EMBODYING CHARISMA

Modernity, locality and the performance of emotion in Sufi cults

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INTRODUCTION
1

THE EMBODIMENT OF CHARISMA

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Sufi saint cults: embodying the sacred

In South Asia living Sufi saints emerge periodically to shape and reshape a sacred landscape; in embodying the sacred as a lived reality they create and extend new Sufi brotherhoods (tariqa) and focused regional cults and pilgrimage centres, a vast network of individual supplicants and devotional communities generated through voluntaristic loyalties which extend beyond local, regional and even international boundaries. It is this continued vitality of Sufism as a living, embodied, postcolonial reality which this book interrogates. For alongside living saints are their mythical predecessors, believed to be alive from beyond the grave. Throughout South Asia, shrines of Sufi saints appear juxtaposed to other complex, postmodern and postcolonial realities: in rural and urban contexts, in the wilderness, besides modern bank buildings or railway stations, opposite mosques or skyscrapers. While some shrines dominate small towns or a vast hinterland, others find their place among hundreds of similar structures in the metropolitan cities of Bombay, Karachi or Dacca.

In South Asia great reformist, living saints have continued to emerge in Bangladesh and Pakistan, as Landell Mills and Werbner show in Chapters 2 and 5. They exist alongside caste-based regional cults of black African saints in Gujarat, discussed by Basu in Chapter 6; famous shrines, such as the shrine of Nagore-e-Sharif in Tamil Nadu, which Saheb shows are the focus of a major transnational cult encompassing both Hindus and Muslims (Chapter 3); and countless living, ‘mad’, divinely intoxicated mājzūbs, analysed here by Frembgen in Chapter 7 and Ewing in Chapter 8. There are the unnamed shrines to unknown saints which mediate between communities in rural Pakistan, Werth discloses in Chapter 4, while shrine practices have been the target of critical literary reformist texts (Chapter 9, by Malik). Despite reform movements, the continued vitality of Sufism in Islamic South Asia is evident, and is considered by Charles Lindholm (Chapter 10) in the context of a sweeping historical comparison between Sufism in South Asia and the Middle East.

In studying Sufi saint cults as living, contemporary modes of organising the sacred we seek to expose false dichotomies applied to the description, and hence
also theorisation, of Sufi cults throughout the Islamic heartland and its peripheries. Such dichotomies deny the embodied nature of ritual and religious belief and practice by positing a series of spurious separations: between magic and religion (the one supposedly instrumental, the other ethical); between ritual and belief (the one aesthetic and symbolic, the other cognitive); between folk and official or normative religion; between syncretic practice and Islamic orthodoxy. These separations have been imposed upon different facets of what is, we argue here, a single, total, symbolic reality. Indeed, even the conjunction of Sufism with saints' cults is unusual. On the one side, Sufism is glossed as an elaborate and coherent neo-Platonic theosophy of mystical realities; Sufis in this construction were historically renowned mystical ascetics, now long dead, whose writings and poetry today inspire mostly middle-class or elite urban circles, seeking 'new' religious experiences (Gilsenan 1982: 244–246). On the other side are the cults of saints or marabouts whose tombs are the focus of magical, superstitious 'folk' (North Africa) or ('Hinduised') 'syncretic' (South Asia) practices by the ignorant (eclectic, tolerant) masses. The shrine's magicality is grounded in heterodox beliefs regarding the divine powers of the saints, who are thought to be able to intercede for the living in their search for personal boons (fertility, worldly success, health) by granting them saintly baraka, divine blessing. Such saints, unlike Sufis, are described as miracle makers whose deeds are publicised through sacred hagiographies.

Despite Trimingham's classical study of Sufi saints and their cult organisation, which spelled out clearly the generative connections between saints, cults and tariqa (Trimingham 1971), a third scholarly discursive disjunction is also prevalent, especially in studies of the Islamic heartland. This scholarly discourse, best exemplified in anthropology by the work of Clifford Geertz and Ernest Gellner (Geertz 1968; Gellner 1981; for a critique see Baldick 1989: 155–156), severs Sufism from its organisational underpinnings: neither Sufi mysticism nor folk superstition is conceived to be related empirically or theoretically to the organisation of Sufi orders or zāhir (meditation) circles; these in turn are often not related to the focused organisation of regional cults around specific saints' tombs or newly emergent living saints (but see Eickelman 1976; Gilsenan 1973, 1982; Lings 1961). To add further to this conceptual fragmentation is the fact that rural saintly lineages are not regarded as linked either to Sufism, to saints' cults, to revivalist Sufi religious movements (Evans-Pritchard 1949; Viktor 1995; Clancy-Smith 1988) or even, as Baldick argues, to Islamic scholarship (1989: 156). Saintly lineages are simply 'there', at most mediating as peacemakers between warring tribes (Barth 1959; Gellner 1969).

One of the advantages of studying Sufi cults as contemporary, viable and generative symbolic and ethical movements is that this enables us to explore the connections between Sufi cosmologies, ethical ideas, bodily ritual practices and organisational forms, which have been lost in earlier historical and anthropological studies. By exposing the falsity of former discursive separations, we hope to reveal the enormous contribution which the study of Sufi cults can make to a
theory of charismatic ritual and religious movements in the context of late twentieth-century modernity and postcoloniality. Our close-grained, finely observed studies allow us to demonstrate the ‘complex interweavings of knowledge and acting’ (Davis 1991: xii); the fact that, as Davis argues about Hindu rituals, ritual serves to illuminate and objectify philosophical categories and topics, while philosophy illuminates the purposes and strategies of ritual; they are two modalities of a ‘unitary power of consciousness’ (ibid.: xi).

Reifying belief

Clearly, the opposition posited by anthropologists and orientalists between folk (syncretic) magic and official Islam draws on indigenous Islamic reformist discourses critical of the practices at saints’ tombs, as Jamal Malik shows in his chapter on reformist literary texts. The new realist Urdu writing highlighted the secretive authoritarianism and dark, rapacious sexuality of the guardians of saints’ shrines. Yet despite their modernist thrust, these avant-garde writers continued to draw on allegories of divine, mystical illumination. Sufi *pirs* (saints) are ambivalent, liminal figures, Werth and Ewing argue in Chapters 4 and 8. Not only do they claim exaggerated powers (Chapter 10, by Lindholm), but they are associated with chicanery and greed in the popular mind (Sherani 1991). Yet they continue to epitomise a human promise and ethical power beyond the ordinary.

This ambivalence reflects the fact that contemporary Sufism is a contested tradition, as indeed are all the different Islamic streams in South Asia (Metcalf 1982; Werbner 1996a; Ahmad 1991). In response to attacks by rivals, adherents of these various approaches have been compelled to create discursive defences of their ‘beliefs’, which thus emerge as increasingly reified and remote from the practices that underpin them. In this respect, the study of Islamic ritual as embodied and transformative poses a challenge to anthropology, more used to studying ritual in small-scale, preliterate societies. In these, practice and belief appear closely intertwined, grounded in ethical premises which remain largely implicit or mythically articulated. ‘Belief’ in this context can only be extrapolated from ritual action itself, or deciphered from fragmentary exegetic commentaries. By contrast, for students of Islam the written religious corpus and hermeneutical traditions of a world religion seem overwhelming.

Yet a major strand in the anthropology of religion, even concerning preliterate societies, has repeatedly detached ‘belief’ (in witchcraft, in spirits, in the ancestors) from ritual action, and reconstructed it as disembodied and abstract. This intellectualist strand, which continued to grapple with Frazerian, Tylorian or Lévy-Bruhlian questions of the relation between magic and rationality (see Tambiah 1990), transmuted the sited, embodied ethics of ritual practice into ideological constructs. The same legacy affected even Durkheimian anthropology, where ritual was often reconceptualised as an (ideological) template ‘cementing’ the social order, a stultifying tendency of some Marxist approaches (e.g. Bloch
1986). Even Mary Douglas’s groundbreaking work on the body as a metaphor for society and cosmos (1966), in stressing the parallels between the body social and the body microcosm, ultimately privileged the ideological over embodied practice.

Nevertheless, it was Douglas’s critique of the false dichotomy between magic and religion which was crucial in moving the debate forward. Against prior evolutionist approaches, she demonstrated that magic and religion were equally grounded in classificatory oppositions between purity and pollution, good and evil, the permitted and the forbidden, the powerfully beneficial and the dangerous, community and strangerhood (Douglas 1966). In this respect the anthropological contribution to theories of embodiment is widely recognised (Turner 1991; Shilling 1993).

The bodies of saints are enormously powerful. Sufism postulates precisely the same analogical relation identified by Douglas between body and cosmos (Nicholson 1978: 121) and between a denial of embodied desire (nafs) and the acquisition of true knowledge, gained by the detached, eternal, rational ‘soul’ (ruh). It is the soul that, through ascetic work on the body, a progressive purification of its hidden ‘lights’ that parallels the transcendental journey towards the Prophet and God, can deny carnal desire, greed and selfishness and gain cosmic knowledge of eternal realities. This knowledge creates a double movement: the death of the desiring soul, the nafs, brings about the eternalisation of the body after death, while the soul retains its living agency; and the ethical subjectivity of the journeying faqir is transformed into a source of infinite love. He is now the conduit of divine giving, blessing the world, with the powerful capacity to change and order both nature and human society; to overcome evil spirits and demonic possession; to heal and pacify.

But this Sufi theory of charisma and the elaborate cosmology it has generated are not necessarily articulated explicitly either by saints or by their devotees. The Sufi theory remains an implicit, embodied form of charismatic knowledge. It is manifested, as our case studies show, in the ritual capacity of saints to imbue their concrete surroundings with their sacred persona (Chapter 2, by Landell Mills) and extend their spiritual dominion through infinite giving (Chapter 5, by Werbner), creating moral spaces of intimate love and amity (Chapter 7, by Frembgen), sacralising urban neighbourhoods through ritual processions and sacred exchanges (Chapter 3, by Saheb), protecting strangers (Chapter 4, by Werth), exorcising demonic spirits and enacting an alternative ethical order (Chapter 6, by Basu). It is equally evident in the antinomian privileges granted saints (Chapter 8, by Ewing) and their powers over ordinary people (Chapter 9, by Malik).

The challenge in the study of Sufi saints and their cults is how to incorporate the Cartesian dualism between body and mind/soul, which devotees presume to be a fundamental truth of human existence, into a higher-order theory which discloses how, in reality, the emotional and ethical premises of Sufism are inscribed in ways that negate such a dualism.
The anthropological study of ritual embodiment

The elements of mythical thought, Lévi-Strauss has argued, 'lie halfway between percepts and concepts' (1966: 18). This embodied quality of objects/persons explains the power of signifying practices to reproduce the social order, even in the face of disruptive external forces. As an embodied phenomenon culture is inscriptive, beyond words, a habitus and hexas (Bourdieu 1977, 1984). So too, modernity's 'civilising' mission is imposed through disciplining practices (Elias 1983; Foucault 1979; see also Shilling 1993). Time and memory are themselves inscribed in the performance of ritual and commemoration ceremonials (Conkerton 1989). It is this dimension of embodiment that is particularly evident in Sufi cults, which, as Landell Mills shows (Chapter 2), both anticipate the future and re-enact their own realities in cyclical time.

In contemporary theory, the most important contributions to our understanding of ritual as an embodied, ethical and experiential practice have come from three key anthropological approaches: the processual, grounded in the work of Durkheim and of van Gennep on liminality in rites of passage; the aesthetic, inspired by French phenomenologists and poststructuralists; and the substantive, building on Mauss's insights into the symbolic embodiment of subjects through objects.

Undoubtedly, Victor Turner's study of the Ndembu ritual process has been foundational in revealing the rootedness of ethical ideas in the body and body substances, manipulated and worked upon to achieve a social, emotional and moral transformation of a liminal subject (Turner 1967). In recognising the emotional underpinnings of the normative, Turner followed Durkheim in attempting to explain the felt force of sociality. Adopting a more structuralist approach, Richard Werbner (1989) has shown that substantive flows between persons, and between persons and places, are morally incorporative, thus underlining the power of ritual to create ethical spaces which counter the alienation and estrangement produced by modernity. This incorporative capacity is an important feature of Sufi cults. In South Asian anthropology, the focus on personhood as constituted by bodily flows and exchanges of substances has been inspired by the work of McKim Marriott in particular (Marriott 1976), and extended to Sufi cults by Richard Kurin (e.g. Kurin 1983, 1984). The tension between embodied ideas about purity/pollution and creative fertility in South Asia is an important subject, considered here by Helene Basu (Chapter 2).

While building upon Turner's insights, anthropologists have also drawn upon aesthetic and phenomenological theories to consider experiential transformations of subjectivity (Fernandez 1982; Kapferer 1983; Boddy 1989; Devisch 1993). In the present volume, Ewing and Frembgen (Chapters 8 and 7) probe the subjectivities elicited in interactions with living saints which go beyond explicit cultural construction. Emotions, anthropologists have proposed, rather than being explicitly articulated, are embodied in gesture and performance. The Balinese cockfight may be interpreted as an 'alternative' cultural text, enacting a forbidden,
officially denied, aesthetic experience of violence (Geertz 1973). Sufism, we show, creates its own alternative texts – utopian experiential imaginaries of other, possible world orders. Through such imaginings it also contributes to ‘shaping a communal moral consciousness’ (Waardenburg 1979: 348).

Discussions of the constructedness of emotion suggest that emotions may be grasped as discursive performances embedded in ongoing power struggles (Abu-Lughod 1986; Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990). Hence studies of resistance in anthropology have drawn on Gramscian and Foucauldian notions of embodied difference (Comaroff 1985; Boddy 1989) to argue that disadvantaged groups such as women or the urban poor can re-form the world from their own perspective. Through mimesis and play the disadvantaged appropriate the power of colonists and dominant classes and make it their own (Taussig 1993; Stoller 1995). Sufism too often occupies, as many of the contributors here argue, such a resistive space.

In all these studies the power of ritual is seen to derive not from belief as a set of abstracted ideas but from ritual as a complex set of transformative, embodied, negotiated ethical and aesthetic practices and the experiences which their enactment generates. Ritual performances must be interpreted as embedded in quotidian ontologies, often implicit and inarticulate, even if particular ritual events or symbolic complexes are set apart spatially and temporally. In this sense one has to disagree with Asad’s genealogical account of anthropological studies of ritual which, he argues, almost universally have tended to divorce symbolic analysis from ‘pragmatics’ (Asad 1993: Ch. 4). While it is true that the stress on ‘belief’ and ‘communication’ has often led anthropologists into blind alleys, the main thrust has been towards more holistic approaches, ones which explore the connections between ethical, cognitive, aesthetic and organisational features of symbolic systems.

**Embodied emotions**

Sufism has often been represented as a realm of Islamic emotional discourse opposed to the ‘cold’ and ‘technical’ constructions put forward by theologians and judicial scholars (Schimmel 1975: 130–148, 287 passim; Rahman 1979). The core of classical Sufi mysticism consists of divine love (ishq, muhabbat) conceptualised as inner experiences of growth and realisation in the relationship between individual worshippers and a saint. The few studies dealing with emotions in the context of saints’ cults have so far been confined to a consideration of saint and disciple, focusing upon the conceived mystical content of dyadic relationships (cf. Nanda and Talib 1989; Pinto 1989, 1995). In the present collection Sam Landell Mills, arguing against the Durkheimian view of symbols as collective representations, suggests that saint–disciple relations can indeed be interpreted as a model for all human dialogical interaction.

Yet several of the authors in this volume go beyond the stress on dyadic relations to examine constructions and experiences of emotion generated amongst
followers themselves and the organisations these create (Frembgen, Ewing, Basu, Werbner).

If emotions are embedded in implicit local ontologies, these are often crystallised in liminal phases and figures. A common thread running through all the chapters is the elaboration of liminality at shrines as sacred localities, and of charismatic saints as threshold persons mediating between two distinct symbolic orders. The liminal has been analysed as a transgressive moment that enables actors to play upon or probe beneath the limits of conventional social understandings (Turner 1967). Such moments may also, Handelman proposes, resonate in some societies with ideas about the ‘unpredictable play of forces in flux’, denying the boundaries that divide ‘paranatural and human realms’ (Handelman 1990: 63 and passim) and revealing the limits of human understanding. Yet the unboundedness of experience, the sense of the ‘inchoate’ beneath the conventional which phenomenologists evoke, is ultimately knowable only in its embodied forms. We may speculate upon, but cannot reach, the biologically ‘unspeakable’. This is, of course, the problem with suggestions, such as those by Csordas (1990) or Shilling (1997), that the study of embodiment needs to look beyond nature–culture or social–biological dualisms in order to recover the pre- or unsocialised dimensions of emotion and sensuality – to escape from a ‘sociological imperialism’ that reduces the complexity of human experience (Shilling 1997). 2 Although providing a salutary reminder of our embodied nature, both writers cannot cope with the fact that – beyond philosophical reflections – the moment of the emotionally expressive is also the moment of dialogical and social communication, that is, the moment of the cultural. Even if the expressive does not exhaust human understanding and experience, one can only study human feelings or perceptions through their cultural and social articulations. The interest of Sufism is not in the unbounded mystical experience or biological transcendence it invokes, but in the tension it embodies between the conventional and the emotionally expressive. This is an important theme, addressed here.

Several chapters deal with a category of transitional ritual figures neglected until recently: the majzub and mastan – those drunk on divine love, the rebels and madmen of medieval Sufism (Eaton 1978; Digby 1984). In Islamic discourses, majzub represent the Other of orthoprax Sufism categorised as ba-shar, outside and beyond the reach of the Law (cf. Ewing 1984, 1988; Frembgen 1993; Gaborieau 1986). Both Katherine Ewing and Jürgen Frembgen here explore the processes of constructing a majzub, though they approach this subject from slightly different angles. Whereas Frembgen concentrates upon followers’ experiences of a living majzub, Ewing focuses upon the narrative experiences of the mother of a majzub. A prominent feature of majzubs is that they are mad. Their ‘madness’, however, is understood as a positive sign of proximity to God and absorption in love, a feature also of the intoxicated Sidi mastan analysed here by Basu.

In Ewing’s analysis, the death of the majzub marks the point in his mother’s narrative when he is recognised as a true saint. Death means perfection. Over a series of interviews, Ewing recaptures how a son is transformed from a troublesome
and subversive young man into a recognised charismatic. Death is critical in this process, mediating the transformations of identity leading to sainthood.

Ewing's study thus reveals how a holistic approach can elicit complex, shifting ethical and emotional perspectives. On the one hand, the bereaved mother mythologises her son as the saint he became, drawing on familiar tropes about the lives of saints; but on the other hand, she reveals the maternal anxieties she felt for him as a wayward and often vulnerable person for whom she was responsible. Ewing uses these narratives to argue, as she has elsewhere, against South Asianist ethnocultural interpretations of personhood that stress their cultural incommensurability with Western notions. Beyond cultural differences, she argues, there are also shared assumptions, rooted in the present instance in maternal concerns for the health and happiness of children. These can only be revealed, however, by listening to alternative, less formalised narratives. There is sadness and a sense of guilt at the death of a son, even as there is pride in his canonisation.

One fascinating question rarely addressed in studies of Sufism is the sense of loss Sufi devotees experience when their saint dies. From a cosmological perspective, the saint remains present and alive in the grave and, indeed, as Jürgen Frembgen shows here in his study of Mama Ji Sarkar, an urban majzub in Rawalpindi, the death of their beloved saint is conceptualised by disciples precisely in these terms. Yet the physical loss of the saint cannot be denied. Even as a very old man, barely speaking and functioning, he was an embodied presence in their lives, cared for, washed and fed by his disciples, the focus of intense sociality.

Although in the grave his power has remained and is increasingly institutionalised by the disciples, as the absence of a felt presence his death is experienced as a personal loss, and Frembgen draws on aesthetic theories of ritual in anthropology to conceptualise this transition which cannot be culturally articulated.

The living stillness of Mama Ji Sarkar is in some ways reminiscent of the living stillness of the pir of Atroshi studied here by Landell Mills. In his otherworldliness, the majzub subsisted just before his death in a condition of 'living death': even the bodily functions that render ordinary human beings impure were seen in his case to be particularly pure; he had hardly any excretions and they did not smell. He had attained physical purity even before death.

The power of emotion to heal and exorcise evil is the basis for the saints' cult in Gujarat studied here by Helene Basu. Believed to be descendants of the Abyssinian companion of the Prophet who was said to be the latter's most devoted follower, the Sidi guardians of the shrine centre trace their ancestry and that of their saints to Africa. Rather than a single charismatic saint, the cult centre consists of a triad of saints, differentiated by gender and seniority, who mythologically are said to have defeated dangerous 'Hindu' demonic forces. Between them the three saints embody cosmogonic forces of heating and cooling, of anger, love and rationality. Basu shows how the Sidis' perceived command of the full emotional spectrum of human passions, from love to anger, symbolised as a hot–cold continuum, enables them to transcend their lowly caste status and invert
hierarchical definitions of purity and pollution. These place their cult below those of Sufi saints who claim descent from the Prophet. Through the manipulation of embodied symbols of heat and coolness, male and female, the Sidi empower a cosmogonic world order of fertility, joy and divine madness which they themselves privilege beyond static cosmic definitions of hierarchical order. This counter-hegemonic definition places the cult ambiguously within the broader regional network of saints’ cults in Gujarat.

Acts of generosity and giving embody emotions, as Prima Werbner argues here in her analysis of the langar (the communal distribution of food at a religious lodge or celebration) as a form of ‘perpetual sacrifice’. The langar is the core institution of Sufi shrines, a locus of sacred exchange which extends the social and spatial ambit of the lodge. Pilgrims arrive at the lodge carrying offerings of grain and livestock for the langar, and are fed by it. People give out of love (muhabbat), expecting merit and grace in return. The saint’s generosity, granted by Allah, makes possible this substantive sharing of substance and nurture.

Sacred peripherality

Most anthropological studies of ritual have focused on bounded, small-scale communities, albeit now embedded in larger national collectivities and subject to external cultural influences and the reifications of print capitalism or reform scholarship. The ‘movement’ or ‘journey’ these studies have analysed is between different subjective conditions, roles and spaces within a local congregation; in initiation rites, sacrifices or curative rituals, or the imaginative travels of local shamans and healers (see Tsing 1993). An important feature of such journeys, anthropologists have shown, is the overcoming of ordeals, sometimes (as in some initiation rites) actual, physical ordeals; at other times in the form of symbolic encounters with dangerous demons or ritual clowns (Kapferer 1983; Werbner 1989) or by crossing dangerous thresholds — as between the domestic and the wild. These encounters, as Basu too shows, are mythologically critical; they move the ritual forward and transform the condition of performers and spaces of community. Such movement is also effected through sacred exchanges across thresholds which exorcise pollution and radiate purity, a subject we discuss more fully below.

It was, once again, Victor Turner’s study of pilgrimage as sacred peripherality, the ‘centre out there’, which opened up a whole new set of questions regarding ritual journeys as transformative movements, this time across vast distances (Turner 1974: Ch. 5). Turner conceptualised pilgrimage centres as alternative loci of value within feudal-type societies. Like the rites of passage of tribal societies, he argued, the ritual movement in pilgrimage culminated in a liminal moment of ‘communitas’ which was anti-structural and anti-hierarchical, releasing an egalitarian sociality and amity. Pilgrimage centres thus embodied an alternative ethical order, one uncircumscribed by territorially defined relations of power and authority.
In the face of a host of critiques levelled against this argument (Sallnow 1987; Eade and Sallnow 1991; and for India see Fuller 1993: 212–213), it seems more accurate to say that sacred pilgrimage creates not ‘anti’-structure but ‘counter’-structure. Nevertheless, Turner’s key point, that pilgrimage centres and the cults generated around them produce sacred geographies where alternative, non-temporal and non-administrative ethical orders are ritually embodied, still seems valid. In this spirit, regional cults were conceived to create spatially alternative local organisations to those centred on bounded, territorially based states or administrative units, and to be inclusive rather than exclusive, tending to cross ethnic and national boundaries and incorporate diverse populations around a single sacred centre (Werthner 1989: Ch. 7).

One way local Islam manifests itself is through the symbolic use of space. The Sufi notion of *wilayat* refers to spiritual dominions controlled by famous saints, but these also have an organised temporal, spatial and social realisation. Shrines thus represent important landmarks in the sacred geography of Islam in South Asia. Symbolically, their spatial ordering often mirrors the sacred pilgrimage centres of Islam in Mecca and Madina. In the present volume Werthner analyses the symbolic connections between local shrine sacrifices and the *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca). The ‘counter-structural’ movement in pilgrimage, she shows, is also a movement of subjective purification, a return to a state of pristine ethical purity.

At the same time, the organisation of a shrine’s space is embedded in place and community. This is reflected even at the most local level, in the countless shrines to unknown saints found on the outskirts of Punjabi villages. Against the unique biographies of named saints, these anonymous shrines, Lukas Werth discloses here, call for explanation. Situated at the threshold of human civilisation, on the margins between the village community and the wilderness, their anonymity is a key feature, he suggests, of their placement as mediators between the dangerous forces of nature and cultural continuity. The ambivalence of such saints’ positioning, betwixt and between, is also the source of their power, and is embodied in the sacred groves of trees and springs surrounding the shrines, symbols of continuity and life which may also be the abode of dangerous *jinns* and other malevolent spirits. A possible (unspoken) implication of the myths told to Werth about these nameless, unknown saints might be that they are manifestations of Khizr, the wayfaring saint and guardian of strangers. Werth shows that the shrines can be understood as standing for a broader and more inclusive ethical vision, beyond the little community: as guarantors of safe passage for stranger-travellers in the wilderness, they create connections between villages, across the wild spaces that separate them.

The association of death and power in social constructions of sanctity is further underscored here by Sam Landell Mills in his study of living saints in Bangladesh. Examining the social production of saints through interactions between a *pir* and his followers, Landell Mills draws attention to the creation of an iconic image of the living *pir* through contrasting images of stillness and action. The
stillness of the saint is like the immobility of the tomb, while the projection of his power depends upon a blend of action and stillness. This is achieved through the organisation of space into objectified structures perceived as an extension of the saintliness of the pir. A living pir thus reverses the image of the dead saint and anticipates his own death: the living pir of Atroshi embodies the tomb, while the lodge he has built and all its objects are transformed into anthropomorphic extensions of his persona, to survive his physical death.

Another facet of localised sacred power is invoked by implicit allusions to royal courts, a common feature of saint worship (Eaton 1982, 1984; Gilmartin 1984; Metcalf 1984). The dargah of Sahul Hameed in Tamil Nadu, studied here by Saeed, is modelled upon the ideal of the Mughal emperor Akbar, who, in the Indian historical imagination, represents the tolerant Muslim ruler par excellence. Royal splendour is invoked during the annual turs celebration by the symbolism of flags and the firing of cannons. As a powerful emperor incorporates the subjects of his state, so the pir of Nagore-e-Sharif, Sahul Hameed, extends the ambit of his embodied persona to the congregations of his followers or subjects throughout his spiritual (wilayat) and geographical domain, which includes Muslim and Hindu occupational groups and devotees from as far afield as Singapore and Sri Lanka.

Hence, a further feature of pilgrimage centres highlighted here, and one particularly evident in South Asia, is their role as sites of sacred exchange. This is true of the great pilgrimage centre of Mecca or Benares (see, for example, Parry 1989). It is equally true at lesser pilgrimage centres. Supplicants arrive with offerings or objects to be sacralised and return home carrying with them a bit of the sacred centre. Sacred exchanges of this type, as Richard Werbner has argued more generally (1989), generate movements of exorcism and purification, on the one hand, and connections between distant places, on the other. The waters of the Ganges (Gold 1988) or of ab-e Zamzam (the spring at Mecca), the earth of Mwali or of Karbala, gowns, amulets and other accoutrements crystallise embodied connections between a sacred centre and its extended peripheries (on the resulting trade in ‘charismatic’ amulets see Tambiah 1984: Ch. 22). The connection is metonymic as well as metaphoric. Indeed, the whole study of ritual embodiment, and of charisma as sacred embodiment, necessarily hinges on an understanding of symbolic movement as effecting both a metonymic and a metaphorical transformation. Meaning is substantively inscribed by creating contingencies and connections, while inscription is rendered meaningful.

Cults of saints create realms of anti/counter-structure by reversals of quotid-i an logic. The ‘saint who disappeared’ described here by Werbner is an absent presence. In the hajj a reversal of time is achieved, Werbner suggests, by reversing the Islamic myth of Ismail’s expulsion into the desert and his subsequent immolation. The charismatic body, as Frembgen shows here, exudes pure polluting substances. Similar inversions underscore the hierarchy of the Sidi cult (Chapter 6, by Basu): the majzub or mustan is not bound by conventions; instead, he is struck
by divine madness, embodying emotional knowledge beyond learned wisdom. This knowledge is marked by movement and ecstasy rather than by stillness. Within a regional context, the master are the rebels in a respectable establishment of Sayyid Sufi shrines. When participating in the rituals of these shrines, they enact a carnivaleque anti-structure.

**Charisma and modernity**

Perhaps it is this anti-structural emphasis that accounts for the continued vigour of saint cults in Muslim South Asia. Their vitality nevertheless needs to be considered against the backdrop of the more general debate about the decline of charisma in the context of modernity. Interrogating Weber’s notion of charisma, Eisenstadt proposes that he was centrally concerned with ‘the problems and predicaments of human freedom, creativity, and personal responsibility in social life in general and in modern society in particular’ (Eisenstadt 1968: xv); and it was in relation to the problem of individual freedom and creativity that Weber’s notion of charisma as antithetical to routine and rationalised institutional orders was formulated (ibid.: xviii–xix). The disenchantment of the world, the hallmark of modernity, was, in Weber’s view, the product of increasing rationalisation, of the growing reach of bureaucratic structures of domination, which he typified as permanent, routinised, recurrent, systematic, methodical, calculating, ordered, procedural and rule bound (Weber 1948: 245 *passim*). By contrast, he saw charismatic domination as highly personalised, intense, expressive and irrational, as well as being innovative and creative. The source of charisma was a perception of the unique, extraordinary, supernatural or heroic qualities of the charismatic leader. Leadership was thus based on voluntaristic recognition and authority constituted by inner restraint and personal responsibility rather than external, rule-bound discipline.

The question of the possibility of attaining personal freedom and ethical subjectivity against modernity’s pervasive, imposed disciplines has been revived in discussions of new social movements. In his last works, Michel Foucault examines the way erotic self-denial and self-imposed asceticism, much like that practised by Sufi saints, operated within an ‘economy of desire’ among the Ancient Greeks, to enable the ‘individual to fashion himself as a subject of ethical conduct’ (Foucault 1992: 251). Although there are echoes here of the exemplary autonomy Dumont attributes to the world renouncer (Dumont 1957), Foucault’s primary contribution to our understanding of saintly charisma lies in the connection he draws between self-mastery, truth and love: “The one who is better versed in love will also be the master of truth; and it will be his role to teach the loved one how to triumph over his desires and become ‘stronger than himself’” (Foucault 1992: 241). The fashioning of the self is interpreted by Foucault as a precondition both of true knowledge and of lasting, other-oriented bonds of love and friendship (ibid.: 201). Elsewhere he implies that aesthetic self-fashioning enables the individual to achieve critical distance from a taken-for-granted order, and hence the
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A further insight into the dynamics of Sufi sainthood may be derived from Edward Shils’s critical re-evaluation of Weber’s theory (Shils 1965). Rather than stressing the antithesis between charisma and bureaucratic or patrimonial domination, Shils argues that institutionalised charisma ‘permeates’ all walks of life. The source of charisma is the ‘contact through inspiration, embodiment or perception, with the vital force which underlies man’s existence’, a force located at the centre of society (ibid.: 201). The defining features of charisma are intensity, embodied centrality (of values or institutions) and the capacity for ordering. This capacity for ordering and cultivating, for taming the wilderness, is also the hallmark of Sufi saints in South Asia, as Werbner has argued (1996b) and as Werth and Landell Mills highlight in the present volume.

In a fine essay building on Shils’s insights, Clifford Geertz interrogates the sacred centrality of sovereign power and its symbolic, ordering capacities. Through royal progressions and processions, he shows, sovereigns mark out their territories ‘as almost physical parts of them’ (Geertz 1983: 125), allegorically shaping their dominion according to some cosmic, ‘exemplary and mimetic’ plan (ibid.: 134). Even in the context of modernity, he argues, political authority retains its charismatic aura.

There is, however, something intrinsically problematic in this siting of charisma at the centre and equating of it with state power and its routinised extensions. For the citizens of postcolonial societies, it is often the opposition between a morally grounded charisma and the rationalised authority of the state which more accurately reflects, we believe, the experiential reality of modernity. What needs thus to be theorised is the nature of charismatic (saintly) dissent and opposition to the bureaucratic domination of the state. At most we might extend Geertz’s view to argue that embodied resistance to the centre’s values draws on the same fund of charismatic symbols which the centre attempts to appropriate for itself. Sufi lodges, we show (Landell Mills, Saheb), are often shaped architecturally like Mughal courts, the lodge (dargah = court) replicating imperial courts, just as the latter in the past replicated charismatic saints’ modes of eliciting allegiance (Cohn 1983).

But beyond these mimetic borrowings, the Weberian opposition still holds true, with a difference. In South Asia Sufis have appropriated the sacred symbols of a tolerant, all-encompassing, inclusive Islam. As Werbner, for example, argues here, the capitalist, commodity economy is converted at a saint’s lodge into a good-faith, moral economy through altruistic giving to the communal langar; indeed, the sites of saints’ lodges, many of the contributors demonstrate, are set apart as spaces of expressive amity and emotional good will. The state and its politicians, by contrast, are seen as menacing, corrupt, greedy and unfeeling. They are not truly ‘rational’ in the Weberian sense since they bend the rules to their selfish interests; but they use the instruments of patriarchal and bureaucratic power to achieve their goals. Theirs is a charisma of unbridled power. By contrast the
saint’s charisma – and his achievement of subjective autonomy and freedom – is the product of his perceived (and projected) self-denial and self-mastery, of love and generosity. Writing about the network of hermitage centres and subcentres in the forests of Thailand, Tambiah describes them as a ‘formidable system of charismatic influence and presence’ countering both ecclesiastical authority and the ‘political authority with its patrimonial-bureaucratic attributes and weaknesses’ (Tambiah 1984: 334).

Hence the charismatic power of saints’ tombs is experienced by followers as an extension of the ambience of divinely inspired love, not the power of the state. The processions to and from the shrine of Nagore-e-Sharif, analysed here in great detail and with great subtlety by S.A.A. Saheb, stamp the saint’s charisma on the neighbourhoods and mahallas (wards) in the vicinity of the shrine through an elaborate ritual of sacred exchange. Tambiah speaks of the ‘sedimentation of power in objects – and of the sedimentation of charisma in gifts’ (ibid.: 339 passim). At Nagore-e-Sharif, the processors move back and forth to the lodge over an extended period of several weeks. They carry with them sacred icons and flags to be revitalised at the lodge, coming from as far away as Singapore and Sri Lanka. The embodiment of Sufi Islamic values through this processing, Saheb shows, includes both Hindus and Muslims, and many different castes and organised associations. Sacred peripherality, to return to Turner, is an intrinsic feature of charisma, and all the more so if the state is perceived to be divorced from the core values of the society.

To what extent do Sufi cults embody distinctively South Asian hierarchical values? In what measure are Hindu influences and borrowings the key to understanding South Asian saints’ cults and their continued viability? In his contribution to the present volume, Charles Lindholm asks himself why, whereas Sufism has been peripheralised in the Middle East, in South Asia it has remained a vital institution. One possible reason, he suggests, is that South Asian Muslims share with Hindus notions of hierarchical order which support the belief in transcendentally inspired individuals. By contrast, the individual egalitarianism and progressive rationalisation of Middle Eastern societies make charismatic saints an anachronism. Lindholm’s argument here tends to support one kind of interpretation of Weber’s theory which stresses, contra Shils or Geertz, that ‘in the modern world, with its cumulative rationality and machine technology’, personal charisma has no place (Wilson 1975: ix). At most it remains a ‘romantic idea’ or faith (ibid.: x).

Beyond the thorny question as to whether one can typify the two societies as ‘hierarchical’ or ‘egalitarian’ in any absolutist sense, Lindholm himself argues here and elsewhere that the alienation, fragmentation, materialism and solipsism of modernity ‘push individuals toward immersion in a charismatic group’ (Lindholm 1990: 82). The idea of excessive rationalisation invading the ‘life world’ and denying expressive forms of identity underlies much of the theorising on new social movements (Habermas 1987: 395; Melucci 1997). Nor has charismatic leadership per se vanished from the Middle East: as Lindholm himself
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reports, along with popular movements of resistance to the power of the state (Lindholm 1996: 163), in Egypt the lure of charisma has resurfaced in the form of Islamist movements which ‘have also been driven to idealisation of charismatic leaders and Sufie organisation’, while condemning ‘all formal authority as immoral imposition’ (ibid.: 206, 207).

The view that Sufism has been entirely marginalised in the Middle East has, moreover, itself been challenged. Denying this trend, Julian Baldick reports that in 1982 there were six million members of Sufi brotherhoods in Egypt, representing a third of the male population, united through a Supreme Council recognised by the state, and having powerful legislative, judicial and executive functions (Baldick 1989: 159). The impression that Sufism in North Africa is no longer viable may stem largely from a dearth of detailed contemporary research on living saints; it may, however, be the case, as Lindholm suggests here, that political repression by successive colonial and postcolonial regimes has turned charismatic leaders towards more violent agendas. Certainly it is striking that in modern Israel Jewish immigrants coming from North Africa have revived a sacred landscape of saints’ shrines and cults, along with all the theosophical premises these embody (Weingrod 1990).

In one sense, then, in highlighting the continued vitality of Sufism in South Asia, this book also constitutes a challenge to Middle East scholars to probe more deeply into the embodiments of Sufi charismatic authority and organisation in the Middle East and North Africa today. This is also the importance of wide-rangiing, comparative analyses such as those by Lindholm which raise new questions about the limits of concepts and their application in different contexts. Through such comparisons, the distinctive features of South Asian Sufism, the product of its historical co-existence with ‘Hindu’ beliefs and practices, might be better comprehended.

The debate about syncretism

The study of Sufism has until recently mainly been the domain of orientalists and historians. From the perspective of orientalists, contemporary shrine cults predominantly appear as degradations of classical Sufism into ‘decadence’ characterised by superstition and magical practices (see Lindholm, this volume; Ahmad 1969). Historians, on the other hand, have for long emphasised the syncretism of saint worship or popular Islam, depicting it as part of a process of ‘indigenisation’ of Islam and rendering saint worship as basically a Hindu institution (Misra 1964; Moini 1989; Mujeeb 1967; Schwerin 1981; Sen 1985). Implicitly or explicitly, this perspective has also informed several of the more recent anthropological studies of Muslim practices associated with shrines and saints (cf. Buddenberg 1993; Currie 1989; Einzmann 1988; Fruzzetti 1981).

The theory of saint cults as being, in effect, incompletely veiled Hindu institutions has been most vigorously proposed by the sociologist Imtiaz Ahmad (1981). Ahmad distinguishes between three distinct levels of Muslim practice: (1) ‘the
believes and practices that are traditionally described as belonging to formal or scriptural Islam’ (1981: 12); (2) customs glossed as being Islamic (ibid.: 13); and (3) ‘practical religion’, containing ‘a large number of non-philosophical elements such as supernatural theories of disease causation, propitiation of Muslim saints and, occasionally at least, deities of the Hindu pantheon, or other crude phenomena such as spirit possession, evil eye, etc.’ (ibid.). These different levels of Indian Islam co-exist, he argues, and are integrated at the local level.

In a key respect Ahmad’s view meshes with Geertz’s theorisation of Islam as plural and embedded in taken-for-granted, historically and culturally specific locales (Geertz 1968). The debate about Islam, one or many, is a perennial one (see, for example, Al-Azmeh 1993; Launay 1992). Arguing against the pluralist interpretation of South Asian Islam, Francis Robinson proposes that the exemplary life of the Prophet constitutes a unifying template of practice and belief, progressively adopted by Muslims in India and worldwide (Robinson 1983).

For both Ahmad and Robinson, however, ‘Islamisation’ refers exclusively to Islamic orthodoxy at the cost of plurality, thus overlooking the diversity of views represented by Islamic scholars, theologians, Sufis and holy men as well as the historically contingent and shifting nature of internal Muslim debates over questions of correct practice. As Richard Eaton has shown, there never was a uniform agreement upon the definition of ‘orthodoxy’. Sufism in medieval Bijapur was represented by different ‘types’: warrior Sufis, literati, reformers and rebels (called majzub) who accepted, challenged and disputed each other’s religious positions (Eaton 1978: 243ff). Variously interacting with both Muslim powerholders and the local population, they mediated Islamic concepts of power, value and knowledge. Moreover, nowhere was conversion a sudden event. Rather than being forced (see Schwerin 1981), it evolved over many centuries (Eaton 1978, 1982, 1984, 1993). In a recent work, Eaton rejects not only the interpretation of the regional cult of Satya pir as syncretic, but the general notion of Bengali folk-religion as constituting a synthesis of Islam and Hinduism (1993: 280).

Present constructions of syncretic folk-religion are based – Eaton maintains – upon the projection of contemporary religious categories, which gained prominence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, onto a premodern Indian past, thus postulating ‘the more or less timeless existence of two separate and self-contained communities in Bengal, adhering to two separate and self-contained religious systems, “Hinduism” and “Islam”’ (ibid.). Instead of imagining two neatly distinct and bounded groups, he suggests we look at ‘a single undifferentiated mass of Bengali villagers’ unsystematically picking and choosing ‘from an array of reputed instruments – a holy man here, a holy river there – in order to tap superhuman power’ (1993: 281).

A key feature of the process of Islamisation involves a ‘displacement’ of local superhuman agencies by Islamic ones (ibid. 282). Hence, the structure of the sixteenth-century Bengali epic Nabi-Bamsa (‘Family of the Prophet’) resembles that of an eighth-century Arabian text (ibid.: 285): in both, local deities are represented as forerunners of Biblical prophets culminating in the Prophet
Muhammad. Both texts are divided into two parts, the first on the predecessors of the Prophet, the second on his own life (ibid.: 286). The author attempts to situate the holy Prophet, Eaton argues, within a Bengali context: Adam is said to have been created by a Bengali goddess, and the four vedas are seen as preceding revelations made by God to different ‘great persons’ of whom Muhammad was the last (ibid.: 289).

Still, this cannot be regarded as syncretism, he proposes, because the basic conceptions underlying the narrative mediate Islamic notions, especially of time (linear Islamic versus cyclical Hindu) and the singularity of prophethood in contrast to Hindu concepts of reincarnation and rebirth (ibid.: 289). Moreover, the Hindu social order of pre-Islamic times is depicted as the realm and creation of the fallen angel Iblis or Satan (ibid.: 290). ‘In short’, Eaton concludes:

far from describing Islamic superhuman agencies in Indian terms, the Nabi-Bamsa does just the opposite: while Brahmans are portrayed as the unwitting teachers of a body of texts deliberately corrupted by Iblis, the rest of the Hindu social order is portrayed as descended from Cain, the misguided son of Adam and Eve. It was only from Adam and Eve’s son, Shish, that a ‘rightly guided’ community, the Muslim umma, would descend.

(ibid.: 290)

Such transformations indicate that Islam had come to be regarded in its own right, representing a cosmology distinct from the indigenous one.

We have quoted Richard Eaton extensively in order to clarify the proposition that Islamisation processes occur in the form of embodied ideas not reducible to the effects of Muslim reformists’ missionary zeal. In contrast to Ahmad’s theory of the ‘indigenisation of Islam’ we have to recognise the reverse process of an ‘Islamisation of the indigenous’. Moreover, Islamisation in terms of a ‘purification of local cosmologies’ is not confined to the encounter with modernity but represents a concrete manifestation of the very rise of Islam under different geographical and cultural conditions (Eaton 1993: 284). In contemporary South Asia, Islamisation processes are influenced by the mutual hostilities, antagonisms and wars between Hindus and Muslims. Since Partition, and in the face of Hindu nationalist religious discourses and communal violence which culminated in the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya, religion, as Peter van der Veer shows, has become more intensely politised than ever, shaping theories of both syncretism and anti-syncretism (van der Veer 1994a). As elsewhere, the politics of syncretism in South Asia defines religious ‘purity’ and ‘hybridity’ in political terms (Stewart and Shaw 1994).

Van der Veer criticises Nandy’s view (1990), aligned with that of Ahmad, that while orthodox fundamentalist ideas promote communalism, syncretic ‘folk-religion’ promotes communal harmony. Although Muslim shrines attract both Muslim and Hindu worshippers, he claims, they do so for different reasons:
whereas for Muslim followers a spiritual relationship to the *pir* is of central importance, Hindus see the *dargah* mainly as a healing domain specialising in the cure of demonic illnesses. Consequently, Muslims and Hindus are clearly divided by different degrees of participation and non-participation in rituals defined as Islamic, such as prayers in the mosque (van der Veer 1994a: 207; 1994b). Yet against this view is a counter-reality, described by Basu and Saheb in the present volume, in which Muslim shrines do often create islands of Hindu and Muslim communal harmony.

According to van der Veer, for Hindus:

Muslims appear to be close to the world of spirits and thus are able to master that world. In that sense they appear to be close to untouchables, who also can be specialists in exorcism. Thus there seems to be an incorporation of saint worship as a lower, impure practice in a Hindu worldview.

(van der Veer 1994b: 207)

Kakar too notes that the majority of possessed Hindus he encountered were afflicted by Muslim spirits; from a Hindu point of view, he suggests, Muslims not only are seen as impure but represent the alien and the demonic, understood as a reification of the unconsciously abjected (Kakar 1982, 1992). The mere presence of Hindus at Muslim shrines, therefore, cannot be taken as a sign of a common, syncretic practice of folk-religion. Rather, the different meanings and values associated with visits to Muslim shrines must be carefully delineated.

Such studies seem to confirm that the encounter of Hindus and Muslims at shrines of saints exemplifies what Dumont long ago wrote about Hindu-Muslim relationships in general: ‘we are faced with a *reunion* of men divided into two groups, who devalorize each other’s values and who are nevertheless associated’ (Dumont 1980: 211; emphasis in the original). The majority of individual Hindu supplicants both at Nagore-e-Sharif and at the shrine of Bava Gor in Gujarat are, Saheb and Basu indicate here, women suffering afflictions of spirit possession. However, the shrine in Gujarat reveals a kind of mirror reversal of the Hindu construction of a demonic Muslim image. Here it is Hindus who are seen to instantiate the demonic by embodying evil spirits when seeking treatment. Moreover, the shrine narrative represents the Muslim saints as victorious destroyers of local Hindu deities represented as demons. Rather than Hinduism encompassing an impure Islam, it is Islam which is constructed as infinitely superior and more powerful, subjugating immoral, alien forces. So too the most important saint in India, Mu’in al-din Chishti of Ajmer, is said to have conquered a ‘Dev’ (god) at whose former temple the shrine is now situated (Currie 1989: 66ff).

Against van der Veer it may be argued that Hindus and Muslims do, in fact, still join together at shrines in amity. This inclusive aspect of local Islam is stressed here by Saheb as the ‘universalist’ dimension of the cult of Nagore-e-Sharif in Tamil Nadu. The various communities participate as equals in the
processions to the shrine centre, but Hindus construct the saint as a deity, while for Muslims he was/is an extraordinary man. Clearly, the charismatic power embodied by a Sufi shrine is crucially dependent on the cosmological ideas actors bring to bear on the saint's image.

Evidently, Muslims do not perceive the presence of Hindus at shrines as indicative of non-Islamic practices. On the contrary, the symbolic repertoires of regional saints' cults in South Asia reinforce beliefs in the universalism of Islam. The Sufi fable of world renunciation is shared by shrines throughout India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (see Werbner 1995). Although each specific cult is deeply embedded in and shapes a local environment, all address similar ontological themes related to death, place and embodiment through which sanctity and sainthood are constructed. To argue that these practices are marginal to the 'true' Islam represented by the mosque and the ulama (religious scholars or officials) is to misrecognise the centrality of eschatological ideas about redemption and salvation to Islam in general (Werbner 1996a). As Jamal Malik demonstrates here in his subtle interpretation of a modern Urdu short story, written as a critique of the practices at saints' shrines, reformist ideas and arguments are 'still bound up with norms and symbols which are rooted in a long tradition'. Thus, although the progressive writer Ahmad Nadim is highly critical of the traditional order, the narrative structure he deploys in his texts follows a pattern similar to that underlying mystical Sufi discourses. According to Malik, modernist reformist values are influenced by a common symbolic framework. It is this multifaceted framework that is the subject of this book.

In interrogating the processes that sustain the devotion to Muslim saints and their tombs, our cases, seen together, examine the social interactions between place, person and society that endow Sufi morality with its continued vitality. The social construction of sainthood by saints, and their perception by followers and devotees, combine to create an alternative universe of ethical meanings. Hence, whereas charisma is usually taken for granted as a magical attribute, the contributors to this book interrogate the fabrications of charisma as they extend to concepts of the body, emotion, morality and sacred topography. In different ethnographic contexts, in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, charisma (baraka, karamat) is revealed as an embodied quality of exemplary persons who creates spaces of potential freedom. This, it seems to us, helps explains the vitality of Sufism both as a mystical philosophy and as a utopian imaginary of an alternative social order.

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Notes

1 While Asad has argued convincingly against Foucault's representation of a 'microcosm of solitude' in the case of Christian monks (Asad 1993: 112), the case of Muslim saints appears to fit better Foucault's rendition of ascetism among the Ancient Greeks.

2 It is noteworthy that Shilling advocates a return to Durkheim's theory of emotional effervescence in order to go beyond simplistic theories of cultural construction, without acknowledging the major contributions made by anthropologists such as Turner or Douglas to the study of embodiment, which draw upon this Durkheimian legacy. See Sharma (1996) on embodiment as an attempt to go beyond Cartesian dualisms, and the difficulties she perceives in reaching towards an alternative mode of theorisation.

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