population in north India, and conducted a ritual cleansing of profane territory. The authors also recognised the presence of temple material in the mosque

as an evidence of a swift transposition of "Muslim rule" in "India" where the "Turkish cavalry" had outdistanced the "Muslim artisans". Architecture in the formal "Saracenic" tradition, constructed under the supervision of immigrant "Muslim architects" and craftsmen had to, therefore, await the later years of *Ilutmish's* reign (607-33/1210-36). Meanwhile the symbolic redeployment of plundered temple rubble in the *masjid-i jāmi*, did not merely proclaim Quṭb al-Dīn's conquest of Delhi (588/1192), it also served as a statement of Islam's victory over idolators. This point was driven home when Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Horowitz and Page recorded in their respective scholarly publications that the name by which the congregational mosque was known in the past was "*Quwwat al-Islām*", or the "Might of Islam". Their self confident assertion was surprising for the *masjid-i jāmi* was not identified as *Quwwat al-Islām* by any extant inscription in the mosque or referred by this name in any Sultanate chronicle.⁷ As we will see later it was a corruption of a name sometimes used for Delhi in the thirteenth century. Suffice it to note for now, that for these scholars, it was almost logical that the congregational mosque which celebrated the conquest of Delhi should be called the "Might of Islam". After all, the conquest of Delhi, the capital of the Sultanate, was the final, victorious culmination of a preceding series of plunder raids led by "Muslims" into Sind, Punjab, and "Hindustan". In the early narrative of Indian history, where the medieval period was synonymous with the Muslim, it was entirely apposite that Delhi's first *masjid-i jāmi* should

be named the *Qunwat al-Islâm* mosque, and symbolise the beginning of a new historical epoch.

In the 1960's when a more "secular" narration of the South Asian medieval past was attempted, historians like Meister, Mujeeb and later Husain glossed over the "Might of Islam" interpretation of the *masjid*.⁸ Their writings focused instead upon the architectural characteristics of the monument where Islamic inspiration was dependent upon indigenous craftsmanship for its ultimate realisation. In an effort to mute the episode of plunder and military conquest involved in the capture of Delhi, the "Hindu" adaptation of the "saracenic arch", or the corbelled dome, were highlighted as examples of inter-community cooperation and amity. Although these scholars continued to accept the interpretation of the *masjid* as the *Qunwat al-Islâm*, their writings suggested that this might have been merely a formal statement not to be taken very seriously. To their mind, the presence of the Hindu hand in designing and constructing the mosque should be given greater recognition.

Anthony Welch and Robert Hillenbrand could not disagree more with such "secular" interpretations of the mosque.⁹ Writing in the 1990's, these scholars are strongly influenced by the cultural anthropological emphasis upon semiotics and ideology. Unlike scholars in the past, who were presumably guided by their anachronistic communal or secular assumptions, these scholars sought the "native's point of view", a potentially more dangerous interpretive

move in its assumption that it could capture an indigenous, native perspective. Welch found it significant that the Muslim patrons of the Hindu craftsmen never compromised with the indigenes: the Delhi Sultans forced the Hindu craftsmen in their service to always conform to a "Muslim aesthetic". In an important passage he noted that "the architecture of this early Turkish-dominated period is not eclectic: instead it is obsessed with imposing an aesthetic that carried comforting meaning for the conquerors. The attempt to replicate the familiar from back home is overriding: it ignores north India's established building types and twists indigenous architectural techniques to accomodate it. The resulting torque is obvious, but not surprising: without such mimetic references the [Delhi] Sultanate would have appeared adrift in an all too new and unfamiliar land".¹⁰

In his study of the epigraphical remains in the congregational mosque, the *minâr*, and Iltutmish's tomb, Welch concluded that the inscriptions were carefully located within the *masjid-i jâmi'* precincts bearing in mind the architectural and functional qualities of the specific structures. Thus, since the *minâr* performed the "symbolic function of marking the *Dâr al-Islâm* (the land of Islam)" newly conquered from the infidels, and the towering structure was "most visible to believers and non-believers outside the city walls", it carried *Qur'anic* statements of conquest and warning to the heathen population.¹¹ The *Qur'anic* and *hadîs* inscriptions on the *qiblah* screen, the direction all Muslims faced during prayer, stressed "instead the

importance of worship, of adherence to the principles of Islam, and of recognition of the obligations incumbent on believers". While the *minâr* was directed primarily to the "Hindus" and its epigraphs proclaimed victory over heathens, the inscriptions within the sanctuary of the *masjid-i jâmi* were addressed only to the Muslims and expounded "general religious statements" concerning their conduct.¹²

Welch's analysis of the congregational mosque and its epigraphs was not far removed from that of Khan, Cunningham or Page. While the latter had emphasised the theme of Muslim conquest and victory symbolised by the Qutb monument, Welch developed the idea further and argued that the congregational mosque also reflected the political context in which it was created. The monument was an uncompromising Muslim celebration of conquest, and the building material, architectural forms and epigraphic texts of the congregational mosque asserted the unity and cultural uniqueness of the "Muslims". It distanced the conquerors from their "Hindu" subjects while creating familiar, reassuring landmarks of Islam's superiority for Muslims resident in a "foreign" land.¹³ From a different methodological track, Welch confirmed that the Qutb complex needed to be understood as the "Might of Islam".

III. Providing the political context

Welch could push his reading of "the native's point of view"

with a great deal of confidence because his arguments coincided with, and were supported by, a larger historiographical interpretation of the nature of early Sultanate society and polity in north India. In the early thirteenth century, according to the author, the Turkic ruling class of the Sultanate was both "compact and cohesive", and severely threatened by "Hindu" opposition. The historiographical understanding of the bonds which tied the Delhi Sultan with his military commanders were worked out in the writings of a number of authors which included scholars of the stature of Habibullah, Nizami, and Nigam.¹⁴ In the interpretations of these scholars, despite the occasions when the "crown and the nobility" were in conflict, an underlying material self interest, a shared Turkish ethnicity, and the religion of Islam, provided coherence and an exclusive nature to the Turkic ruling oligarchy in the thirteenth century. In this logic, the common background of the ruling elite and their Sultan made them a category apart, and in the absence of any shared affinities with the ruler, the "Hindus" were a distinct group who were then treated indifferently as subjects. The equation, Muslim rule = Muslim state, was worked out to its full extent in the writings of Habibullah, who completed the juxtaposition by defining resistance to the Sultanate as "Hindu aggression".¹⁵ In Welch's analysis this was summed up in his declaration that "with their victory in 1192...[the Muslim armies]...initiated an Islamic state that by the beginning of the fourteenth century encompassed nearly all of the Indian

subcontinent.”¹⁶

In this vision of medieval history it was also argued that by the fourteenth century the composition of the Muslim ruling elite began to alter until it started to include “low class” indigenous Muslim converts, a process which one scholar described as the “plebianization of the nobility”.¹⁷ The presence of these neo-convert indigenes provided the Sultanate with cultural “roots” in the subcontinent.¹⁸ This was most apparent in art, architecture, literature, and ritual; but it did not affect the great chasm which separated the politically cohesive, rapacious Muslim state from the exploited peasantry. The juxtaposition of the monolithic entities — the rulers and the ruled — was perceived by scholars as an axiomatic reality throughout the middle ages. With regard to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, Irfan Habib, perhaps the most influential scholar writing on medieval India, noted:

The Ghorian conquests of Northern India, leading to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) may be said to mark the true beginning of the medieval period in India...To begin with, the new conquerors and rulers, who were of a different faith (Islam) from that of their predecessors, established a regime that was in some profound respects different from the old. The Sultans achieved power that was, in terms of both territorial extent and centralisation, unprecedented (except, perhaps, for the Mauryas 1,500 years earlier)...[Centralisation]... ensured that the land revenue (*kharaj/mal*) demanded on their behalf should comprehend the bulk, if not the whole, of the peasant's surplus produce; and the King's bureaucracy thereby became the principal exploiting class in society.¹⁹

Habib shifted the argument of his peers to suggest that the fundamental contradiction within the medieval political systems constructed by Muslims in south Asia derived from class and not confessional interests. Yet, despite the presence of a variety of class interests, it was the fundamental divide between the rulers and the ruled which determined the fate of the state. In Habib's argument, the binary relationship between the extractive state and oppressed peasantry was initiated by the Delhi Sultans, but finessed under the Mughal emperor Akbar (963-1014/1556-1605). “The peculiar feature of the State in Mughal India — indeed, in Medieval India”, according to Habib, “was that it served not merely as the protective arm of the exploiting classes, but was itself the principal instrument of exploitation.”²⁰

Habib's description of the Mughal state as an instrument of class oppression also led him to define the Mughal *manṣabdārī* corp as the primary exploitative class. This class was certainly largely Muslim in composition and almost wholly Persianate in its urbanity and, as Habib argued, “for the Hindu population in general the imperial services were not something they could aspire to”.²¹ In his analysis, the homogeneity within the Mughal ruling class of exploiters was quite exceptional, but this interpretation left the large class of rural *zamīndārs* quite literally as intermediaries, a group oscillating somewhere between the peasantry and the Mughal elite. In his argument, “for the indigenous population in many parts of the sub-continent, the Mughal empire was a machine to extract resources to be consumed or hoarded

by a small number of aliens, with a share of the spoils going to the native ruling class".²² Despite their rôle in the revenue administration of the state, Habib was at pains to point out that *zamindâri* interests did not always coincide with that of the Mughal ruling elite. As a result, while these intermediaries were important for the collection of revenue from huge areas of the Mughal empire, *zamindâri* conflicts with the state originated over their share of the collected land tax. The ability of the *zamindârs* to raise large armies and sometimes withstand Mughal pressure "always [made them] a thorn in its side. Thus the statements of [Mughal] official chroniclers frequently reflect an attitude of hostility towards the *zamindars* as a class".²³

Originating from a completely different set of epistemes, the implications of Habib's analysis actually left him very close to Habibullah's (and Welch's) conclusions. Despite differing methodological perspectives, both Habibullah and Habib agreed that the cohesive unity of the state was never challenged by its participants. Habibullah argued for a hostile relationship between the Muslim Turkic ruling elite and the Hindu subject population, and for Habib, a variety of class contradictions notwithstanding, the significant divide remained the one between the exploiters and the exploited. Although the "hostile relationships" and "class contradictions" derived from different reasons, their implications for the state and the ruling elite were very similar. Just as Habibullah had suggested that "dynastic troubles and rebellions" might have temporarily *weakened* the state

during the inter-regnal years of the early Sultanate, but "Hindu aggression" *threatened* and challenged its structure, Habib argued that the Mughal "Empire never really faced a serious revolt from within the ranks of its own bureaucracy...[and]... the major upheavals... caused by the wars of succession...did not by themselves endanger the Mughal throne."²⁴ Hence, when the tyranny of the exploitative state resulted in agrarian distress, peasant forces, sometimes led by *zamindârs*, were ranged against the state mechanism. It was the politically "disenfranchised", the outsiders, that endangered the state. In the analysis of the two authors, at least this aspect of the medieval state system did not alter dramatically through the Sultanate into the Mughal period.

IV. Positivistic readings of the text

In a historiography where the material interests of the monolithic state were threatened only by the exploited, conquered indigenous population, the discursive assertions of the authority of the state were read as reaffirmations of the existing [class] solidarity of the ruling elite. What was lost in reading a text from this perspective was the recognition that discursive texts, like Delhi's thirteenth century *masjid-i jâmi*, carried the authorial voice of their patrons, the Delhi Sultans, and they would have hardly acknowledged the presence of competing centres of power or resistance in a monument that was a public statement of their authority. In a similar fashion it was hardly likely

that the court chroniclers of the Delhi Sultans would organise their narratives to suggest that Delhi was not the legitimate centre of power and authority in north India. In the Persian chronicles of Minhâj-i Sirâj Jûzjânî, Ziyâ' al-Dîn Baranî or Abû' al-Fazl, the power of the monarch might be challenged by his subordinates — as it certainly was when rulers were morally incompetent — but the occasional hiatus notwithstanding, there was never any alternative to the authority of Delhi or the Mughal *Pâdishâh*.

Since the 1960s historians of the medieval period have shown increasing care in their usage of primary sources, and have stopped taking literally the encomiums paid to their masters by court chroniclers. Such a literalness was largely a result of positivistic emphases of the historian's craft, where greater attention was paid to ascertaining "facts" from "unimpeachable sources". In his "defence" of Baranî's *Ta'rikh-i Firâz Shâhî*, Habib explained his argument: "first, that Baranî's factual account is correct in all substantive matters; and secondly, that, though the 'analysis' is his (Baranî's) own, it is nevertheless sound...".²⁵ In the same historiographical tradition, Shireen Moosvi worked out the reasons to believe in Abû' al-Fazl's veracity: "Abu'l Fazl in his conclusion to the *Â'in* tells us of the way he collected the material for his work. He says that his information was based on the testimony of contemporaries and eyewitnesses, after a critical assessment of whatever they had said...for the *Â'in-i Akbarî* he relied practically entirely upon state papers, and his statistical data were, naturally,

supplied by government departments. He tells us he revised the text five times...".²⁶

Most contemporary scholars forget, however, that the medieval documentation used by them, either chronicler or archival, was either produced by or for the state. For them, once we sift the encomia from these texts we remove the obvious elements of bias, and are left with a largely unaltered narrative in which the king and his subordinates remained the principal actors in the history of the period. In a sense, as in the case of Ranke himself, the search for "authoritative information" in chronicles and archives privileged the knowledge conveyed by the written word which, for the medieval period, concerned the state and governance. Information from other authors was understood to be biased unless it corroborated the product of the state. In his study of the Sikh sacred text, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, Habib argued that "my purpose has been to suggest that research for material of historical value in this popular religious literature of medieval times may not altogether be an unfruitful pursuit. But it should be borne in mind at the same time that such research should go hand in hand with a close study of the Persian evidence as well, for only a familiarity with the latter can help us to pick out information that is *really* of significance (my emphasis) in the source-material in local languages."²⁷ If research is going to privilege information produced by the state and then look for its corroboration from other sources, Athar Ali's conclusion is hardly surprising:

"fresh explorations of documentary evidence have only tended to confirm and underline the standard proposition about the elements of centralisation and systemisation in the Mughal polity..." and "the picture of the Mughal Empire in its classic phase, as centralised polity, geared to systematisation and creation of an all imperial bureaucracy, ...still remain[s] unshaken".²⁸

The positivist methodology which exalted documents as the pristine sources for the study of the past directed scholars of medieval India to seek in their Persian documentation the secrets of the middle ages. But a Rankean epistemology, which elevated the state as the epitome of historical development and the proper subject of historical investigation, also led them to accept the discourse of a unitary dominion, a cohesive ruling elite, and a potentially recalcitrant peasantry without any critical reflection. It is this epistemology which enables the reading of the Qutb monuments today as the "Might of Islam".

There can be no gainsaying the fact that Persian chronicles are the major extant sources available to the historian of the Middle Ages, especially for the Delhi Sultanate. There are, however, other sources of information as well: epigraphy, numismatics, architecture, and a voluminous literature produced in the "courts" of the *ṣūfī* saints. With very few exceptions, these sources lack the coherence and chronology present in the chronicles, and they are, therefore, used as a repository of facts useful to substantiate or expand the material

provided by the "histories". Information which contradicts the "evidence" of the court chronicles has frequently remained unexplored. The discourse of the monolithic state has therefore remained unquestioned.

It is, however, possible to pluck the seams in this discourse. The texts of the Persian court chronicles themselves are riddled with discrepancies, with niggling inconsistencies which are significant only if the reader approaches the text with the awareness that it carries information deliberately organised to impress specific conclusions upon the reader. These discrepancies in the text are important indicators of fractures in the discourse, dissonances which need to be enlarged with the aid of other source material. But giving space to the internal dissonances within a text is not always an easy task and it certainly does not contribute to the writing of monolithic, linear histories of state systems.

V. Political competition and the discourse of the unitary state

The premise of the unitary Muslim state, and a composite ruling elite owing allegiance to the Sultan of Delhi, would be difficult to question if we followed the obvious conclusions of the Persian chroniclers. *Fakhr-i Mudabbir's Ta'rikh-i Fakhr al-Din Mubarakshâh*, a text dedicated to Qutb al-Din Aibeg, suggests, for example, that the

favourite, competent military slave of Mu'izz al-Dîn, was appointed as the sole authority, the "viceroys" of his master's dominion in north India.

This hero and world conqueror of Hind (Qutb al-Dîn) was addressed as Malik,²⁹ and was made the heir apparent, *walî'ahd*, to Hindustan, and the lands from the gates of Peshawar (Parshûr) to the limits of Hind were given to him, and the [authority] to appoint and remove, (literally, "unfasten and bind, *hall wa 'aqd'*"), the remaining commanders was entrusted with him, *ba-dû mufasṣawaz gardânîd*. [Mu'izz al-Dîn] left [Qutb al-Dîn] as his deputy and heir in the capital of Hindustan, *qâ'im maqâm wa walî'ahd-i khud ba-dâr al-mulk-i Hindustân ba-guzasht*, and sent him back to Delhi.³⁰

The narrative of the near contemporary chronicler Minhâj-i Sirâj Jûzjânî also supported Qutb al-Dîn's claims to be the *Amîr al-Umarâ'*, the chief of the Mu'izzî military commanders in north India. Writing in the 660's/1260's for the Delhi Sultan Nâsir al-Dîn (644-64/1246-66), Jûzjânî arranged his text to suggest that Delhi and its ruler had always been the paramount power in Hindustan.

Jûzjânî's narrative, however, was organised in the more disaggregated *ṭabaqât* form, where each unit of the text studied "people belonging to one layer or class in the chronological succession of generations". As a result, his history moved beyond the sharp focus on the ruler and included accounts of social peers or dependents. Thus, the twentieth section, *ṭabâqâ*, narrated the history of other important Mu'izzî subordinates in Hindustan without losing

sight of his need to emphasise Qutb al-Dîn's overall superiority.³¹ In this section Jûzjânî provided a somewhat circumspect account of the independent ability of the Mu'izzî commanders to raise a military retinue, wage war, and sometimes compete with each other over the distribution of spoils. One such military commander was Bahâ' al-Dîn Tughril, the governor of Thangir, in the province of Bayana.

According to Jûzjânî, Bahâ' al-Dîn sought to improve the economy of his appanage by attracting merchants, *tujjar*, and well known men, *ma'arâf-i rûy*, from different parts of Hindustan and Khurasan towards his domain. In an effort to encourage trade within the Bayana region, all merchants were granted accommodation and material support, *jumleh-ra khânah wa asbâb bakhsîd*, by the Mu'izzî subordinate. As a result, Jûzjânî noted, Bahâ' al-Dîn Tughril made his province prosperous, an indication of which was the construction of Sultânkôt; a new capital to go with changed circumstances.³² From Sultânkôt, Bahâ' al-Dîn commenced periodic raids towards Gwalior and was promised its territory by Mu'izz al-Dîn upon its capitulation. The seizure of Gwalior would have opened up the frontier into northern Rajasthan and Bundelkhand and brought considerable plunder and war material into the Amîr's reach. Bahâ' al-Dîn's efforts to enlarge and consolidate his appanage were resisted by Qutb al-Dîn Ai-Beg, who reacted to Bahâ' al-Dîn's increasing influence in the area by seizing Gwalior himself in 597/1200. Jûzjânî, who narrated this incident, concluded rather diplomatically that as a result of the Gwalior

episode there was (not?) a little dislike between Tughril and Quṭb al-Dīn, *miyān Malik...wa Sultān andak ghabārī bād*.³³

Although Quṭb al-Dīn Ai-Beg may have believed and proclaimed that he was the supreme Mu'izzī commander in north India, his peers certainly did not share this opinion. Despite the predisposition of the Persian documentation towards Quṭb al-Dīn and the authority of Delhi, the presence of competing autonomous dominions could not be wholly obscured. Even the eulogy of the likes of Fakhr-i Mudabbir wore thin on occasion, and he confessed:

And although all the victories which God caused him (Quṭb al-Dīn Ai-Beg) to win are clearer than the sun, and well known to all the world: nevertheless it must not be forgotten how much was due to the care and assistance of the *Sipahsālār* Ḥusām al-Dīn Ahmad 'Alī Shāh, who was the slave and officer of the King of Islām (Mu'izz al-Dīn), and was never absent from his stirrup, and was present at these victories and battles. Indeed all the generals of this court were gifted, brave and noble, and each was distinguished for his courage, and received an ample share of the fortune and prosperity of the King of Islam, who by his patronage and favour made each and all famous. To some he gave high commands, body guards, pavilions, drums, standards and districts, and each performed fine acts of service, and was duly praised...³⁴

In a political world where all the generals of Mu'izz al-Dīn's court were "gifted, brave and noble, and each...received an ample share of the fortune and prosperity of the King of Islam, who...made each and all famous" there was also considerable rivalry and conflict. It is

in the context of a fragmented political environment of the "north Indian Sultanates" (certainly in the plural), rather than a unitary dominion of the Delhi Sultanate, that we need to situate Quṭb al-Dīn Ai-Beg's urgency to appear as the unique *Amīr al-Umarā'*, the protector of the fortunes of the Muslim community.³⁵

The construction of the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'* was a part of Quṭb al-Dīn's effort to impress the Muslim congregation of his military and pious virtues. The inscriptions on the main entrance to the mosque remarked on his unique prowess and piety as a military commander destroying infidel temples. But again, given the nature of the political competition of the age, Quṭb al-Dīn was hardly unique in making statements of this nature. His rival in Bayana, Bahā' al-Dīn Tughril, also constructed congregational mosques which were architecturally similar in form and conception to the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'*. The Bayana mosques also eulogised Bahā' al-Dīn as the conqueror of infidels and the creator of havens for Muslim congregations. But if Quṭb al-Dīn Ai-Beg's inscriptions in the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'* drew the attention of the visitor to his military and moral accomplishments as the "viceroy" of Mu'izz al-Dīn Ghūrī, the visitor to the mosques in Bayana saw evidence of the same virtues in Bahā' al-Dīn's constructions. The only difference was that the inscriptions in the Bayana mosque went beyond Quṭb al-Dīn's claims and introduced Bahā' al-Dīn as *Pādīshāh* and *Sultān*.³⁶

Divorced from their assumed political context of a unitary

dominion and a composite ruling elite, the discursive statements carried in texts like Delhi's *masjid-i jamī* need to be oriented to an audience other than that comprised of infidels. Indeed, the probity of the military commander as the paradigmatic Muslim leader, God's choice of a shepherd for his flock, was an important theme in the epigraphs in the mosque, but these statements seem to have been directed to the Muslims who visited the congregational mosques, and were aimed at displacing rival claims made by Mu'izzī peers.

VI. The congregational mosque and the "Hindus"

The Delhi *masjid-i jamī*, like other congregational mosques, differed from ordinary mosques in its size and function. Where the latter served the purpose of performing prayer for a limited number of people, the Delhi *masjid-i jamī* was a huge public monument created for the purposes of a congregational gathering of Muslims. Through the performance of prayer in congregation, Muslims acknowledged the fact that they were one united community who had submitted to the will of Allah. In the normal course of events, unbelievers, especially profane idolators, would not have been allowed within the precincts of the Delhi *masjid-i jamī* and, as a result they may have only possessed a general sense of the manner in which temple spoils were redeployed within the mosque. The architectural composition of the mosque, however, would have impressed the congregation of

believers, who would have seen in it the evidence of their Amīr's ability to defeat infidels and provide a sanctuary for Islam.

Despite their ignorance of the precise architectural forms in the interior of the Delhi *masjid-i jamī*, it would be naive to assume that the "idolators" were unmoved by the destruction of their places of worship. But certainly within Delhi itself, there is no epigraphic record of rancour or sorrow at the destruction of temples, not even in the *devnagiri* graffitis inscribed by Hindu artisans in the nooks and crannies of Quṭb al-Dīn's mosque.³⁷ Instead, one early inscription in a local dialect identifies the minaret as "the pillar of Malikdīn. May it bring good fortune." Another anonymous artisan in 'Alā' al-Dīn's reign (695-715/1296-1316) had no hesitation in recognising the minaret as *Shrī Sultān Alāvadī Vijayasthamb*, the Sultan's pillar of victory. In Muḥammad Shāh Tughluq's reign (725-52/1325-51) the architects Nānā and Sālḥā recorded their contribution to the repairs of the minaret in an inscription which also celebrated the completion of their work "by the grace of Sri Viśvakarmā".³⁸ Although the destruction, desecration, and appropriation of temple artifacts was an unexceptional event during conflict between rival Hindu kingdoms in the Middle Ages (and it is perfectly possible that Quṭb al-Dīn's conduct drew a reaction from the local population quite dissimilar from ours in a similar context), we need to nevertheless remember that the actions of the Mu'izzī commanders differed from those of the precedents set by the Hindu rulers.

Whereas Hindu rajas pillaged each other's temples, the authority of the vanquished lord was either appropriated or reconstituted within the temple shrine of the conqueror. The statements of conquest embodied in the process of destruction and reconstruction of imperial temples, was carried out within ritually homologous forms of Hindu kingship.³⁹ By contrast, Quṭb al-Dīn's statements of conquest in the *masjid-i jāmi'* redeployed temple spoils, but there was no sense of appropriation of authority. It signified instead the arrival of alternate traditions of governance in Delhi. This carried larger social and moral implications for the constitution of authority in Delhi since the royal temples were also the sites of redistributive and transactional relationships between the king, his subordinate chieftains and the larger subject population. Quṭb al-Dīn's conquest, destruction of temples and the construction of a mosque in their stead, fractured the relationship between the king and his subordinate chieftains. This development need not necessarily imply, however, a concomitant distancing of the subordinate echelon of rural chieftains from newly emerging structures of Sultanate authority. It is certainly worth querying whether the Mu'izzī governors constructed new, but different, relationships with these local political regimes in the countryside.⁴⁰

The discourse of the Persian chronicles and the nature of the *masjid-i jāmi'* would suggest that this was not the case; political authority remained the exclusive preserve of the new Muslim Turkish elite and "Hindus" were hunted, not recruited, in the new political order.

Stray references within the same chronicles, however, would suggest that this was hardly universally true. The author of an early Muslim epic of conquest, Fakhr-i Mudabbir, mentioned that *rātkān wa takrān/rautagān wa thakkurān*, petty ["Hindu"] chieftains and their military subordinates, were present within the ranks of the pillaging armies of Quṭb al-Dīn Ai-Beg.⁴¹ We lack a sense of numbers and rôles occupied by these subordinates within the new dispensation, but their sheer presence forces us to reevaluate the relationships between the different ruling elites in ways more complicated than those suggested by a simple confessional divide.

The efforts of Quṭb al-Dīn, and other Mu'izzī commanders, towards consolidating relationships with "Hindu" chieftains only becomes clearer when we turn to other source material. In their ability to reach a far larger audience, the coinage of the Mu'izzī governors, even more than the *masjid-i jāmi'* in Delhi (or Bayana), served as effective discursive statements of conquest. Unlike the congregational mosque, however, the coinage carried statements of both conquest and reassurance to the conquered people. To begin with, the coins were unequivocal in their announcement of a new political order, and they introduced the new masters, the Mu'izzī *Amīrs*, as *Shrī Hammirah*; the Persian titles of the new lords stamped in the locally comprehensible *devnagiri* script.

The presence of the new political order, however, did not seem to suggest any evidence of material change. The conquerors

made no effort to alter the weight and purity of the precious metals in their coins which harmonised perfectly with existing circulating mediums. Deliberate attempts seem to have been made to emphasise continuity with the older patterns of fiscal and commercial exchange. Perhaps even more impressive was the confessional ambiguity in the sigilla of the Mu'izzî coins of this period. Emblems of a previous political regime, the image of God Shiva's vehicle, the *nandî* bull and the "Chauhan horseman" were stamped on the coins together with the title of *Shrî Hammirah*. Even more significant were the gold coins which carried both the outline of Lakshmî, the Hindu Goddess of wealth, and the Sultan's title in the *devnagiri* script. As discursive statements, these coins made deliberate attempts to incorporate the conquered people within the newly established political and economic systems, not through pillage and mayhem, but through reassuring measures and symbols that suggested continuity with a preceding regime. These statements would suggest that "Muslim conquest" did not seek to traumatise the subject population and it certainly did not wish to create any major disjunctions in their material life. As the hoard evidence from north India confirms, Mu'izzî coins were valued as much as the earlier Rajput currencies and were fully assimilated within an economic world unimpressed with transitions in the political realm.⁴²

Without devaluing the statement of plunder and conquest conveyed by the Delhi *masjid-i jâmi*, it should not be forgotten that it is

the Persian chronicles and the epigraphs in the mosque that make much of the episode of temple destruction. It is these texts which saw in the mosque the proof of the incumbent ruler's piety, a statement directed to the Muslim congregation in the mosque. From a different aspect, the destruction of the temple of the "Hindu" Raja was also necessary to break the social and political networks which sustained the old regimes. The ideology of iconoclasm, even within a "Hindu" context, carried the familiar sense of conquest and valour, but the construction of the *masjid-i jâmi* denied a reconstitution of authority along old "familiar" lines. Within the new Sultanate regimes, "Hindu" subordinates might have been ritually distanced, but the sigilla on the coinage points to the presence of discourses — different "non-monumental" structures — which eased the political transition and sought to construct new, stable, productive relationships with the *rautagân wa thakkurân*. The trauma of the political change was assuaged somewhat by the remarkably restrained and confessionally ambiguous ways in which the new regime intruded into the life of a second rung of "Hindu" political commanders. Within the context of their own discursive statements, this was a fact that the Persian chronicles and the Delhi *masjid-i jâmi* would not wish to recognise.

VII. Pietistic Muslim responses to the mosque

The main audience of the Delhi *masjid-i jâmi* were the Muslim resi-

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dents of the town. This community of Muslims increased in both size and heterogenous complexity during the 620s/1220s. Because of the destruction and havoc caused by the Mongol invasions, people from different regions in Afghanistan, eastern Iran, Transoxania and the central Asian steppes, immigrants of varied ethnic backgrounds, speaking distinct regional dialects, and with separate customary usages, made their way into the sanctuary of north India. It is doubtful if they automatically felt any sense of solidarity with each other purely because they were denominationally Muslim. Many of them possessed artisanal skills which made a material difference to the regional economy of the fledgling Sultanate. Whether the presence of a greater number of "Muslims" contributed to any sense of an integrated community is a different question altogether. Jûzjânî's history was sensitive to the appearance of such large numbers of immigrants but, to his mind, integration was not a problem since the confessional solidarity of Islam overcame all distinctions between Muslims. Jûzjânî claimed that Iltutmish (607-33/1210-36) collected people from all parts of the world in Delhi,

(which is) the capital of Hindustan, *dâr al-mulk*, the centre of Islam, *dâira'i Islâm*, the cradle of the commands and prohibitions of the *Shar'at*, *mahbûb-i awâmir wa nuwâhi-yi Shar'at*, the keeper of the Muslim faith, *hauz-i dîn-i Muḥammadi*, the dais of the Muslim community, *manassa'i millat-i Ahmadi*, the sanctuary of Islam in the eastern world, *Qubba'i Islâm mashâriq-i gâ'i*...⁴³

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The author's description of Delhi as the *qubba'i Islâm*, the sanctuary, the dome of Islam, conveyed to the reader the new identity of the capital in its axial role of representing the fortunes of the larger collectivity of Muslims. This was accurate enough in the context of Delhi's emerging military influence in north India; by 625/1228 Iltutmish had managed to defeat and annex the territories of the remnant Mu'izzî and Quṭbî commanders. Jûzjânî's representation of this political transformation, however, went much further. The chronicler's narrative suggested that just as Iltutmish's sultanate was a monolith, Islam was also a unitary, homogenous entity without any internal dissonances or complexities, at peace with itself, especially since the Delhi Sultan was its great protector.

Doubts about the degree of confessional coherence within the Muslim population of the Delhi Sultanate, however, emerge rather ironically from Jûzjânî's history itself. Towards the end of Iltutmish's reign, sometime around, or after 634/1236, Jûzjânî mentioned that a "sort" of learned man, *shakhs-i danishmand gûna*, by the name of Nûr Turk collected a large following near Delhi. According to the chronicler, this was a congregation of common people, *khalq-i 'awâmm*, who collected from distant areas like Gujarat, Sindh, the environs of Delhi and the banks of the Ganga and Jumna. They were strongly moved by Nûr Turk's exhortations, *tazkîr*, where the preacher referred to the 'ulamâ' of the majority community, *'ulamâ'i abl-i sunnat wa jamâ'at*, as those who had wronged the cause of 'Alî. According to Jûzjânî, Nûr

Turk specifically condemned the '*ulamâ*' of the *Shâfi'i* and *Hanafi* legal schools of interpretation, and instigated his followers to conspire against Islam, *qas'd Islâm kardand*. This group of people attacked the Delhi *masjid-i jâmi'*, an action which led Jûzjânî to describe the group as Shi'i Qarmatians and heretics, *mulâhida wa qarâmîta*.⁴⁴

Jûzjânî sought to obscure the significance of the "Muslim" attack on the Qutb mosque by suggesting that it was the conspiracy of "heretics", a people who were outside the pale of the Sunni community. As a result, the attack on the *masjid-i jâmi'* would have remained one of the many curious details of a challenge which the "Muslim" sultanate had withstood successfully. A thorough vindication of the main protagonist in this story, however, by no less a person than the widely revered and respected *ṣūfi* saint Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ', makes it impossible to accept Jûzjânî's gloss of the incident.

On the 13th of Sh'aban, 718/October 10, 1318, during one of his daily meetings with the congregation who visited his hospice in Delhi, the *ṣūfi* was queried about Nûr Turk and Jûzjânî's description of the derwish's beliefs and actions. Contrary to Jûzjânî's evaluation, Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ' made it a point to clarify that Nûr Turk's faith was free from any heresy and absolved him of all Shi'i Qaramatî links. According to Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ', Nûr Turk had publicly criticised the '*ulamâ*' because he had seen how polluted they had become by the material world of the capital, *ishân-râ âluda'i duniyâ didê*. It was for this reason that the '*ulamâ*' had fabricated all kinds of

offensive charges (of the kind reported by Jûzjânî, no doubt) against the pious derwish, *u-râ badân chîzhâ mansûb kardand*.⁴⁵ In Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ's recounting of the tale, Jûzjânî's appraisal of Nûr Turk coincided with the biased opinions of the '*ulamâ*' in Delhi. The wheel had come full circle; for Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ' it was the *sharî'a* minded '*ulamâ*' who were not paragons of virtue or comportment.

The renewed discussion of Nûr Turk's beliefs, his animosity towards the Delhi '*ulamâ*', and Jûzjânî's account of the incident may well have cropped up accidentally during the course of Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ's discourse. In the manner of his discussion of the Nûr Turk episode however, the *ṣūfi* saint's arguments did not merely rework Jûzjânî's report, it also sought to foreclose all options for independent analysis on this subject. If Nûr Turk's piety was unimpeachable, the conduct of the '*ulamâ*' offensive, and Jûzjânî's history biased, then, without so much as actually articulating the thought, Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ's narrative suggested that Nûr Turk's righteous moral indignation exonerated the derwish's attack on the *masjid-i jâmi'* and its corrupt '*ulamâ*'. Hidden as a sub-text in this discussion was a comment on the sacred character of the Delhi *masjid-i jâmi'* if its '*ulamâ*' misrepresented Islam.

These contrasting evaluations of Nûr Turk are important because they were made by two not entirely dissimilar people. Both Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ' and Jûzjânî were members of the *sûnni-jamâ'a* community, and both were popular preachers, respected for their

piety. Yet, even within the sunni-jamā'a community there were obviously wide differences in understanding the virtuous conduct of Muslims, especially amongst mystics and *sharī'a*-minded scholars. Some of these differences were explained by Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā'.

The '*ulamā*' are the people of intellect *ahl-i 'aql*, the *derwishes* are the people of love *ahl-i 'ishq*, the intellect of the '*ulamā*' overpowers, *ghālib*, [their sentiment] of love, [whereas] the [emotion] of [divine] love of these mystics triumphs over [their] intellect.⁴⁶

Intellect in the thirteenth century, carried with it the associated meaning of a prescriptive, scholastic method of "knowing" a mortal's subordinate relationship with God. Conduct and belief for the individual Muslim was carefully worked out in its details in authoritative texts by the '*ulamā*', with the intention of securing social conformity and the ideal of a unity within the Muslim community. This sharply reduced the opportunities for independent speculation, and contrasted with the emotion of divine love. In the *ṣūfī* understanding of Islam far greater importance was given to an inner, intuitive understanding of ritual. The faith of the believer could lead him to experience aspects of God's bounty and love, foreign to the cognition of the '*ulamā*'. As a result the *ṣūfī* could believe that "a preacher... was so transported by his own eloquence that he flew away from the pulpit (*minbar*) to a neighbouring wall;...[that] meetings...[took place]...in deserted places with Khwaja Khizr who

has everlasting life; ...[that there were] various 'fairy people' — ...*abdals* who physically fl[ew] above the territories which they protect from harm, ...[that] a holy man [circled] around the [*mihrab* of the Delhi *masjid*] through the night till the dawn, ...[that] the *mardān-i ghaib*, men of the unseen, ...appear[ed] and disappear[ed], and sometimes call[ed] away a mortal to join them".⁴⁷ Whereas reason and intellect would regard these as patently fraudulent experiences, for many people in the early thirteenth century these were "real" events, evidence of God's intervention in an insecure mortal world. The mystic's interpretation of the individual's relationship with God resisted the authoritarian intervention of the intellect; the *nūr-i bātin* of the *ṣūfī*, his internal, hidden emotions, provided him with the space to contravene the '*ulamā*'s understanding of the social dictates of the *sharī'a*.

This independence, the freedom to negotiate one's piety through a variety of prescriptive norms, was abhorrent to the '*ulamā*' who regarded the *ṣūfī* ability to mobilise huge congregations to their way of thinking as positively dangerous to the unity of Islam. The Delhi Sultans, nervous about the popular charismatic appeal of the saints, could not have agreed more with the conclusions of the '*ulamā*'. Although the Sultans lacked the ability of interfering and disciplining the conduct of the *ṣūfī*, they could encourage a homogeneity of conduct by constructing and patronising institutions which supported the *sharī'a*. Both Iltutmish and 'Alā al-Dīn Khalajī, two sultans who added to and reconstructed the Qutb mosque, took their rôles as the

"preservers of the *sharī'a* very seriously. 'Alā' al-Dīn's inscription in the mosque explained the Delhi Sultan's contribution:

When God Almighty, whose greatness is sublime and whose names are exalted, for the revival of the laws of the [Muslim] community, *ihyā'yi marāsim-i millat*,⁴⁸ and the elevation of the banners of the *sharī'at*, chose the lord of the Caliphs of the world, *khudaygān-i Khulafā'i jabān-rā*, so that every moment the foundations of the Muslim religion, *asās-i dīn-i Muḥammadi*, and the roots, *binā-yi*, of the Muslim *sharī'a* are strengthening, *istihkām mīpazīrad/qawī mīgardad*, and for preserving the state and consolidating the Sultanate, *dawām-i mamlikat wa nizām-i Sulṭanat*, [the lord of the Caliphs] built mosques in accordance with the commands of Him beside whom there is no God, (*Qur'ān* IX: 18) "But he only shall visit the mosques who believes in God".⁴⁹

Other than acknowledging the divine dispensation of authority to 'Alā' al-Dīn, the *Khalajī* inscriptions linked "reviving", "protecting" and "strengthening" the *sharī'a* to the construction of mosques. 'Alā' al-Dīn's constructions created the material conditions in which Muslims could cleanse themselves of sin, and it is for this reason that another inscription implored: "may God perpetuate his kingdom (so that he may continue) to build mosques, and preserve till eternity his sovereignty (so as to protect) the lustre of the places of worship".⁵⁰

Iltutmish's inscriptions quoted the *Qur'ān*, *sūra* 62: 9-10, to clarify the importance of performing the obligatory rituals of prayer in the midst of one's daily activity:

O' believers, when proclamation is made for prayer on Friday, hasten to God's remembrance and leave trafficking aside; that is better for you, did you but know. Then when the prayer is finished, scatter in the land and seek God's bounty, and remember God frequently; haply you will prosper.⁵¹

Another inscription cited the traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad to emphasise the connections between individual and congregational worship.

The Prophet...said, "whoever offered his morning prayer in congregation got his (worldly) troubles removed by Allah; and whoever offered his afternoon prayer (in congregation) got his living made plentiful by Allah; and whoever offered his late afternoon prayer (in congregation) became (as pure) as on the day he was born; and whoever offered his evening prayer in congregation is considered as if he has given away his wealth and (even) his life (in the way of Allah), and whoever offered his bed-time prayer in congregation received Allah's blessing". (The Prophet)...said, "whoever observed these five prayers in congregation would have his way (to Heaven) widened by Allah."⁵²

As a part of their "administrative" repertory aimed at controlling their Muslim subjects, the Delhi Sultans needed the '*ulamā*' in their supervisory rôle of enforcing obedience to the *sharī'a*. The construction of mosques and schools proclaimed the Sultan's pietistic intentions while providing the '*ulamā*' with the monumental sites where the Muslims could be socialised into following the prescriptive codes

of the *sharī'a*. It was the socially fragmented world of the Muslims that the Delhi Sultans sought to cohere within one community, governed by one law, under the authority of a morally upright monarch. The Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'* was extremely important in disseminating this sentiment, and 'Alā' al-Dīn *Khālajī* was very direct in developing its sacred significance. His inscription on the left pier of the south door to the mosque argued:

"he ('Alā' al-Dīn) built this mosque, which is the mosque of paradise, for saints and....men of piety and a place of assembly of the eminent angels, and an edifice inhabited by the souls of the chief prophets".⁵³

'Alā' al-Dīn did not question the spiritual authority of the saints of God, *awliyā'*, instead he argued that together with angels and prophets, their presence in his *masjid-i jāmi'* was on account of the sacredness of the mosque. It was the Delhi Sultan's special relationship with God and His blessings which had transformed the mosque into a hallowed precinct. Rather than the congregation lending significance to the mosque, the pious congregated in the *masjid* because of its holy character and accepted the dictates of the *sharī'a* which it represented.

As we have already seen, Nūr Turk was far from impressed by similar claims made by Iltutmish. Although he had chosen a more direct military recourse in challenging the *Sharī'at* order constructed by the Delhi Sultan, Nizām al-Dīn relied upon his teachings to counter

the coercion of the '*ulamā'*. In establishing an alternative disciplinary formation, the teachings of the *ṣūfī* were as threatening to Sultanate "order" as an armed attack. There was no mincing of words in his inversion of 'Alā' al-Dīn's claims regarding the sacredness of the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'*:

[Nizām al-Dīn] asserted: "Whatever place there might be, it is scented by the blessed feet [of the *ṣūfī* saints]. Take, for example, the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'*. The feet of so many saints and pious have trod there, which is why that place has so much tranquility."⁵⁴

In other words, 'Alā' al-Dīn's *masjid-i jāmi'* would have remained a spiritless place, a pile of stones and mortar, had the *ṣūfī* saints not transformed it. It was important to make this point in case visitors to the mosque attributed the pious environment of the mosque to its constructors, the Delhi Sultans. Nizām al-Dīn wanted to make sure that his audience realised that the "tranquility" of the place originated from the blessings of the saints of God and not from the efforts of the Delhi Sultans.

VIII. Conclusion:

"Objective" history and the memory of the Qutb

At the time of its construction, the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'* left a variety of different impressions upon visitors. For many it was a symbol of a

flourishing Muslim community abiding by the tenets of the *shar'ia*, triumphant over its idolatrous opponents, secured by the energetic, armed interventions of its Sultans. For others, it was a haven for "scholars", who were concerned less with the spiritual fate of their congregations and more with a coercive regimen of rituals, pecuniary gains and their own authority. These claims and counter claims were very much a part of the history of Delhi's first *masjid-i jâmi'* in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Events after the thirteenth century consolidated rival interpretations of the congregational mosque and the modern memory of the Qutb was strongly impressed with these conflicting images.

For over three centuries after 'Alâ' al-Dîn *Khalajî's* death (715/1316), the old *masjid-i jâmi'* was sporadically associated with the authority of the rulers of Delhi. But this was not at the expense of the *ṣūfīs* whose influence remained undiminished during this period. In the fourteenth century itself, the tomb of Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ' emerged as the most venerated shrine in the region of Delhi, completely eclipsing the Delhi *masjid-i jâmi'*. The area around his shrine was blessed by the grace of the saint and his disciples chose to be buried in the proximity of their *pîr*, their intercessor with God at the day of judgement. Amongst many others buried in this necropolis was the Mughal emperor Humâyûn (died 963/1556), and a pilgrimage to the *dargâh*, or the "court" of Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ', was a part of the Mughal itinerary whenever the rulers of the dynasty visited

Delhi.⁵⁵ Mughal patronage to the shrine, paradoxically, "controlled" the discourse of the saint against the inadequacies of temporal government. The Mughals did not hesitate to appear as disciples of mystic saints and incorporated strains of mysticism within an ideological baggage explaining their rites of kingship.

The example of Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ' notwithstanding, not all *ṣūfī* shrines were equally hegemonised by the Mughals. To the south of Delhi, near the old *masjid-i jâmi'*, the *dargâh* of Qutb al-Dîn Bakhtiyâr Kâkî (died 634/1236) was also an important *ṣūfī* shrine. Although he was not an unusually influential saint in his own life time, Bakhtiyâr Kâkî was the *pîr* of Bâbâ Farîd, Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ's spiritual master, and the renown of the student had certainly accrued to his teachers as well.⁵⁶ The record of royal visitations to the *dargâh* suggests that Bakhtiyâr Kâkî's shrine emerged as a pilgrimage site as early as the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.⁵⁷ In 932/1526 it was included in Babar's tour of significant areas worthy of visitation in Delhi and in the mid 1150s/early 1740s Dargâh Qulî Khân commenced his account of Delhi's *ṣūfī* shrines with a narration of Bakhtiyâr Kâkî's *dargâh*.⁵⁸ Bakhtiyâr Kâkî may have lacked the popularity of Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ', but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, his mystical powers were considered commanding enough that the Mughal emperors Shâh 'Âlam Bahâdur Shâh (1119-24/1707-12), Jalâl al-Dîn Shâh 'Âlam (1173-1221/1760-1806) and Mu'în al-Dîn Akbar (1221-53/1806-1837) chose to be

buried near the *dargâh*. The wish of the last Mughal ruler, Bahâdur Shâh "Zafar" (1253-74/1837-58), to be buried near the saint remained unfulfilled; he was deported to Rangoon by the British where he died.⁵⁹

Unlike Nizâm al-Dîn's *dargâh*, Bakhtiyâr Kâkî's charisma did not materially alter the prestige of the Mughal emperors. This was not because of any shortcoming in the saint's popularity. By the end of the eighteenth century, Mughal might had not survived the onslaught of the Afghan, Maratha and British incursions and its capacity to command obedience was in obvious decline. The Mughal ability to access the increasing popularity of Bakhtiyâr Kâkî's shrine for its own ends was also severely limited. In the eighteenth century many people in Delhi regarded Qutb al-Dîn Bakhtiyâr Kâkî as the seniormost in the "hierarchy of saints", the *Qutb al-aqtâb*, specially chosen by God to maintain order in the world. The actual extent of his influence is uncertain, but at least within a local, popular cosmology evident in Delhi in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century, Bakhtiyâr Kâkî was regarded as the *Qutb*, the axis, around whom the world revolved. This interpretation was also provided an iconic representation when the *minâr* of the neighbouring, thirteenth century *masjid-i jâmi'*, was described as *Qutb sahib ki lâth*. In other words, the minaret was believed to represent the staff of Qutb al-Dîn Bakhtiyâr Kâkî which pierced the sky, and like the *pîr* himself, connected heaven with earth, providing stability and shelter to mortals on earth.⁶⁰ In this reworked popular cosmology, it was the saint who was the *qubbat al-*

Islâm, the "sanctuary of Islam" and not the congregational mosque. It was in acknowledgement of the *pîr*'s charisma, that the minaret of the mosque was christened the Qutb *minâr*, the name which it still carries today.

The reason why we have any information at all about the later developments in the meaning of the *masjid-i jâmi'* is because of attempts made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to correct some of these "errors". In 1263/1846-7 the *munshif*, judge, employed with the British East India Company, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, wrote his famous topographical monograph on Delhi, the *Âşâr al-Sanâdîd*. At that stage in his life, Sayyid Ahmad was strongly influenced by the emerging positivistic historiographical methodologies gaining currency in the west. In his research on Delhi's monuments, the scholar was extremely careful in citing his literary and archaeological evidence, and in ascertaining chronological, geographical and lexicographical details. Subsequent to the *Âşâr al-Sanâdîd*, Sayyid Ahmad Khan published critical editions of Abû' al-Fazl's *Â'in-i Akbarî*, Ziyâ' al-Dîn Baranî's *Ta'rikh-i Fîrûzshâhî*, and Jahângîr's, *Tûzûk-i Jahângîrî*, all medieval Persian chronicles on which he had started work several years ago. The course of his research was charted by his belief that "only a correct and sober presentation of the facts can convey a true sense of direction in history and enable the Indians to arrive at a realistic assessment of their situation".⁶¹ The documentary record of the court chronicles was an important source for the historian, and

Sayyid Ahmad Khan carefully selected texts which were, in his opinion, repositories of reliable, objective information.

His concern to recount the "correct facts" about the capital of the great Sultans and the Mughals motivated Sayyid Ahmad Khan to write the most comprehensive text on the monuments of Delhi. In his account of Delhi's old congregational mosque, he did mention that one of the names for the minaret was "*Qutb shāhib kī lāth*", and, amongst other names, the *masjid* was also called *Quwwat al-Islām*.⁶² Presumably, because these names belonged to the realm of an oral, popular culture, and not to an "objective", "scientific", verifiable, documentary record, there was no discussion of why the mosque and the *minār* were ascribed such intriguing names. Sayyid Ahmad Khan's text led the reader away from these names towards the more "relevant" subject of the architectural and epigraphical content of the monument and each Sultan's contribution to its construction.

In its own turn, the *Āshār al-Sanādīd* was regarded as an "authoritative" text because it carried all the evidence of sound historical research. Archaeologists and historians of a later generation were dependent upon Sayyid Ahmad Khan's collection of data, his readings of the epigraphs, bibliography of sources, and discussion of the authorship and architectural significance of the mosque. The major development in the early twentieth century occurred when the analysis of the congregational mosque was further elaborated by an emerging consensus about the history of the Delhi Sultanate.

Ironically, in their research in this area as well, scholars continued to be dependent upon Sayyid Ahmad Khan's scholarship. It was his editions of the Persian chronicles which became the staple diet for most medievalists, because their "factual account[s]", scholars in the twentieth century noted, were "correct in all substantive matters".

There is no doubt that the scholarship on the medieval period today bears little resemblance to that of Sayyid Ahmad's time. Irfan Habib's work in itself has inspired research into questions concerning material culture, agricultural production and the structures of the state. These developments notwithstanding, historians are still wary of examining medieval Persian texts as discursive constructions of evidence, as images which sought to shape reality. In the absence of such interrogation, a circular logic which first locates "authoritative" sources, and then reconstructs a "definitive" history of the Middle Ages, has led to the writing of histories which have in different ways remained congruent with the fortunes of the state.

This methodology has left little space for the presence of local histories, popular memories or contesting discourses in the history of medieval India.⁶³ For the Qutb mosque, it led to the "clarification" that the minaret was not named after the *ṣūfī* saint Qutb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, but the military commander Qutb al-Dīn Aī-Beg. The term *Qubbat al-Islām*, or the "Sanctuary of Islam", which was at first ambiguously used by Jūzjānī for Iltutmish's Delhi and later applied to define the spiritual domain of Bakhtiyār Kākī, was transformed

into *Qutbat al-Islām*, or the "Might of Islam" and used for Qutb al-Dīn's mosque. This name coincided more closely with the military persona of the first constructor of the mosque and his proclamation of a new political order built out of the rubble of temples. Despite all the other developments in research on medieval Indian history, this interpretation of the mosque has remained unquestioned. In that sense, the problem before us today is not a simple one of reinterpreting the significance of the Qutb monuments. We need to be aware that it is the epistemologies dominant in the study of medieval Indian history that enable the interpretation of the Qutb monuments as the "*Qutbat al-Islām*" mosque.

As purveyors of "information", historians shape the contours of India's past, in history text-books, school and college syllabi and the popular media. Despite the best intentions of many of these practitioners, their work only serves to consolidate popular misconceptions concerning the monolithic character of Hindu and Muslim social structures in the medieval period. Historians may no longer use the term "Muslim period" to refer to the subcontinent's Middle Ages, but their histories still consider the Delhi Sultans and the Mughal *padishāhs* as the principal actors in the history of medieval India. The different rulers and their structures of administration, revenue and diplomatic policies are studied as the agencies which introduced social and economic change in the subcontinent. Marxist analyses of relations of exploitation and dominance in Sultanate and Mughal society,

confirm the image of a monolithic ruling elite, predominantly Muslim and obsessed with "a" Persian culture. This static and undifferentiated account is disturbed only occasionally by the *bhakti*, sometimes the *śūfī*, perhaps even by groups such as the Mahdawīs. But these are often discussed as dissenting groups, "non-conformist movements", related to, but outside the pale of two well contoured religions. During this entire period "Muslims" remained the politically dominant group within the subcontinent. The relationship of these historiographies and the memory of the Qutb is extremely important. The events and individuals — Qutb al-Dīn Aī-Beg or Qutb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, for example — are not terribly significant in themselves, but once situated within larger contextual frames of signification they recall a host of memories. The Qutb is one of those historic sites which can extend beyond its own historical moment to carry a much larger symbolic statement.

Part of its importance lies in the manner in which it has been preserved and "done up" into a national and world heritage monument. In one of its advertisement campaigns the *Hindustan Times*, a national newspaper, asked its readers the rhetorical question: "Can you imagine Delhi without the Qutb?" Its ruins are presented today as a part of "Indian" antiquity, a part of each citizen's inheritance which he or she can cherish. One mosque out of several from the twelfth century has gained this doubtful honour. Indians are asked to take pride in "their" *minār* — we are told that it is one of the tallest

free standing minarets built out of stone and mortar. Nationalist pride, however, is shortlived and the Qutb monuments lead to a host of ambivalent reactions.

If the minaret is wonderful, what of the mosque? Responses vary. For many, especially children, the monument is an incredibly beautiful and grandiose palace or a large congregational hall. That it is a mosque escapes most of them. Other, more "discerning" visitors, remain disconcerted by the statues, pillars, and elaborate carvings, so obviously of a Hindu/Jain provenance situated within a congregational mosque. Still others may see in the mosque evidence of the might and dominance of "their community" in the affairs of the subcontinent in the near past.

Since it is a major tourist site, the Archaeological Survey of India has placed short descriptions inscribed on stone near the several monuments to "guide" visitors through the Qutb complex. These inscriptions provide the name, the physical properties, functions and significance of the respective monuments. These are facts; there is no hint of doubt, speculation or debate concerning the multiple interpretations of these sites or the changing historical contexts in which they were built. Instead, the self-confident recounting of undisputed information is in itself reassuring to the visitors. It is presented as the wisdom of the professional body of historians and archaeologists, the "authorities" whose knowledge should be above doubt.

Once armed with the crucial information that the *Quwwat al-Islam masjid* celebrates the conquest of Hindustan by the Muslim Sultans of Delhi the nature of the monument itself leaves little space to visitors for doubt. Even as they function as historians themselves, the "evidence" of plunder before them is "proof" sufficient of Muslim iconoclasm and a bigoted hatred of Hindus and their religious beliefs. Their empirical conclusions are not very far from a seamless historiography of medieval Indian history which has provided little to contest the overriding impression of the hegemony of the Muslim state.⁶⁴ As a result, the Qutb serves as a catalyst which resurrects a host of memories about Muslims and their governance: from casual stories concerning Muslim fanaticism and violence, to history lessons where Muslim rulers and their subordinates monopolised power and exploited Hindu subjects. Within the mosque the visitor is struck by the juxtaposition of the great monolithic communities, a divide which the Qutb suggests commenced from the very intrusion of Islam into India. A partition which from its very first encounter was remarkable for its violence.

More than any large tome or pedagogical instruction, the Qutb provides an opportunity to educate visitors about the complex fragmented political and religious world of India's Middle Ages, a time when there was considerable disunity and contestation within the groups defined as "Hindus" and "Muslims". It is this frame of reference which should also guide us to reflect upon the manner in

which discursive constructions of knowledge were formed in the Middle Ages. The *Qubbat al-Islam* mosque was built to represent a unity of belief and conduct to a Muslim congregation who not only remained quite unimpressed with Sultanate statements of piety and power but also produced their own contesting discursive texts. The spoils of the Hindu and Jain temples are only a small part of the story of the Qutb; Mu'izzî *amîrs* such as Bahâ' al-Dîn Tughril, *ṣāfi* derwishes like Nûr Turk, *shaykhs* like Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ', the popular veneration of Qutb al-Dîn Bakhtiyâr Kâkî and the historiography of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his successors are all ingredients that should be used to explain the multi-leveled history of the mosque and minaret to visitors. Instead it is the extreme nationalist ideologies prevalent in India which filter our understanding of the Qutb. This unfortunately also burdens visitors with unequivocal evidence of wrongs inflicted in the past upon the Hindu community, wrongs that are in need of correction today. As a result, the Qutb stands as an icon, encapsulating the trauma of 1947 and acting as a historical exoneration for the acts of December 1992. What is tragic is the manner in which historians of medieval India have provided "proof" and "evidence" supporting the readings of this icon.

¹This is an abbreviated version of a paper presented at the Indo-French Seminar (sponsored by the UGC, ICHR and the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme) held at the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 14-16

February, 1994. A revised version of this paper is included in my forthcoming book titled 'Sites of Power and Resistance: A Study of Sultanate Monumental Architecture'. The paper has profited from the comments of Anjali Kumar, David Gilmartin, Dilip Menon, Ebba Koch, Gail Minault, Suvir Kaul and Tanika Sarkar, none of whom necessarily share the opinions of the author expressed here.

²Alfred Gell, "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology", in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, ed. J. Coote and Anthony Shelton, (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 40-63.

³For details on the spatial, architectural and epigraphic information, other than my own field surveys, I am reliant on the research of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Alexander Cunningham, J. Horowitz, J.A. Page, A.B.M. Husain, M.A. Husain, and Ebba Koch. The full bibliographical citations are given below.

⁴Although there is absolutely no evidence to warrant such an assumption all historians and archaeologists have concluded that it was the Muslims who placed the iron pillar within the Qutb mosque. Their conclusions might have been guided by the fact that later rulers like Firûz Shâh Tughluq and Akbar transported Asokan pillars and placed them as trophies in Delhi and Allahabad respectively. As Richard H. Davis, "Indian Art Objects as Loot", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 52 (1993): 22-48, has pointed out, however, temples were also plundered by Hindu rulers, and their idols were frequently treated as war trophies and publicly displayed as statements of conquest. A similar effort at embellishing his own authority may well have guided the Tomara ruler Anangpal sometime around 1052. At least according to popular legends, it was this ruler who placed the fourth century iron pillar at its current site. See Alexander Cunningham, "Four Reports made during the years 1862-63-64-65", *Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, (Simla: Archaeological Survey of India, Government Press, 1871), vol. 1, pp. 171-175.

⁵See, for example, the opinion of H.C. Fanshawe, *Shah Jahan's Delhi — Past and Present*, (Delhi: Sumit Publications, 1979 reprint of 1902 edition), p. 257.

⁶See Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Āṣār al-Sanâdîd*, ed. Khaliq Anjum, (Delhi: Urdu Academy Delhi, 1990 reprint of 1847 edition), Alexander Cunningham, "Four Reports...", J. Horowitz, "The Inscriptions of Muhammad ibn Sam,

Qutbuddin Aibeg and Iltutmish", *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* (1911-12): 12-34, J. Yazdani, "Inscriptions of the Khalij Sultans of Delhi and their contemporaries in Bengal" *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* (1917-18), pp. 23-30, J.A. Page, *An Historical Memoir on the Qutb*, (Calcutta: Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, no. 22, Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1926).

⁷As far as I have been able to date it, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was the first author to refer to the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'* as the "*Quwwat al-Islām*" mosque. S.A. Khan, *Āṣār al-Sanādīd*, vol. 1, p. 310, provided three names for the mosque: *Masjid-i Adina Dehli yā* (or) *Masjid-i jāmi' Dehli yā* (or) *Quwwat al-Islām*. Cunningham (1871) either misread *Quwwat al-Islām* in Khan's text as *Qutb al-Islām* or, as is more likely (see below), he relied upon a locally current source for his reading. Literature on Delhi produced for English tourists at the turn of the century always referred to the mosque as *Quwwat al-Islām*. See H.C. Fanshawe, *Delhi—Past and Present*, p. 258, and Gordon Risley Hearn, *The Seven Cities of Delhi*, (New Delhi: SBW Publishers, 1986 reprint of 1906 edition), pp. 51, 54, 94. Some years later, the widely cited Horowitz, "Inscriptions..." *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* (1911-12) and J.A. Page, *Qutub...*, (1926), informed scholars that *Quwwat al-Islām* was the name of this mosque. It was a fateful christening for it was to eventually become the "official" name of the mosque. From two edges of the historiographical spectrum where this term is used for the *masjid-i jāmi'*, see: J. Burton Page, "Dihli", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. C.E. Bosworth et al, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, second edition, 1956-), vol. 2, pp. 255-266, representing the "Islamicist" tradition, and Y.D. Sharma, *Delhi and its Neighbourhood*, (New Delhi: Director General Archaeological Survey of India, 1982 reprint), pp. 17-19, 52-9, amongst the better tourist guide literature.

⁸Michael W. Meister, "The Two-and-a-half day Mosque", *Oriental Art* 18 n.s. (1972): 57-63; Mohammad Mujeeb, "The Qutb Complex as a Social Document", in *Islamic influence on Indian Society*, (Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1972), pp. 114-127; and A.B.M. Husain, *The Manara in Indo-Muslim Architecture*, (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Publication no. 25, 1970).

⁹Robert Hillenbrand, "Political Symbolism in Early Indo-Islamic Mosque Architecture: the Case of Ajmīr", *Iran* 26 (1988): 105-117. Anthony Welch, "Architectural Patronage and the Past: The Tughluq Sultans of India", *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 311-322.

¹⁰Welch, "Architectural Patronage...", p. 314.

¹¹Anthony Welch, "*Qur'ān* and Tomb: the Religious Epigraphs of two early Sultanate Tombs in Delhi" in *Indian Epigraphy: its bearings on the History of Art*, ed. Frederick M. Asher and G.S. Ghai, (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., American Institute of Indian Studies, 1985), pp. 260, 257. Welch summarised here arguments which he presented in another, apparently still unpublished article: "Islamic Architecture and Epigraphs in Sultanate India" in *Studies in South Asian Art and Architecture*, ed. A.K. Narain, forthcoming.

¹²Ibid, p. 257.

¹³In Welch's analysis, "Architectural Patronage...", pp. 311, 312, 313, 314: "Building types — mosques, tombs, madrasas, and minars — as well as forms are also at the same time assertively alien to the Hindu majority, and in their strident distinctiveness from indigenous buildings, they proclaim Islam's universal aspirations and its distance from the polytheism of the subject population" (pp. 312-3).

¹⁴A.B.M. Habibullah, *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*, (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1976 reprint), Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in the Thirteenth Century*, (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1974 reprint), S.B.P. Nigam, *Nobility under the Sultans of Delhi, A.D. 1206-1398*, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968).

¹⁵Habibullah, *Foundation of Muslim Rule*, ch. VI, pp. 120-134.

¹⁶Welch, "Architectural Patronage...", p. 311.

¹⁷"The plebianization of the nobility", a clumsy formulation at best, has several proponents but was first suggested by Muhammad Habib, "The Governing Class" in *The Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate*, (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, n.d.), pp. 144-151, and later developed by Irfan Habib, "Barani's Theory of the Delhi Sultanate", *Indian Historical Review* 7 (1980-81), p. 109.

¹⁸For the architectural consequences of this development see Welch, "Architectural Patronage and the Past", pp. 314-5. Here the author argues that since the Tughluqs were [more?] secular rulers, governing a pan-Indian state, their architecture was also less "saracenic" and more eclectic.

¹⁹Irfan Habib, "The Social distribution of Landed Property in pre-British India (a Historical Survey)", *Enquiry* n.s. 2 (1965), p. 45.

²⁰Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), p. 257.

²¹Irfan Habib, "The State and the Economy" in *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, ed. Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (Cambridge: University Press, 1982), vol. 1, p. 184.

²²Ibid.

²³Habib, *Agrarian System of the Mughal Empire*, p. 334.

²⁴Habibullah, *Foundation of Muslim Rule*, ch. V-VI, pp. 96-134, Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p. 318.

²⁵Irfan Habib, "The Price Regulations of 'Alâ'uddin Khaljî—A defence of Zîâ' Barani" *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 21 (1984), p. 393.

²⁶Shireen Moosvi, *The Economy of the Mughal Empire, c. 1595: A Statistical Study* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 4.

²⁷Irfan Habib, "Evidence for Sixteenth century Agrarian Conditions in the Guru Granth Sahib" *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 1 (1963-64), p. 70.

²⁸Athar Ali, "The Mughal Polity — a Critique of 'Revisionist' Approaches", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 52 (1991-2), pp. 308, 310.

²⁹"*in pahlwân (?) wa jabândâr-i Hind-ra Malik khitâb farmûd*". "Pahlwân" in the Persian edition of the *Ta'rikh* must be a mistake for "pahlwân".

³⁰Fakhr-i Mudabbir, *Ta'rikh-i Fakhr al-Dîn Mubâarakshâh*, ed. E.D. Ross, (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1927), pp. 28-9.

³¹On the *ṭabaqât* form as a historical genre of writing see Franz Rosenthal, *History of Muslim Historiography*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), pp. 93-95 and Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1997), pp. 9-10. For the Mu'izzî subordinates in Hindustan, see Minhâj-i Sirâj Jûzjânî, *Ṭabaqât-i Nâsirî*, ed. Abdul Hayy Habibi, (Kabul: Anjuman-i

Tarikh-i Afghanistan, 1963-4), vol. 1, pp. 415-438.

³²Jûzjânî, *Ṭabaqât*..., vol. 1, p. 421.

³³Ibid, vol. 1, p. 421. Notice also the titulature and Jûzjânî's attempt to communicate his sense of the heirarchical relationship: Malik was used for Bahâ' al-Dîn and Sultan for Quṭb al-Dîn.

³⁴Fakhr-i Mudabbir, *Ta'rikh-i Fakhr al-Dîn Mubâarak Shâh*, pp. 25-6. I have used the translation of E.D. Ross, "The genealogies of Fakhr al-Din Mubarak Shah" in *'Ajâb Namah: A Volume of Oriental Studies presented to E.G. Browne on his 60th birthday*, ed. T.W. Arnold and R.A. Nicholson (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), p. 399;

³⁵For a more detailed treatment of the evidence and argument see my forthcoming, *The Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate*.

³⁶For Bahâ' al-Dîn's inscription in the "Chaurasi Khamba" mosque in Kaman, see Mehrdad and Natalie H. Shokoohy, "The architecture of Baha al-Din Tughrul (sic) in the region of Bayana, Rajasthan", *Muqarnas* 4 (1987), p. 115.

³⁷But note the graffiti on the right-hand jamb of the eleventh slit window on the stairway in the minaret: "May your mother be ravished by a donkey!" See Page, *The Qutb*..., p. 40. This may have been a response to the destruction of temples, but at least equally, if not more likely, a venting of frustrated resentment by an artisan at a personal injury caused by an aggressive supervisor at work.

³⁸See Page, *The Qutb*..., pp. 39-40, 41, 43. I have followed the revised and edited translations of Pushpa Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of Delhi Sultanate 1191-1526*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 3, 19, 35. I concur with Pushpa Prasad's reading of the inscription from Muhammad Shah Tughluq's reign. But for an alternate reading see Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), pp. 32-3.

³⁹See Davis, "Indian Art Objects as Loot", pp. 22-48.

⁴⁰Peter Hardy, "Growth of Authority over a Conquered Political Elite: Early

Delhi Sultanate as a Possible Case Study" in *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, ed. J.F. Richards, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998 reprint), pp. 216-241, had studied a similar set of questions years ago without much success. Significantly his research was based primarily on the textual evidence of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

⁴¹Fakhr-i Mudabbir, *Ta'rikh*..., p. 33, Hardy, "Authority over a Conquered Political Elite", p. 238.

⁴²See John S. Deyell, *Living without Silver*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 193-206, 318.

⁴³Jûzjânî, *Tabaqât*..., vol. 1, pp. 440-1.

⁴⁴Jûzjânî, *Tabaqât*..., vol. 1, p. 461.

⁴⁵Amîr Hasan Sijzî, *Fawâ'id al-Fu'ad*, ed. Khwaja Hasan Sani Nizami, (Delhi: Urdu Academy, 1990), p. 334.

⁴⁶Sijzî, *Fawâ'id al-Fu'ad*, p. 226.

⁴⁷Simon Digby, "The Sufi Shaikh as a source of authority in Medieval India", *Purusartha, Islam et Societe en Asie du Sud* 9 (1986), p. 62.

⁴⁸The picture of the Delhi Sultan as the "reviver of the forgotten commandments, *mubâ'iyi âsâr-i ahkâm*", reoccurs on an inscription on the right pier, east door. Yazdani, "Inscriptions of the Khalji Sultans...", p. 24.

⁴⁹Inscription on the right pier, west door. Ibid, p. 28.

⁵⁰Inscription on the left pier, east door. Ibid, p. 25.

⁵¹Transcribed and translated by Maulvi Muhammad Ashraf Hussain, *A Record of all the Qur'anic and non-Historical Epigraphs on the Protected Monuments in the Delhi Province*, (Calcutta: Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, no. 47, 1936), p. 105.

⁵²Ibid, pp. 109-110.

⁵³Inscription on the south door, left pier. "*banâ farmûd in masjid kî masjid-i jannât zumreh-yi awliyâ wa... tabaqab-i atiqiyâ' wa majmâ malâ'ik-i kirâm wa mahzar-i arwâh-i*

arbiyâ'-yi 'uzzâm ast." I have followed the epigraph as it was transcribed and translated by Page, *Quth*..., p. 37. In this case, Page's reading was less ambitious, but clearer than Yazdani, "Inscriptions of the Khalji Sultans...", p. 27, and plate VIII. For a fuller treatment of 'Alâ' al-Dîn and Nizâm al-Dîn's discursive statements see Sunil Kumar, "Assertions of Authority: A Study of the Discursive Statements of Two Sultans of Delhi" in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture*, ed. Muzaffar Alam, Francoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, Marc Gaborieau, (Delhi: Manohar, 2000), pp. 37-65.

⁵⁴Sijzî, *Fawâ'id al-Fu'ad*, pp. 18-19: *sakhan dar barkat-i qadam-i nik mardân uftâd: farmûd keh bar mauzâ' keh hast, ba-yamn-i aqdâm-i ishân muraawah ast, chunâncheh masjid-i jâmî' Dehlî. B'ad az ân farmûd keh, aqdâm-i chand awliyâ' wa buzurgân ânjah rasîdah bâshad keh ân maqâm chunân râbat dârad.*

⁵⁵See Ebba Koch, "The Delhi of the Mughals prior to Shahjahanabad as reflected in the patterns of Imperial visits", in *Art and Culture*, ed. A.J. Qaisar and S.P. Verma, (Jaipur: Publication Scheme Press, 1993).

⁵⁶In contrast to the very full account of Bâbâ Farîd, the *Fawâ'id al-Fu'ad* provides occasional references to Bakhtiyâr Kâkî's life and teachings: pp. 42-3, 87-8, 104-05, 132, 184-5, 212-3, 246, 268, 315-6, 336, 407, 420. It was in Amîr Khwurd's *Sijâr al-Awliyâ'*, ed. Sayyid Mahdi Ghuri, (Lahore: Markaz-i Tahqiqat-i Farsi Iran wa Pakistan, no. 23, Mu'assi-yi Intisharat-i Islami, 1978), pp. 48-56, a late fourteenth century biographical compendium, that the spiritual genealogy of the Chishtî mystical order was clearly worked out, and Bakhtiyâr Kâkî's position in the descent of Chishtî saints confirmed.

⁵⁷According to Ibn Battuta's evidence, Bakhtiyâr Kâkî's grave had already become a place of pilgrimage, by the time he visited it in the mid or late 730s/1330s. Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, trans. H.A.R. Gibb, (Cambridge: University Press, Hakluyt Society, second series, no. 141, 1971), vol. 3, pp. 625-6. In 800/1398 the agreement between Mallu Iqbâl Khân and Sultan Nâsir al-Dîn Mahmûd Shâh (795-801/1393-99) was reached in the *dargâh* of Bakhtiyâr Kâkî, see Yahyâ Sihri, *Ta'rikh-i Mubâarak Shâhî*, ed. M. Hidayat Hosain, (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1931), p. 163. Faced with the threat of Husain Shâh Sharqî's invasion in 883/1478, Bahlul Lûdî prayed at the *dargâh* of the saint. See, Shaikh Rizqu'llâh Mushtâqî, *Waqî'at-i Mushtâqî*, trans and ed., I.H.

Siddiqui (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1993), p. 11.

⁵⁸Babar, *Babar nâmah*, vol. 2, p. 474. Dargâh Qulî Khân, *Muraqqa'-i Dihlî*, ed. and trans. Nurul Hasan Ansari, (Delhi: Urdu Department, University of Delhi Press, 1982), pp. 23-25, 119-121. The description of Bakhtiyâr Kâkî's *dargâh* followed accounts of shrines venerating the Prophet's and 'Alî's footprints and it preceded an account of Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ's tomb.

⁵⁹Mughal construction within the *dargâh* is in evidence from the eighteenth century during the reigns of Shâh 'Âlam Bahâdur Shâh (1119-24/1707-12), and Farrukh Siyar (1124-31/1713-19). See Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Âşâr al-Sanâdid*, vol. 1, p. 335. The author makes no mention of the floral multi-coloured tiles presumed to have been fixed in the shrine by Aurangzeb, for which, see, Y.D. Sharma, *Delhi and its Neighbourhood*, pp. 62-3.

⁶⁰Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Âşâr al-Sanâdid*, vol. 1, p. 312.

⁶¹Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: a Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1978/79), pp. 105, and for his scholarship in the context of the *Âşâr al-Sanâdid* see his "A Note on an Early Topographical work of Saiyid Ahmad Khân: Athâr as-Sanâdid", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1972): 135-46.

⁶²Sayyid Ahmad Khân, *Âşâr al-Sanâdid*, vol. 1, p. 310-12.

⁶³It is also one of the reasons why medieval Indian history is so weak in social as well as women's history.

⁶⁴This is not to suggest that no historian has questioned the interpretation of the monolithic state and its ruling elite in the medieval period. The writings of scholars such as Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam is, however, restricted to the Mughals. For their recent contribution see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *The Mughal State*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). The writings of Alam, Subrahmanyam and others, however, have not received the circulation they deserve. Their fate seems to be determined by what Peter Hardy described as "a kind of Gresham's Law" (which continues to operate for the Sultanate period) where "one or two text-books of political history...drive out of intellectual circulation many

articles on cultural history in learned periodicals". Peter Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India: Studies in Indo-Muslim Historical Writing*, (London: Luzac and Company, 1966 reprint), pp. 4-5.

A MEDIEVAL RESERVOIR AND MODERN URBAN PLANNING: LOCAL SOCIETY AND THE *HAUZ-I RÂNI*

In France of the sixteenth century, Lucien Febvre argued, people could not be atheists. In Febvre's reasoning, since the sixteenth century was an age that wanted to 'believe', it would be anachronistic to suggest that even as radical a thinker as Rabelais was capable of the sentiment of atheism.¹ If the cultural world of an individual such as Rabelais made it difficult for him to conceive the idea of a world without God, could one argue that in the sub-continent of India in the late twentieth century, most Indians are stuck in the rather paradoxical situation of being familiar with the idea of 'secularism', but unsure of its meaning in the practice of their daily lives?

The members of the Constituent Assembly seem to have been aware of the tenuous hold of secular consciousness amongst the larger body of the nation's citizens in 1947 and they had envisaged an important role for the state and government in the popular

dissemination of this sentiment. The amended Constitution of India consolidated the sentiment and proclaimed the secular character of the Republic. Article 51A(e) enjoined the nation's citizens 'to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional diversities...' What was less clear, however, was the manner in which this spirit of common brotherhood would be introduced and sustained in the nation.

If the people of the nation had to be 'taught' and 'shepherded' along the secular path, who would teach and guide the government, which was, after all, in the democratic logic of things, constituted of and by the people? The individuals who comprise 'the government' are not divorced from the society that they are governing and carry with them many of the thoughts and sensibilities of the people that they are presumably leading into a more humanitarian world. Thus the paradox: if the policies of the Government of India paid regard to the sentiments of social justice and concord present in the constitution, these theories were further processed by social-domestic ideologies resident upon caste, class, or communal sentiments present amongst many government administrators. And since 'government' carries legitimate power and authority to introduce and enact policy and change in society, it also occupies the dangerous position of sometimes confirming and disseminating existing prejudices and bigotry as 'normal' and authoritative structures in the nation.

I

I thought it would be useful to test my general introductory statements through a study of the history of a medieval reservoir, *ḥauz*, located in South Delhi. Although the *Ḥauz-i Râni* was a reservoir that predated the Delhi Sultans (before 1192 CE) it came to be venerated as a sacred area by the local inhabitants in the fourteenth century. As the focus of the city subsequently shifted northwards to Nizamuddin and Shahjahanabad, the sacred character of the *ḥauz* became increasingly obscured. It was not until the 1960's and the 1980's when South Delhi started encroaching into the area, that the construction activities of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) once again focused attention on the *ḥauz* which was eventually destroyed. The developments in the 1980's also introduced communal polarisation and tension in the region, not because an erstwhile sacred space had been demolished but because of the nature of the planned development of the region. A 'Sports Complex' was constructed on the site, ostensibly as secular a structure as can be. Yet, while the 'Sports Complex' might have been planned as a 'secular structure', ingrained in its conception were notions of class and confessional distinctions that destroyed older patterns of land usage. The introduction of communal hatred in the region had been far from the intention of the Delhi Development Authority engineers. Yet, in the transposition of

their mental universe where the Hindus and Muslims belong to inalienably different moral worlds, it was hardly surprising that the map of the 'Sports Complex' sought to construct this social reality in stone and cement. As far as the DDA engineers were concerned, they had constructed a wonderful facility for sport enthusiasts in the city in an 'undeveloped' area of the city. They had established order out of chaos; they had abided by the secular principles enshrined in the constitution of the republic, and, without any internal contradiction whatsoever, they had also been honest to their communal prejudices.

II

The *Ḥauz-i Râni*, the 'Queen's reservoir', was constructed sometime in the twelfth century, by a queen or a princess, a *Râni* about whom we possess no further information. In fact, it is only by accident that we can at all glean episodes about the early history of the *Ḥauz-i Râni*. There were other reservoirs in the Delhi plain from the same time period, but most of them have not been remembered. The *Ḥauz-i Râni* was first mentioned in the Persian chronicle of Minhâj-i Sirâj Jûzjânî (completed 1260) only because the city constructed by the early Sultans of Delhi was in its immediate neighbourhood.² In the early thirteenth century, the city's major entrance, the Budaun gate was about three hundred metres to the west, and faced the *ḥauz*. As a result, people entering the city on one of its major thoroughfares

from the *Bāgh-i Jūd* in the north (modern Jorbagh), inevitably passed by its banks. According to Jūzjānī, alongside the *ḥauz* was a vast plain which was sometimes used as an army encampment, *lashkargāh*. This area was also used for large ceremonial occasions when, presumably, the space in the city proved deficient.³ It was near the *ḥauz* on the 28th of October, 1242, in the reign of Sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn Ma'sūd (1242-1246), that Sultan Iltutmish's military slaves wrought a terrible punishment upon their political competitors.⁴ In 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī's reign (1296-1316), it could not have been far from the *Ḥauz-i Rānī* that the Sultan set up his major markets. The Sultanate historian, Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī noted that these bazaars were located in the vicinity of the Budaun gate which we know was close to the *ḥauz*.⁵

The incidental nature of the information concerning the reservoir notwithstanding, its locale and proximity to the expanding capital of the Delhi Sultans suggests that the *Ḥauz-i Rānī* did not occupy a desolate or secluded spot in the Delhi region. In fact, during the Tughluqid period (1320-1414) the area around the *Ḥauz-i Rānī* saw considerable building activity. The wall of Muḥammad Shāh Tughluq's (1325-1351) new city of *Jahānpanāh* passed the *ḥauz* about two hundred metres to its north. With the construction of *Jahānpanāh* greater efforts were made to regulate the drainage of the seasonal rivulets which meandered their way from their watershed in the Aravalli Hills, towards the River Jumna in the east. One branch of these streams, *nālas*, passed by the west and north wall of the *ḥauz*; while another

passed some distance away in the east. Since it was necessary to control the flow of these streams as they crossed into the city of *Jahānpanāh*, especially during the monsoon rains, the *Sātpula* dam was constructed on the city wall, northeast of the *ḥauz*.

Through the thirteenth and into the fourteenth century, the area in and around the *Ḥauz-i Rānī* underwent substantial transformation. By the early fourteenth century, not merely had this area been the scene of considerable construction activity, but, as the presence of the nearby *Khirkī* mosque suggests, it had come to possess a large enough population to warrant the construction of a sizable mosque. The *ḥauz* still lay outside the Tughluqid walled city, and suburban access to *Jahānpanāh* was provided by several gates, one of which was named after the *ḥauz* the *darwāza-i Ḥauz-i Rānī*.⁶ We know little about the composition of the population that resided in the vicinity of the *ḥauz*; in all likelihood they were service-folk who either worked in the city or provided its markets with produce or artisanal products. Although associated with the material life of the capital, they were distant from its politics and unattached to the household of its elites.

What is significant, however, is that the *ḥauz* around which these relatively undistinguished people resided, continued to be repaired well into the Tughluqid period. Its ruined walls today show the presence of the true arch, which in its architectural and stylistic form can only be attributed to the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries. It is doubtful if the local residents themselves possessed the means to carry

out this repair work, and in all likelihood it was the Sultan or his administrative agents who made the necessary investment towards its



Photo 1: The west wall of *Hauz-i Râni*, a part of the best preserved section. The arches from a later time period (after 1350's) indicate that the *hauz* continued to draw attention and was periodically improved. (Photographed in 1985)

maintenance.

The construction activity in and around the *hauz* certainly drew the attention of observers to this local landmark, a regard which also coincided with the ascription of a sacred significance to the reservoir. The hallowed character ascribed to the *hauz* was unlike the ones attached to reservoirs like *Sâraj Kând*, constructed adjacent to a temple for ritual purposes. There is no evidence of the presence of a temple or

mosque in the vicinity of the *Hauz-i Râni*. In fact, since the name of the *hauz*—‘the Queen’s reservoir’—is devoid of any religious significance, it is unlikely that the tank was associated with any deity or sacred occasion. At least to begin with, no special legend, like the one connected with the *Hauz-i Shamsi* and Sultan Iltutmish’s vision of the Prophet Muḥammad, raised the stature of the ‘Queen’s reservoir’. Yet the *hauz* was special because of the unique cultural role that was attached to water in the life of medieval people.

Water, *âb*, was not a plentiful commodity in the central Islamic lands, nor for that matter was it commonly available in the south Delhi plain in the Middle Ages. Its presence was a source of comment, and the Persian terms for cultivation, *âbâdânî*, or the terms *âbâd* and *âbâdî* which meant increasing population and prosperity in a town or district, were derived from the same root, *âb*, or water. The benefactors who made water easily available in the community were singled out for social esteem, and when any great man or woman won social applause because of their altruistic concern for the welfare of the community, it was said that ‘the drops of rain were entrusted by God in his or her care’.⁷ In the Middle Ages, water was regarded as the hub of life, of prosperity, a gift given by God. A *hauz* was special because, amongst its other nourishing qualities, it was an indication that God continued to care by providing capable shepherds for his folk. By the early fourteenth century these sentiments had also started influencing the manner in which local

residents regarded the *Hauz-i Râni*. Through constant maintenance, not merely was it an exceptionally pleasant place to repair to from the bustle of the town, but it was also a place where one could be close to his Maker. There was some discordance, however, about the identification of the 'shepherd' who was associated with the *hauz*.

By the fourteenth century, many local residents came to believe that it was the famous *Chishtî* mystic saint, Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ's (died, 1325) association with the *hauz* which lent significance to the 'Queen's reservoir'.⁸ On the 26th of November, 1315, Nizâm al-Dîn narrated the episode of how he came to establish his hospice, *khânqâh*, in *Ghiyâspûr*, at that time a small village about five kilometres north of the *hauz*. The *ṣāfi* saint was fed up with living in the crowded old town of Delhi and was searching for alternative residences without much success. It was while he was at the *Hauz-i Râni* and praying for guidance that he received a divine message to go to *Ghiyâspûr*. The *ṣāfi* saint's reported experiences at the banks of the *hauz* provided the reservoir with a special venerable status.⁹ Proof that the waters of the area possessed a special merit was further provided by Nizâm al-Dîn's spiritual successor Naṣir al-Dîn Chirâgh (died, 1356), who performed his prayer ablutions in the stream adjacent to the *Hauz-i Râni*, and read his prayers in the nearby *Sâtpul* dam. Together with the veneration that both these Awliyâ, 'Friends of God', acquired amongst their congregations in Delhi during the fourteenth century, the areas associated with their unique spiritual experiences

also gained regard as sacred territories. By the fourteenth century, to many people residing in the vicinity of the *Hauz-i Râni*, the reservoir was no longer regarded as just any other *hauz*; it was the site of a mysterious miracle. And since their habitation was associated with the experiences of a charismatic, holy figure, a 'saint' who was close to God and empowered by Him to perform miracles, it also distinguished the residents of the *hauz* as his special disciples.

The association with the *ṣāfi* saints also served to distance the local residents from the over weaning authority and discourse of the Delhi Sultans. As the 'friends of God', the *ṣāfi* saints did not recognize any temporal authority; next to the Prophets themselves, they were the special individuals chosen by God to preserve harmony and stability within the Muslim community. By contrast, the Delhi Sultans claimed that they were the ones who preserved the laws of Islam (*Sharī'a*), the social regulations which allowed individuals the opportunity to live their lives according to the *Qur'ānic* inspiration. Sultan 'Alâ' al-Dîn Khalajî's inscriptions on the Delhi congregational mosque stated, for example, that he was the 'reviver of the [Muslim] community, the elevator of the banners of the Muslim Holy Law (*Sharī'a*), the strengthener of the foundations and roots of the Muslim religion'.¹⁰

One way the Sultan and his agents could strengthen Islam was by carefully supervising pietistic practices considered to be contrary to the interpretation of the *Sharī'a* as defined by the jurists. *Ṣāfi*s, with

their emphasis upon an inner, intuitive understanding of the Holy law and obligations due to their Maker, particularly felt the rigours of this discipline and its stress on appropriate, socially cognisable behaviour.¹¹ The construction of charitable institutions, schools and mosques were not intended to merely impress subjects of the altruistic and pious conduct of their rulers; these were also places of congregational worship and religious education where Muslims were socialized to accept the jurists's interpretation of the Shari'a and suffer a policing of their conduct to remove 'error' in their ritual practise. There was, however, considerable resistance to this coercion, some more dramatic and public than others.¹² But it is important to recognize that the *Hauz-i Râni* residents were not rebels; their everyday life was inexorably tied with that of the Sultanate capital. What they sought to preserve, instead, was a degree of autonomy, a space which their *şâfi* patron saints created for them.

Another way the Delhi Sultans claimed they were strengthening the 'roots of Islam' was by attempting to destroy the foundations of idolatry and all evidence of infidel worship in their territory. There was the occasional public and dramatic statement of piety when Hindu and Jain temples in the region of Delhi were destroyed, and in the discourse of the court chronicles of the Sultans it was suggested that the righteous wrath of the 'protectors of Islam' sought to erase all signs of Hindu habitation from the region of the capital.¹³ The presence of the *Hauz-i Râni*, however, questioned this 'official' repre-

sentation of the virtuous deeds of the Delhi Sultans. As the name *Hauz-i Râni* itself signifies, not merely were old, pre-Sultanate habitations still in existence in the vicinity of Delhi well into the fourteenth century, but the memories of their infidel patron-constructors continued to be perpetuated in their names. Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ', himself, provided the information that *Hauz-i Râni* lay within the premises of a garden called the *bâgh-i Jusrath*, the 'garden of Jusrath' who was, as his name clarifies, certainly a Hindu.¹⁴ A stone's throw from the court and its vaunted claims concerning the consecration of newly conquered lands through the destruction of the symbols of infidel profanity, resided a community of Muslims who were apparently unconcerned by the past history of their habitat. Indeed, when the local population wanted to articulate their sentiments concerning the sacredness of the *Hauz-i Râni*, despite the disfavour of the court towards *şâfis*, they associated the reservoir with the miraculous life of their spiritual master Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ'. Rather than the *hauz's* continued links with a "Hindu past", it was the connection with the Delhi Sultans that was a concern to the area's residents.

The qualities ascribed to the *Hauz-i Râni* in the fourteenth century can only be understood in the context of its complicated relationship with the capital of the Delhi Sultanate. On the one hand, the reservoir and its population remained geographically outside the city, and, through a tenuous association with Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ',

lent itself both importance and some autonomy from the influence of the imperial city. On the other hand, the residents in the vicinity of the *hauz* were sustained by the economic life of the capital. They either worked in the town, or produced goods which were retailed in its markets. Despite all their efforts to the contrary, the prosperity of the *hauz*, was materially tied to the rhythms of the neighbouring capital. The uneasy association with the powerful agencies resident in the capital, implied a simultaneous attempt on the part of the suburban community to maintain its ties with Delhi, while creating a distance from the court by seeking a distinct, alternate identity.

This close association with the capital also implied that any change in the fortunes of Delhi also had a direct impact upon the *Hauz-i Râni* and its neighbours. This was apparent between the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries, when there was a demographic shift in the population settlements in the Delhi plain.¹⁵ The imperial capital had already shifted away from the Delhi region during the reign of Ibrâhîm Lôdî (1517-26) and during the duration of Mughal rule in the sixteenth century, some of its elite population also sought greener pastures away from the old capital. The older Sultanate capitals like *Jahânpanâh* were in palpable decline, and the fifteenth and sixteenth century imperial residences situated in the north of the Delhi plain, *Firâzabâd*, *Dînpanâh*, *Salîmgarh*, only manifested occasional flashes of a past glory.¹⁶ The loss of markets and material support for the residents around the *Hauz-i Râni* was nothing short

of devastating, but equally disastrous was the emergence of the hospice of Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ' as the primary sacred area associated with the saint's charisma, the major pilgrimage site in the plain of Delhi. With the popularity of the grave shrine, the *şâfi* saint's association with the *Hauz-i Râni* carried little appreciable significance. The construction of the city of *Shahjahanabad* in the northern segment of the Delhi plain, and the transfer of the Mughal capital in 1648 to that town, further transformed the region around the old *hauz* into an outback.

Even when the last of the Mughal emperors, and some notables from the city of *Shahjahanabad*, started establishing residences in south Delhi in the early nineteenth century, their hunting lodges or summer homes were located mainly to the west of *Hauz-i Râni*, in the Mehrauli area near the Qutb. *Hauz-i Râni* remained unaffected by the change in the fortunes of Mehrauli and while it continued to figure as a 'reservoir' on nineteenth century British land survey maps of the Delhi plain, the Gazetteer of the Delhi district admitted that by 1883-4 the *hauz* was no more than a seasonal swamp with its lands occupied by a mango grove.¹⁷

The gradual silting and ruin of the *hauz* by the nineteenth century does not mean that the area of the reservoir lost all significance to the local Muslim residents. A village called Hauz Rani was established near the reservoir, on the ruined walls of the *Jahânpanâh* fort. Sometime in the nineteenth century the banks of the 'Queen's

reservoir' started being used by the villagers as a graveyard. The choice of the area as a graveyard might have been motivated by considerations of convenient accessibility to the village, and, perhaps, by the presence of a grove of trees, incongruous in the midst of the flat, monotonous farmland, reminiscent of the garden of paradise. It is doubtful if in the nineteenth century, the memory of the *ḥauz*'s special significance derived from the *ṣūfī* saints was at all alive. Instead in the history that was ascribed to the area at this time, the tank was no longer a sacred place imbued by the *barakat* or the grace of the mystic saints; it was merely a graveyard where some of the esteemed members of the village were buried. Together with the other changes which had occurred in the old city of Delhi by the nineteenth century, the *ḥauz* of the *Ḥauz-i Rānī* had also become unimportant in the popular imagination of its residents.

III

When I first wandered through this area in 1975, the city had again started intruding into the region of the *Ḥauz-i Rānī*. The first houses in the neighbouring suburb of Saket had started to be built and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) had already notified and appropriated most of the fields belonging to the residents of Shaikh Sarai and Hauz Rani villages. In the transfer of land ownership little attention had been paid to the *ḥauz*, and, in the process of notifica-

tion, the DDA had taken over half of the reservoir. The remaining half was left with the villagers as their graveyard and common property. In the master plan for Saket, the area of the *ḥauz* in the possession of the DDA was earmarked for a sports complex. But even before the construction work could start, the Delhi Development Authority dug a *pucca nāla*, a storm water drain through the southern wall of the *ḥauz*, trapping and diverting the old rivulet away from the *Jahānpānāh* city wall.

The response of the Hauz Rani villagers to the intrusion of the Delhi Development Authority was by and large supportive. Some of the larger landlords did complain about the compensation paid to them for the lands notified by the government, but the majority saw in the recent developments signs of 'progress'. While most of the residents of the village were aware of the presence of an old reservoir near their graveyard, they could only talk positively of the *pucca nāla* that had destroyed a part of the *Ḥauz-i Rānī*. Because of the new drainage system, the old silted streams no longer flooded the village every other monsoon.

The 1970's and 1980's were dynamic years of transformation for the village of Hauz Rani. As construction in the suburb of Saket and adjoining Pushp Vihar gathered speed, Hauz Rani emerged as their satellite, providing commercial services to the building industry. Many of the older residents of the village were the plumbers, electricians, welders, carpenters, masons and daily wage labourers to their

new neighbours. There was some transfer of property as Hindus and Jains set up their supply and repair stores at the fringes of the village facing Saket. Together with the change in a life-style dependent upon a salaried or contractual relationship with an employer resident outside the social world of the village, the intrusion of the rhythms and comportment of a city life-style, marked the difficult period as the village made the transition into a suburb of New Delhi.

Greater earnings went hand in hand with lower self esteem as Hauz Rani residents recognized their status within a social hierarchy where the professional and business classes of the neighbouring residential areas were far and away the more privileged group. The economic disparity was further accentuated by the confessional divide which characterized the distinctions between the suburbs. The majority of the people living in Saket, Malaviya Nagar and Pushp Vihar were Hindu, followed by Sikh, Jain and finally, a miniscule Christian and Muslim population. In Hauz Rani, only the newer residents on the peripheries of the village were Hindu, Sikh or Jain; the core remained Muslim. The 'inner-outer' geographical distribution of communities within Hauz Rani mirrored the manner in which the Muslim residents of the village sought to deal with the outside world. In their relationships with an 'outside' world, Hauz Rani Muslims presented a non-denominational, almost 'professional' face. It was only as you entered the 'inner regions' of the village that the significance of the mosque, the *maulvi* preacher, the pictures of the

Ka'ba in cigarette and barber saloons, the pavement *kabab* vendors with their meat delicacies, and the butchers selling buffalo meat, manifested the presence of an alternate world.

One should not, however, make too much of a case for the class and confessional divide between the neighbouring suburbs at this time, or the fact that the Hauz Rani village possessed an 'inner' face, an alternate world. Although largely Muslim, the confessional bond did not create a united community sense within the residents of the village. Despite sharing a common cultural and religious heritage, the social relationships within the village, and with members outside, were also influenced by a wide range of material considerations. Nor was the Hauz Rani village, in the 1970's and 1980's, a closed or defensive realm; there were significant breaches which muted the divisions between the village and the adjoining neighbourhood of Saket. Important in this context were the parched lands of what had once been a part of the old *Hauz-i Râni* reservoir.

Although the DDA had constructed a 'sports complex' on their portion of the *hauz*, at this stage of development it constituted three large fields without any barriers distinguishing the open spaces, the *maidâns*, from the village burial, and common grounds. Saket residents and the Hauz Rani villagers moved freely throughout the area. In fact, in a fit of rare sensitivity, the DDA constructed a paved pedestrian path and bridge that passed through a grove of trees near the village common ground and connected Saket with Hauz Rani.

The absence of barriers between the two neighbourhoods was apparent in that children from Saket played football every evening, ten to fifteen a side, with their peers from Hauz Rani. The very absence of a structured sports regimen allowed for an unregulated fraternizing between the residents of the two neighbourhoods. The people of Saket were unaware of the presence of a *hauz* in their vicinity and only some of the older Hauz Rani villagers reflected about the history of their graveyard. As far as one could make out, the lands of the old *Hauz-i Rānī* had lost their history and effectively become desacralized. It had also become one of those rare areas where, at least for some time, people forgot their class, ethnic and confessional differences.

The DDA was directly responsible for demarcating and developing this secular lung in an area witnessing the introduction of class and sectarian distinctions. But this was only by accident; their actual intentions for the *Hauz-i Rānī* area were clarified in 1990 when the interim sports complex was razed and supplanted by its more elaborate version.

In the place of the accessible, open *maidāns* left free for unstructured activities, the new Saket Sports Complex was open only to members for squash, badminton, tennis, table-tennis, cricket, jogging, basketball, aerobics, yoga and horse-riding. The Hauz Rani villager's competence hardly extended into these exalted realms, and by default, if nothing else, the new Sports Complex was not visual-

ized to cater to the poorer segment of the city's population. When I queried the DDA engineers about their plans for the development of this area, they were very forthright in establishing the connection between the Sports Complex and the neighbourhood of Saket, with its



Photo 2: The east wall of the *hauz* with a part of the village graveyard in the background in the grove of trees. The pedestrian path connecting the village of Hauz Rani and Saket skirted the graveyard. The openness of the area, photographed in 1985, stands in contrast to photographs 3 and 5

upper middle-class residential profile. Even if it had been constructed on [only half of] the bed of the old *hauz*, the orientation of the Sports Complex was certainly not towards the Hauz Rani village.

The class bias which was evident in the construction of the new Sports Complex was however only incidental to its overall

conceptualization. The real problem for the DDA was posed by the fact that it was in the vicinity of a 'low-class' Muslim village and its graveyard. Here 'class' was understood in more than its economic implications and encompassed the host of Muslim practises that the Hindu engineers of the Delhi Development Authority found abhorrent. Not the least of these was the practice of burial, or more prosaically, the practice of indiscriminate interring of corpses. As it was rather colourfully explained to me, not merely was burial unhygienic because it attracted maggots and other sundry vermin, but since these were largely unbuilt graves covered with earth, people were forever stumbling onto them. It was a filthy unhygienic practice, and as a guard at the Sports Complex explained to me, 'No matter how deep you buried a corpse, its odour nevertheless permeated the region'. People who observed this ritual were not merely unclean, but they did not accept the norms of society as the Hindus or the DDA engineers understood them. Amongst the other cultural values ascribed to the Muslim residents of Hauz Rani by the planners of the Sports Complex (and I presume that these were believed to be more general qualities shared by the entire community) were hysteria, unruliness, pilfering, and a communal sentiment which made fraternizing impossible.

Thus, if the Saket Sports Complex was to be a successful DDA project, its development had to include plans whereby it could be insulated from the hostile environment posed by the Muslim village.



Photo 3: The only entrance to the village graveyard and the *hauz*. Note the sign proclaiming the 'old graveyard'. Photographed in 1991

The remedy lay in zoning the areas where the villagers were permitted entry. This was now restricted by stone and barbed wire walls to include only the approach to the half of the *hauz* which fell within the common property and graveyard of the village. The Sports Complex itself was enclosed by towering walls and reoriented towards a solitary entrance approached from Saket. The pedestrian pathway connecting the two neighbourhoods was also fenced in and secured by two gates which were patrolled at night.

If the DDA sought to divide and insulate the two communities, the reactions of the villagers only accentuated the distance and mistrust which pervaded the area of the *Hauz-i Rānī*. Despite the fact



Photo 4: The Sports complex boundary walls divide the once-open spaces. Photographed in 1991

that the area of the Sports Complex had been land legally notified by the DDA, the sudden and obtrusive denial of access to land and freedom, was ascribed a more nefarious and long term design. The villagers were convinced that the government intended to eventually expel them from their common property and graveyard as well. They became acutely aware of their minority community status and sought to defend their lands. This implied a systematic destruction of the half of the *hauz* which fell into the share of the Hauz Rani village. Its walls were pillaged to build goat and buffalo pens, and all paths into the area were barricaded with thorn and bristle bushes.

The villagers sought further protection by constructing a



Photo 5: The east wall of the *hauz* photographed in 1991 from about the same spot as the one taken in 1985 (photo 3). The villagers have started using the old *hauz* walls for their cattle.

Photo 6: The interior of a buffalo-pen built into the side of the east wall of *hauz*.





Photo 7: The villagers, ironically, pointed to unattended graves such as this as evidence of their long presence in the neighbourhood. Most of these graves are, however, not that old and in considerable disrepair.

sacred history linking the lands of Hauz Rani with their ancestors. Ironically it was not the history of the *Hauz-i Râni* that the villagers chose to embellish, but that of the graveyard, now regarded as a sacred place where the ancient progenitors of the current villagers, all *Sayyids* (descendents of the Prophet Muḥammad), were buried. Placards were placed around the graveyard emphasizing its historicity as an ancient burial ground, *qadīm qabristân*. With one stroke not merely had the villagers claimed rights to these lands from antiquity, but, as descendants of *Sayyids*, they were by extension related to the Prophet. Only the ignorant could call them 'low class' now.

The response of the Hauz Rani villagers to the DDA challenge, also provoked a public articulation of their Muslim identity. Mosques were renovated and repainted and children enrolled in schools of religious instruction. In a disarming conversation between a preacher and a small congregation that I eavesdropped upon in a mosque, I managed to savour the 'facts' of Indian history taught to the children of the area. The *imâm* explained to his audience, that there had occasionally been governments, *ḥukûmat*, in the past that had denigrated Islam and heaped injustice upon God's chosen community. There was, for example, the apostate Mughal emperor Akbar (1556-1606), and in modern times there was the current Hindu government, but God would give to each of them His chosen retribution at the Day of Judgment. Clearly the heroes of the Hauz Rani villagers were no longer those of the Indian republic.

Across the great divide, the response of the Saket residents to the Sports Complex differed completely from the villagers. There was immediate support to the building activity introduced in their vicinity by the DDA. On the one hand, the proximity of such an elite facility to Saket was appreciated for its positive impact in improving the profile of the neighbourhood amongst the New Delhi suburbs. It was assumed that rental rates in Saket could now be legitimately inflated. On the other hand, Saket property owners were also pleased by the security precautions. They had not quite forgotten the trauma of the 1984 riots after Mrs. Gandhi's assassination, when (what was

assumed to be) lumpen mobs had looted Sikh business and domestic establishments. At that time, neighbourhood vigilante groups had patrolled the streets against a faceless enemy, but they had been sure that the adversary was poor and desperate, and that not just Sikh but all middle-class homes were legitimate targets. By 1990, many of the Saket householders had provided an address, if not a face to the enemy; they knew that their adversaries resided in Hauz Rani. After a burglary in 'M' block Saket, so sure had the victims been of the provenance of the thieves, that in their rage they had sought to sever links with the village by demolishing the bridge leading to the pedestrian path connecting the two neighbourhoods. Their worst suspicions were confirmed when the DDA also identified the Muslim villagers as a threat, and they applauded the security measures which distanced the two realms. The harmonious fraternization that had occurred between neighbourhoods in the *maidāns* of the *Hauz-i Rānī* just a few years ago, suddenly seemed a lifetime away.

IV

The Saket Sports Complex was conceived and designed as a recreational facility which would encourage physical fitness and competitive sports, all positive sentiments. Within its limited context, it was a wonderful complex which, it could be argued, successfully accomplished its goals. Nor had the engineers of the Delhi Develop-

ment Authority intended to introduce a communal polarization between the Saket and Hauz Rani neighbourhoods. In fact, the Saket Sports Complex was a very 'secular' institution, and its definitions of 'secularism' originated from the constitution of India no less. Its brochure clarified that as a facility constructed by the government for the public, the Saket Sports Complex sought to 'induce...[a] ...spirit of mutual help and goodwill among citizens of Delhi' and membership was open to all individuals without respect to caste or creed. The only qualification was a prior sports record and the ability to pay the membership fees. Nevertheless, as we have noticed, these declarations of secular principles hardly served to promote 'goodwill' within the *Hauz-i Rānī* region.

It needs to be remembered, however, that there was a phase of 'development' when in fact the DDA had successfully bridged gaps between class and sectarian differences which had started to manifest themselves in this area. The open fields of the 'interim' sports complex provided the liminal space which eased the differences between communities, presenting an opportunity to strangers to establish acquaintances outside their familiar social realms. The free access and unstructured nature of the leisure activities placed no premium on class or confessional differences. For the moment people were accepted as individuals and not as extensions of their separate social worlds. On the contrary, the process of fraternization provided the opportunity for doubting the validity of the many inherited clichéd

sentiments about unfamiliar people. Not merely was this sports complex secular and democratic, but it could also have proved to be an agent for neutralizing a potential class and communal polarization between neighbourhoods.

The problem, of course, lay in the fact that this sports complex was still perceived to be 'undeveloped'. It was unable to maximize its potential since it lacked the 'structure' of a formal sports arena. If the 'openness' of the original complex was its weakness, the prescribed 'limits' and 'discipline' of the new one were its strengths. The new Sports Complex promised limited membership, discipline in dress and conduct of members, coaching, and facilities where the rules of the game would be followed. This was an exclusive world available only to the familiar. The old cohabitants were suddenly relegated by the DDA to the other side of the boundary as foreigners and threats. The liminality of the *maidāns* was lost and the newly resplendent Sports Complex presented an unmistakable class, and confessional bias, strikingly apparent to those suddenly ostracised from the area.

I had suggested in the introductory comments to this paper that despite the awareness of secularism as a positive, just and progressive ideology, most Indians were unsure of its substantive meaning in the context of everyday practice. In the light of the *Hauz-i Rānī* episode that I have just described I would further clarify that a large number of Indians are secular from time to time in their every-

day lives without being aware of the significance of their practice. As had happened in the sports complex of yore, and still occurs in some places, people of differing backgrounds—caste, class, region—continue to meet equably in diverse situations, and strike common, individuatistic, human equations. These transpire frequently enough in the proscribed course of one's daily life and certain situations and places — educational institutions, travel, pilgrimage — increase the opportunities for this kind of intermingling. Yet, in the definition of human activities, these everyday happenings are not signified for their potential importance in creating a secular mentality and little effort is made to preserve or encourage them. Such occasions were more readily available in the past, but they were not valued and, as in the case of the *Hauz-i Rānī* the open social spaces are being encroached. Thus the opportunities available to individuals to momentarily relinquish their more particular forms of social identification, permit a dialogue with dissimilar people and allow for the growth of a secular sentiment are diminishing.

It is not my argument that the existence of these arenas of informal social mingling will in themselves allow for the presence of a secular sentiment in our society. Secularism needs the protection of constitutional guarantees, but its everyday practice also needs to be cherished and defended. Without it secularism only carries a notional definition.

The ritual genuflection to secular sentiments was certainly present

in the brochure of the Saket Sports Complex, and its construction had received the patronage of the Congress-I and the Janata Dal, all self-proclaimed secular political parties. This secularism had meant precious little to the DDA engineers, whose class and community biases distanced the neighbouring Muslim villagers from the *Hauz-i Rānī*. As a final mockery of the secular spirit, the DDA chose to approach a Muslim, the Janata Dal Home Minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, to inaugurate the Sports Complex and legitimise all their actions. The villagers perception of the developments in the *hauz* were perhaps justified. They looked beyond the secular platitudes of the DDA Sports Complex brochure, and the Muslim chief guest; in reflecting upon the changes in their own lives they saw instead, a triumph of the Hindu *hukūmat*.

¹ Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. B. Gottlieb, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). Febvre's generalisations have been questioned most notably by Carlo Ginzberg, *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, (New York: Penguin Books, 1982 reprint), pp. xxiii-xxiv, 133-4. Although Febvre's provocative generalisations are problematical they serve a useful purpose in guarding us against anachronistic characterisations of material and belief structures (in the plural) maintained and ascribed by different social groups in the historical past.

² Minhāj-i Sirāj Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāsirī*, ed. Abdul Hay Habibi, (Kabul: Anjuman-i Ta'rikh-i Afghanistan, 1963-4, 2 vols.).

⁴ *Ibid*, vol. 1, p. 469, vol. 2, p. 27.

⁵ Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī, *Ta'rikh-i Firūz Shāhī*, ed. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1860-2), p. 309.

⁶ S.H. Hodivala, *Studies in Indo-Muslim History*, (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1957), vol. 2, p. 144.

⁷ Fakhr-i Mudabbir, *Ādāb al-Mulūk wa kifāyat al-Mamlūk*, ed. Muhammad Sarwar Maulavi, (Teheran, Haidari, 1976), p.16. See also H. Ringgren, "Some Religious Aspects of the Caliphate", in *The Sacral Kingship*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959), pp. 737-47.

⁸ Unlike Christianity and its institutionalised forms of canonisation of saints, the recognition of a saint (*walī*, 'friend of God') in Islam was the result of a social consensus concerning the exceptionally pietistic qualities of an individual. Several participants were involved in the creation of this 'social consensus', not least of all the aspirant himself, but it also included disciples who embellished and popularised the qualities of their master. Nizām al-Dīn, in particular, was extremely fortunate to have amongst his disciples, litteratures of the calibre of Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī, Amīr Khusrāu and Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī, whose writings spread the virtues of their teacher to a huge audience beyond the limits of his immediate congregation in Delhi. On the question of 'sainthood' in Islam, see P.M Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu'in al-Dīn Chishtī of Ajmer*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), and on the 'process' of disseminating the charisma of a saint see Richard Eaton, "The Political and Religious authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid: in *Moral Conduct and Authority*, ed., Barbara Metcalf, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), Bruce B. Lawrence, "The Earliest Chishtiya ad Shaikh Nizam ud-din Awliya", in *Delhi Through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society*, ed. R. E. Frykenberg, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Sunil Kumar, "Assertions of Authority: a Study of the Discursive Statements of Two Sultans of Delhi", in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, ed., Muzaffar Alam, Francoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, Marc Gaborieau, (Delhi: Manohar, 2000).

⁹ Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, ed. Hasan Sani Nizami, (Delhi: Urdu Academy, 1990), p. 242, Amīr Khwurd, *Siyar al-Awliyā'*, ed. Saiyid Mahdi Ghuri, (Lahore: Markaz-i Tahqiqat-i Farsi Iran wa Pakistan, no. 23, Mu'assi-yi Intisharat-i Islami, 1978), p.120.

¹⁰ G. Yazdani, "Inscriptions of the Khalji Sultans of Delhi and their contemporaries in Bengal", *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica*, (1917-18), pp. 8-42.

¹¹ Sunil Kumar, "Assertions of Authority", pp. 37-65.

¹² See Sunil Kumar, "Qutb and Modern Memory" in this volume.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Sijzi, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 242. In Hindu myth, Jasrath/Dasrath was an ancient king of Ayodhya, better known as the father of Rama, the celebrated hero of the epic *Ramayana*. The *bāgh-i Jasrath* was probably an orchard, or a grove of trees rather than the formal Mughal *chahār bāgh* the walled-in garden, or the Victorian gardens popular in India today.

¹⁵ See also Sunil Kumar, "Making Sacred History or everyone his/her own Historian: the Pasts of the village of Saidlajab" in this volume.

¹⁶ Ebba Koch, "The Delhi of the Mughals prior to Shahjahanabad as reflected in the patterns of Imperial Visits" in *Mughal Art and Imperial Ideology*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Anonymous, *A Gazetteer of Delhi*, (Gurgaon: Vintage Books, 1988 reprint). See also H. C. Fanshawe, *Delhi Past and Present*, (Gurgaon: Vintage Books, 1991 reprint), Map 8.

MAKING SACRED HISTORY OR EVERYONE HIS/HER OWN HISTORIAN: THE PASTS OF THE VILLAGE OF SAIDLAJAB¹

I

All of us, whether we realise it or not, function as historians. In our own different ways we constantly process information about our past—concerning our family, the work place, our community, even the nation—and seek the aid of a multitude of sources to juggle our memories—letters, diaries, written messages, oral testimonies, photographs, or the media. Few of us would claim, however, that the exercise of processing information about our past was carried out with the arcane interests of most (boring) professional historians. We are most frequently interested in only our own immediate past, to provide some context to our present and to perhaps enable us to make "wiser" decisions about our future. Yet we ascribe fairly long histories to other parts of our reasoning. Most of us would find it

extremely disconcerting to accept that our religious faith, or things which we regard as sacred and holy, had only an immediate history. Even if we do not remember the unfortunate history classes of our youth and cannot date our scriptures and beliefs with any certainty, we are confident that they originated in early antiquity and this hardly needs any substantiation; proof is readily available in almost everything that we read, hear and watch daily.

Sacred beliefs are quite naturally holy cows and many of us prefer not to question or tamper with them. But this is where we tend to mortgage the historian within all of us. We accept in our daily lives that the experience of yesterday will help us cope with the present and the future, tacitly recognising that life is a dynamic process and that no two days will be quite alike. We constantly remind ourselves of our past mistakes so that we may avoid them in the future and we store information to ensure that our memory does not fail us on this score. Despite our successes and frustrations we recognise the presence of historical change in our society which we try in our own frail ways to understand and deal with. But this understanding of change does not extend into the realm of the sacred; since it is not the realm of mortals suddenly the laws of history no longer apply.

It was in this context that I thought I would explore how some elements from the past came to possess historical significance. I have studied this through the history of Saidlajab, a village in south Delhi where a shrine was ascribed with sacred qualities in the middle ages.

Over the passage of time the sacred element of this shrine was lost and replaced by other points of significance which had nothing to do with its original formulation. In what came to be the eventual history of the village, structures which were actually constructed at a much later time than the original shrine were subsequently attributed with religious significance. Nor has the making and remaking of the sacred history of this monument occurred in a historical vacuum. It is interesting to note that the reassignment of religious domain took place in the context of an existing conflict over territory between opposing groups of people. And, not surprisingly, mortals had a big hand in defining what was eventually sacred in Saidlajab.

II

Saidlajab is a small village located to the east of the Qutb minar, just south of the New Delhi suburb of Saket. Today the village is inhabited almost entirely by Jats and Mewatis, although increasingly a migrant population is setting up a flourishing commercial and industrial base on its fringes. Its proximity to Saket has driven up property and rental rates and the village is inundated by all the evidence of city consumerism. To a traveller on the Mehrauli-Badarpur road the fleeting glimpse of Saidlajab provides a picture not unlike many truck-stops: dhabas, mechanic shops, and an aggressive, self-confident population.

Saidlajab however, is an old village, and the name is a corruption of *Sayyid al-Hujjáb*, a notable of the fourteenth century who resided in the area where the current village is located. The Sayyid whose real name was Ma'rûf, or the famous one, was a chamberlain, *hâjib*, in the court of the Sultan Firûz Shâh Tughluq (1351-1388). He was also a descendent of the Prophet, had performed the *hajj* and his title *Sayyid al-Hujjáb* reflected the distinction that he had won for himself: the head of all the court chamberlains. The chronicler Shams Sirâj 'Afif included a short biography of the Sayyid in his *Ta'rikh-i Firûz Shâhî*, where he mentioned that Ma'rûf was a name given to the Sayyid by the *sûfi* Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ' who had prescient knowledge of the boy's future greatness.² Ma'ruf was an extremely devout person widely respected for his piety and concern to follow the *shari'a* in his daily life. He had served Sultan Muḥammad Shâh Tughluq (1325-1351) but was a particularly close confidant, *nadîm*, to Firûz Shâh Tughluq. According to Shams Sirâj 'Afif the Sayyid had sufficient influence with the Sultan to calm his temper and revoke such orders that were given in haste or anger.³

While he was in the service of Firûz Shâh Tughluq, Ma'ruf must have resided near his Sultan in Firûzabâd, but he also had a residence just south of Jahânpanah outside the south-eastern wall of the Qal'a Ra'i Pithora. This was probably constructed while he had been in the service of Muḥammad Shâh Tughluq and the court was located in Jahânpanah. In Firûz Tughluq's reign this residence must

have seldom been used; the Sultan could not bear to have him away for any length of time. It was, therefore, only after his master's death that Ma'rûf returned permanently to south Delhi.

In his years of service as *hâjib* with the Delhi Sultan, Ma'ruf had won public acclaim as one who interceded with the Sultan on behalf of the indigent and the afflicted. To some extent this was hardly surprising; the Sayyid's piety and high moral qualities had already been foretold by none other than the mystic saint Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ'. Thus, Ma'ruf's altruism was in keeping with his saintly personality which had also won him the regard of the Sultan. After the Sayyid's death these saintly qualities were obviously not forgotten, and as the graves in the vicinity of his residence in south Delhi suggest, his followers expected their master to intercede on their behalf in the court of the High Majesty on the Day of Judgement. The *barakat* or the grace of the holy person imbued the sacred area where he was buried and protected those who chose to reside there.

III

It is not clear exactly how long after Ma'ruf's death, the reputation of his holiness continued to attract disciples to his hospice. It is doubtful for instance, if people in the sixteenth century held Ma'ruf in as high a regard as before, and he is not included amongst the many pious remembered in the *Siyar al-'Arifin* or the *Akhhâr al-Akhyâr*, biographical

encyclopaedias of mystics completed in the sixteenth century.⁴ Nor does Abû'l Fazl mention him in the *Â'in-i Akbari* amongst the pious men of yore, once resident in Delhi.⁵ By the standards of veneration paid to saints over long periods of time, *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* seems to have had a relatively brief innings. Yet, the Sayyid's diminished popularity should not be attributed to "deficiencies" in his spiritual merit, instead the composition of the residents in the village underwent continuous change from the fifteenth century onwards and in displacing the old inhabitants, the new migrants also altered the original *raison d'être* of the settlement.

The original residents of *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* in the fourteenth century had been the dependents of Ma'rûf who continued to reside near the grave of their master. It was a small settlement whose inhabitants worked the fields in the neighbourhood and relied upon the Tughluqid government to provide an umbrella of security from the neighbouring Mewatis. As the late Sultanate chronicles, the *Ta'rikh-i Mubâarakshâhi* and the *Ta'rikh-i Muhammadi* describe however, Firûz Shâh Tughluq's successors lacked the military capacity of their predecessors to intervene effectively in the southern suburbs of their own capital.⁶ Timûr's plunder of Delhi (1398-99) robbed the Sultanate of the little prestige it had commanded, and other than the provinces of the empire, even the suburbs of Delhi challenged the Delhi Sultan's commands.⁷

From the late fourteenth century onward a migration of

Mewatis, and Jats occurred in the southern peripheries of the Delhi plain. Of the two groups the Mewatis were the more predominant and for short periods had political control of the southern suburbs. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, Bahâdur Nahîr Mewatî negotiated with the Tughluqid Sultans Nâsir al-Dîn Muḥammad Shâh (1390-93), Nâsir al-Dîn Maḥmûd Shâh Tughluq (1393-1395, 1399-1413) and Nuṣrat Shâh (1395-99) from Mehrauli and Qal'a Râ'i Pithora,⁸ and for some time during 'Alâ' al-Dîn 'Âlam Shâh Sayyid's reign (1446-1451) Aḥmad Khân Mewatî ruled from Lâdû Sarây, a village about a thousand metres from the old village of *Sayyid al-Hujjâb*.⁹ The Mewatis who migrated into these regions were Muslims and in *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* they either expelled the older inhabitants or seized their more productive lands. In their bid to place their own authoritative stamp upon the village they disregarded the faith of the older inhabitants in the shrine of *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* and constructed their own mosques in the village. In effect, while the settlement continued to bear the Sayyid's name, the significance of *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* in the lives of the peasants inhabiting the village started becoming insignificant.

The process of Mewati and Jat immigration into *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* must have continued through the period of Mughal rule but as the information in the *Â'in-i Akbari* suggests, there was a noticeably larger movement of Jats from the late sixteenth century onwards. According to Abû'l Fazl, by this time period, the population of Palam

was largely Jat in composition and in the general area of the old suburban districts of Delhi, Jats and Chauhan Rajputs predominated.¹⁰ The Jat element in the rural population of these areas must have increased and derived greater confidence from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century peasant rebellions in western U.P., and under Chaurâman Jat they successfully tested the might of the Mughal empire. By the end of their rebellions as one observer noted "all the parganas under Agra and Delhi had been sacked and plundered and, from the tumult of [the] perdition seeker [Chaurâman Jat], the routes and ways were blocked".¹¹ It is doubtful if the village of *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* was directly affected by these uprisings, but the predominantly (Hindu)-Jat composition of the village probably dates from this period. As Sir Henry M. Elliot's information brings out, the overweening presence of Jats amongst the village residents of the *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* area was in clear evidence by 1844.¹²

The social consequences of this demographic change are not clear, but with the change in the balance between the Hindu-Jat and Muslim-Mewati residents, wider alterations in land proprietorships must have occurred. These land transactions had certainly been accomplished by the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1913 when Zafar Hasan carried out his "Survey of Mohammadan (sic) and Hindu monuments in Delhi" he had noticed that the *khangah* of *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* was owned by Khem Chand and housed his family, a mosque in the village was jointly owned by Tulsi, Nathu, Nanak and Cheku

who resided on the premises, and a tomb was owned and converted into a dwelling by one Ratia.¹³ Zafar Hasan had also noticed that the village contained a mosque with a sizeable courtyard whose income had been set aside sometime in the past as a *waqf* for charitable purposes.¹⁴ The relative unimportance of the Muslim population in this village at the turn of the century was evident, however, in the fact that this *waqf* land remained barren and unused.

IV

By the 1940's the changes in the *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* village were even more dramatic. The communal tensions of the decade and the increasing minority status of the Muslims in the village had led them to seek security through migration into the nearby villages of Shaikh Sarai or farther away in Nizamuddin and Shahjahanabad. As a result in the 1980's *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* did not possess a single Muslim family. The total marginalisation of the Muslim population and the complete loss of the original significance and character of the village is perhaps best brought out by the changes which occurred in its name. In a topographical map of Delhi drawn in 1807 by the British, *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* was corrupted into Sieud Lujab. While we are aware that spelling was not one of the strong points of the British—the map spells Safdar Jung as Sufter Jung, Mehrauli as Moorali—yet these misspellings did not pass into history; many were subsequently corrected.¹⁵

In the case of *Sayyid al-Hujjáb*, however, since the name of the village meant nothing to its inhabitants it continued to evolve imaginatively until Sieud Lujab was contracted to become the present Saidlajab. This was also convenient: when the present residents of the village narrated their history to me they were convinced that they were the original inhabitants of Saidlajab, their ancestors had resided and cultivated the neighbouring fields since the dawn of time. At least as far as they were concerned *Sayyid al-Hujjáb* had never existed.

As historians can get to be, the villagers were altogether a little bit too glib in narrating their history. As it turned out they were not entirely unaware that the history of their village included other earlier



Photo 1: The mosque in the *waqf* area. Photographed in 1985.

residents who were, for one or the other reason, no longer with them. When I first visited Saidlajab in 1985 I was chasing ruins which I thought might exist in a village which figured in old land survey maps of Delhi. Most villagers were unaware about any ruins, but one directed me to the village dump. This was a fairly large area, overgrown with thorny shrubs and thickets, used by the village women to make their dung cakes, and its entrance was filled with garbage and refuse. In the centre of this area was a partially ruined mosque, and at some distance a few graves. Whereas the rest of the village was marked by dense construction, this large expanse of land was strangely free of all construction. I later realised that this was the *waqf* property that Zafar Hasan had described in his survey.

On the day I visited this area some Muslims were also present and they introduced themselves as visitors from Meerut. These gentlemen were in the process of cleaning up the garbage and refuse from the mosque and its environs. The process of cleansing also centred around a grave near the mosque over which a green silk veil, *châdar*, had been placed, incense sticks lit, and the surrounding area sprinkled with rose water; cleansing and sacralisation of the grave were obviously linked agendas. The grave had been identified as belonging to Sayyid-sahib and since at that time I was ignorant of *Sayyid al-Hujjáb* my hosts were kind enough to narrate the saint's great moral qualities and miracles which proved that he was one of the *Awliyâ'*, friends of God.



Photo 2: The grave identified as that of 'Sayyid sahib'. Note the green *châdar*, the north-south orientation of the grave and the attempts to clean the neighbouring area. Photographed in 1985.

The attempt to sacralise their *pîr's* tomb symbolised the winning back of the *waqf* territory which was used and occupied by the villagers as their de facto common ground. The line demarcating the cleansed area and the village area filled with dung cakes was as significant as any political frontier. The Muslims from Meerut had ambitions of getting electricity and water connections, of repairing the



Photo 3: the southern area of the *waqf* land. Note the refuge and unkempt area beyond the grave. Photographed in 1985.

mosque and starting the prayer and *urs*, the death anniversary celebrations for the Sayyid.

I next went back to Saidlajab in 1986 to discover the victors in the border conflict. There was no sign of the Muslim visitors from Meerut, and it was only with some difficulty that I managed to rediscover the grave of 'Sayyid sahib'. It had been buried under a

mound of dung cakes and shrubs. The other graves in the vicinity, which I had been informed belonged to the Sayyid's disciples, had



Photo 4: The desecrated grave of 'Sayyid Sahib'. Photographed in 1986.

been overturned or partially covered by the ubiquitous dung cake huts. Upon tactful inquiry as to what had transpired in the area, I was told that at a panchayat meeting the Pradhan had voiced popular opinion when he had declared that 'the Musalmans shall be thrown out of our village and community, it is our land which we shall defend with our blood'.

The ritual profanement of the locus-mundi of the shrine was the direct result. Another brave

villager informed me of future plans: 'we shall take apart the mosque brick by brick until nothing (of significance) remains for them'. Although the villagers casually dismissed the mosque and grave as relatively new and insignificant, the seriousness with which they regarded the challenge to their primacy in the village was evident in their reactions to the attempts of the 'Meerut-Muslims' to reconsecrate the area and recall (unpleasant) memories of their past residence in the village. The Jat villagers had their version of the past, and this



Photo 5 and 6: Desecrated graves in the waqf area. Photographed in 1986.



history had no place for Muslims, mosques, or *Sayyid al-Hujjâb*, all of whom in a microcosmic caricature of communal 'national history' were branded as 'foreigners' coveting the property of others. By 1991 only one of the pillars supporting the last cloister of the mosque had



Photo 7: Photograph of mosque in 1991. Compare with the one taken in 1985 to assess the intervening destruction.

escaped destruction. There was little sign of the grave identified as belonging to 'Sayyid-sahib'; it was virtually lost in the surrounding debris and vegetation.

The true irony behind this story of conflict over sacred space is that all the participants had misread their history. As Zafar Hasan had noted in his survey, the sacred shrine, the grave of Ma'rûf, was not

located in the *waqf* area of the mosque at all, it was about four hundred metres distant in the Sayyid's *khânqah* which had been sold to Khem Chand sometime before 1913. According to Zafar Hasan this area had already been built upon and transformed by its residents, and the author had recommended to the Government of India that no money should be expended towards its preservation. An old Persian inscription memorialising Ma'rûf and praying for God's favour was removed from the structure and placed in the Delhi museum. But the outlines of the *khânqah* were still visible when I visited the village. While the central structure had a massive house built around and over it, the lower walls were unmistakably of the Tughluqid



Photo 8: Part of the *khânqah* of *Sayyid al-Hujjâb* with constructions on roof. By 1991 the cloister on the far right housed a plastics factory.

period. Several large cloisters extended from under the house and these were previously used as buffalo pens; in 1991 one of them housed a small factory.

Since the *khânqah* was not a part of the *waqf* and therefore the scene of a latter day territorial conflict, it never became a part of the current episode in the making and re-making of the sacred history of *Sayyid al-Hujjáb*. This was in a sense most appropriate because the conflict had very little to do with Ma'rûf. In the fight over disputed land both the contesting parties took recourse to history; one who emphasised the presence of a sacred domain of the Sayyid, the other who slighted these claims by stating a primordial right of settlement to be protected from 'foreign incursions'.

That both the contestants were 'wrong' in their separate reading of history is of marginal interest here. More interesting is the fact that the meaning and significance of what was 'holy', 'sacred', or 'religious' were not fixed forever in time, but were subject to constant reinterpretation. As our experience with the daily world alters so does the manner in which we interpret our past and define what we regard as sacred. Neither the past, nor our understanding of religion are ineffable 'truths' whose meaning remains unaltered through the passage of time. While it is perhaps axiomatic to declare that history is subject to constant, sometimes contrary reinterpretations, it is a far more difficult proposition to convince people that the symbols of what they regard as sacred have undergone a similar process of

dramatic redefinition over the years. Even if many of the symbols of what we regard as sacred today had their origin in early antiquity, with social and material changes through the passage of time, these same symbols often come to possess an alternate meaning and stand for completely different things. The elements through which the importance of places like Saidlajab or the 'Ram Janambhoomi' for example, were resurrected had nothing to do with the original formulation that had attracted the religious sentiments of its residents. Together with other historical changes in their neighbourhood, the sacred was also redefined.

If we recognise that our religious beliefs cannot be attributed uncritically to 'tradition' passed unchanged through time, we also need to bear the burden of the actions that stem from our religious beliefs more directly. After all, we are the ones that either make or acquiesce in the identification of what is sacred. If one of the consequences of our religious beliefs is a sense of hostility towards people of another religious denomination for what we believe are past wrongs, then complicitly we are like the 'Meerut Muslims' or the Saidlajab villagers, or those individuals who carefully demolished Babar's mosque. The only way that we manage to assuage our conscience is by historicising our right to hate and wreak violence upon others even if we have not thrown the proverbial stone. Amongst everything else here, we are also functioning as very poor historians.

V

Postscript

Several years after writing this paper, in the summer of 2001, I visited the *wagf* area in the village once again. To my shock I discovered that the mosque had been completely demolished in the intervening period. Not a trace remained of its rubble or of the graves. Barring a few stones from the roof, only a small mound in the centre of the open space indicated the site of the old mosque.

Together with the removal of the mosque and the attending graves, the village garbage dump and the dung cake huts had also vanished. The place was clean of thorn and scrub bushes; a few *kikar*



Photo 9: The *wagf* area in 2001. The raised mound in the centre was the site of the medieval mosque.

trees remained to provide shelter on the raised area where the mosque had previously stood. The *wagf* land was now the village park; competitive volley-ball and neighbourhood cricket matches were in session on the occasions that I visited.

Despite the obvious prosperity and congestion that urbanisation had brought Saidlajab—corporate offices of Price-Waterhouse, mansions constructed by property developers—the *wagf* area was still vacant. But there were two new constructions there. The first was a tall light tower that illuminated the park with its halogen beams. A marble plaque memorialised its inauguration: none other than Sahib Singh Varma, the ex-Chief Minister of Delhi, had presided over the commemoration of the medieval site into its present incarnation. Instead of the old Persian inscription acknowledging Ma'rûf, there was a new one heralding the present character of the 'park' and the village. The villagers were grateful to the local MLA and Sahib Singh Varma for 'help' in cleaning the park. 'It was a dirty area, but it is now a wonderful park'. Another more artless villager confessed, 'With the removal of the ruins we have ensured that the Muslims will not come back to our village. We have wanted to do this for some years past.'

The second construction in this area was, oddly enough, a new tomb encased in marble, with a small fence and a gate. This was in the approximate area of the demolished mosque. A dog was sleeping within the tomb precincts when I first visited the area on a summer afternoon. The second time was some months later in the evening

when some village women were lighting candles by the shrine. I asked after the identity of the person buried in the tomb. No one knew. 'It was the tomb of some old, pious person that the women worship', I was told. 'There are no Muslims in the village', another villager echoed, 'and for the past fifteen years the panchayat has been trying to clear this area of the ruined mosque'. Recently they had received permission from the court to do this (which court? they didn't say). It was then that the village women had started their worship at this grave. Who had built this grave? When was it built? No one knew. It was an odd grave, obviously new and incorrectly laid out, NOT in a north-south orientation as Muslim graves in India are, but on an east-west axis.

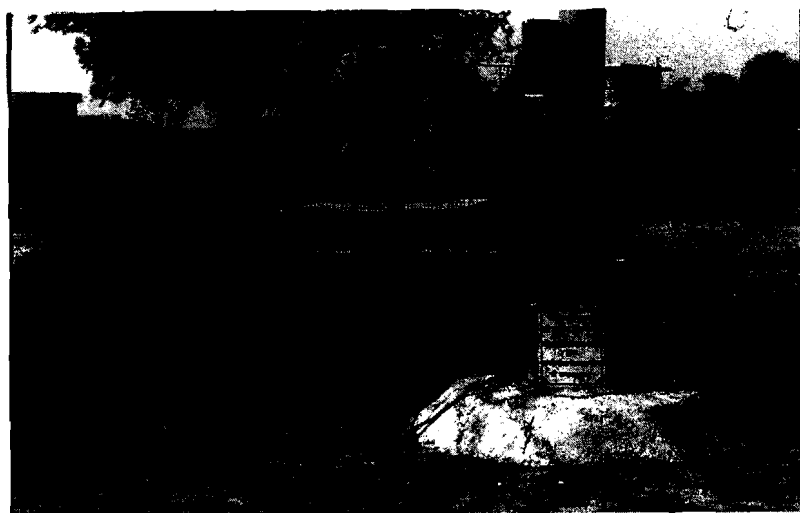


Photo 10: The anonymous grave adjacent to the light tower. The memorial plaque thanking Sahib Singh Varma is at the base of the light tower.

A grave with no name and no history. The distance between *Sayyid al-Hujjáb* and the village of Saidlajab was complete. And with it was erased the complex history of movement and resettlement of people over centuries in a small village in Delhi.

¹ A slightly different version was first published in *The India Magazine of her People and Culture* vol. 13 no. 10 (Sept. 1993).

² For a short biography of *Sayyid al-Hujjáb* see Shams Siráj 'Afif, *Ta'rikh-i Firúz Shâhî*, ed., Maulawi Wilayat Husain, (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1882), pp. 445-451.

³ Ibid, pp. 448-9.

⁴ Hâmid ibn Fazl Allâh Jamâlî. *Siyar al-Ârifîn*, (Delhi: Rizwi Press, 1893) and 'Abd al-Haqq Muḥaddis Dehlawî, *Akhhâr al-Akhyâr*, Urdu trans., Mawlana Muhammad Fâzil, (Karachi: Madina Publishing Co., n.d.)

⁵ Abû'l Fazl, *Â'in-i Akbarî*, trans. H. Blochmann, (Delhi: New Taj Office, 1989 reprint).

⁶ Yahyâ ibn Aḥmad Sirhindî, *Ta'rikh-i Mubâarak Shâhî*, ed. S.M. Hidayat Husain, (Calcutta, Bibliotheca Indica, 1931) and Muḥammad Bihâmadkhânî, *Ta'rikh-i Muḥammadi*, trans., Muhammad Zaki, (Aligarh: Centre for Advanced Study, 1972).

⁷ The events of these years have been discussed in Simon Digby, *War-Horse and Elephant in the Delhi Sultanate: a Study of Military Supplies*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 74-82, and Gavin Hambly, "The Twilight of Tughluqid Delhi: Conflicting Strategies in a Disintegrating Imperium", in *Delhi Through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 45-62.

⁸ See Sirhindî, *Ta'rikh-i Mubâarak Shâhî*, pp. 145-54,

⁹ See Khwajah Ni'amat Allah, *Ta'rikh-i Khân Jahâni wa Makhzan-i Afghâni*, edited S.M. Imam al-Din, (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960), vol. 1, p. 134. See also S.H. Hodivala, *Studies in Indo-Muslim History*, (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1939), vol. 1, pp. 491-2 for doubts about reading Mehrauli in the text. Nirodbhusan Roy, *Niamatullah's History of the Afghans*, (Santiniketan: Santiniketan Press, 1958), p. 30, fn 8, suggests Mewat as an alternative reading. This reading has some merit; Ahmad Khân succeeded Bahâdur Nahîr as the chieftain of Mewat. The village of Lâdû Saray still has some extant monuments from the Sayyid dynasty in occupation by the villagers.

¹⁰ Abû'l Fazl, *Â'in-i Akbarî*, vol. 3, pp. 291-2.

¹¹ Cited in Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707)*, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), p. 342.

¹² See the revised map adapted from Henry M. Elliot, *Memoirs on the History, Folklore and Distribution of the Races of the North-Western Provinces of India*, (London, 1869), in Joseph E. Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 61, Plate VII.B.2.c.

¹³ M. Zafar Hasan, *Delhi Province: List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments*, (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915-22, 4 vols.), vol. 3, pp. 121-3.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ P.S. White (Surveyor), *Sketch of the Environs of Delhi, 1807*, reprint of the hand-drawn original, Surveyor General of India, 1989.

NAMING

I like my name; it perplexes a lot of people. In chagrin, they keep asking me my "real" (caste) name so that they can then classify me socially and culturally. I like my children's names: one is Shefali, the other is Sikandar. My nieces are Irfana and Saraswati-Nandini. Hindus and Muslims, all in the same family! Confusion compounded. I love it. But then we like this momentary anonymity; you have to make the effort to know us. Conventionally speaking, our names give away little.

The process of naming is rarely accidental and never trivial. To begin with, it involves considerable reflection and deliberate choice from a host of possible options. Even the retention (or dropping) of the family name is often deliberate in its intention to maintain (or obscure) a genealogical link. Names serve as identifiers, of who you are, and how others should know you within a larger social constellation. They can, therefore, be important indicators of the choices individuals make concerning group or ideological membership.

It is in acknowledgment of the evidence concerning social and cultural identities that a whole industry of historians study names. Through a record of names kept at pilgrimage sites in medieval Europe, scholars reconstructed historical changes in the composition of families, matrimonial customs and inheritance patterns. Within the Islamic world, names have been studied as indices of religious and ideological identification, the process whereby individuals internalized new ideas or cosmologies over time, and were prepared to make a public acknowledgment of their beliefs.

The history of place-names is as interesting for what it has to tell us about the manner in which people chose to identify their own and others' areas of residence. In India, the region of Delhi has witnessed considerable demographic change through the years, and the city has come to incorporate neighbourhoods dating to different periods in the past. Some settlements are still known by their old names: Bhogal, Yusuf Sarai, Shaikh Sarai, Hauz Rani, Lado Sarai. Some abbreviation and corruption of old names has also taken place: Bagh-i Jud became Jod Bagh, Khirki masjid became Khirki, Badarpur Sarai became Badarpur, Malcha Mahal became Malcha Marg. Perhaps the most interesting process was that of renaming: Ghiyaspur was transformed into Nizamuddin; Siri into Shahpur Jat; Inderpat into Din Panah and then the vague Purana Qila; Kingsway into Raj Path; Queensway into Jan Path; and now Connaught Place has been renamed Rajiv and Indira Gandhi chowks.

If we recognize the implication of "naming" as a means of identifying properties which people believed rendered a place socially and culturally significant, then the swath of names from different historical epochs provides a unique entry point into the study of Delhi's history. Hauz Rani or more precisely Hauz-i Rani is interesting, because it is a later thirteenth century name for the site and carries the Perso-Arabic element Hauz, meaning reservoir, together with the Hindi title of Rani for queen. The "Rani" must have either constructed or patronized the reservoir before the Sultanate occupation of Delhi, sometime perhaps in the twelfth century. The thirteenth century chronicles do not provide us with the original name for this tank, but in incorporating "Rani" in their version of the name, the authors of the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* and the *Fawa'id al-Fu'ad* honoured the memory of the Hindu queen. Subsequently, one of the southern gates of Muhammad Shah Tughluq's city of Jahanpanah (The Refuge of the World) was named the "Hauz-i Rani Gate". The city gate and the reservoir were significant enough as centres of local identification to provide the name Hauz Rani to the village settlement established in their neighbourhood. Areas which possessed local significance for a variety of different reasons—hauz's, bagh's, tombs, or sarais—and remained stable, if insulated centres of habitation over a long duration of time, sometimes kept their original names. Other areas were not so lucky: the Bagh-i Jasrath near the Hauz-i Rani, disappeared very early from historical and popular memory.

Names were also subject to corruption, especially when changes in the demographic composition of a region introduced new residents, who had little regard for the features believed to provide uniqueness to an area. Thus, for the fourteenth century disciples of Sayyid al-Hujjab, the presence of their teacher and his hospice on the Mehrauli-Badarpur road (near the Qutb minar), rendered the area significant. Their village was therefore named after him. When the original inhabitants were driven out by succeeding Mewatti and Jat migrants through the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, the new residents had little attachment to the old shrine of the saint. The old structures were dismantled and built upon by the later Hindu migrants. In the absence of its original *raison d'être*, there was nothing to stop the name of the village from evolving from Sayyid al-Hujjab, to Sieud Lujab in 1807 and into its current version of Saidlajab. In a predictable denial of historical change, not merely did the villagers believe that they were the primordial residents, but that their version of the name of the village dated back into antiquity. Through this process of renaming and re-identification, new claims to lands and residence were legitimated. Sayyid al-Hujjab and the original residents of the hospice might just as well have never existed.

The corruption of an original place-name sometimes involved a variety of people not all of whom belonged to the local neighbourhood. The differing names applied to an area provide a valuable insight into the contradictory perceptions of people

concerning the significance of the same site. A good example is Delhi's first Jami Masjid, better known today as the Qutb mosque. This mosque underwent construction and reconstruction at various times during the late twelfth, thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. At the time of construction the mosque was uniformly described in the epigraphs and Persian chronicles as the "Masjid-i Jami" (the congregational mosque), and the Qutb was merely referred to as the "Minar". In the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, a chronicle written in the mid-thirteenth century, the Sultanate city of Delhi was called the "Qubbat al-Islam", or "the Sanctuary of Islam", a name which was perhaps also ascribed at a later time to the congregational mosque itself. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, if not earlier, the minar was popularly referred to as "Qutb sahib ki lath", or the staff of the sufi saint Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki buried in nearby Mehrauli. The popular cosmology in its fully developed form was wonderful. The sufi saint [Qutb al-Din] Bakhtiyar Kaki was a qutb, the axis, who protected the world from disorder, and this symbolism was articulated in the mosque which was the "sanctuary of Islam" where the minar itself represented the saint as the axis and stabilizer of the universe.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, scholars regarded much of this popular cosmology surrounding the Jami Masjid as superstitious nonsense and sought to discover the "real" name and meaning of the mosque. They concluded that the minaret was first constructed

by Qutb al-Din Ai-Beg, and it should therefore be eponymously named after him. They argued that the reference to Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki in the "Qutb sahib ki lath" was a corruption, originating from a false etymology. These scholars also concluded that "Quwwat al-Islam" or "the Might of Islam" was the authentic name of the mosque. From a purely positivistic perspective there was no evidence—epigraphic or documentary—that could support their conclusion. But in the interpretation of history, where Muslims were homogenized into a composite group, all uniformly militant, aggressive conquerors, proud of their iconoclasm, it seemed natural that Delhi's first congregational mosque should celebrate the "Might of Islam". Ironical as it may seem, it was scholars who corrupted the popular version of the name "Qubbat al-Islam" into "Quwwat al-Islam", all the while suggesting that it was their research which had discovered the original name of the mosque. It was a fateful christening, and supported by the weight of scholarly opinion, it was internalized as "truth" by subsequent generations of students. In this process of [re]-naming however, local residents played little role. In fact their understanding of the significance of the Jami Masjid was completely ignored. It was the manner in which a national history was being written, and the direction from which the events in its past were being interpreted, that determined not merely the meaning of the monument, but also its new name.

The end of colonial rule, partition, and the rapid growth in the

size and population of the capital, also introduced a frenzy of naming. Post-partition migrants sought to preserve their identities in their Punjabi Baghs, Lajpat and Malaviya Nagars, Tagore and Chittaranjan Parks. New colonies of the upwardly mobile, with verdant visions of the future were established: Green Park, Mayfair Gardens, Panchsheel Park and Vasant Vihar, promised lands of plenty. Segregated communities identified their residences as Jamia or Ambedkar Nagars. These were names which reflected the often contradictory and competing "identifiers" which pulled the nation's citizens along different paths. As housing and residential committees searched the scriptures for auspicious names and Janakpuri, Greater Kailash and Saket were established, a different composite identity of the Hindu nation also received popular support.

In contrast to these trends, the state attempted to socialize its citizens along secular, socialist ideals. History and the media consolidated the image of a free India, the culmination of an epic "nationalist struggle", a transition through fire which united the people of the country, and transformed them all into patriots engaged in the making of their motherland. The euphoria of freedom was greeted by the symbolic removal of names from public sites which honoured erstwhile colonial masters. The process of renaming sites after an individual from Indian history was an expansive moment marked by considerable diversity in the selection of heroes: Asoka and Teen Murti, Aurangzeb and Shivaji were all accommodated within Delhi. In the

post-independence xenophobic mood of searching for an indigenous identity and self-reliance, the historical lineage of the Indian nation had to erase the memory of "foreigners" who had subverted the country's independence.

The historical genealogy of the nation culminated with the country's latest heroes; the freedom fighters who had brought India to its "tryst with destiny". The ascriptive qualities of these nationalists coincided in one way or the other with the values which were seen to be central in the constitution of the new nation. These were people regarded as martyrs, one and all; they were principled fighters, either non-violent or eventually propelled to violence by grave injustice; they were constructive social workers, not merely dismantling an old regime but providing the moral inspiration for the construction of a new country; their private and public lives were models for all. Men were the responsible wage earners, public citizens and the patriarchs of the home; women were always supportive wives or even better, nourishing, protective mothers, the makers of the heroes of the infant nation. The iconography of India's past was mapped out in the streets of Delhi. If in the past Indians had been "led" to freedom by their heroes, their memory guided the residents of Delhi in the present. There was no 5th Avenue or Main Street in Delhi; instead you took Lala Lajpat Rai Road, into Zakir Husain Marg, took a left at Kasturba Gandhi Marg, and reached downtown.

Genealogies, however, are always prone to challenge and

change. Much as the representation of India's ancient past came to be disputed by the fundamentalist Hindu nationalists in the present generation, more contemporary heroes also had to be celebrated to legitimize succession within the collateral lineages of the ruling elite. Until the 1960's there was no major controversy in the choice of the heroes of the "freedom struggle". The Congress party claimed a lineage which went back into 1885 and incorporated the largest chunk of heroes. And since the "good fight" was for a common cause, carefully screened "outsiders" were embraced as spiritual brothers within a polyheaded movement.

With the passage of time this was harder to accomplish, and certainly by 1969, with the split in the Congress and the imposition of Emergency, even the Congress party was utterly divided about who it regarded as its heroes. Today, despite the occasional massive electoral support, no political party represents the aspirations of the majority of Indians. This is not for want of trying. Huge political rallies, massive cardboard cutouts of political figures, sell the virtues of one or the other contender.

It was therefore intriguing when a political party with a bare majority in Parliament sought to alter the name of Delhi's central commercial complex in an election year. It was proposed by some members of the Congress (I) that Connaught Place named after the Duke of Connaught, should be renamed as the Rajiv and Indira chowks after the two prime ministers and the political party's self

acknowledged, martyred idols. This attempt to gain electoral support was necessitated as the Congress (I) faced dissension and split within its ranks. The incumbent prime minister, Narasimha Rao argued consistently that the death of Rajiv Gandhi did not mark a hiatus in the rule of the Nehru-Gandhi family; the charisma of the original dynasts devolved upon the current leader and his supporters. The proximity to the ideals and the vision of Rajiv and Indira Gandhi motivated the "loyalist" faction of the Congress (I) to transform Connaught Place into a shrine immortalizing their beloved, martyred leaders. By exclusion, the dissidents within the party had no moral claims to leadership, a spiritual succession that ignored them as it traversed time into the glorious epoch of the freedom movement.

The Congress (I) also claimed that it was acting within the purest traditions of the freedom struggle in renaming Connaught Place and removing the vestiges of colonial heritage in the capital. But there were other residues of British presence in Delhi which it could have exorcised. The choice of Connaught Place as a site to make a "patriotic" statement was not accidental. In the post-liberation era of the nation's economy, this commercial complex, more so than India Gate or Rashtrapati Bhawan, is regarded as the centre of the city. The centrality of this area in the financial and social life of the metropolis, makes for a perfect shrine; the Indira Gandhi International Airport cannot compare. Once the commercial hub of the capital was named after Rajiv and Indira Gandhi, mother and son were fêted as the

ultimate protagonists of the modern nation, the champions of a new economic order of liberalization which they helped to usher. The fact that the political party and the nation share a common parentage only confirms the Congress (I) credentials to be the historical representators of the nation through the different stages of its chronology. Although the irreverent may blaspheme and suggest that it is apt to name a bazaar after Congress politicians and their money making proclivities, succeeding generations of Delhites would be distant and ignorant of the actions of a dictator and the incompetence of her son. The Congress (I) banked upon this eventuality, and (to complete the awkward metaphor) saw it as a long term investment in the furtherance of their political interests.

The spasmodic reaction of seeking native identities is part and parcel of a larger representation of history indulged in by all nations. The emergence of a nation implies the making of an imagined community hopefully contested over by differing ideologies. Connaught Place was one part of a larger theatre of New Delhi where the British dramatized their rituals of power, and rationalized their historical rights to lead the natives into a universe enlightened by their rule. Today, much like the village of Hauz Rani, the name Connaught Place has remained as a legacy after the disappearance of the power and symbolism of British colonialism. With the changes in the city of Delhi and the sky line of Connaught Place, the commercial complex bears little resemblance to the historical vision of the

original constructors. The imposition of a new name upon Connaught Place is similar in many ways to the transformation of "Qubbat al-Islam" into "Quwwat al-Islam", a corruption of the name deliberately and authoritatively imposed upon the old mosque by outsiders. The new name, "Might of Islam", altered the symbolism of the monument and negated a history through which the local people had understood the mosque as the "Sanctuary of Islam". These were not "academic" revisions in nomenclature of limited arcane interest; it reconstituted a history of the past which validated the interpretation of two homogenous communities in a perpetually hostile relationship.

In the case of Connaught Place, even if the name survived through the years without corruption, it was enriched through accretion. A large number of people also call the commercial complex "C.P.", an acronym which had its origins in elite usage but which gradually gained a larger public currency. Like the village of Sayyid al-Hujjab known today as Saidlajab, "C.P." keeps its tenuous links with the past without carrying the historical baggage of the original name. Many residents of Delhi may regret this development, and feel that "C.P." (and Saidlajab) is a vulgarization of the original name. But at least it is part of a democratic tradition to arrive at consensual names for public spaces. In the middle ages a popular imagery had incorporated Delhi's old Jami Masjid within the saint Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki's mystical domain and transformed the minaret into

his staff, "Qutb sahib ki lath". The rejection of the popular name and cosmology was carried out without consideration of local, and if you wish, "vulgar" sensibilities—but with tragic consequences. It is precisely this subversion of the popular, democratic sentiment by the process of renaming through administrative fiat which is a colonial exercise. And it is not the presence of Connaught Place, but the renaming of the area as Rajiv and Indira Gandhi Chowks which marks the survival of colonial traditions of governance, the desperate attempts of an unstable government to gain a history by converting a public space into a shrine for its heroes.

ERRATUM

The citations on pp. 15-16, and fns. 21 and 22 are from Tapan Raychaudhuri, "The State and the Economy: The Mughal Empire" in the *Cambridge Economic History of India*, ed. Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (Cambridge University Press, 1982), vol. 1, p. 184. The references ascribed to Irfan Habib, "The State and the Economy" in the *Cambridge Economic History of India*, ed. Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (Cambridge University Press, 1982), vol. 1, p. 184 are a regrettable error.