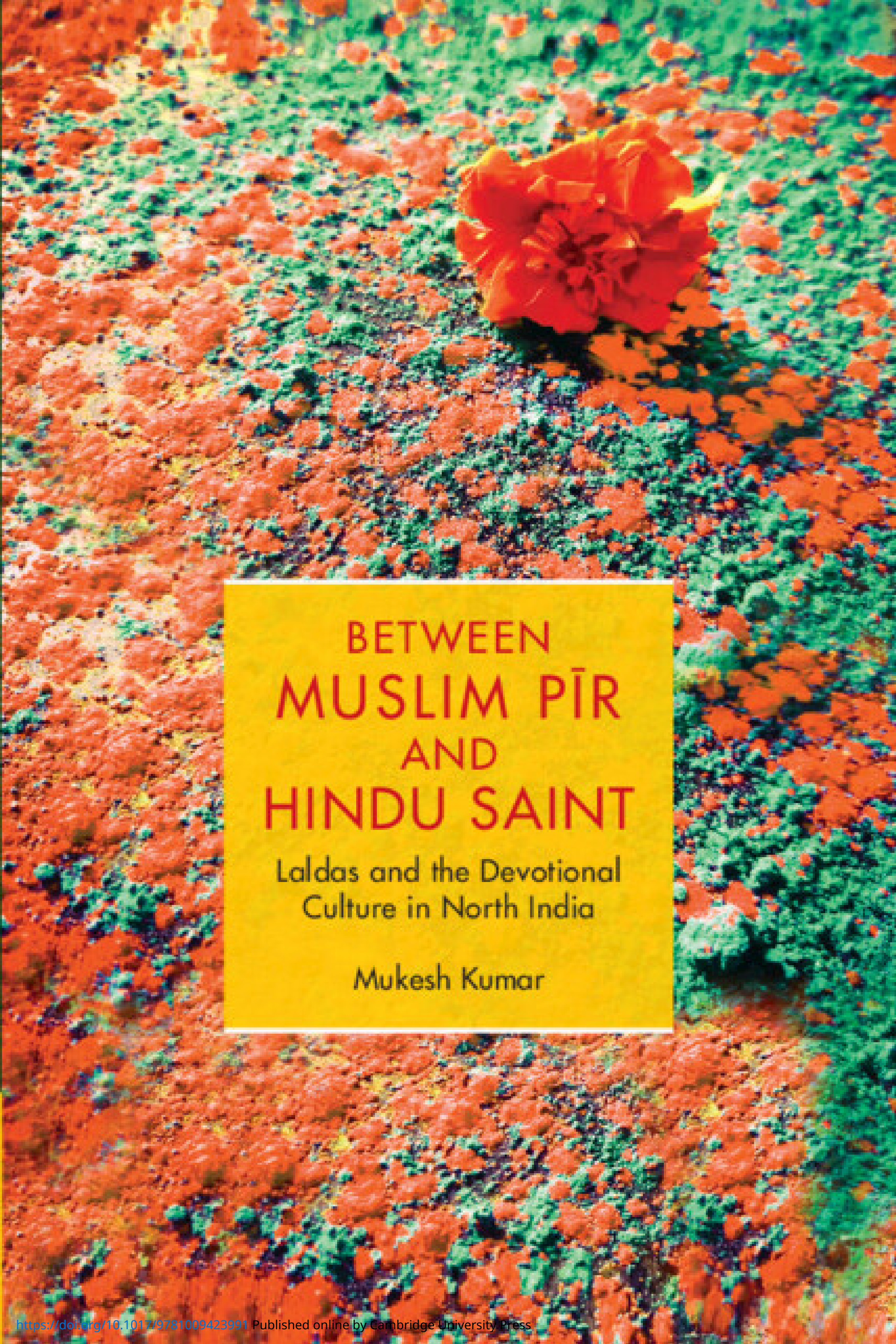

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Advance Praise

Skillfully blending insights and methods from anthropology, sociology, religious studies and history, Mukesh Kumar's empirically rich and highly original study complicates simplistic understandings of religious ideology and practice in northern India. One can only hope that his carefully researched monograph will find the broad transdisciplinary readership it deserves.

Harald Fischer-Tiné, Chair of Modern Global History, ETH-Zurich

This remarkable book shows how sixteenth-century north Indian Lāldāsī tradition embraced aspects of cultures which today span a landscape divided by fault lines of Hindu and Muslim identities. Through both intensive field work and in-depth textual studies it documents both the history of the tradition and modern reconstructions of Lāldāsī identities. This study will be welcomed by those interested in the interaction between Hindu *sant*s and Muslim Sufis. It casts new light on interactions between *sant*s, such as Kabir and Ravidas, and their doctrine of *nirguṇ bhakti*, devotion to the divine as formless, and Sufi *pīr*s, such as Laldas, whose teachings embodied the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the oneness of God. This book is a mine of original insights into the original genesis of this Sufi–*sant* interaction and a critical examination of how social and religious realities in north India have impacted on living contemporary Lāldāsī traditions.

Peter Friedlander, Associate Professor in South Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra

Most studies of religious sites in India that have sometimes been shared by Hindus and Muslims and sometimes contested by members of these groups, focus on individual locations at specific moments in time. In the important and highly innovative study, Mukesh Kumar looks at the changing configurations of the networks of sites dedicated to Laldas, a saint whose teachings contain elements commonly associated with both Hinduism and Islam, even though those religious traditions are supposedly mutually incompatible. The politicisation of religion in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has not only increased contestation over the shrines but also induced many of Laldas's followers to find covert ways of drawing on both traditions despite the efforts to 'purify' the sites that have been made by orthodox Muslim and Hindu leaders. The multi-sited fieldwork data are rich, and the analyses provocative. This book sets a new, high standard for works on shared and contested religious sites in South Asia, and more widely.

Robert M. Hayden, Professor Emeritus, University of Pittsburgh

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This is a very important book. Against the background of India's current, tragic polarisation between Hindus and Muslims, it reminds us that things were not always so. It focuses on the social expressions of *nirguṇ bhakti*, worship of the formless absolute, which rejects institutionalised religion altogether and therefore allows and even encourages various forms of religious exchange between Hinduism and Islam. By means of a subtle, detailed historical and ethnographic analysis, Mukesh Kumar shows how the followers of Laldas, a sixteenth-century mystic, responded to the changing religious landscape in subsequent centuries, trying (but ultimately failing) to preserve their particular form of Hindu–Muslim synthesis in the face of those forces trying to separate the two communities.

William Sax, Professor and Head, Department of Anthropology, South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University

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BETWEEN MUSLIM PĪR AND HINDU SAINT

Between Muslim Pīr and Hindu Saint studies the changing form of religious culture around the *bhakti* figure and the religious order of Laldas that has undergone multiple transformations since its inception in the sixteenth century in the Mewat region of north India. The study uncovers the fascinating historical and contemporary dimensions of Hindu–Muslim socio-cultural interactions around his shrines. It explores reformist and extremist politics that influenced shared religious traditions, shedding light on the impact of the reformist ideologies of the Arya Samaj and Tablighi Jamaat on the followers of Laldas. It presents a compelling analysis of how some shared religious practices persist and adapt amidst the pressures of dominant reform movements, highlighting the resilience of faith and the strategies employed by believers to maintain their religious convictions. The inclusion of marginalised voices, particularly women maintaining their disagreements by concealing their faith in the saints and traditional bards expressing their righteous views through folk songs, adds a poignant and powerful dimension to the narrative. Through its comprehensive and thought-provoking approach, the book provides valuable insights into the continuously evolving religious landscape of north Indian devotional Hinduism and popular Islam.

Mukesh Kumar is a postdoctoral fellow (2021–23) at ETH Zürich. Previously, he was an Alexander von Humboldt postdoctoral fellow (2019–21) at the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University. He has published several research articles in international journals, such as the *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Cambridge University Press), *Contemporary South Asia* (Routledge), *History and Anthropology* (Routledge) and *Economic and Political Weekly*.

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BETWEEN MUSLIM PĪR AND HINDU SAINT

LALDAS AND THE DEVOTIONAL CULTURE IN NORTH INDIA

MUKESH KUMAR

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For Garima, who has been kind enough
to deal with my absentmindedness

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CONTENTS

List of Figures, Maps and Tables xi
Acknowledgements xiii
List of Abbreviations xvii
A Note on Transliteration xix
Maps xxi

1 The Spectre of Binaries 1
2 Laldas and Religious Duality of *Pīr* and *Sant* 39
3 The Laldas Shrines and Inter-religious Disputes 75
4 A *Fait Accompli*: The Complete Hinduisation of the Laldas Order 110
5 Religious Reform and Shared Shrines 135
6 Concealment and Secrecy: Hidden in Plain Sight 162
7 Poetic Response to Religious Puritanism 187
8 An Ephemeral Line in the Sand 218

Appendices 235
Glossary 327
Bibliography 334
Index 359

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FIGURES, MAPS AND TABLES

FIGURES

1.1 The Sherpur shrine of Laldas or Khan at Sherpur Village, Ramgarh, Alwar 3
1.2 The new temple of Laldas at Punahana 5
1.3 A *kabra* in the Laldas shrine at Sherpur 6
1.4 The spread of Meo population in the late nineteenth century 16
2.1 Laldas in interaction with the Mughal prince Dara Shukoh 44
2.2 The Laldas temple in Saharanpur 45
2.3 A typeset version of the biographical text of Laldas, *nuktāvalī* 48
2.4 The abandoned Mecca mosque 53
2.5 The meditation place of Laldas on the Aravalli Hills 57
2.6 A mosque attached to the place of Laldas's meditation 57
2.7 Laldas surrounded by cows 59
2.8 The current Muslim *sādh* performing *ārtī* at the Sherpur shrine 64
2.9 White sheets offered to Laldas (*top right*), a visitor carrying sheets (*top right*) and a *sayyed*'s tomb with the green sheet (*lower left and right*) 65
3.1 A side view of the Sherpur shrine 76
3.2 The decommissioned mosque at the Laldas shrine 77
3.3 The Dholidoob shrine of Laldas, Alwar 80
3.4 A news report about the dispute, 1946, by the *Dawn* 82
3.5 The deity Laldas in an anthropomorphic form for *darśan* 100

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4.1 One of the new temples of Laldas 113
4.2 Various temple idols of Laldas with turbans 115
4.3 Newly published booklets and pamphlets about Laldas 117
4.4 The *sajrā* (family lineage) of Laldas 119
4.5 The graves of Laldas (*top left*) and those of his sons, parents and wives (*clockwise*) 121
4.6 The *kaccā* houses of the traditional Muslim *sādh*s 122
4.7 Invitation for a *jāgran* by a temple committee 126
5.1 Laldas temple in the premises of the Arya Samaj in Punahana 136
5.2 The temple of Jaharpir 138
5.3 Goddess Durga's temple 138
5.4 The tomb of Shah Chokha 155
6.1 *From right to left*: Fatima, Fatima's husband, and Rabiya and her children 172
7.1 A Bhapang 199
7.2 The newspaper cutting of Farookh's interview 203

MAPS

1 The map of administrative blocks in Alwar with adjoining regions, Bharatpur and Nuh xxi
2 The district of Nuh (Mewat) of Haryana xxii
3 The traditional shrines of Laldas and other field sites xxiii

TABLE

1.1 Meo population of Alwar: Selected *nizāmat*s (districts) (1931) 17

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ABBREVIATIONS

BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party
DAA	District Archives Alwar
GoI	Government of India
MDS	Mewati Development Society
RSAB	Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner
RSS	Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh
VHP	Vishva Hindu Parishad

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

All non-English words written in the Devanagari script are transcribed using the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) system. This system allows for the representation of various Indic scripts, such as Sanskrit, Hindi, Braj, Mewati and others, in the Roman script. The biographical text about Laldas frequently includes Urdu words written in the Devanagari style; therefore, the same style of transliteration is used for Urdu words as well. However, no transliteration is applied to proper nouns like people's or places' names, or to commonly used words like Sufi or Bhakti.

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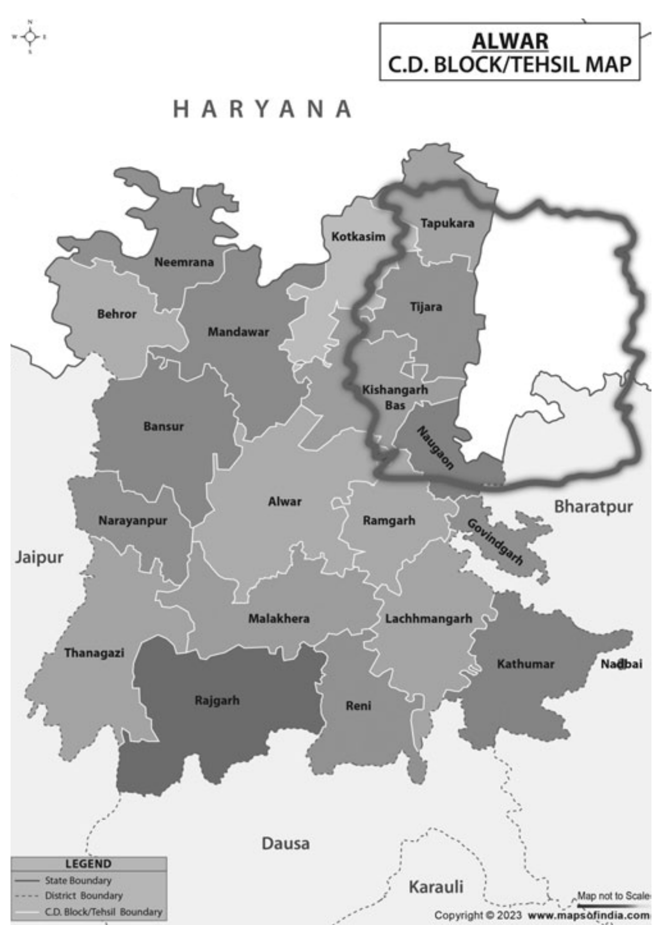
MAPS



MAP 1 The map of administrative blocks in Alwar with adjoining regions, Bharatpur and Nuh (Mewat)

Source: © Map of India, https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/rajasthan/tehsil/alwar.html, accessed 7 October 2018.

Note: The cultural region of Mewat (in dark red line) across meeting borders of Rajasthan and Haryana.

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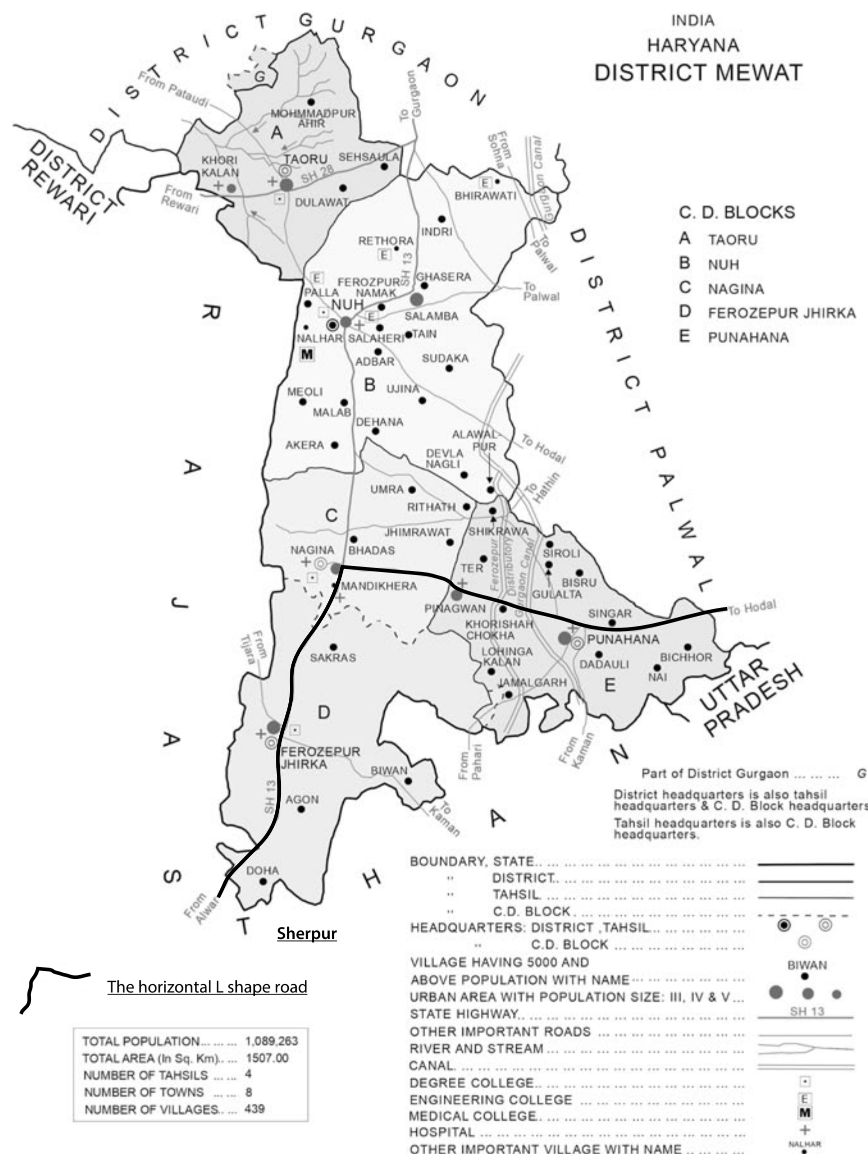

MAP 2 The District of Nuh (Mewat) in Haryana

Source: District Census, Mewat, 2011.

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MAP 3 The traditional shrines of Laldas and other field sites

Source: Google Map.

Notes: The dropped pink pins from top to bottom (*clockwise*) in the image:

1. Shah Chokha tomb
2. A new temple of Laldas, Punahana
3. The main shrine of Laldas, Sherpur
4. The shrine of Bandholi
5. The shrine of Dholidoob

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1

THE SPECTRE OF BINARIES

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, temples dedicated to Laldas, who was born to Muslim parents, have mushroomed all over north India. Although he is currently mostly worshipped by the Hindu caste of Baniyas (merchants or traders), Laldas was historically known for having a dual religious identity as a Sufi *pīr* (Islamic mystic or saint) among Muslims and *bābā* or *sant* among Hindus.[1] He preached *nirguṇ bhakti* (formless devotion) to the Hindu god Ram,[2] lived a married life, combined 'Islamic' and 'Hindu' religious doctrines and developed a distinct form of religiosity shared by people across religious denominations. The saint taught his followers to observe five rules: to refrain from killing animals and eating meat (particularly beef); to abstain from alcohol consumption; to avoid partaking of any food in their daughter's home; to not cultivate tobacco and sugar cane in the area; and to avoid stealing. The ultimate objective for devotees from diverse socio-religious backgrounds was to continuously chant the name of Ram.

Laldas and his teachings straddled the boundaries of 'Islam' and 'Hinduism'.[3] But his main followers, Hindu Laldasis of the Baniya background and Muslim Laldasis of the Meo Muslim background, began to identify him more closely with either 'Islam' or 'Hinduism' in the twentieth century. Born into a Meo Muslim family in the sixteenth century (1540 CE) as Lal Khan Meo, the saint is presently more popular under the designation of Baba Laldas. Following his guru Kabir, Laldas not only advocated worshipping 'God' in a *nirguṇ bhakti* manner but also lived by the values of 'Islam' in his personal life.[4] Like Kabir, Laldas, his religious instructions and the Laldasi

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panth (religious path or way) founded by his followers traditionally did not discriminate on caste and religious levels.[5] The saint considered institutional religious identities as impediments in the path of *bhakti* (devotion). His teachings are still followed by people of both religions. But the saint's identity and associated religious practices have recently been transformed, indicating a shift from a shared liminal religious entity to an emerging component of north Indian devotional Hinduism.

This book is an attempt to understand historically and anthropologically a changing form of religious culture around the *bhakti* figure and the religious order of Laldas that has undergone multiple transformations since its inception in the sixteenth century. In doing so, the book analyses the changes in shared religiosity of Laldas, who characteristically spoke of an inward Lord transcending institutionalised 'religions'.[6] It mainly shows how the cultural memory around him has evolved over time. While saints like Laldas typically welcomed followers of any religious background in the past, their tradition did not normally sustain a shared religious ethos in the long run. Since the early twentieth century, Hindu and Muslim followers of the saint have been disputing each other's claims over his identity and numerous shrines. As a result, these shared or mixed shrines have presently become precarious, as tightened religious identities emerged and the financial clout of Hindu devotees grew, alongside the rising religious reformist politics among 'Hindus' and 'Muslims'.[7]

The book goes beyond its initial scope to explore the semantics of syncretic and anti-syncretic dynamics in north Indian society, explaining how the notion of religious purity advocated by reform organisations, the Arya Samaj and the Tablighi Jamaat, came into existence.[8] It further explores how devoted followers of the saint responded to the growing reformist pressure. They employed various strategies to cope with the situation, ranging from concealing their faith to subtly expressing their opinions through lyrical poems. These coping mechanisms allowed them to navigate the challenging environment within and outside their homes. Furthermore, the shared religious practices of Laldas's followers, which were generally condemned by reformist ideologies, did not succumb to purist views but instead found ways and means to survive. Overall, the book examines the relation between religion, culture and power in Mewat in the light of heightening sectarian tensions in north India in recent years over religious identities, conversion, shared shrines and cow protection among other issues. The growing religious tensions surrounding Laldas's shared shrines point to a shift in the dynamics

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of socio-religious relations between 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' over time. Taking a *longue durée* approach, the book provides a nuanced analysis of the making and unmaking of this shared religious figure, exploring the conflicts both within and between different religious communities at his sacred sites. These divergent trends allude to a traditionally incorporative nature of Indic religiosity and recent exclusionary tendencies of reformist politics in India.[9]

Apart from the main shrine at Sherpur (Figure 1.1)—situated right on the border of eastern Rajasthan and southern Haryana—where the saint is buried with his sixteen family members in Islamic-style graves, there are two other main shrines and numerous new temples dedicated to Laldas across north India.[10] The two other main traditional shrines of Laldas are in the villages of Dholidoob (where his parents, Chandmal and Samda, are buried) and Bandholi (where one of his sons, Kutub or Dhruvji, and his two daughters, Riddhi and Siddhi, are buried) in Alwar in eastern

FIGURE 1.1 The Sherpur shrine of Laldas or Khan at Sherpur Village, Ramgarh, Alwar

Source: Photo by the author.

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all the photographs in this book are taken by the author during fieldwork in the area between 2016 and 2019.

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Rajasthan. These three traditional shrines, located in Sherpur, Bandholi and Dholidoob villages (see Map 3), are among the central places of shared worship of Laldas.

Changing the outlook of the religious order of Laldas was historically the work of a variety of socio-religious, economic and political forces. However, in recent times, the dominant influence of orthodox Vaishnava[11] beliefs held by the Baniya community,[12] particularly their strong emphasis on temple worship and veneration of images or icons, has significantly shaped and solidified the religious identity of Laldas as primarily a 'Hindu' figure rather than a liminal entity. People's devotion to Laldas and his family members has resulted in boons, which have contributed to the Laldas order's meteoric rise as a wealthy religious order. Currently, the Baniyas play a crucial role as the principal advocates and driving force behind the ongoing religious transformations within the order. The Baniyas, probably the wealthiest caste cluster in Indian society, responded to their strong religious appeal in Laldas with their money and power, transforming the overall character of the order and the saint. In order to attain their objectives, the Hindu (Baniya) followers of Laldas—who although agree that the saint was a Muslim—have begun constructing new and marvellous temples. One such temple that also became one of my main field sites was built in 2015 in Punahana (Figure 1.2), which stood at the heart of the town.

Visitors to the aforementioned temple were all Hindus, mostly Baniyas. Such new temples of Laldas not only reveal the story of Hinduisation of the order but also show intricate ways through which some shared religious practices evolve, change and acquire newer forms with time. The comparatively new temples of Laldas fulfil some unique 'devotional desires' of Baniyas in a religious manner that generally requires experiencing the physical presence of a deity. More importantly, these new temples of Laldas, spread over north India, stand in ritual and symbolic contrast to the main shrine.[13] For instance, at the main shrine in Sherpur, the centres of ritual offerings are graves (*kabra*, or mausoleum) (Figure 1.3), unlike these new temples in which a well-adorned Laldas idol (as shown here) is installed. These temples have ironically endowed a strong advocate of *nirguṇ* (formless) devotion with a *saguṇ* (God with attributes) anthropomorphic form.

The process of building new Hindu-style temples of Laldas has happened mainly in the first two decades of the twenty-first century to bring the imaginary of the saint more in line with the traditional religious orientation of the Baniyas. They began to propitiate him in the Vaishnava style of religious

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FIGURE 1.2 The new temple of Laldas at Punahana
Source: Photo by the author.

worship, which has historically been favoured by the Baniyas (C. Bayly 1992). Installing idols (images) of the saint in many temples in Mewat and neighbouring regions implies symbolic and ontological transformations that are a complete subversion of Laldas's teachings and his *samprādāya*'s

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FIGURE 1.3 A *kabra* in the Laldas shrine at Sherpur

Source: Photo by author.

(religious order) shared practices and beliefs.[14] I argue that the rise of shared religiosity around Laldas and the persistence of disputes between the two different types of religious followers indicate historically changing forms of religious cultures in north India in general and Mewat in particular.[15]

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Additionally, this new symbolism and meaning of the shrines and the new persona of Laldas allude to the displacement of the religious symbols of one group by the other. While these transformations are designed to meet the devotional needs of the wealthy and powerful merchant class, they also represent changes in a constantly shifting network of socio-religious relations and belief systems around shared sacred spaces, defined as 'religioscapes'[16] by Hayden et al. (2016). Each religious group sharing a sacred site constitutes its own form of religioscape, such as 'Hindu' religioscape or 'Muslim' religioscape, intersecting and sometimes mutually opposing each other's religious practices.[17] Constantly shifting social horizons and forms of interactions between various religious communities exhibit and sometimes force changes in religioscapes, depending upon the power dynamics of inter-religious relations (Hayden et al. 2016: 28–31). Similarly, the changes at Laldas shrines also demonstrate that religious cultures evolve and change over time, generally in tandem with the rising tides of comparatively newer forms of ideologies and power dynamics in society. In a way, the 'Hindu' religioscape of the Laldas order is slowly expanding since Baniyas continue to build new temples. The majority of Baniyas perceive their wealth and prosperity as the direct outcome of their genuine service, or *saccī sevā*, to the saint. As a result of this belief, there is also a substantial influx of material contributions to the saint's shrines and new temples, marking changes in physical settings, symbolic meanings and ritual practices at the traditionally shared sacred sites.

These changes also led me to ponder the following questions: What are the social, religious and economic developments that are reshaping the contemporary religious perspectives of the Hindu and Muslim Laldasis, causing them to act for the transformation of traditional forms of religiosity? How do we comprehend and distinguish between the past and present religious engagements of people who presently identify as 'Hindu' or 'Muslim'? How have religious boundaries, identities and practices changed and evolved historically in relation to religious spaces traditionally shared by people of all faiths? Which major forces have transformed the religious culture from the one that was more plural and mixed to the one that is more segregated?

The answers to these questions are inextricably linked to the transformations that have occurred at the Laldas shrines and the increasing significance of the Hindu aspects of the saint's religious order and persona in recent decades. However, the focus here is not on the system of classification

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but instead on how the historical growth of religious and communal consciousness around social categories led to the current teleological outcome of mutual distrust and hatred against each other in religious communities. In turn, these developments also affected religious cultures around shared shrines of saints, such as that of Laldas. Consequently, it would be more useful to explain the processes by which members of these diverse religious communities with varying religious orientations have come to identify their identities and shared practices around the shrines of Laldas as either 'Islamic' or 'Hindu'. These shifts continue to have an impact on the outlook of the dominant Meo Muslim community and on local inter-religious relations in Mewat.

THE AREA, MEWAT AND THE MAKING OF THE OTHER

The book is set in the Mewat region, located 65 kilometres south-west of the capital of India, Delhi. Mewat derives its identity from the Meos, the majority inhabitants of the region, and geographically spreads across the border regions of three present-day north Indian states: Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Overall, Mewat is located within a triangular zone bounded by three major cities: Delhi, Jaipur and Agra. It covers an area of nearly 9,000 square kilometres without constituting a single administrative unit. Mewat, as shown in Map 1, is, thus, closely identified as a cultural zone, defined by the distribution of the Meo peasant population and the use of the Mewati language.[18]

Numerous peasant communities reside in and around Mewat, creating a sort of caste boundary. Due to their numerical dominance, their locations are generally identified by caste names. For instance, the districts beyond the north and north-west sections of Mewat (the western side of Alwar, and parts of Rewari and Gurgaon) are controlled by Ahir peasants, whose territory is termed the Ahirvati (the Ahirs' habitation) in popular parlance. Similarly, Jat peasants can be found in large numbers in areas beyond the north-east and south-east of Mewat; this region is known as the Jattiyaat. Similarly, Meenavati and Gujarvati are two distinct peasant caste cultural zones (after the Meena and the Gujjar peasants, respectively).[19] There are remarkable similarities between these peasant castes who bestow on one another equal social status, including the Meos. All these caste communities identify as Hindu, except for the Meos, who are Muslim.[20]

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Mewat is flanked by the Aravalli mountains, colloquially called *kālā pahād* (the black mountains), which occasionally rise to 500 metres. The region is one of the least fertile areas on the outskirts of the alluvial Indo-Gangetic plains. In the absence of perennial rivers and other freshwater sources, irrigation heavily relies on either rainfall or waterpumps. The area experiences low rainfall, resulting in a hot, dry and semi-arid climate.[21] Economically, Mewat is currently recognised as one of the most underdeveloped regions in India.[22]

Traditionally, Mewat has been a meeting ground of diverse religious traditions, characterised by the presence of Sufis, Naths, Jains and Bhaktas, among countless others religious streams (M. Kumar 2022a, 2002b; Mayaram 1997b, 2004c). Beyond the binary of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', it represented a mosaic of various religious orientations and a complex arrangement of social relations. However, Mewat and Meos have currently been highly defamed by Hindu right-wing activists and popular media. Hindu right-wing activists describe the region as a 'dark place' and a 'hotbed of breeding terrorism', with Muslims supposedly engaging in forced religious conversion of Hindu girls as well as cow smuggling (Bose 2022).[23] These issues have sparked numerous sectarian conflicts in recent years, with many people labelling the area as the source of 'anti-national' activities. This association is largely due to stereotypes and prejudices against the Muslim community, which have led to an inappropriate classification of the region as a hub of criminal activities and lawlessness. For instance, in 2016, just before the beginning of an 11-month fieldwork in Mewat, I became a little depressed by the entrenched negative beliefs about the region held by many people in proximate areas and big cities like Delhi and Gurgaon. 'A place of Muslim terrorists', 'a mini-Pakistan', 'full of robbers and kidnappers'—these were the usual allegations I heard about 'Mewat' in general and about the Meo Muslims in particular. Many people suggested that unless I changed the field area of my research, I would not return alive.

With the help of a friend in Delhi, where I was temporarily based, I was able to find a local friend who agreed to show me places in Mewat. On the day we met, my friend in Mewat queried my interest in the Meos, asking me, 'What is the purpose of studying Muslims? You could find a better topic for your research.' When I asked him to clarify his comment, he invoked the prevailing negative knowledge about Muslims rather than information based on concrete evidence. His description of the 'Muslims' of the area included adjectives like 'dangerous', 'thieves', 'criminals', 'beef-eaters' and 'terrorists'.

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Not once did my 'Hindu' friend, whose background was the middle-class peasant caste Yadav community, refer to them as the Meos. Instead, throughout the few days I stayed with him, the collective noun 'Muslims' and the adjective 'Muslim' kept popping up continuously. This popular understanding of the category 'Muslim' is pan-Indian. A growing concern with religious boundaries, a trend already set in motion in the twentieth century, drew my attention to what could be referred to as a fixation with the colonial idea of religious difference.[24] Although not entirely meaningless, the assumption that religious identities in India are fundamentally exclusive entities currently has significant sway over political-bureaucratic understanding and underpins many academic discussions, particularly those on the themes of secularism, religious tolerance and inter-religious relations.[25] In these discussions, religious communities are assumed to be monolithic, internally coherent, homogenous and externally non-interactive. Such an understanding is 'the objectification of culture', a process both 'totalising and individualising' (Cohn 1987: 224–54) in approach. With the beginning of the 'modernity' projects of the colonial state in the late nineteenth century, the main emphasis of colonial officers and administrators remained on the bounded definition of groups through the production of census operations, anthropological surveys and administrative reports and gazetteers. In this endeavour, 'the position of the subjects was constituted by the colonial state by classifying and naturalising categories and identities' (Cohn 1996: xi). These categories were mostly created in a mutually opposing binary manner, such as educated or uneducated, rich or poor, male or female, young or old, Hindu or Muslim, Welsh or Scottish and so on (Cohn 1996: xi).

Unfortunately, many political scientists, anthropologists and historians of South Asia still continue to reify—consciously or unconsciously—religious, caste and community groups, describing them as possessing coherence and definite boundaries.[26] Fundamental religious categories such as 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', which are in fact internally diverse, have been homogenised, not only in political and reformist rhetoric but also in treatises supposedly written to counter such notions.[27] 'Scholars too heavily rely on Hindu and Muslim as descriptive adjectives and categories', as Gottschalk (2000) rightly points out. 'Such distinctions are, though, not without uses', he adds, 'but privileging them implies that such communal divisions exist for all South Asians at all times' (Gottschalk 2000: 3).

The friend with whom I was travelling in 2016 appealed to the same bounded notion of religious communities. He was conscious of his own

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caste status in Hinduism, but he presumed that 'the other' (Muslim) was a homogenous group. Similarly, the initial questions many Muslims, whom we met in the process of fieldwork, asked us were also related to our religious identity. The Muslims we met differentiated themselves from other Muslims (by caste identity, such as the Meo, the Mirasi, the Qureshi, and so on)[28] but treated 'the other' (Hindus in this case) as a coherent group, or so it seemed to me. Identification with 'religion' seemed to have surpassed other measures of social identification in the public domain, at least in categorising unfamiliar people. It appeared that strangers were located first by religious categories so as to guide one's initial behaviour and conduct. Although these trends around newer forms of 'religious consciousness' have been powerful in shaping the binary outlook of 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' currently, beneath the bounded conception of 'religion' and religious communities lay multiple layers of pluralism.[29] These pluralistic impulses always remained in the background until uncovered by in-depth social and cultural research. For instance, I encountered some unique practices of social solidarity, discussed here, across religious boundaries organised by village-level brotherhood rather than the simple binary of 'Hindu' or 'Muslim'.

The history of tension and contestations between local (Mewat) and imperial (Delhi) powers provides an interesting starting point to understand the multifarious nature of religious and social identities in Mewat. The area was an important part of the Mughal province of Agra and served to connect Delhi to both the Agra and Ajmer regions. Imperial rulers were keen to control Mewat because of its strategic location on these two important trade and pilgrimage routes. The text *Ain-i-Akbari* describes many of Akbar's imperial sojourns as he passed through this region when he travelled westwards, either to subjugate rebel chiefs or to visit the famous Chishti saint Moinuddin at Ajmer (Mubarak, Blochmann and Jarrett 1894). In a popular folktale about the relationship between a famous local Chishti saint, Shah Chokha (whose tomb is near the Punahana temple), and a Meo figure called Dada Bahar, the Sufi saint supported the demands of local Muslims against the imperial power of the Mughal court.

The legend begins by introducing Rajni, a renowned beauty whose father served as a local official for Akbar in Bisru village near the Punahana Temple. Rajni's exceptional beauty caught the attention of Akbar, who, upon hearing tales of her captivating charm, expressed his desire to marry her. As a result, Rajni was brought to the imperial court in response to Akbar's fascination with her. Rajni's father, Randhir Singh Meo, held a prominent position in the

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village as its head and the local tax collector. Despite his high status, he was bound by the endogamous practices of his Meo community, which strongly believed that Rajni's marriage to Akbar would bring great dishonour to their community. To address this situation, a Meo caste council (*pancāyat*) was convened under the guidance of the Sufi saint Shah Chokha. During the council, it was decided that Dada Bahar, belonging to the Chiraklot clan (*pāl*) of the neighbouring village Kot, would be given the task of bringing Rajni back home.[30]

Shah Chokha advised the Meos to take this course of action in order to safeguard their community's honour. He did not support the marriage or the practice of strengthening the Muslim *ummāh* (religious community) by encouraging Meo Muslims to enter into marital alliances with Muslims of non-Meo origins. Additionally, the opposition of the Meos to Akbar's alleged desire to bring a Meo girl into the royal Mughal harem highlights the difference between the religious consciousness of the Meos and that of their imperial rulers in terms of their Muslim identity and religious beliefs.[31] The saint was not working to unify Islamic religious identity but was supporting a Meo version of 'Islam'.

When, one day, Shah Chokha was passing the Meo village, Kot, he noticed Rajni, the wife of Bahar (popularly called Dadi Bisarani or 'grandmother from Bisru village'), whom Dada Bahar had rescued from Akbar and later married. The saint asked Dadi Bisarani to make *kheer* (rice pudding) for him. She replied that milk was not available as the young heifers in her house were not yet ready for milking. The saint asked her to bring a pot for milk. One of the saint's miracles was when he caressed a young heifer the animal began to give milk. While Dadi Bisarani was making the *kheer*, the saint sat next to her and began throwing the rice in various directions. When he was ready to toss a handful of rice to the east following three successful attempts in other directions, Dadi grabbed his hand, asking, 'If you throw away all the rice, how will I cook kheer for you?' The saint smiled and answered, 'Had you not stopped me, your children [Meos] would have spread in the eastward direction too.' The village still believes that the reason for the Meos' absence beyond this border was because Dadi Bisarani interrupted the saint and prevented him from throwing rice towards the east.

Kot, the village of Shah Chokha's friend Bahar, constitutes the present-day border between two communities, the Hindu Jats of the Rawat clan on the east and the Muslim Meos of the Chiraklot clan on the west. Kot is the last Meo-dominated village in this region. Another event from the

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same folktale of Dada Bahar reinforces these local–imperial dichotomies and the fraught nature of the current religious distinctions among peasant communities, like the Meos and the Jats. The Meo Chiraklot clan of Kot village had always shared an antagonistic relationship with the adjacent village, Hathin, of the Hindu Jats of the Rawat clan. Bahar of Kot had killed many Rawat Jats in conflict. Amidst the escalating reign of terror, the Rawat Jats entered into a pact of brotherhood with the Damrot Meo clan of the Bisru village. This alliance aimed to foster unity and cooperation between the two villages in the face of growing challenges and threats from other villages. A similar alliance was also formed by the Chiraklot Meos with the Jats of the Sorot clan of a nearby village. In times of crisis or conflicts, the Muslim Meos of the Damrot clan in Bisru would stand in support of the Hindu Rawat Jats of Hathin, rather than their fellow Muslim Meos of the Chiraklot clan. Similarly, the village of the Jats of the Sorot clan would follow the same principles. Stories depicting imagined conflicts and wars between these peasant communities were common in the area. The primary sources of contention, as shared by village elders, revolved around village boundaries, leadership and control of resources. These conflicts were not based on religious differences or identities.

Even in the present day, the relationship between the friendly clans of the two communities continues to be characterised by a strong sense of *bhāī-cārā* (brotherhood), surpassing caste and religious divisions. Stories of the past about inter-community alliances and conflicts are still alive in actual practice. But cross-caste religious village affinities have significantly shaped these relationships. Peasant clans and village antagonisms are the main markers of community solidarity and differences, rooted in local dynamics such as geographical locations, concerns about village expansion and boundaries and clan populations. This relationship of cross-caste and religious brotherhood between Meo and Jat villages and clans developed several centuries ago is still lived in everyday life by extending invitation to each other in marriages, funerals and other ceremonies. One particular ceremony is that of anointing the chosen clan headman, or *caudharī*, the traditional power authorities who are still relevant, although without official state recognition. The anointment is always done by a group of representatives from the brotherhood alliance. For example, if the Rawat Jat clan headman has to be chosen, the anointing will be done by the headman and representatives of the Damrot Meos.

The folktale of Dada Bahar and other stories indicate that the differences between the Jats and the Meos had not been colloquialised in terms of religious

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sentiments and identities, despite these two communities contemporarily identifying themselves as 'Hindus' and 'Muslims', respectively. These stories further illustrate that a significant aspect of Indic 'religions' is the importance of locally rooted social and religious practices that mediate identity-related social interactions. Prior to the twentieth century, local social practices were more valuable than the institutional 'Hindu' and 'Islamic' practices.

Members of the Mewati Muslim society continue to take pride in their resistance to Mughal and British imperial rulers (Mayaram 2004a) and in their loyalty to the land of Mewat and, by extension, India. Now they view their long-held allegiance to the land as an example of strong patriotism that has remained unshakeable even in the face of their passionate devotion to Islam. As they were true patriots and devoted to what is now India, they fought against the long reign of Muslim monarchs from the Arab and Persian lands. Throughout my research, Mewatis recounted multiple stories in which the Meos fought alongside other 'local' kings to repel foreign invaders, including Muslim ones. Hasan Khan Mewati, the king of the Meos, was often held up as a hero by contemporary Meos because he fought alongside the 'local' Hindu ruler, Rana Sanga, against Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire, in 1526 CE.[32] Several Meos used this incident to argue that Muslims in Mewat sided with a Hindu monarch against a Muslim invader because they valued local brotherhood over religion.

The popular stories within the Meo Muslim community repeatedly highlight these chronicles. This also implies that 'Islam' followed at the grassroot level competes with Sunni 'Islam' practised politically in a global form (Mohammad 2013). Islamisation of the Meos appears to have been of a very different nature, and, as has been indicated previously, the assertion of Muslim identity was not an important aspect of Islamisation in the region (Bharadwaj 2017). For instance, the anecdotes of Laldas, who flourished in Mewat during the reigns of Akbar and Shah Jahan, are also full of instances of persecution perpetrated by Mughal officers. These anecdotes reveal the Meo peasants' distinct relationship with the Mughal state. It was not only that the local forms of 'Islam' contrasted with their imperial counterpart, but there was also a wide range of religious activities embedded within those local forms and meanings. Some of the narratives of Laldas also dispel the prevailing stereotypes about the Meos and Mewat. Whether it be cow veneration, worshipping Ram or genealogical ties to Hindu gods, Meos' everyday practices were historically anchored in Indic cosmologies, in

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contrast to their present-day negative image constructed and perpetuated by the media and anti-Muslim Hindutva activists in India.

SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS AND ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE MEO COMMUNITY

Historically, the Meos constituted the majority of Mewat's population and were categorised as middle-caste cultivators in colonial censuses. Based on the 1901 census data, the Meos accounted for 168,590 individuals, approximately 2 per cent of the entire population of Rajputana (modern-day Rajasthan).[33] They were one of the largest groups of peasants in the states spanning eastern Rajasthan and southern Haryana. Specifically, in the two princely states of eastern Rajputana, the Meos constituted 113,142 people, more than 13 per cent of the total population in Alwar, and 51,546 individuals, or more than 8 per cent in the kingdom of Bharatpur (Hunter 1909: 313).

By 1931, the Meos had not only become one of the most populous castes in eastern Rajputana and southern Haryana, but they also formed the largest Muslim community in the area (Figure 1.4). Notably, out of the overall Muslim population of 186,500 in the Alwar kingdom, more than 80 per cent (146,460 individuals) belonged to the Meo caste (Table 1.1) (Cole 1932: 129; Copland 1999: 118).[34] Similarly, in the southern parts of the British district of Gurgaon within the Punjab province, the Meos were the numerically dominant Muslim community. During the 1931 census, out of Gurgaon's total population of 740,163, approximately 242,357 individuals were Muslims, and slightly over half of them (124,821 individuals) belonged to the Meo community (K. Khan 1933: 79, 306).[35] Presently, the Muslim population at large, and the Meo community specifically, constitute a substantial segment of the population in the districts of Alwar and Nuh (Mewat).[36] This demographic presence empowers the Meos to exert influence over social and political developments in these regions.

Meos converted to Islam or signalled their commitment to adopt Islamic norms in their social life many centuries ago. Although they used Islamic symbols, they also continued to observe local marriage norms, rituals and caste endogamy (Chauhan 2003; Mayaram 1997a, 2004a; Jamous 2003). These rituals, some of which still exist, are comparable to those practised by Hindu peasant caste communities in Mewat's neighbouring regions. The Meo peasant world and the social, cultural and religious developments occurred

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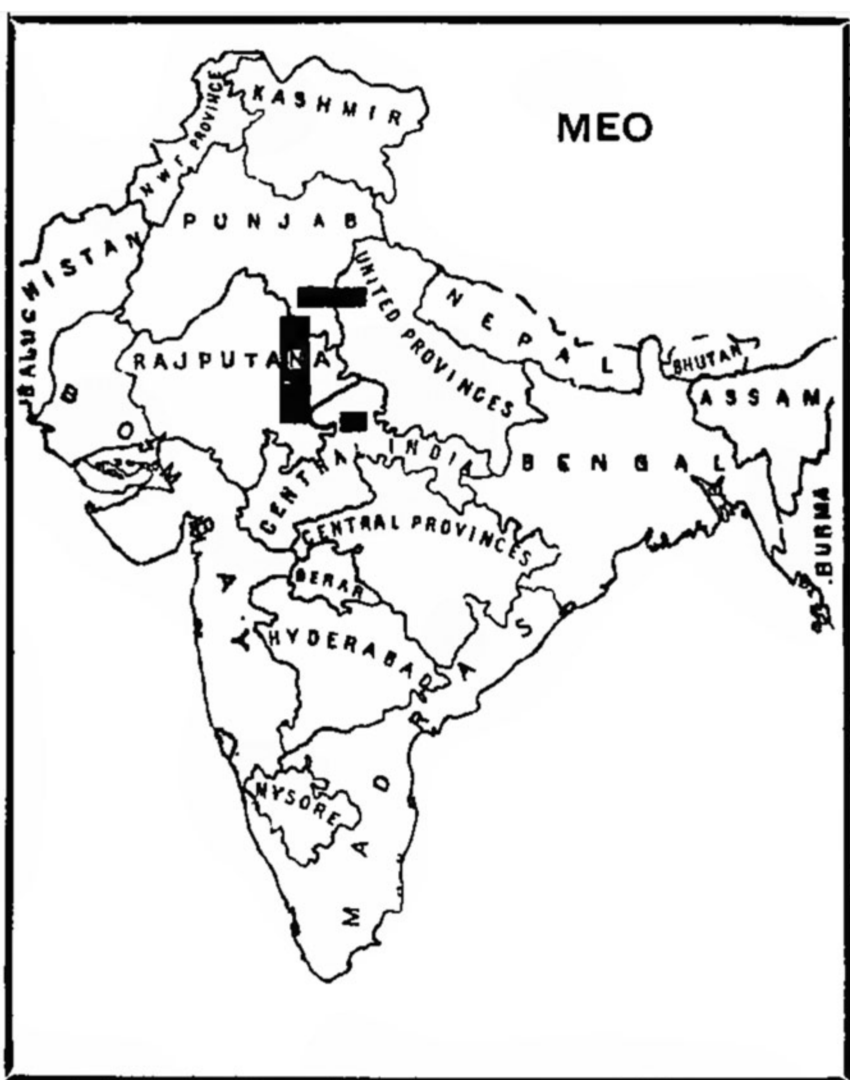

FIGURE 1.4 The spread of Meo population in the late nineteenth century
Source: Risely (1999 [1915]: 340).

within a common social setting of interaction between these various peasant castes. It was this social setting, marked by shared socio-religious semiotics, which is one of the key Indic backgrounds against which the diverse religious outlook of these communities was formed. Among the Meos, the worship of 'Hindu' deities and goddesses, along with the observance of 'Hindu' rites and

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TABLE 1.1 Meo population of Alwar: Selected *nizāmat*s (districts) (1931)

District	Meo population	Total population	Percentage
Tapukrah	12,411	27,058	45.8
Ramgarh	15,089	33,306	45.7
Alwar	18,937	43,705	43.4
Govindgarh	11,877	28,176	42.2
Kishangarh	7,713	31,083	24.8
Khairtal	7,713	31,374	22.4
Malakhera	5,722	35,017	16.5
Lachmangarh	8,140	49,472	16.4
Mandawar	3,580	31,079	11.5
Tijara	13,243	39,620	33.4

Source: Census of India 1931, vol. XXVII, Provincial Tables I and III.

customs, formed an integral part of their socio-religious traditions. Powlett (1878: 38), a colonial ethnographer,[37] wrote as early as the 1850s:

> Meos are all Musalman in names, but their village deities are the same as those of Hindu Zamindars [landlords]. They keep, too, several Hindu festivals. Thus, the Holi [Hindu festival of colours] is with Meos a season of rough play and is considered as important a festival as the Muharram, Eid, and Shabibarat [all Islamic festivals]; and they likewise observe the Janam Asthmi, Dasehara, and Diwali [another set of Hindu festivals]. They often keep Brahmin priests to write *pili chitthi*, a note fixing the date of marriage. They call themselves by Hindu names, with the exceptions of 'Ram' and 'Singh' is a frequent affix, though not so common as 'Khan'.

According to colonial historical records, the names 'Meo' and 'Mewat' were in use for at least a thousand years prior to the preceding account written by Powlett in the nineteenth century. The name 'Mewat' is commonly thought to have been derived from the word 'Meo'. After the establishment of the first Delhi Sultanate kingdom in the twelfth century, Balban, a formidable ruler of the slave dynasty, led raids and plundered the Mewatis (Mayaram 2004a: 74–96). The Mewatis have continuously been portrayed adversely by Indo-Persian historians, Mughal sources and British colonial

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chronicles (Mayaram 2004a). Barani (1285–1357 CE), the famous Persian historian of the Delhi Sultanate era (1206–1526), described the Meos negatively as 'lawless plunderers, raiders, robbers and assaulters' who had 'virtually besieged Delhi' (Mayaram 2004a: 74).

The Meo community's origins are shrouded in mystery due to the dearth of historical materials before the tenth century. Mayaram (1997a, 2004a) draws parallels between the migratory histories of the Meos and the Jats. She carves out a space for the history of the Meo migration from the western side of India in the light of Persian and Arab chroniclers of Sindh. Under the pressure of the Arab forces after the conquest of Sindh in 711–12 CE, the Meo and Jat communities occupying the Sindh and Punjab regions were forced into the interior parts of north-west India around the tenth century (Mayaram 1997c: 26, 2004a: 19–26). Between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Meo community saw significant socio-economic, political and religious transformations. In addition to their ties to Islam, the Meos started to become a community of peasants in the fifteenth century (Bharadwaj 2012: 217–19).[38] This process linked the Meos to Hinduism's iconography, in addition to their prior ties to Sufi and localised forms of Islam. The 'religion' of the Meos was a form of popular 'Islam' that was mediated locally. Before the twentieth century, the majority of Meos were not concerned with their Islamic identity, despite observing certain aspects of Islamic rituals. Instead, they fought to preserve the local social customs and practices that were important to them.[39] However, these transformations in the peasant worldviews of the Meo Muslims strongly contained elements of piety, asceticism and renunciation which emerged during the Bhakti-Sufi period.[40]

Sufi, *bhakti*, tantric and yogic religious currents historically influenced one another's patterns of religiosity and ways of being (S. Bayly 1989; Burchett 2019; Green 2008; Snehi 2019). Particularly, the confluence of popular Sufism and devotional Hinduism affected the early modern societies of north India (Burchett 2019). Many communities were influenced by a broad network of Sufi saints (Eaton 1993, 2015; Ernst and Lawrence 2016; Green 2012), some of whom also acquired a Hindu identity—for example, the Nath saints with dual religious identities such as Kanifnath/Rahman Shah and Ratannath/Haji Ratan (Bouillier and Khan 2009; Hayden et al. 2016). These developments led to the formation of religious communities centred around a new 'Sufi'- and 'Bhakti'-influenced devotional sensibility (Burchett 2019). Previous studies have questioned the idea of one coherent monolithic Bhakti movement (Hawley 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015b; Pauwels 2010). Hawley (2012) claimed that

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ideas about the coherence of 'Bhakti' emerged centuries after the saints in these traditions lived in order to serve different religious and political aims. For example, some saints were later considered as representative of the 'Hindu' religion even though the saints had vigorously criticised Hindu practices and Hindu identity in their time. Similarly, the existence of a coherent Sufism is problematic, too (see Eaton 2015; Green 2012), since Sufism represents a complex world with complex relationships to Islam and Hinduism in South Asia and has vast regional differentiations and diverse saintly traditions. Consequently, each saint of Bhakti and Sufi backgrounds and their respective location need to be analysed separately to understand the complex nature of religious belonging.[41]

Likewise, these developments also affected the Meo community and sparked significant arguments—first over the Meos' transition from a nomadic to a settled community and then regarding the Meos' conversion to Islam.[42] Mayaram (1997a, 2004a) correctly observes in her study that communities such as the Meos were both Hindus and Muslims in their cultural and religious practices, inhabiting a liminal space. Mayaram's analysis has not provided a comprehensive explanation regarding why and how the process of the Meos considering themselves as both *kṣatriya* (warriors) and Muslim occurred, and the specific conditions that influenced this belief. Therefore, further investigation is required to delve into the factors that shaped their self-perception.

Meos' link to the Hindu past is maintained by assertions that they are descendants of the two Hindu warrior gods and kings, Ram and Krishna, as well as Arjuna, a prominent warrior figure in Mahabharata. This, I suggest, is rooted in the relationships between kinship, land, the emergence of the concept of private property and peasant community rights—facts that Mayaram fails to examine in her works.[43] As private property rights established during the early years of Mughal rule, the Meos' declarations about their ties to these 'Hindu' figures served as a compelling justification for their claims to land, comparable to those of other peasants.[44] In this instance, a specific cultural process to create relationships with religious characters of these epics who are also kings demonstrates a close relationship between peasantry, land, ownership and cultural claims. Not only did Meo clans establish genealogical links with Hindu deities, but they also coveted land ownership.

The Meos maintain two distinct types of genealogies, one that covers the entire community and the other that focuses on specific families. *Pālo kī vanśāvalī* (the descendant lines of *pāl*s) is the Meo community genealogy

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that details the history of the Meo territorial clans, or *pāl*s. They are often associated with a Hindu warrior god or a hero from the Ramayana or the Mahabharata.[45] Meo links to *kṣatriya* (warrior) status are rooted in the tradition of kinship formation centred on king-type gods. Five Meo *pāl*s are Jaduvansi (the descendants of Yadu/Jadu, the clan of the Hindu god Krishna); five others are linked to the Tomar clan of Rajputs (the descendants of Arjuna); two *pāl*s consider themselves Raghuvansi Meos (the descendants from the god Ram); and one small unit called *pallākrā* is said to have descended from Nirban Chauhans[46] (Mayaram 2004a: 52). I recorded a series of *dohā* (couplets) from a group of Mirasi bards which nicely describes the narrative of five Jaduvansi *pāl*s, which all relate their origin to the Hindu deity Krishna:

jadūvans bahāl, pānc pālan main pāyo
jabro dal mevāt, ek sāu ek samāyo
jadū vansī ke bīc huyē hai krīṣnā murārī
brīj mandal ke bīc basā dī mathurā pyārī
jā sū ab tak kahē jahān tīn lokan sū nyārī
chhīraklot, duhlot ko jabro mero damrot ko dal
punglot vā naī kī sar nyuñ pāncho pāl sabal.[47]

The Jadu clan flourishes, divided among five *pāl*s
A powerful faction in Mewat, a hundred and one
Among the Jadu clan, Krishna [also called Murari] was born
In the middle of the Braj region, he founded the beautiful town of Mathura
People say it [Mathura] is unique in all the three worlds
Chhiraklot, Duhlot and my powerful Damrots
Punglot and Nai as well, thus, the five *pāl*s stand strong.[48]

This passage begins by invoking the Jadu (Yadu) clan of Mathura, the centre of the Braj region and the abode of the cowherd god Krishna. Geographically, the Braj region intersects with Mewat and shares a close cultural resemblance in language, culture and music. The appropriation of Krishna as a deity who was also a cowherd by Jaduvansi Meos is similar to that of another peasant caste, the Ahirs/Yadavs. The concept of religious ancestry centred on Krishna has been essential to the establishment of the Ahir/Yadav community (Michelutti 2002). Similarly, many Meos regard Kanhaiya (Krishna) as *dādā* (literally, 'grandfather', a Mewati term for ancestors) and *autārī* ('incarnated one'). His bravery and central role in the Mahabharata war is crucial for the

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Meos. Two other Meo *pāl*s call themselves Raghuvansis or Kacchvaha Meos and trace their ancestry back to another Hindu warrior deity, Ram, the hero of the epic Ramayana:

> *kachvāhā rājput ramchandar kā potā*
> *jānai rāvan kūn bas kiyā diyā durjan ke gotā*
> *raghuvansī insūñ kahain saccā karūñ bayan*
> *hain ye dahngal yāi vansa main bankan bargujar balvan*
>
> The Kacchwaha Rajputs are the grandsons of Ram
> Who vanquished Ravana and destroyed evil men
> Raghuvansis they are called, my testimony is true
> The Dhaingal are in this line, the brave Bargujars too. (Mayaram 2004a: 54–5)

Sometimes more than two *pāl*s associate their origins with the same figure. Meo *pāl* eulogies invariably extol qualities such as courage and generosity, which are attributes of royal monarchs and rulers, thereby implying a *kṣatriya* status. These panegyrics symbolise the community's assertion of its martial roots and traditions. The *pāl* is, thus, basically a clan's territorial unit. *Pāl*s are crucial to Meo society's politics. They determine endogamous and exogamous marriage. The Meo Muslim community practices endogamy, but the Meo *pāl*s follow exogamy. For instance, females of a particular *pāl* are customarily married into one or more specific *pāl*s.[49] Hence, taking or giving daughters in marriage (*betī lenā aur betī denā*) marks the bond between *pāl*s. Traditional conventions and intricate procedures govern the bridal exchange system, with occasional exceptions. Hence, a *pāl* is a huge extended family centred on brotherhood. In Meo weddings, parallel marriage is permissible for maternal cousins to marry paternal cousins as long as it does not violate the bride's receipt custom from a particular *pāl*. The *pāl* system also governs politics, dispute settlement and various other socio-political issues.

Meos' genealogical perceptions were expressed in material and symbolic practices. The Jogi and Mirasi bards[50] sing the origin story of a cluster of Meo *pāl*s, about the same warrior ancestors, as well as panegyrics of each village, block, family and a *pāl*'s main personalities. One of the main concerns of genealogies is to promote those values that reflect the realities of a social community. Several questions arise here: Why did the Meos connect themselves with Hindu Gods? Why do the Meos claim the status of the Hindu

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warrior class (*kṣatriya*) despite being a Muslim peasant community? At what point did they begin to make such a claim?

This warrior tradition among the Meos has connections with the Rajput martial tradition in Rajasthan.[51] As mentioned earlier, the process of genealogical identification in Mewat generally operates at multiple levels: religion, community, caste, village and personal. Meos link their collective social memories, history and pasts to the present, largely in the tradition of *itihās-purān*.[52] The political genealogies of *itihās-purān* and the genealogical stories of creation found in the Brahminical Vedas differ from each other (Thapar 1991). The genealogies found in *itihās-purān* texts marked a significant shift as they began to reflect the genealogical traditions of castes beyond the Brahmins, particularly those of political rulers. This departure from the traditional focus on Brahmin genealogies highlighted the importance of caste-based lineages and their association with political power and rulership (Thapar 1991: 6–12). A comparatively new form of non-Brahmin caste genealogy in the *itihās-purān* tradition was recorded and performed by the bardic castes rather than by the Brahmins. However, aside from the genealogies of the Brahmins and political rulers, common peasant and other genealogies did not emerge until after the fifteenth century.

In the case of most peasant communities such as the Meos, Jats, Minas and the Gujjars, their marauding activities earned them a negative reputation. Until the thirteenth century, these communities did not have a settled mode of life of agricultural cultivation. A peasant community like the Meos, the Jats—a pastoral community in Sindh around the twelfth century—underwent a transformation from the middle of the fourteenth century onwards to become a settled agricultural community (Habib 1995: 170–80). Moreover, the Meos underwent a similar transformation from an itinerant to a peasantry community, although their Islamisation was already underway (Bharadwaj 2012, 2016).[53] Later, there is evidence to suggest about the expansion of agricultural activities from the late fourteenth century onwards, which occurred on a large scale during the period of Mughal rule (S. Chandra 1996: 190; Habib 2011). In this period, the idea of private property began to emerge, even if loosely defined. This process intensified under late Mughal rule in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (S. Chandra 2003: 168–92, 2009; Habib 1999: 137). For instance, the Ahir (Yadav) community and Kurmi peasants engaged in *khud-kasht* (personal cultivation), which gave peasants certain private rights over the land (S. Chandra 2003: 168–92, 2009; Habib 1999: 137).

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The Meos' genealogies are, thus, developments of the post-fifteenth-century period. Their genealogies offer a crucial means of understanding the patterns of social interrelations and socio-economic status, deeply rooted in the respective cultural imagination of a collective self.[54] What we see in the cultural imagination of the Meos is a reflection of the changes going on at that time. While Mayaram (1997a) asserts that the Meos were unconscious of their simultaneous Hindu and Muslim identity, I argue that the Meo connection to Hinduism was a conscious cultural choice because the cultural construction of *kṣatriya*-hood enhanced a deeper connection of Meo peasants with land. Meo kinship conceptions in the form of genealogical links with Hindu gods emerged later than their initial conversion to Islam and were connected to the evolution of the idea of peasant ownership of land after the fifteenth century. Moreover, the dual religious connection of Laldas is not different from the processes the Meo community was undergoing at that time. The shared religiosity of Laldas, therefore, reflects the once prevalent shared religious culture among the Meos. The kind of life most Meos once lived strengthens not only the locally rooted cosmologies of the community but also its varied associations with traditions like the Laldas order.

Aside from these important developments taking place around claims on land, the emergence of warrior sensibilities in the Mughal state shaped the Meo community's connections, especially with 'Hinduism'. A new martial ethos among the peasant communities first emerged during Mughal rule in the context of what Kolff (2002) calls 'the military labour market'. The Mughal imperial state's demand for soldiers made the emphasis on martial traditions an important aspect of village life. This created and redefined the martial sensibilities of rural peasants. Valour and bravery were already central to peasant–state relations, with the importance of self-defence in incidents such as non-payment of taxes as well as for survival in their villages (Hauser 2004: 404).

The areas the Meos inhabit now are the same areas mentioned in the Mahabharata and are close to Krishna's Braj kingdom. Islam on its own was not able to advance the traditional cultural claims of land ownership of the Meo peasants over the land of Krishna, especially when the Meos had already formed a relationship with Islam. To fulfil this purpose, the pre-existing cultural connection to 'Hinduism' came to be further emphasised. Meo genealogies and the Meo vernacular versions of the 'Hindu' epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, popularly known as *lankā ki caḍhaī* (the raid

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to Lanka) and *pandun kā kaḍā* (the couplets of Pandu) (Mayaram 1997b), provide examples of such linkages. Bards of Meos, known as Mirasis and Jogis, recite these folk epics, which were originally written by Meo poets in the early seventeenth century.[55] Cultural developments like this signify the need for cultural resources to legitimise claims on land through kinship ties. The Meo's forms of kinship with Krishna, Ram and other figures—kings, warriors and the sole owners of the land—were rooted in the process of legitimising peasant rights and claims of private ownership on the land. Since the Meos are historically a powerful group of peasants controlling almost three-quarters of the land in Mewat (Channing 1882), their genealogies emphasise their superior social status through a claim on warrior qualities. Kolff's views on martial sensibilities among peasants in the Mughal period remain relevant today (Hauser 2004: 404). This martial sense of identity is still present among Meos, who often insisted to me that they were a martial and trustworthy community (*Hum ek bahādur aur vafādār kaum hai*).[56] The Meos were proud of their patriotic loyalties to the land and to their martial status, citing the examples of Hasan Khan Mewati and the numerous sacrifices made by the Meos in the 1857 rebellion against the British.[57] Among north Indian peasant communities such as the Ahirs, Kurmis and Jats, the claim of an ancient past full of *kṣatriya* (martial) glory was further strengthened in the first part of the twentieth century with the formation of many caste *mahāsabhā*s (major associations) (Pinch 1996). The claim of martial peasant origins was reinforced by and deeply rooted in the Vaishnava traditions. Peasant communities, or *shudra*s,[58] generally proclaimed *kṣatriya* status based on genealogical ties to Ram and Krishna, the two avatars of Vishnu (Pinch 1996: 82–85).

Nonetheless, it also appears that Mayaram's representation of the community as 'marginalised' does not resonate with the Meo's self-perception, emotions and sensibilities or their current landed status.[59] It can be concluded that a common theme across these peasant and landholding groups was the idea of being a community of warriors. The Meo's genealogies reflect the same concerns as other land-owning peasant castes' genealogies. The peasant martiality reflected in genealogies needs to be understood in the context of these groups' desire to own land, their memory of the martial ethos relating to their recruitment into imperial and state armies, and their desire to achieve and maintain a superior social-economic status. In the sixteenth century, Laldas was born into such an agrarian Meo Muslim family. He perfectly embodied the lax religious attitude of the Meos. Like many other Bhakti and

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Sufi saints, he was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim but both and beyond, all at the same time.[60] His in-betweenness reflects the rustic agricultural milieu of the Meos, in which both religions co-existed in accordance with the devotional ethos of north Indian peasantry.

THE RESEARCHER'S LIFE IN THE FIELD

I first took the horizontal L-shaped route in black on Map 2 from Hodal to Ramgarh in Alwar (Rajasthan), which connected to the main road from Gurgaon to Alwar via Firozpur Jhirka at Nagina. Hodal and Ramgarh were around 80 kilometres apart, linked by a *pakkā* (metalled) road. This straight asphalt road also passed through other smaller towns and villages in the Nuh district, including Punahana, Shah Chokha, Pinagwan, Badkali and Firozpur Jhirka, before reaching Alwar through the Ramgarh *tehsil* of Alwar. The road served the area's transportation requirements by allowing peripatetic three-wheelers and modified Indian jeeps to ply between neighbouring villages and towns. Moreover, the road also functioned as a marketplace for each town and village. Many fruit stalls, vegetable carts, rental cars, mobile repair shops and clothing stores, positioned on both sides of the road, made it a narrow thoroughfare in some places. The route connected the temple at Punahana via Shah Chokha tomb to the main shrine of Laldas in Sherpur village on the Rajasthan–Haryana border.[61] These were the three main fieldwork sites, apart from some other less frequently visited sites of Laldas and other saints (see Map 3).[62] Numerous other smaller temples and shrines were located within a 50-kilometre radius of the main shrine. A religious pilgrimage from these temples to the Sherpur shrine was regularly organised to either celebrate the birth of Laldas each year or build a common Hindu tradition of going on a pilgrimage.

Before I did ethnographic fieldwork, I looked at and analysed relevant historical materials from the archives in Delhi, Rajasthan and Alwar. Most of these materials were available online. I also gathered oral histories, biographies of saints and pamphlets and cheap booklets. Historical sources, ethnographic observations and interviews with people in the field not only helped compare periodic changes but also allowed to observe interconnections. At first, I used the participant observation method for a few months before identifying key themes to be examined in detail. After gathering basic information on the field sites, their social makeup and the three shrines and countless temples of

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Laldas, the next step was to meet individuals in each village and neighbouring areas. Early in the fieldwork, I made friends with individuals who worked for the Mewati Development Society (MDS) in Punahana. Islamuddin, the local head of the MDS, not only helped me organise logistics but also became a very close friend and informant. He took me to several villages, let me stay at his house and the homes of his relatives, and set up many meetings with religious leaders, politicians and women (who were part of the MDS and were living around the chosen field sites).

An extensive fieldwork was conducted at a variety of field settings and among a wide range of social, religious and cultural communities. Multi-sited religious ethnography allows one to go beyond spatial limitations to include religious ideas, rituals and practices that exhibit similar or diverse forms beyond a specific locale. Often, specific religious traditions are rooted in diverse socio-historical contexts within and beyond a specific area. The comparative method of multi-sited ethnography, thus, helps to understand interconnectedness and transnational (trans-local) networks (Marcus 1995) as well as allows the comparison of the same issue from different angles, highlighting variations in perspectives and experiences at both individual and community levels. Adoption of this method reflected change and continuity across the traditionally shared religious shrines and newly built temples of Laldas.

A good share of oral history data was gathered from the Jogi and Mirasi, the two communities of minstrels who were considered to be 'low caste' by Meos. My first interaction with them was at the Laldas shrine in Sherpur, where they were performing at the annual *melā* (festival). These folksingers and oral storytellers traditionally sang popular tales about the Meo community and Laldas, among other saints.

I also collected data from visitors at the shrines, other bards and singers of the Jogi and Mirasi backgrounds, the priests who officiated there and numerous village and town residents. I lived near Punahana near the temple of Laldas and worked there from Tuesday to Thursday. Most Hindu visitors visited the temple daily, as that was a usual practice among followers, so I spent the entire day there for three consecutive days. During this period, I occasionally spent some of my time visiting other temples of Laldas in nearby areas. For another set of three days from Friday to Sunday, I carried out fieldwork in and around the main shrine of Laldas at Sherpur. Here, I proceeded in the same manner as I had at the Punahana temple. More crucially, speaking with Muslim villagers about the Hinduisation of

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the Laldas shrine, as well as seeing the activities and reactions of Tablighi reformists to the recent transformations, helped me comprehend the influence of Islamic reformism on shared sacred shrines. As the saint Laldas was born on a Sunday, worshippers at his shrine in Sherpur flocked there more often on that day.

Occasionally, I ventured outside the confines of my field locations to meet with other individuals, including bards, who had connections to the shrines, as well as other Meos, Jogis and Mirasis. Marriage ceremonies, rituals, festivals, pilgrimages and other cultural events were common occasions for contact with important participants. I also made frequent trips to the *dargāh* (tomb) of the Sufi saint Shah Choka to see how the new Islamic reforms were affecting shared religious sites. The tomb was controlled by Tablighi Jamaat members. Mewat has also been an experimental ground for the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement, and the Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic reform organisation. For many reform movements and ideologies, imposing uniformity has been a leading political priority since their origin.

By examining people's responses to reform organisations' attempts to enforce uniformity, one can effectively explore the internal diversity of a community that is perceived and assumed to be homogeneous for epistemic and religious reasons. People's religiosity often reflects and is influenced by socio-economic and political changes, making it crucial to analyse how they either embraced or resisted the endeavour to homogenise their religious practices. During my fieldwork in the area, I delved deeper into the question of whether all liminal–syncretic traditions eventually fade away as reform organisations strive for purity by narrowing boundaries, or if certain liminal–syncretic practices demonstrate resilience. I sought to understand why certain traditions persist and show resilience while others perish by examining identity formation, the adaptable and diverse nature of religious boundaries, and the fluid dynamics of inter-caste relations on the one hand, and community divisions, boundary making and opposition to puritanical reforms on the other. Specifically, I focused on Laldas's shrines, new temples dedicated to him and the tomb of Shah Chokha to shed light on these dynamics.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Following historical and disciplinary distinctions, the book thematically and analytically explores the aforementioned concerns and concepts. Chapter 2

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examines the historical context of Laldas and the nature of religious activities around the saint and his shrines by analysing oral materials such as folksongs and folktales, hagiographical tales and popular beliefs. In addition, it also analyses the malleability of religious boundaries and the intersection of caste, clan, village and religious identities in relation to Laldas's widespread devotion.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine how Laldas has become a disputed figure among the Hindu and Muslim communities. These chapters explore contested sacred sites and the Baniyas' exclusive adoption of the Laldas order as a Hindu sect. Hinduisation of the Laldasi tradition demonstrates how reformist Hinduism practiced among the Baniya communities is now transforming folk traditions in a manner analogous to the gradual displacement of traditional beliefs by modern orthodox Islam among current Muslim descendants of Laldasis. Chapter 5 analyses the influence of the Arya Samaj and the Tablighi Jamaat on this issue and how these contemporary reform movements have tried to replace traditional religious activities with new standardised orthodox practices and beliefs. It demonstrates how the growth of reformist ideals has affected shared religious sites.

Chapter 6 adopts a thoroughly new approach to consider how communities cope with the pressures to adopt orthodoxy through concealing their practices. Using the works of scholars such as Simmel (1906), Taussig (1999) and Urban (1998), I analyse concealment in the context of religious disciplining in a region where female literacy is low and the social structure is highly patriarchal. Many women and some men hid their faith in these saints for fear of being mocked and vilified. Individuals followed concealment to preserve a tradition of visiting a shared shrine. Chapter 7 also discovers forms of coping strategies, in this case by bardic communities in search of new patrons due to the realignment of the Meo community with orthodox Sunni Islam. It further investigates layers of resistance employed by members of performing artist communities in regard to the Laldasi and other shared tradition, using ideas of 'passive resistance' and 'public and hidden transcripts' developed by James Scott (1990, 2008). The final chapter, Chapter 8, brings together the various strands, historical, linguistic, anthropological, ethnographic and theoretical, to demonstrate how the study of Laldas and his traditional followers is relevant to both this specific community and a broader understanding of how diverse communities in India are now developing.

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NOTES

1. *Pīr* is a term used for Islamic mystics whose shrines are centres of popular devotions across South Asia, while *sant* (saint) is generally used for a living or dead Hindu 'holy' person. Meo Muslims and Baniyas (Hindus) were the two primary communities that traditionally followed the teachings of the saint. Baniyas, also known as Vaishyas, are one of the four *varna*s, or castes, in Hinduism, traditionally associated with trade, commerce and money lending. Their traditional status was 'low' compared to Brahmins and Kshatriyas.
2. By using the phrase 'the Hindu god' I do not intend to label a figure within a particular religion. Instead, it has been employed to convey a simplified sense of current religious significance of an entity to readers who may not be familiar with it. Ram has multiple imaginaries and interpretations in the minds of believers. By invoking Ram, Laldas indicated an omnipresent supreme being.
3. The terms 'Hinduism' and 'Islam' are not used in their modern usage; instead, they refer to amalgams of multiple forms of religious practices. Moreover, the term 'Hinduism' here does not refer to the modern understanding of political Hinduism, called 'Hindutva'. Nor does my usage of the term 'Islam' refer to a single orthodox form of reformist Sunni Islam. Defining these two terms, 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', religiously is a daunting task as they represent diverse meanings and traditions. I am following Flueckiger's suggestion that we should expand 'the boundaries of what counts as "religion" to include "ways of life"' (Flueckiger 2015: 4). It is more appropriate to speak about several types of 'Islam' and 'Hinduism' rather than confining these terms to a single meaning.
4. Laldas was a *kabīrpanthī nirguṇ* Muslim saint. The term *kabīrpanthī nirguṇ* stands for a follower of the fourteenth-century Bhakti saint Kabir, who advocated the formless devotion of God. On the issue of devotion to Ram, there were two main schools, Ramanandi and Kabirpanthi. Ramanandi followed a more orthodox and *saguṇ* form of devotion, which is venerating God with physical attributes. *Kabīrpanth*, a fellowship of *nirguṇ* Ram, is generally considered more progressive (Hawley 2012, 2015a; Lorenzen 1995; Schomer and McLeod 1987). Again, it is doubtful whether all the saints followed a clear lineage of these two religious ways or not. Sometimes, saints had no connection to each other at all. The regional developments of *bhakti* (referred to as 'nodes'

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by Hawley [2015a]) differ from region to region. The major figures of the north Indian form of *bhakti* devotion were Kabir, Ravidas, Dadu and Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. More on this issue comes in the next two chapters.

5. *Panth*, meaning 'path or order', refers to a Hindu *samprādāy*, or 'sect'. The origin of a *panth* is usually linked to the teachings of a particular 'Hindu' saint; for more information on this, see Juergensmeyer (1982). Although 'sect' does not correspond well with the Hindi word *panth*, I still use the term to give readers the closest idea of what *panth* means.
6. The idea of 'religion' and the division of the four 'world religions' have been challenged by many scholars (Asad 1993; Bergunder 2014; Juergensmeyer 2005; Masuzawa 2005). Sketching the emergence of 'religion' as a modern historical object and category of analysis, these scholars explored how Western concepts and religious practices have shaped the hegemonic understanding of 'religion' that we frequently use today. The critique of the term 'religion' challenges us to question the universality and objectivity of this category and to recognise the ways in which it has been used to justify colonialism and cultural imperialism among other issues.
7. Scholars like Bowman (2010) and Hayden et al. (2016) use the word 'mixing/mixed' over 'sharing/shared' to refer to a religious congregation at a sacred site because sharing presumes 'amity', which may not be the case at most sites analysed over a long period of time. Here, both terms are used interchangeably.
8. Although I prefer the term 'liminality' over 'syncretism' depending upon the nature of a religious interaction, here my usage of anti-processes of these two theoretical stands refers to both anti-syncretism and anti-liminality terms. The term 'anti-syncretism' was popularised by Stewart and Shaw (1994) in their very influential work to refer to the reform ideologies which oppose diverse forms and practices of religious synthesis and mixing. Anti-syncretic and anti-liminal terms here have been used to denote the ideologies of the two reform organisations which seek Hindus and Muslims to follow a 'pure' form of their respective 'religions'.
9. The term 'Indic' is used to refer to the broader cultural and social contexts of the Indian subcontinent, including its art, music, literature, religion and traditions. The complex and diverse societies that have developed in the Indian subcontinent over thousands of years share common philosophical and cultural roots and have had a significant impact on the region's history and culture. Indic refers to unique and mixed religious practices that cannot

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be confined to 'Hinduism' alone, despite some obvious thematic overlaps between the religious practices of what is generally taken as 'Hinduism' and other religions, such as 'Buddhism', 'Sikhism', 'Jainism', 'Christianity' and 'Islam'. It indicates the breadth of South Asian norms beyond 'Hindu' doctrine or practice. Gilmartin and Lawrence (2000), who first popularised the term, write that Indic suggests 'a repertoire of language and behaviour, knowledge and power' that defines a broad cosmology of 'human existence beyond bounded groups self-defined as Muslim or Hindu' (2).

10. It is important to distinguish here between the terms 'shrine' and 'temple' when referring to the places dedicated to Laldas. A shrine is characterised by its lack of a specific religious identity, whereas a temple is typically associated with Hinduism. Therefore, all the locations dedicated to Laldas that are traditionally visited and subject to contention by both Hindus and Muslims are referred to as 'shrines'. On the other hand, the term 'Laldas temple' is used to describe buildings constructed more recently by Laldas's Hindu followers in the style of Hindu temples.
11. Vaishnava refers to the followers of God Vishnu and his incarnations, such as Ram and Krishna. They generally worship images of these deities in temples. The Vaishnavite tradition is known for its ardent devotion to a Vishnu avatar (mainly Krishna) and as such played an important role in the expansion of the 'Bhakti' movement in the Indian subcontinent from the second millennium CE. It has four schools of various denominations (*sampradaya*s): Ramanuja's medieval-era *Vishishtadvaita*, Madhvacharya's *Dvaita*, Nimbarkacharya's *Dvaitadvaita* and Vallabhacharya's *Shuddhadvaita*. Brahminical texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Panchatantra (Agama) scriptures and Bhagavata Purana are all important texts in Vaishnavism (Hawley 2015b; Beck 2005; Raj and Harman 2007).
12. The Baniya community is a caste cluster divided into a number of subcastes, such as Jain, Aggarwal, Gupta, Jaiswal and so on. The socio-economic status of various Baniya sub-groups, primarily identified as Hindus or Jains, considerably vary. Currently, the wealthy Baniyas also associate themselves with the one unified caste cluster. In rural areas, the term was mainly used for the village grain dealers in the past. These village-level Baniyas were not as powerful as the great merchants of the city, called Mahajan (literally 'great men') or Sahukar (money lender) (Bayly 1992). I am using the term 'Baniya' to refer to a 'petty business class' who were engaged in money lending, trading and grain dealing with the Meos in the past.

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13. There are currently 15–20 new temples built in Alwar alone which I visited. The number of total temples in north India may be in hundreds. It was difficult to identify all of them within this project.
14. Throughout the book, the terms 'idol' and 'image' are interchangeably used. Although the use of 'idol' has a Christian root and 'image' is a preferred term, but the word 'image' does not fully capture the physicality of the material representation of a religious figure in a temple.
15. This is one example of a much wider phenomenon of shared/contested saints' shrines in South Asia but also stretching through Anatolia and the Balkans, as well as the Middle East. See Hayden et al. (2016) for more information.
16. As described by Hayden et al. (2016), the concept of religioscape refers to spatial parameters of the social presence of various religious communities in a shrine, which are defined by 'physical markers of the space in which practitioners of a given religious community interact' with the other (28).
17. The physicality and temporality of a sacred space observed over a period of time define religioscapes as inherently fluid. For instance, Hayden et al. (2016) claim that devotees carry their respective religioscapes when in interaction with people of other faiths at a mixed site, affecting the built environment and intersecting each other's religioscape through physical, material, symbolic and religious exchanges (28–35).
18. Carving a separate district of predominantly Meo population from Gurgaon district in Haryana was a long-standing demand which was first fulfilled in 2004 when the then chief minister, Omprakash Chautala, named it first as 'Satyamev Puram'. The name was later changed to Mewat by the Congress government in 2005, followed by one more change in 2016 as Nuh by the BJP government this time.
19. The word 'peasant' is far from a homogenous category (Bhattacharya 2019; Stokes 1978; Thorner 1971), so its use should be clarified. The category of 'peasant' as opposed to merchants (Baniya) and Rajput warrior castes here refers to land-owning agriculturists from middle-caste status communities. Their traditional social position in the hegemonic Brahminic view was of 'Shudra', which is the 'lowest' category in the Brahminic fourfold divisions of Hindu society. But the peasant communities like the Meos, Jats, Ahirs, Gujjars, Patels and others, numerically, economically and politically continue to wield immense influence in various parts of India, not necessarily resonating the Brahminic view of the caste order.

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20. The Meos currently identify themselves as Sunni Muslims, considering their connections with Hinduism as *bigār* (perversion). Their Muslim identity was largely shaped by a reform organisation called the Tablighi Jamaat in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as discussed in Chapter 5.
21. The excessive use of groundwater for agricultural and domestic purposes has caused water salinity. A report produced by the National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) scheme noted the overexploited use of groundwater (DACP 2016: 3). The major field crops in Mewat are wheat (49.8 per cent), millet (*bājrā*/pearl millet, 32.8 per cent) and mustard (22 per cent) (DACP 2016: 4).
22. In the 2018 report of the Planning Commission (NITI Aayog), Mewat topped the all-India list of the most underdeveloped regions, with poor health resources and the lack of educational infrastructure cited as the reasons for its underdevelopment (A. Kumar 2018).
23. The issue of cow protection has led to multiple mob-lynching of Muslims in Mewat; see Ara (2023). Haryana, ruled by the Hindu right wing, the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), enacted a cow protection act in 2015 and has recently passed an anti-conversion bill (2021) to polarise the sectarian debates even further. There are many cases of riots and killings in the region. Citing all of them is beyond the scope here. There are also many instances of widely circulated fake news related to these issues to defame Mewat.
24. The British colonial state saw India as made up of separate and bounded collectivities, considering differences in terms of caste and religion as the main feature; see T. Metcalf (1997) and Kolsky (2005).
25. The literature on this issue is too vast to cite here.
26. There are, however, a few exceptions: Assayag (2004); Bigelow (2010); Frøystad (2005); Gottschalk (2000); Flueckiger (2006); Mohammad (2013).
27. There are countless writings which consider the Hindu and Muslim sectarian and communal problems from a 'difference' perspective. Analyses of various aspects of secularism, communalism, nationalism and electoral behaviour in India require a focus on the bounded definition of religious groups. However, I understand the impulse and relevance of such works, but at the same time they work with a bounded and collective definition of religious communities, which under-communicates the internal diversity of a community.
28. The description of the self and the other Muslims by these Muslim groups in Mewat was mostly in terms of *jātī* (castes) than religious identity. Mayaram (1997a: 47–9) notes this aspect about Meos. However, for neighbouring

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Hindu castes, the first identification was a religious one. Sociologists and social anthropologists have offered various definitions of this problem of caste among Muslims in South Asia. For instance, Barth (1998) notes, among Muslims of Pakistan, *jātī* or *qaum* (caste) is an integral aspect of social identity, while Marriott (1960) describes that caste ranking and social hierarchies are visibly present among Muslims in India and Pakistan. However, scholars generally agree that although the Hindu ideological justification for caste does not exist in the case of Muslims (I. Ahmad 1978: 11), behavioural Islam in the local context stands in stark contrast to Islamic scriptural requirements. Others have argued that inter-caste relations among Muslims cannot be simply reduced to the rank and purity of castes (see Raheja 1989: 80). The Meos' self-perception was deeply rooted in local notions of caste; therefore, they should be seen as practising a form of hierarchy that closely resembles the Hindu caste system. In recent years, the caste attitudes of the Meos have partially changed under the impact of reformist Islam. For instance, most Meos may pray with 'lower-caste' Muslims in mosques, but they still do not accept food from members of 'lower-castes' of both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds.

29. Communalism in India is often referred to as sectarian differences between religious communities such as Hindu, Muslim and Christian. There is substantial literature on the rise and growth of communalism and the increased Hindu–Muslim religious consciousness encouraged by British colonial policies (B. Chandra 2008; Pandey 2006; Van der Veer 1994a), revivalist movements (Hardy 1972; M. Hasan 1985; Jones 1968) and the politics of local power and practices (C. Bayly 1985; Freitag 1989; Robinson 2007). As C. Bayly (1985) argues, whether 'a unilinear growth of a more homogenous Hindu or Muslim religious consciousness can be postulated is doubtful' (180). However, there is general agreement among scholars that communal (religious) consciousness generally increased in the twentieth century.

30. *Pāl*s are territorial units and identities of the Meos. There are 12 main *pāl*s, one smaller unit called *palakara* and 52 smaller clans. Marriage practices usually determine the rules by which Meo *pāl*s delineate their status and show how the local symbolism of caste honour surpasses their religious identity. Many Hindu Rajput rulers from Rajasthan gave their daughters in marriage to Mughal rulers to strengthen their position and build alliances. Meo Muslims, on the other hand, are proud of the fact that their daughters were always given in endogamous marriage according to caste and clan lines. Therefore, their honour was not compromised, unlike the Hindu Rajput

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rulers, who allowed their daughters to become part of the Mughal harem. The *pāl* system is discussed throughout the book at relevant places.

31. Although cross-caste marriages among Muslims in Mewat are now encouraged by *maulavi*s (theologians), it is still not a common practice. A few decades ago, some cross-caste marriages led to violent confrontations (Chauhan 2003).
32. Raja Hasan Khan Mewati (reign 1504–27) belonged to the Khanzada Rajput community and was a ruler of Mewat. He was the son of the previous ruler, Raja Alawal Khan, and his family had been ruling Mewat for almost two centuries. His lineage could be traced back to Raja Nahar Khan Mewati, who was the king of Mewat in the fourteenth century. It is believed that his ancestors converted to Islam in the 1350s at the invitation of Firuz Shah Tughlaq and under the influence of the Sufi saint Nasiruddin Chiragh Dehlavi's preaching. During the sixteenth century, he was instrumental in reconstructing the Alwar fort. In the Battle of Khanwa in 1527, Hasan Khan Mewati joined forces with the Rajput Confederation, bringing 5,000 soldiers to the battlefield. Unfortunately, he was killed in battle by the Mughal forces led by Babur. Hasan Khan Mewati's legacy continues to inspire people in the Mewat region and beyond. He is remembered as a brave and visionary leader who fought for the independence of his kingdom and the dignity of his people.
33. Bannerman (1902: 72).
34. In 1931, especially in Alwar, Muslims made about 25 per cent of the entire population (746,000), spread throughout 10 *nizāmat*s (districts).
35. Even after mass migration to Pakistan in 1947, the Meo population remained relatively stable. Bharatpur was controlled by Jat kings, while Alwar was dominated by Rajput lords.
36. In Alwar, Muslims are currently in the minority (14 per cent), compared to the Hindu population (79.37 per cent); however, in Nuh (Mewat), Muslims are in the majority, despite the fact that the overall number of Muslims in both districts is considerably large (547,453 in Alwar; 862,696 in Nuh).
37. William Percy Powlett was a British colonial settlement officer in Alwar (Ulwar) district in the nineteenth century. He carried an extensive survey of the district, which constitutes one part of the cultural region of Mewat. His work is an important historical source material for information about Alwar's physical nature, politics and history. His main contribution is to document oral folk materials concerning religion, belief and people's lifestyle. A section of his work devoted to Laldas is an important source of information for understanding the nature of inter- and intra-religious relationship around his shrines in the nineteenth century.

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38. The writings of Shail Mayaram and Surjabhan Bhardwaj trace the history of Meos from the thirteenth to mid-twentieth century.
39. For example, in the case of the Meos of Singhal *pāl*, a popular folktale sung and narrated by Mirasi and Jogi bards also shows Meos' resistance to Islamisation. The tale celebrates Isardas, who not only refused to marry his daughter to a Muslim king but also refused to convert to Islam (Aggarwal 1971: 39).
40. Bhakti and Sufism are broad conceptual frameworks which are commonly known as 'movements'. They are highly diverse and complex cultural-religious phenomena. I am using the two terms in a general sense without discarding the complex reality. The Bhakti period is considered between 700 and 1800 CE and Sufism from 1300 CE onwards in India. The peak of Bhakti and Sufism is between 1400 and 1800 CE. Many influential Bhakti and Sufi saints were contemporaries. Like the saint Laldas, classification of these saints from present religious-theological point of view is almost impossible. More description of these diverse traditions coupled under the two terms is given in the next chapters.
41. The cultural encounter of the two is another complex issue, aptly discussed by Burchett (2019) and Snehi (2019) in their respective works. The high tide of these two major socio-religious movements of 'Bhakti' and 'Sufism' was preceded by Shaivite philosophy (such as the Nath and *tantric* traditions), which had already swept through north India (Ernst 2005).
42. The process is still going on.
43. The same issue is further discussed in Chapter 4.
44. In the sixteenth century, this process was still underdeveloped. But there was certainly an idea of private property emerging, although not in a clear sense. It intensified in the later centuries.
45. Most of the *pāl*s organised by the Meo population is headed by a 'Choudhary' (headman) (Mayaram 2004a: 49–73).
46. A clan of Chauhan Rajput rulers in Rajasthan.
47. I recorded these couplets among a group of Mirasis from Natoli village in Mewat, namely Sannu Khan, Sahab Khan and Jumma. I am truly indebted to all these participants for the pain they took to perform for a small gathering of three or four people, including myself and my informant friend.
48. The English translation is mine.
49. This feature is analogous to the Hindu lineage (*gotra*) system. The son of a family from the Hindu peasant castes of Jats, Ahirs, Gujjars and Meena is not usually permitted by customs to marry into the *gotra* of his mother and

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grandmother. This practice among the north Indian Hindu peasants is restricted to the lineages only. By contrast, in the Meo *pāl* system it is applied to an entire *pāl*. There are a few exceptions also in which some villages belonging to the same *pāl* follow the *pāl* marriage system differently, such as they may take daughters from a *pāl* into which other *pāl* members marry their daughters. Then this custom is usually identified as the custom of that village only.

50. The Jogi and Mirasi are two separate communities of bards who mainly performed for Meos and were paid in cash and kind. More information about them comes with relevant themes throughout the book.
51. The Meos' claims intersect with the claim of Rajput groups but is rooted in a peasant conception of the martial community, a widespread phenomenon among north Indian peasant communities (Pinch 1996).
52. The term *itihā*s means 'history', and *purān* refers to 'the legends of Hindu gods', mainly those of Vishnu's incarnations. *Itihās-purān* is a widely prevalent mode of the traditional historical consciousness across India (Mayaram 2004a: 52).
53. Bharadwaj (2016: 93) writes that

    > from the late 14th century they began migrating to plains and settling down as peasants. This process was induced by rigorous military campaigns, large-scale clearance of forests and construction of garrisoned forts by the Delhi Sultans to contain their depredations; growing Meo population pressure on the scarce resources of the hilly terrain; the Khanzada chiefs pressurizing the Meos for relocating to plains and taking up agriculture; and the administrative integration of Mewat into the Mughal empire during Akbar's reign.

54. Genealogy can pinpoint the historical memories of the socio-economic experience of a community or collective group while reflecting the present. Myth, memory and history in genealogical perceptions merge as does the present into the past (Goody and Watt 1963; Mayaram 2004a; Thapar 1991: 52–73). Memory 'can be useful in articulating the connections between the cultural, the social, and the political, between representation and social experience' (Confino 1997: 1388).
55. The Mewati version of the Mahabharata was written by a Meo poet Saddullah Khan around the eighteenth century (Mayaram 1997b: 7).
56. This line was repeatedly asserted by many Meos.
57. The number of sacrifices made by the Meos during the 1857 rebellion exceeds any other district of the Haryana state. K. C. Yadav notes the total number of people who died from the Haryana part of Mewat was around 1,100 far more

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than the total numbers of 200 of the second placed district in the list; see Yadav (1977).

58. Shudra refers to the lowest category of the Hindu fourfold divisions into the Brahmins (priests), the Kshatriyas (kings), the Vaishyas (traders) and the Shudras (peasants and labourers).
59. Moreover, the Meos were not always anti-state as Mayaram claims. Bharadwaj (2012) has shown that Meos were hired for the Mughal imperial postal services and as personal bodyguards to the emperor; they were known as *dāk-meorā*s (Meo postmen) and *khidmattiyā*s (service men) (248).
60. This phrase is inspired by Lorenzen's phrase from his work about religious identity of Kabir and Gorakh as it expresses Laldas's situation perfectly; see Lorenzen (2011: 20).
61. Sherpur, the village of the main shrine of Laldas, had a dominant population of Meos. The population also included members of some refugee groups from Pakistan that arrived after the partition of India in 1947. Sherpur's area size is 356 hectares. With a total population of 1,505 people (800 male and 705 females) in 267 families, the economic condition of the residents of Sherpur is much better than many villages as most residents own land. Most Meos (135 households) in Sherpur identified themselves as 'cultivators' in the 2011 Alwar district census. In Sherpur, 374 people identified as low-caste Hindu post-partition refugees who sometimes also worked on Meo lands as agricultural labourers. Apart from low-caste Hindu communities such as Jatav and Lohar, there were a few households of upper-caste Brahmins and Baniyas in Sherpur (Census of India 2011a).
62. Punahana was dominated by Hindus of the Baniya caste. According to the religious data of the census of 2011, Muslims in Punahana were 55.40 per cent, followed by the Hindu population of 43.70 per cent of its total population of 24,734. The Baniyas had a variety of commercial stores, the majority of which sold everyday items. Most of the dwellings on the outskirts of the town were of Meos.

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2

LALDAS AND RELIGIOUS DUALITY OF *PĪR* AND *SANT*

Folk stories in Mewat narrate how, in the sixteenth century, Sahab Khan, the Mughal governor of Tijara, near the present-day Alwar district in eastern Rajasthan in north India, summoned Laldas (1540–1648 CE) to account for not practising Islam, despite being born into a Muslim family. Sahab Khan offered him meat, saying it was Muslim food that a Muslim should willingly eat. This move was intended to symbolise the saint's Muslim identity and to reintroduce him to the Islamic fold from which he had strayed. The meeting with Sahab Khan is documented in a hagiography—compiled and written in rhyming verses by a Laldas devotee called Dungarisi Sadh:[1]

> *tabaī mughal ne svāgat karī, baitho pīr dayā tum karī,*
> *rotī-khānā karo kabāb, bhūkhā khāyā badā śabāb,*
> *dān yār to badā ajīj, upar musalmān ki cīj*
> *musalmān hove khāye khulāye, to vah rāh khudā kī pāve.* (Dungarisi n.d.: 26; see Appendix A.1)[2]
>
> Then the Mughal welcomed him saying, sit *pīr* and bestow your blessings on me
> Eat a meal of bread and kebab, it is really tasty when you are hungry
> Serving you is a matter of immense joy, this is also a Muslim practice
> If a Muslim eats it himself and feeds others, then he attains the path of God.[3]

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Although the Mughal officer's invitation for Laldas to consume *kebab* might seem like a respectful act, it was, in fact, a deliberate tactic aimed to ascertain the saint's religious standing. By depicting Laldas's religious conduct as transgressing Islamic boundaries in these hagiographic narratives, the text seeks to establish his identity as a Hindu saint. According to the verses, Sahab Khan heard reports that Laldas did not pray as a Muslim: he neither performed ablution nor invoked the name of the Prophet, despite being a member of the Meo Muslim caste and the 'Islam' religion. In another set of stanzas, Dungarisi Sadh goes on to narrate the doctrine taught by the saint to both Hindus and Muslims, which got him in trouble:

> *śīlvant santan sukhdāī, satjug kī sī rāh calāī*
> *daurī khabar tijāre gayī, sahib khan sū jā kahī*
> *jāt meo arū musalmān, hindū rāh calāī ān*
> *rojā bang nivāj nā pathe, īd-bakrīd kū man nahī dhare*
> *rojā rakhe nā kalmā kahe, hindū turak sū nyārā rahe*
> *nabī-rasūl kahe nā kahāve, rām-rām mukh setī gāve*
> *ketā hindū musalmān, ek hī rāh calāī ān.* (Dungarisi n.d.: 23–28; Powlett 1878: 55)

> He was benevolent, gratifying the saints, his conduct was like that of *satyug*
> This news sped to Tijara, Sahab Khan was notified
> He is Meo by caste and a Muslim, but he preaches the ways of Hindus
> He neither fasts nor offers *namāz*, and has little interest in celebrating Eid and Bakrid
> He does not keep *rojā* nor recites the *kalmā*, he remains aloof from Hindu and Turk
> He does not utter or encourage others to speak the name of the Prophet [*nabī-rasūl*], his mouth only chants Ram-Ram
> He says, whether a Hindu or a Muslim, the path is the same.

Sahab Khan decided to test him due to the complaints that were made against Laldas's unconventional religious behaviour. The saint's adherence to strict vegetarianism resulted in a miraculous event when he accepted meat from Sahab Khan; the moment the saint touched the meat, it transformed into rice (Dungarisi n.d.: 23–28). This was not the end of their encounter. The daughter of the Mughal governor was tormented by a malicious *djinn*. Kazis

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and Mullahs were unsuccessful in exorcising him, but when Sahab Khan's wife approached Laldas, the issue was resolved. When Laldas met the girl, she instantly began to kiss his feet and the *djinn* surrendered before the saint, leaving the girl's body.

In another account, the saint was interrogated by a different Mughal *faujdār* (garrison commander or police officer) of Bhadarpur, Alwar. This time, Laldas was accused of murdering a Mughal official who had laid hands on another man's wife. To teach Laldas a lesson, the *faujdār* dispatched an unruly horse with soldiers to fetch him on its back. As the saint arrived while riding the horse, the *faujdār* was surprised to see how well he controlled the (unruly) horse and that there were both Hindus and Muslims among his followers who had accompanied him. Laldas and his 12 companions were then detained overnight under the surveillance of Mughal soldiers. They all miraculously disappeared from there. When the guard was imprisoned for presumably allowing them to go, they subsequently reappeared in the prison. Later the Mughal official asked the saint a few questions about his caste and religion and expressed amazement in the following words:

> *faujdār jab pūchī bāt, fakar kon tumārī jāt,*
> *dīn tumhārā kinhūn nā jānā, jinhe sunā acraj āna.* (Dungarisi n.d.: 13)
>
> When the faujdar asked the saint, what is your caste
> Nobody knows your religion, whoever hears this is a surprise.

The saint replied:

> *hindū-turak ek sā būjhe, sāhib sab ghāt ek hī sūjhe*
> *bolan hār kine batāyā, jāmā ek meo ghar pāyā,*
> *vastra vivek morchal hāth, mūrakh ho so pūche jāt.* (Dungarisi n.d.: 13)
>
> Hindus and Turks are same, God considers them as one,
> Tell me, who taught you this? [I] received [my] clothes in a Meo family,
> Clothes, wisdom, and my free hands, only a foolish man enquires about caste.

As the discussion continued, Laldas voiced his opinions and stated, 'Love God'. He elaborated that God is a unique entity and should be viewed separately from religious boundaries. The saint highlighted that Hindus and

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Turks (Muslims), despite their contrasting beliefs, follow the same route towards their desired goal. The saint's response to the official's question emphasised the unity of God and the absurdity of asking about caste identity. Laldas used the metaphor of his birth into a Meo family (receiving his flesh and clothing) to assert that this is not who he is. The official, disturbed by Laldas's behaviour, demanded payment before releasing him. Laldas declined the offer, stating that he is not wealthy. Hearing this, the *faujdār* forced the saint to drink water from a poisoned well. Another miracle ensued: the poisoned well turned into a source of sweet water. The *faujdār* stood in front of the saint, humbly folding his hands, and inquired about the saint's 'true' identity. In order to clarify his religious stand, the saint instructed his followers, expressing his belief and true religious intentions in the following couplet, which refers to the advocacy of God in *nirguṇ* form:

> *mai hu lāl, tu merō dās, nirguṇ bhakti karo prakās*
> *niraṇkar ko sumran kijō, yahī sīkh sādhuṇ ko dījo.* (Dungarisi n.d.: 4)

> I am Lal, you are my follower [*das*], spread the doctrines of *nirguṇ bhakti*
> Recall the formless, give this lesson to the sages.

In the hagiography, various encounters between Laldas and state officials or individuals seeking assistance provide a glimpse of his 'religion'. The verses make it abundantly clear that his 'religion' is distinct from both 'Hinduism' and 'Islam'.[4] Without creating distinctions between his followers, he welcomed people of all castes and religions into the order, urging them to be compassionate towards all living beings by following his principle of *jivdayā* (kindness to living beings). When he was accused of murder, Laldas in his defence said that 'I never even hurt an ant, so why would I kill anyone'. But the Mughal officer insisted that Laldas could not be considered a true *pīr* (saint) without proof of his *ajmat* (greatness). The officer mockingly asked: *ajamat kachū dikhaho hum kū, sahī pīr hum jane tam kū* (If you demonstrate your greatness to us, then only we will consider you to be a true *pīr*). At this stage, the hagiography condemns the despicable act of the Mughal officer (frequently labelled as *asur*, or demon) who killed a deer and commanded Laldas to revive it. Although Laldas remained patient and did not respond to the officer's provocation, he eventually used his stick to bring the deer to life for the sake of the animal.[5]

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Numerous similar miracles, recounted in couplets in the hagiography and supplemented by the information in Powlett's gazetteer, are fundamental to the formation of the religious order known as *lāldāsī samprādāy*. The origin tale of Laldas varies from place to place in north India. Laldas's life is recounted in numerous regions of Alwar and Bharatpur through oral accounts, handwritten poetry and pamphlets. Laldas was born into the Duhlot *pāl* of the Meo Muslim community in approximately 1540 CE, and he spent his early years in the care of his maternal grandparents in Dholidoob, Alwar. Having resided in Dholidoob for numerous years, Laldas would frequently roam the nearby hills of Alwar, as well as venture into the forests, in search of logs and firewood that he could sell to support his family's livelihood. Later, Laldas relocated to Bandholi, 16 miles northeast of Alwar. He diligently worked there, driven by both a sense of altruism and the need for his own sustenance. Residing atop a hill, the saint followed rigorous ascetic practices, while enduring scorching weather and showing no fear of snakes and tigers (Powlett 1878: 54). Additionally, he healed the poor and sick. Soon he had disciples from all castes. Then, after a brief stay in Todi and Rasagan villages, he settled in Nagla, where he remained for 40 years until his death in 1648 and was buried in Sherpur (Powlett 1878: 54). These six locations are the most revered in the order.

Laldas did not live a life of celibacy, even though he had practised the most severe forms of asceticism. He had a daughter named Sarupa, who also possessed the power to perform miracles. Popular stories indicate that Laldas once conveyed to Sarupa that both greatness and the ability to perform wonders were ultimately futile, as they vanish like smoke in the wind; the only things that mattered were purity of soul and kindness to others. He stated further that those who owned these virtues would reach a state of perfect tranquillity in heaven (called *har ke lok*) and would no longer be subject to the cycle of birth and death. Laldas's son Pahara as well as his two brothers, Sher Khan and Ghaus Khan, also performed miracles for people's welfare. All of these individuals, closely related to Laldas, placed their faith and confidence in one God (Ram), and not in any other deity or divinity.

Throughout north India, various figures by the name of Laldas have been conflated in popular parlance. These stories provide conflicting descriptions of the figure variously called Baba Laldas, Baba Lali and Baba Lal Dayal. His admirers in Dhayanpur include Sikhs and Shams Guptis, who remember him as Baba Lal Dayal. However, Mewat's Laldas currently overpower the stories and persona of other figures by the same name. Although the saint

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is considered to be the contemporary of the great Mughal emperor Akbar, there are stories of a figure known as Laldas who had intensive interactions with other Mughal rulers over spiritual matters. In Mewat, popular accounts, printed materials and other historical sources make several references to this encounter. He is referred to as a Hindu gnostic in these oldest accounts.[6] The Mughal prince Dara Shukoh, who was interested in Hindu philosophy, had an extensive dialogue with the saint Laldas, which is also available in various versions of the text *Su'āl va javāb-i Dara Shukoh va Baba Lal Das* (Questions and answers between Dara Shukoh and Baba Laldas) (Hasrat 1953; Hayat 2016; Wilson 1861) (Figure 2.1).[7]

With time, the religious order of Laldas has assumed enigmatic religious forms outside of Mewat. For instance, the same Laldas is regarded as a follower of the river goddess Ganga in the Saharanpur district in western Uttar Pradesh (see Figure 2.2). A well-known legend in the region states that the saint spent some time there and commuted daily for around 60 kilometres to Haridwar, a sacred city on the banks of the Ganges, to take a dip in the holy river.[8]

FIGURE 2.1 Laldas in interaction with the Mughal prince Dara Shukoh

Source: FACT (Foundation for Advancement of Cultural Ties), http://www.darashikoh.info/, accessed 17 November 2017.

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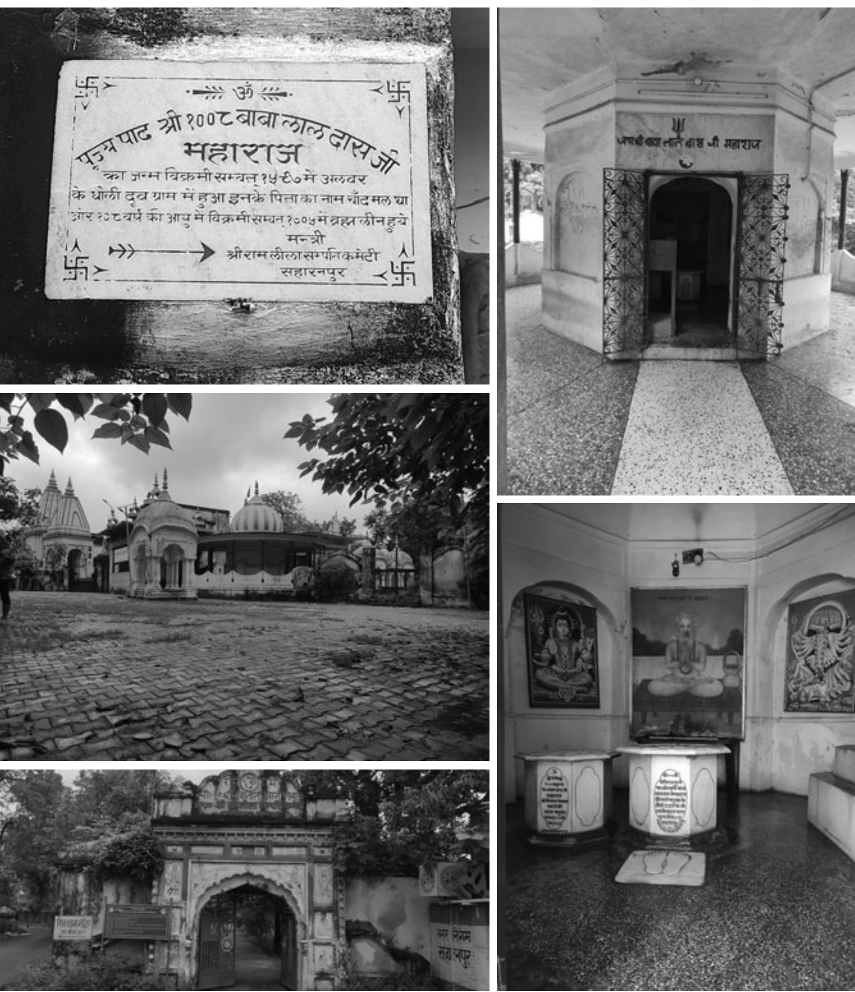

FIGURE 2.2 The Laldas temple in Saharanpur
Source: Photos by the author.

In response to his unwavering devotion, Mother Ganga, the goddess, bestowed a blessing upon him. Manifesting herself, she caused a stream to flow in front of his hut, making it easier for him to conduct his daily rituals in the holy water. Currently, the stream goes by the name Paondhoi (literally, foot rinsing) river. The saint Laldas, also known as 'Bhagirath of Saharanpur',[9] plays a significant role in regional folklore.[10] Similar to this, Laldas is associated with a Vaishnava sect in Dhyanpur, Punjab. From Dhyanpur

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to Mewat and Saharanpur, there are several accounts of his birthplace and miracles. The Dhyanpur temple considers Lahore to be Laldas's birthplace, while the Saharanpur temple clearly associates it with Mewat. H. H. Wilson (1861: 347) notes that he was born in Malwa during the reign of Mughal king Jahangir (c. 1605–1627) and later travelled with his guru Chetan Swami to Lahore. While the Dhyanpur temple claims that he was born during Firoz Shah Tuglak's reign and lived for 300 years (c. 1355–1655), in Mewat, he is believed to have lived from 1540 to 1648 CE.

However, unlike other ambiguous claims about the identity of the figure Laldas, in Mewat, stories about his identity are supported by historical evidence such as a family genealogy recorded by the Jaggas.[11] Some of the Meo families traced their ancestral links with Laldas/Lalkhan (*pīr*) through both maternal and paternal sides. Given that 'das' was a frequent word for a saint with a 'Bhakti' background, Lalkhan Meo in Mewat may have undergone a similar identity adaption and change to become Laldas. As with all oral traditions, it is impossible to say with certainty that all of these stories are about the same person named Laldas. Laldas's identity is interwoven with several personas. Currently, the same Laldas is popularised throughout north India as the great saint of Mewat and *sāmpradāyik sadbhāvanā ke pratīk* (the emblem of communal harmony),[12] overpowering the origin tales at other locations indicated earlier. Devotees across north India have presently come to identify Mewati Laldas as the 'real' Laldas. Currently, many shrines and temples dedicated to Laldas have recognised the Sherpur shrine as the main 'temple' of the saint where devotees regularly offer tributes. Many devotees from other parts of India come to visit his shrine during an annual pilgrimage, considering Mewat to be the birthplace of Laldas. Despite the diversity of these tales, they have certain characteristics, most notably the intersection of Sufi and Bhakti themes.[13]

The devotion of the Meo and other Mewati Muslims to the Bhakti and Sufi saints prior to the twentieth century is significant in this context because it suggests that Indian Muslims' entanglement with the religious boundaries and institutional practices of Islam was very varied. This was not in contrast to the many different castes of Hindu peasants at the time, each of which followed its own unique set of Indic rituals and beliefs. The teachings and biographies of Laldas provide evidence of such patterns of Hindu–Islamic cultural interaction and the nature of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' identities prior to the twentieth century. The following is an example of how Laldas used to convey his messages of religious indifference:

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kāhe lal saiṇ ko pyāro, sāhab ek banāvan har
hindū-turak ko ek hī sāhab, rāh banāī do ajab. (Dungarisi n.d.: 26)

Says Lal, the beloved of God, the Almighty has created us one
There is one God of Hindu and Turk, but the two strange paths have been made.

Laldas through messages urged Hindus and Muslims to see the futility of their differences and to look beyond their religious affiliations to more universal concerns. Moreover, religious identities were often represented through *panth*s and ethnic designations. For instance, the hagiography frequently uses *turak* and *mughal* to refer to the behaviours of state officials rather than to indicate their Muslimness. Religious orders, such as that of Laldas, contradicted the institutional forms of religions associated with political power and represented by the 'professional' clergy.[14] Here, the concern for the institutional form of Islam (like Sahab Khan's concerns) is associated with state and representatives of its power. Often in the text, the ethnic label 'Turk' is used to depict the 'Islam' of the political rulers. In many other instances across Rajasthan, religious categories were often replaced by such ethnic labels (Turks, Mughals) (Talbot 2009) or sect names (Bhakti, Sufi and Nath traditions), prioritising the latter over the former.[15] Oral histories, folk tales and saint hagiographies aid in understanding several strands of meaning involved in slowly shaping a more uniform religious practice around the persona of Laldas. In particular, interviews with Laldas's followers and hagiographical writings about the saint show that religious interaction surrounding the saint was multifaceted, complex and dynamic, in contrast to the present day's narrower religious classifications.

THE LALDAS ORDER: AN ORCHARD OF DIVERSITY

The hagiographical narratives of Laldas are more common today among Hindu followers. The Hindu Laldasis are striving to construct the persona of Laldas as a miraculous *bhakti* saint who is significantly distinct from and superior to his Islamic counterparts. Nonetheless, the tales mentioned in the hagiography do not hide Laldas's distinctive position of being in-between. The first section of the biographical text about Laldas, the *nuktāvalī*,

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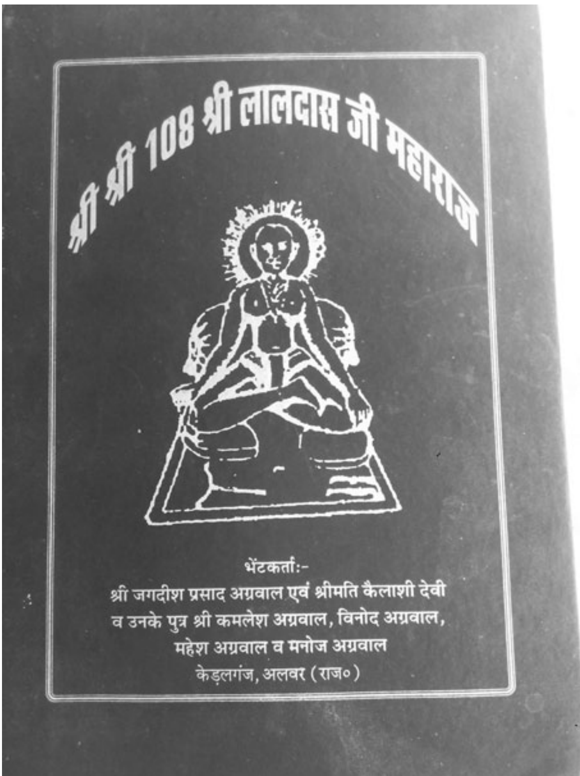

FIGURE 2.3 A typeset version of the biographical text of Laldas, *nuktāvalī*

Source: Photo by the author.

chronicles the saint's entire life in verse form, including accounts of his incarnations, miracles and other significant occurrences.[16] The text is divided into sections like *śrīmad lāldās gītā*, *samvād sār* (a dialogue between the saint and a disciple) and *sākhī* and *rāg* (tales and songs sung in Hindustani classical music style) (Figure 2.3).[17]

The text narrates life stories of the saint and his sayings in couplets, adopting a poetic style similar to that of the great epics in Sanskrit and Hindi. For instance, the opening stanza of the text says:

> *sadhu-sant kī āgya pāū, śrī lāl bhakt kī kathā sūnāū*
> *pur-pattan sherpur vās sthān, jahāṇ dungrisi sādh ne kiya bakhān*
> *san pandrah sau sattānave mein lāl liyo avatār*
> *hindū-turak bīc baithkar kinhā bhakti pracār.* (Dungarisi n.d.: 1)

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> If the saints and sages permit, I will tell the story of Sri Laldas.
> I was born in Pur-Pattan and reside at Sherpur; Dungrisi Sadh's [my] narration begins there.
> In the year of 1597, Lal was incarnated
> He spread the messages of *bhakti* sitting among Hindus and Turks.[18]

In addition to using Urdu terms to convey specific meanings within stanzas in Hindi, the text also sporadically employs the Mewati dialect of the region. As an illustration, one tale of a childhood miracle—the saint's mastery over a mad elephant—is recounted in the text using a 'linguistic duopoly'[19] (Bakshi 2012) of Hindi and Urdu. The Mewati dialect and the vernacular languages have an impact on the text, but Hindi and Urdu are given priority:

> *ek din mārag lāge jāy, bhay mantā gaj nād nacāī*
> *main mantā gaj bahut alām, karī sūṇḍ sū tīn salām.* (Dungarisi n.d.: 6)

> A fearless elephant trumpeted loudly, walking on a street one day,
> That elephant was very angry [*alām*] and bowed [*salām*] three times with its trunk.

In the above couplet, the Urdu word *alām* refers to the disturbed status of an insane elephant. As soon as the saint confronts the elephant, the animal bows to him. The Islamic greeting *salām* is used here to refer to the elephant's submissiveness to Laldas. The narrative style of the text, loaded with vernacular terms, blends words from the Mewati dialect with infrequent usages of Urdu words and numerous references to the mode of oral use of Hindu epics and religious texts. The verses thus depict a 'linguistic duopoly' in which the Mewati dialect, the Urdu and Hindi languages, and the epic prose style converge to serve the narrator's purpose of describing a saint who transcended institutional religious boundaries. The text also displays the intimate connection between the familiar and the known 'religious other' in a world conscious of religious differences but connected in multiple ways through shared ideals of public life. Similar examples throughout the text indicate the complex nature of a closely knit interlingual world, often reflected in the literary 'web of intertextuality' (Ramanujan 1989: 190).[20] Such examples point to the intimately related literary and oral traditions of 'Hinduism' and 'Islam' and institutional and vernacular/popular cultures.[21]

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Similarly, another stanza of the text employs the Arabic/Urdu word *mustaqīm*, meaning 'a straight path' or 'the right path' in Islam.[22] The text uses the phrase to talk about the path of *nirguṇ bhakti* taken by Laldas. For instance, after the *faujdār* realised that he mistreated the saint, he ordered his soldiers to approach Laldas again. This time, the soldiers acknowledged the saint as a true *pīr*:

sunte hi cākar dauḍe āye, pīr-murīd dhyān me pāye
unkā aisā sāncā dīn, sāī nām sū hai mustaqīm
lāldās tum sacce pīr, ab baksho merī taqsīr. (Dungarisi n.d.: 14)

The soldiers came running as they heard the order, *pīr-murīd* were in meditation
Their religion is so true, their path is linked to the name of *sāī* [God]
Laldas you are a true *pīr*, now please forgive my crime.

The use of the phrase *mustaqīm* indicates that for Laldas the right path to God is 'formless devotion'. The term used here is taken from the Quran, where it appears multiple times implying 'straight' or 'right' path as seeking to be led to God, indicating a longing for intimacy, nearness, knowledge and love of God. In Islam, it is often used in the context of the guidance provided by Allah for Muslims to follow in order to attain success and salvation by walking on the path of righteousness. The 'straight path' by Laldas is defined in a manner of Sufi spiritualism by the fusion of the external aspects of religious behaviour with the internal dimensions of spirituality. *Mustaqīm* results in a cohesive blend of the exoteric (worldly) and esoteric facets of Laldas's faith. Moreover, the usage of *mustaqīm* in the couplet above negates worshipping God through observable human actions (idol or image worship) and prefers nurturing a profound personal spiritual bond with Him. Laldas, thus, advocated the value of living a life of moral uprightness and following the straight path towards God, without being concerned with religious labels or categories. The numerous interactions of Laldas with Mughal officials mentioned earlier indicate the nature of his teachings centred around the idea of one formless God that he taught to his followers. Rising above worldly boundaries to love 'God' in a true sense was the central tenet of his preaching.

In many other verses of the *nuktāvalī*, the Bhakti and Sufi modes of piety are seen as true paths that are different from the ways of both institutionalised religions.[23] Moreover, Laldas's beliefs in the *nirguṇ bhakti*

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of Ram complemented his Meo Muslim background. Meos believe in the Islamic conception of Allah, a formless entity, developed through Sufi influence in the region. There are many close parallels between various popular modes of religiosity in the Laldas order that strongly intersected theological doctrines of Sufism and *nirguṇ bhakti*.[24] Both conceptions stress upon a formless imaginary of God. A conversation with a Sufi saint, Chishti Gadan of Tijara, who purportedly inspired Laldas to work for the cause of *dīn* (religion) expresses the concern of *waḥdat al-wujūd*:[25]

> *gadan kahe tum dar mat māno, dīn durast kar durmat bhāno*
> *durmat kutiyā dur uḍāo, hindū-turak kū rāh gavāho*
> *hindū-turak ka aisā hait, jaise dharā bijūrā khet*
> *pahel vidu kā yah jasle, sāī kahen soi kah de.* (Dungarisi n.d.: 7)

> Gadan says don't be afraid, strengthen your religion and eradicate evil thought
> Banish the evil of bad thought, show the path to Hindus and Turks
> Such is the manner of Hindu-Turks, like a man of straw in a field
> First take this vow, whatever *sāī* [God] says is so.

Chishti Gadan noticed Laldas levitating during meditation. Upon discovering the nature of his piety and unworldliness, the Sufi saint instructed Laldas to preach both Hindus and Muslims. The conversation between Laldas and Gadan indicates that both Hindus and Muslims (Turks) needed to be brought on the right path (*mustaqīm*). Among saints like Laldas, the Sufi concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) finds a closer structural parallel with the interpretations of non-dualism provided by Indian philosophers like Shankara, Chaitanya and Nimbarkar (Alam 2004: 91–98). Alam (2004: 91–92) writes that this idea of the oneness of God

> was expressed in the *nirguṇ bhakti* assertation of the fundamental unity of Hindus and Turks. Kabir, for instance, saw no difference between Ram and Rahman. Notable in his poetry is the coalescence of Hari and Hazrat, Krishna and Karama, Muhammed and Mahadev, Ram and Rahim.

Similarly, *waḥdat al-wujūd* is a central concept in Sufi Islamic philosophy that refers to the idea of the unity of existence.[26] The concept maintains that

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existence, or *wujūd*, is one and unique reality from which all reality derives, considering that the external world of sensible objects is but a fleeting shadow of the formless God (Akbar 2016; Zolghadr 2018). *Waḥdat al-wujūd* finds its ultimate expression in the doctrines of *nirguṇ* saints like Kabir, Ravidas, Nanak and Laldas, among others.

Laldas and Chishti Gadan, both, echoed a shared critique of hegemonic religions which are predicated on institutionalised 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' practice as distinguished by ignorance and the absence of a true love for God. They believed that the emphasis on outward practices and rituals can obscure the deeper, more meaningful aspects of religion, and that this can lead to a superficial and ritualistic approach to spirituality. Their conversation reflected a commitment to the inner spiritual dimension of religion and a desire to transcend the limitations of institutional structures and dogmas in order to connect with the divine in a more direct and meaningful way. The unanimity of the two figures in the narratives thus illuminates the critique of both usual 'Islamic' ways of life and 'Hindu' modes of worship. These two traditions enhanced and complemented each other.

Laldas is said to have gone on the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca three times during his life. On each of his journeys, he brought back a brick and used it in building mosques. Two mosques, the Mecca and Medina, still exist in the vicinity of his shrine at Rasgan village, where he spent his married life. As an incipient Indic cultural tradition, this kind of religious interaction is necessarily an indication of the co-existence of opposite religious values alongside the desired ones. In this process, religious synthesis and the negation of values take place simultaneously. For instance, when a person follows mixed religious practices, he or she can simultaneously be both Hindu and Muslim, neither and beyond representing a break from already established categorical societal norms. For instance, when Sahab Khan sent soldiers to bring Laldas, the saint was sitting at the Mecca mosque he had built (Figure 2.4).

Laldas was reciting *saī* (God) Ram's name, despite the fact that he was sitting at the Mecca mosque to send the message of religious indifference among his followers:

us fakar ko dekho jāye, es ghoḍā pe lāo caḍhāī
dehāde jab nagale āye, makkā mahjad baithe pāye. (Dungarisi n.d.: 12)

Go and see that *fakir* [mendicant], bring him on this horse
When they reached Nagla, they saw sitting him at the Mecca mosque.

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FIGURE 2.4 The abandoned Mecca mosque

Source: Photo by the author.

For the saint, religion and its symbols meant to invoke the one formless entity. Other similar verses in the text, although the text is oriented towards Hinduism, clearly indicate the saint's proximity to as well as distance from both Islamic and Hindu religious symbols and practices.[27] Laldas thus separates himself from both the Muslim identity of his birth and orthodox Hindu forms of religious practice. He presented a unique form of religious liminality and a betwixt and between zone which unsettled fixed notions of 'religion'.[28] He stood for *nirguṇ bhakti* ideas that were compatible with his Islamic faith.

The hagiography's goal of detaching Laldas from Islamic aspects, although successful, could not hide the saint's distinctiveness. Saint Laldas's liminal status is visible in his non-observance of the Islamic practices of *rojā* and *namāz*, despite being born a Muslim.[29] But the text shows that Laldas also opposed Hindu religious doctrines. For example, he does not condone idol worship, although it is one of the central aspects of 'Hinduism', but instead encourages the *nirguṇ bhakti* of Ram. This idea resonated the sayings of many other saints who spoke against Brahminical Hinduism and the *saguṇ* mode of devotion that was widely prevalent at the time.[30]

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Although the text stressed that Laldas was a *bhakti* saint and adherent of Ram, this was not the only story. There are occasional references in the text that give some indication of Laldas's equal proximity to certain tenets of the Islamic (*Islamicate*) religion. Laldas foreswore some 'Islamic' and 'Hindu' rituals and borrowed concepts from both religions to create an alternative set of practices in a liminal space where the participants' preceding identities, groups or commonalities could be transformed into new behaviours and rituals. This inter-structural liminal period was also a period of creativity.[31] A liminal phase is characterised by a period of limbo, uncertainty and an anti-structure stand.[32]

While applying the perspective of liminality on the ambiguity of Laldas's identity as a Hindu *sant* and/or a Muslim *pīr*, one needs to be wary of homogenising religious behaviour of a liminal group.[33] Various caste communities of Indian Muslims, like many Hindu castes, invented their own versions of the Indic religious world in which a wide range of religious symbols coexisted in an unusual way.[34] One central idea in Laldas's teachings is that the distinction between Hindus and Muslims is meaningless. Laldas emphasised a kind of equality and non-difference between the two religions, while also enriching the Meos' version of popular Islam. His religious messages and symbolic acts drew a large number of adherents from both faiths.[35] In other words, similar to many saints and religious orders, Laldas advocated common religious ideals for both Hindus and Muslims without denying the authority of God or the gods of either religion. The members of both religions were asked to follow a righteous path in the context of the similarities and differences (institutional and dogmatic) in pursuit of a common universal spiritual message. The history of the Laldas order exemplified the acculturated form of the popular religious world, in which sect and ethnic differences were more important than identification with Hindu and Muslim identities and differences. Moreover, in this regard, he is comparable to Satya Pir of Bengal and other saints who blurred 'the line between Hindu and Muslim as religious categories' (T. Stewart 2000: 22).

Despite the fact that 'Islam' and 'Hinduism' had an equal impact on people's lives in Mewat,[36] the Bhakti and Sufi doctrines drew people's attention and garnered greater followings than the two dominant religions, as evidenced by many folk accounts about Laldas. The order of Laldas, while incorporating certain principles from both 'Hinduism' and 'Islam', deliberately distanced itself from the two religions. These Bhakti and Sufi saints gave priority to the local over the non-local or imperial/political,

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to esoteric mysticism over dogmatic practices and to monotheism over polytheism. The saint venerated by the Meo peasants neither completely disavowed Meo versions of popular religion nor demanded an allegiance to either 'Hinduism' or 'Islam'. His stories were embedded in shared pluralistic contexts. The Meos' religious environment from Laldas's time until the twentieth century was more heterogeneous, diverse, pluralistic and hybrid. His anecdotes indicate that diverse identities, practices, beliefs and symbols were combined and merged in the popular religious world that transcend and contradict our contemporary understanding of both religions as disparate 'entities'.

LALDAS AND COW VENERATION

Cow veneration is commonly perceived as a 'Hindu' tradition. Most Hindus in contemporary times regard Muslims to be the natural enemy of cows since they eat beef. The cow, like other Hindu peasant communities, operates as an Indic religious motif in the cultural practises of the Meo Muslims of the Laldasi heritage. Yet, in recent years, advocates of right-wing Hindutva ideology have entirely seized the iconography of the cow in order to garner political mileage. For many Meo Muslims who are Laldas followers, the veneration of cows is imbricated with their peasant identity and rustic religiosity surpassing dogmatic notions of religions. Contrary to the prevailing portrayal of Meo Muslims as enemies of the cow by the Hindu Right and certain prominent media sites, Meos had a tremendous amount of respect for the animal. For instance, one day, I spotted a beautifully adorned cow sitting in front of a Meo's house. I enquired about the reason for doing so from the house-owner. An elderly Meo replied, 'We are the followers of Laldas and always have had cows in our house for religious and agricultural reasons.' In addition, he stated, 'This cow is about 20 years old and has provided them with an abundance of products, including milk, butter, bullocks, and manure. Therefore, it will be "inhuman" to sell her to be butchered for a small amount of money.' The man wanted the cow to die a natural death.

There were numerous such examples that demonstrated the impact of Laldas's teachings on his Meo Muslim disciples. A blind Meo, a devoted follower of Laldas, spent his entire day grazing a herd of cows, bullocks and other animals. He was doing so to follow Laldas's path since, as he remembered, the saint himself gave him the instruction to care for cows in

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his dream. He has devoted his entire life to the cause since then. Muslims in this region believe that they will continue to be blessed and protected by Laldas as long as his precepts are obeyed. His profound fondness for cows became widely recognised to the extent that, until recently, Meo Muslims would present a young yellow heifer to his shrine during times of hardship as a gesture of devotion. For instance, many Meo Muslims continue to think that if the rain fails, a yellow heifer must be offered to the saint, and it will rain before the devotees return home.[37] The yellow heifer will live in the vicinity of the shrine and enjoy the protection of the saint.

As Laldas solidified his religious ideas, he not only advocated *nirguṇ bhakti* (formless devotion) but also preached the values of cow herding and vegetarianism. Vegetarianism was fundamental to the creation of his religious order, which was premised upon the concept of *jivdayā* (kindness to all living beings). Laldas also emphasised that those who take the life of another person will face consequences, as God will hold them accountable. He added further, the righteous never forget to be afraid of God. Laldas's teachings rejected the idea that 'religion' is primarily about following rules and regulations, or about achieving a particular status or position in society. Instead, he emphasised the importance of the inner spiritual experience and the need to cultivate a deep and personal relationship with God. His traditions also stressed the importance of compassion, service and love towards all beings as a natural expression of the love and devotion that one feels towards God.

He also took his family's cows to graze on a nearby hillock in the Aravalli mountain range. There he is said to have engaged in *tapasyā* (meditation) of *nirguṇ* (formless) Ram while surrounded by the grazing cows. A very old, ruined building marks the spot of his meditation (Figure 2.5). Numerous couplets attributed to the saint contain explicit or implicit allusions to his association with both religions, and the remaining ruins serve as tangible evidence of his devotion to both faiths. Laldas is believed to have prayed to Ram at the mosque located near the adjacent ruined building. Another mosque from the same era was also present in close proximity (see Figure 2.6). It was at this very place that Laldas encountered Bhogari, one of his future wives. Bhogari's father, a shepherd who spent time with Laldas, had been apprehended by tax collectors of the Mughal state. The informants in the field and bards narrated that Bhogari's father was detained due to his alleged non-payment of *jamā* (rent).

By the time of this encounter between Bhogari and Laldas, he was renowned for his miracles, particularly those performed in the service of

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FIGURE 2.5 The meditation place of Laldas on the Aravalli Hills

Source: Photo by the author.

FIGURE 2.6 A mosque attached to the place of Laldas's meditation

Source: Photo by the author.

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the poor and destitute. Laldas produced a gold coin and gave it to Bhogari in order to settle her father's debt and free him from prison. But he swore her to secrecy regarding this incident. Bhogari was flattered by the saint's action and chose to marry him. Upon her father's return to the house, she informed him of her decision, and shortly thereafter, Bhogari and Laldas were married. As a result, Laldas moved on to the next stage of the Hindu life cycle, which is the stage of a householder. Laldas's marriage is significant because, in contrast to many saints, Sufis and Yogis who promoted a full detachment from the material world, it gave Meo peasants a model of householder asceticism. The saint's model of asceticism within a married life was more in tune with the peasant ideals of the Meos.

Many popular religious traditions of saints like Laldas evoked the centrality of peasant life through their teachings, including those of Tejaji among Jat peasants in Rajasthan, the cowherd god Krishna among Yadav (Ahir) peasants, Gazi Miyan among Ahir and Kurmi peasants in Uttar Pradesh and Baba Laldas among the Meos. It is important to remember here that the love for cows as an Indic phenomenon closely follows the Krishnaite tradition among cow herders.[38] Grazing, saving the life of cows and taking care of them were everyday characteristics of peasant rusticity. Both Tejaji and Gazi Miyan in the respective folklores of Rajasthan and the Gangetic belt died saving cows from Hindu attackers (Amin 2016; Bharucha 2003). Moreover, Gazi Miyan, who was an eleventh-century Muslim iconoclast known for smashing Hindu idols and historically hostile to Hinduism, gradually transformed into a figure of veneration among Hindus and Muslims. In Indo-Gangetic folklores Gazi Miyan kept company with *gvāl*s (shepherds) and vowed to protect cows—a quintessentially Indic Krishnaite theme—from Hindu perpetrators (see Amin 2016).[39] Such Indic forms of religiosities generally straddle the boundaries of mutually contrasting religious orientations. Cows had several symbolic meanings among peasant castes. Specifically, cow devotion denotes a divide between peasant and non-peasant societies, non-Brahminical and Brahmanical religiosities, and low and high cultures.

In India, animal grazing overseen by *charvāhā* or *gvāl* (shepherds) is a communal practice and a popular trope in local religions; for example, the god Krishna spent his adolescence in the company of *gvāl*s and was indulged in shepherding. Many stories reiterate and reflect the same Krishnaite theme about Laldas that he used to take risks to protect animals. Although saintly religious paths attract people from all caste backgrounds, including upper

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caste Brahmins and Baniyas of orthodox religious standing, the significance of peasant life lived by these saints invokes the religiosity of popular world where Indic themes found their most deep expression. The walls of the main shrine of Laldas in the village of Sherpur, a few kilometres away from his birthplace, are decorated in paintings depicting the saint's life. Nearly every image portrays him surrounded by cows (Figure 2.7).

Many saintly figures often come from Hindu and Muslim peasant or low caste backgrounds, and the common thread that runs through their biographies is their devotion to caring for cows and ensuring their well-being. It was popularly believed that Laldas would protect cows at any cost. In the hagiography of Laldas, a devoted follower is described to have unintentionally caused the death of a calf from his herd of cows. Overwhelmed by the circumstances, he hastily buried the deceased calf beneath a heap of hay.

FIGURE 2.7 Laldas surrounded by cows

Source: Photo by the author.

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Upon the mother cow's return from grazing, she began to moo anxiously in a desperate search for her calf, the mournful cries persisting throughout the night. Early the next morning, the follower visited Laldas and recounted the entire incident, including the cow's distressing moos. In response, the saint conveyed, 'There is nothing hidden from Ram; He is the one who grants and takes away life from all' (Dungarisi n.d.: 39–40). Laldas consistently displayed profound kindness towards cows, and as soon as the follower returned home, he witnessed the cow playing joyfully with her calf.

Although the politics around cows in north India have caused various sectarian conflicts in Mewat, many Meo people are still of the opinion that cows ought to be protected for a variety of reasons, including the socio-economic and religious significance of cows. When the Haryana Gauvans Sanarakshan and Gausamvardhan Act, 2015—also known as the Cow Protection Act—was passed, more than 200 village *pancāyat*s in Mewat declared cow slaughter to be a horrific crime and made their intentions to save the animal noticeable by implementing state policies. It was an effort to repudiate Mewat's reputation of being 'anti-cow'. The concerned *pancāyat* pledged to take decisive action against the wrongdoer, promising to hand them over to the authorities and sever ties with the offender's family. This stern stance would be enacted if anyone from the 200 villages was found guilty of engaging in cow smuggling, cow slaughter or trading of beef (*The Tribune India* 2016). Many Meos felt relieved that such a regulation will assist them in combating the false and tarnishing image of the community as 'cow smugglers', despite the fact that such an initiative was strongly entwined with the nationalistic politics of Hindutva and the cow protection drive by the ruling BJP. Consequently, many *gauśala*s (cow shelters) were opened by Meos (*The Tribune India* 2016). These newly opened cow shelters also proved to be beneficial for managing stray cows and bullocks. Due to their relatively poor milk production, compared to buffaloes, and the evolving agricultural technologies, cows were no longer a reasonably viable option for household economies. As a result, several farmers had let their cows wander the streets. The practice created yet another difficulty with crops being harmed, and it had turned into a recurring issue of how to handle stray animals, especially cows, in relation to the region's prevailing politics of cow protection. *Gauśala*s, thus, received widespread Meo support to protect their harvests from stray animals. Historically, the reasons for cow protection have varied depending upon socio-economic realities. Laldas and his Muslim followers in Mewat

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still respect and venerate cows as much as other Hindus do simply because of the peasant religiosity that provided the origin for the practice.

ORDAINED AND NON-ORDAINED *SĀDH*S

Examples of the saint's equidistance from both religions and the distinctive religious synthesis that he preached can be found in the Muslim adherents of Laldas. As was already mentioned, practically all Laldasi shrine priests are Meo Muslims known as *lāldās kā sādh*. The term *sādh* originates from *siddh*, meaning 'perfect' in meditation. Etymologically, *sādh*, *siddh* and *sādhu* are related, describing those among the Hindus who lead religiously oriented lives. A devotee of Laldas may be called a *sādh* in Mewat, but the term more commonly refers to the Meo Muslim priests who sit at Laldas's shrines, although in recent times some of the priests have also been Hindus.[40] Muslim *sādh*s traditionally performed this duty, which has brought upon them the disapproval of non-Laldasi Muslims. In one famous popular saying, the *sādh*s' lifestyle is the object of sarcasm and disapproval:

> *dāḍhī-mūnch katā ka raho risāy*
> *dono dīn sū jāyego lāldās ko sādh.*
>
> They are pleased to shave off their moustaches and beards
> They will fail both religions, these *sādh*s of Laldas.

The complexity of these religious beliefs is exemplified by the fact that the priest at the Sherpur shrine is a Muslim of Meo caste who neither observes *rojā* (fasting during the holy month of the Ramzan) nor recites the *kalmā* (the lines of the Quran)—a man who is neither a Muslim nor a Hindu but a Laldasi. Every tradition that has the potential to surpass the tenets of 'Hinduism' and 'Islam' is criticised by religious purists because it undermines the foundation upon which their beliefs rest. The conversations with a large number of Hindu and Muslim *sādh*s during fieldwork indicated that in many aspects of their personal lives, their behaviours frequently transcended religious borders and therefore was frequently criticised by the non-Laldasi Meos.

Muslim *sādh*s, particularly the older generation, do not grow beards like other Muslims, nor do they pray in mosques or observe Ramzān fasting. A

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sādh of Laldas, Nasimuddin shared that he had never consumed meat in his entire life. He believed that the saint would punish anybody who broke this custom, and as a result, no member of his family will ever disobey the saint. He recalled that on one occasion his nephew disobeyed this rule and ate meat, which led to him experiencing extreme discomfort in his stomach. Later, he was brought to the shrine to pray for forgiveness.

It is a common practice among the followers of Laldas, who are collectively referred to as Laldasis and originate primarily from the Duhlot *pāl* of Muslim Meos, to abstain from eating meat. Although the consumption of pork is forbidden, Islam does not encourage vegetarianism as a lifestyle choice. On the other side, in Hinduism, both religious and personal reasons are associated with vegetarianism. In the case of Laldasi Muslim Meos, vegetarianism embodies values of a complex religiosity that render the theological beliefs of both Hinduism and Islam superfluous. The family of Nasimuddin had been the caretakers of the Sherpur shrine for many generations, and they had always adhered to the Laldasi path. As a result of the beliefs and practices that they uphold, Meo Muslim *sādh*s are confronted with a myriad of societal problems in the areas where they live. The marriage of their children can be difficult if the prospective in-laws anticipate adherence to strict Islamic behaviour, particularly after the success of the Tablighi Jamaat in Mewat. On the day of the wedding of Nasimuddin's daughter, Muslim relatives of the groom who were of the Tablighi background insisted on providing meat at the wedding ceremony. This resulted in a fight, which ultimately led to the cancellation of the marriage.[41]

Women married into *sādh* families first pay a visit to the shrine to establish a bond with the religious order and abandon the Islamic customs of their birth families. Nasimuddin's wife, Ruksana, recollected that for her it was a smooth transition from her prior Islamic belief. She believed that the saint fortified her faith at every step in becoming a *sādh*. As was the case with Laldas himself, the *sādh*s are also family-oriented individuals who generally married Meo women but do not dine with non-Laldasi Meos. The initiation procedures which a convert like Ruksana must undergo in order to become a member of the order included showing a sincerity of faith. Traditionally, to prove that a *sādh* has given up his pride, a male *sādh* was obligated to blacken his face, ride a donkey facing backward and wear a string of shoes around his neck (Powlett 1878: 59). After that, a cup of sherbet is presented to him, and at that point, he is initiated into the order. It has been advised for Meo *sādh*s by the saint to let their homes be emptied of possessions for the welfare of

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others. In addition to providing for themselves through their own labour, a good Laldasi is expected to share some of the wealth that they have earned with others in need (Powlett 1878: 59).

Presently, these Meo Muslim *sādh*s are very few in numbers, but there are a large number of Meos who merely hold Laldas in reverence as a *pīr* and a great Meo. It appears that the only form of worship is the recitation of Ram's name and the singing of hymns; however, meditation, also known as 'keeping God's name in the heart', is said to be considered a fundamental practice for these followers. No one questioned the religious practices of Muslim Laldasis till recently, but life is more difficult, as Ruksana recalled, because other Muslims want the Meo Laldasis to uphold strict Sunni Islamic principles. Her spouse has made an exception by going to the local mosque and participating in the Eid and Bakr-e-Eid celebrations in the name of community solidarity. However, the Laldasi Meo Muslims have not yet fully departed from the fundamental principles of the order as a result of the pressure to adhere to Islamic law. Rather, it has inspired the creation of new traditions, such as modifying the Laldas-oriented traditional belief system to incorporate reformist teachings. For instance, Laldasi Muslims buy goats and offer them to someone else to sacrifice on their behalf on Bakr-e-Eid, an Islamic festival of sacrifice, to avoid going against Laldas's teachings. Hence, the two faiths are balanced to some extent by every Muslim *sādh*.

Hindus, too, in some cases, have started using the term *sādh* as a second denomination of their names. Hindu devotees of Laldas are prohibited from worshipping any goddess, as Hindu goddesses require ceremonial meat offerings. I observed that many young Hindus from Punahana who previously prayed to the Goddess Kali had to quit this practice when they embraced Laldas. The saint had come in people's dreams, exhorting them to place confidence in Sufi saints rather than a goddess, so approving and demonstrating the Laldasi path's relationship to Sufism.

Every day it is the duty of the *sādh* to bathe and open the shrine and perform *ārtī* in front of Laldas's grave at Sherpur (Figure 2.8). A group of Hindu devotees, including the members of the Sherpur temple committee,[42] join the *sādh* for evening prayers. The Muslim priest's austere lifestyle, and his performance of Hindu rituals at the saint's shrine which resembles an Islamic *dargāh*, signifies the border crossings in Indic lives. The rituals include Hindu-style *ārtī* and *bhajan*s (Hindu religious songs) with Hindu devotees. Given that they worship a wide variety of deities, the majority of Hindus do not perceive any conflict in these rituals.

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FIGURE 2.8 The current Muslim *sādh* performing *ārtī* at the Sherpur shrine
Source: Photo by the author.

Cloth offerings to both the saint and the guardians of his tomb are another example of a mixed ritual practice.[43] The grave of four *sayyed*s, located at each corner of the Sherpur shrine, symbolically served as a sign of protection for the saint's and his family's graves. Safeguarding the graves is a popular Muslim practice, and the community known as Sayyeds or Fakirs usually did this job for Meos and other Muslims in Mewat. The Islamic insignia of a *chaddar* or *galeb*, traditionally used to cover tombs, is presented to these four *sayyed*s (fakirs) as is the case with other Sufi saints. Both Hindus and Muslims use the Islamic way of reverence when presenting the cloth to Laldas and the four *sayyed*s, albeit the cloth presented to Laldas is white rather than green, as it is in Sufi *dargāh*s.

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FIGURE 2.9 White sheets offered to Laldas (*top right*), a visitor carrying sheets (*top right*) and a *sayyed*'s tomb with the green sheet (*lower left and right*)

Source: Photos by the author.

Hindu and Muslim devotees buy both white and green *chaddar*s to offer to the saint and the *sayyed*s respectively (Figure 2.9). Sallu, an elderly *sādh* who claimed to be a hundred years old, shared that the practice of offering a white *chaddar* was 'a perpetual tradition at least in my life span and probably in my father's too', not a recent change.[44] The symbolism of offering white cloth to Laldas, a customary apparel for Hindu ascetics, along with the green cloth to *sayyed*s (traditional for the Islamic dead), synthesises differing religious symbolism and practices in the *panth*.

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Laldas's Hindu, Muslim and Sikh followers, who visited the shrine in the morning and evening, followed more or less the same practice of offering grains to the shrine. They offered grain to feed animals and birds. Other offerings included oil, incense sticks, rice, corn and sweets. Every Sunday and the day before a full moon were observed as days of fasting. On these days, only one meal (dinner) was prepared in a household, after which a lamp must be lit and maintained throughout the night.

The experience of a miracle by visitors or the fulfilment of their wishes being as a result of their faith in the saint formed an important strand in their devotion to Laldas. If the wishes of a visitor to the shrine were fulfilled, that person would show gratitude to the saint in various ways, including offering a *chaddar* or installing memorabilia in the shrine.[45] Unlike many other Sufi saints who are usually worshipped on Thursdays, Laldas is customarily worshipped on Sundays, his birthday, although visitors pray at the shrine every day, most prostrating themselves in front of the grave. They then circumnavigate the grave, walking on the path between the main *sanctum* and the outer walls, Muslims reciting verses from the Quran and Hindus singing the *bhajan*s of Laldas. In addition to granting miracles and blessings, the saint served various beneficial roles in people's daily lives. The shrine was also frequently used for *pancāyat* meetings to settle disagreements, as it was believed that witnesses would not lie within the premises. It was a common belief that the saint would personally supervise the procedures. When someone's sincerity needed to be proven, the community would bring him to the shrine, place some rice in his hand and ask the *sādh* to recite some lines from the Quran or offer prayers to the saint. If the rice turned red, it indicated guilt for the offender. Also, I witnessed a land dispute between two families. The dispute had remained unsolved for a long time. Both factions agreed to a final hearing in the shrine. Snacks and beverages were provided, and some older people were asked to oversee the event. Nobody objected to the final decision, and it went as easily as a conversation in a dining room. This attests to the continuing importance of the saint within the area.

To briefly sum up here, through his teachings, Laldas was opposed to the pre-existing social and religious hierarchy. This is consistent with the views of other Bhakti personalities, such as Kabir, Ravidas and Dadu.[46] Caste and religious identities were concepts that were questioned by a number of saints who came from a lower socio-economic background. The teachings of Laldas reflected the specific caste connections of the Meo community towards both religions and the rural background of his family and

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community. His primary concern was the transcendence of institutional religiosities related to mainstream 'Hinduism' and 'Islam' through the imbrication of Meo relationships with vernacular and acculturated forms of religiosities, thereby making the boundaries between the two religions more fluid. This was accomplished by merging beliefs in his order. Religious orders such as that of the Laldas expressed a distinct form of religiosity while simultaneously diminishing the significance of the religious categories of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'. In spite of this, the preoccupation with maintaining one's religious identity gradually grew dominant at the shrines of Laldas. Chapter 3 will analyse the emergence of disputes between the Meo and the Baniya Laldasis around the traditional shrines of Laldas to understand the changing form of religious culture and to describe the reasons behind those disputes.

NOTES

1. Dungarisi Sadh published the biography of his guru Laldas called *Sri Laldas Maharaj ki paricawali* (The introduction of Laldas) in *doha-caupai* (couplets/quadruplets). This is a narrative poem written in simple Mewati and comprised of roughly 580 verses. It is broken up into 31 *nukta*s, which can be translated as 'small chapters'. It is the only historical biography of Laldas that has been found.
2. Although Dungarisi is said to have compiled the verses of Laldas, other portions of the text such as the biographical *nuktāvalī* seem to have been added later. Since it is the work of many authors and the verses are not identifiable, I am treating it as anonymous but will refer to the cited couplets under the name of Dungarisi Sadh. The verses are of unknown dates. All these couplets from the text are in Appendix A.1.
3. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of the verses throughout the book are mine. I take responsibility for any errors.
4. Masuzawa (2005) points out that the category of religion is based on a particular understanding of what counts as 'belief' and 'practice'. This understanding is shaped by Christian theology and assumes that religion involves belief in a transcendent reality and the worship of a deity or deities. However, many non-European cultures do not fit this model of religion, and their belief systems were often classified as 'superstition' or 'magic' by Europeans. Similarly, the model of 'world-religions' is problematic, too.

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5. These aforementioned popular stories of Laldas appear in the hagiography, along with other tales of Laldas's miracles. These also appear in the accounts of the colonial ethnographer and British colonial settlement officer P. W. Powlett, who undertook an extensive survey of Alwar state in the 1850s and wrote the *Gazetteer of Ulwar* in 1878. Powlett (1878: 53–60) cites many verses of the hagiography under the subheading '*panthi*s or sects' in the chapter on religion. This provides some idea of the earliest date of the circulation of this hagiography: probably sometime between the late seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries. Powlett and other sources indicate the verses were already in circulation before his survey work. Powlett describes Laldas as the most famous saint of the area.
6. In exploring the identity of Laldas in general, Hayat (2016) notes the distinctive nature of the saint, although he ultimately accepts the suggestion of Laldas's Punjab origin (Lahore, presently in Pakistan). Hayat's conviction about the time frame of the several meetings between Laldas and Shukoh, that is, before 1654, follows the works of Hasrat (1952) and Qanungo (1952), while Wilson assumes it to be in 1649. Hayat, however, agrees that the time period and the number of the meetings remain ambiguous. There is no mention of these cases in the historical manuscripts and sources. Indeed, sources refer to the impossibility of any interaction between the Mewati Laldas and Dara Shukoh, as the former is believed to have died in 1648.
7. Among all the available variants, Hayat (2016: 13) notes there are six manuscripts and two texts that record these dialogues. Hayat's list includes eight works and a partial mention to one other work. Kept in various archives and libraries in London and Berlin, the manuscripts and texts are available in Persian, English and Hindi languages. Hayat meticulously notes the minute differences in all these works.
8. Fieldwork, July 2016, Saharanpur.
9. In Hindu mythology, Bhagirath was responsible for bringing the river Ganga from the heavens to the earth. Shiva, residing on mount Kailash, then channeled her through his thick locks.
10. In Saharanpur, Laldas was a good friend of a Muslim saint called Haji Shah Kamaal. The extraordinary friendship between the two is still a unique symbol of communal harmony. Haji Shah Kamaal remained in the vicinity of Laldas and took spiritual advice from him. A *majār* (tomb) of Shah Kamaal is located next to Laldas's temple. Both saints are said to have followed the same lifestyle.

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11. Jaggas are a community of Brahmin genealogical recordkeepers in Mewat. The state acknowledges that the Jagga documents are credible pieces of historical and legal evidence.
12. Many cheap pamphlets about Laldas have the title 'the great saint of Mewat and the symbol of communal harmony'.
13. Bhakti and Sufism are movements of theistic devotion in Hinduism and Islam. While Bhakti spread from south to north India from the tenth century onwards (Hawley 2015a), the currents of Sufism arrived in India around the thirteenth century from the Persian and the Arab world (Ernst and Lawrence 2016). Central to the practices of both traditions are mysticism and god-centred meditation. Both Bhakti and Sufi ideas were also circulated through collections of the teachings and sayings of numerous saints, disseminated through songs and oral presentations, which were centred on devotion to one God (in Sufi Islam and *nirguṇ bhakti*) or multiple gods and goddesses such as Ram, Vishnu, Krishna, Shiva, Durga and Kali in other Bhakti traditions (Hawley 2011; Prentiss 1999; Schomer and McLeod 1987; Vaudeville 1993). Saints of both traditions inspired poetry, musical cultures such as classical *rāg*s and *qawwalī*, advocated socio-religious reforms and through their teachings challenged and sometimes reinforced religious orthodoxy and orthodox practices.
14. The ethnic label 'Turk' shows the multifarious nature and various ways of identification with religious identity.
15. The coming of the Turko-Persian and Sufi versions of Islam to north India added one more dimension to the diversity of traditions on the subcontinent. The period from the seventh to twelfth centuries was marked by the dominance of Shaivite traditions in which the god Shiva and many *tāntric* goddesses acquired supreme standing in the court culture of the ruling classes. Closely related to Shaivite philosophy were the Naths and yogis, whose anti-institutional ideas opposed the Brahminical hierarchies of society. Later, the Naths and extreme Shaivite yogis had a particular interaction with the Brahmanical as well as Bhakti and Sufi movements (Burchett 2019). Nath (Jogi/Yogi) Shaivism, Bhakti and Sufism were, thus, reflexive currents challenging orthodoxy and societal norms, and advocating alternative realities. According to Ernst (2005), by the time Sufism arrived in India at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Nath yogis, strong proponents of an anti-Brahminical society, were already organised into a group similar to Sufis. The encounter between the two led to an exchange of practices, such

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as Hatha yoga being adopted by the Sufis (Bouillier 2015). Many scholars also believe that Sufis later influenced the poetry of the *nirguṇ bhakti* saints (Horstmann 2014) as well as their (inner) vision of God (Vaudeville 1987).

16. The term *nuktāvalī* is made of *nuktā* + *avalī* words, whereby the *nuktā* stands for 'couplet' and *avalī* for 'collection', meaning 'the collection of couplets'. The *nuktāvalī* is the first part of the 600-page-long handwritten text. Although the first part is compiled by Dunagarisi Sadh as the text mentions it, the task is equally difficult to date the text and the circulation of hymns.
17. I am very grateful particularly to Anand Sadh, Ramnaresh Sadh and Sonu Aggrawal, among others, for providing me with a copy of the text *Śrī lāldās nuktāvalī*. Though the date of compilation of the text is not known, I assume it to be from the 1940s to 1950s on the basis of the written style of Hindi.
18. The English translation of the couplet completely loses its rhyming characteristics. Readers of the Hindi language would be able to grasp this nuance in the verse.
19. Linguistic duopoly refers to the dual connection of the Mewati dialect, a spoken Indo-Aryan dialect, with the Hindi and Urdu languages. In the text, *nuktāvalī*, words of Mewati, are used with Hindi, Sanskrit and Urdu words. The style in the text is similar to rhyming scriptures. Bakshi (2012) argues that 'Mewati is possibly undergoing a shift towards Hindi-Urdu with Urdu playing a key part due to its associations with Islamic identity' (234). The large presence of the Tablighi Jamaat–run *madrasa*s is also pushing this shift towards Urdu.
20. Ramanujan's (1989) 'intertextuality' incorporates different forms of 'reflexivity', a key for understanding the relations between various Indian literary traditions of myths and folktales.
21. For instance, motives, words, symbols and narrative frameworks produced in Sanskrit, Hindi and Urdu were extensively used in Mewati in a reflexive manner in producing the Mewati versions of the Hindu epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.
22. *Mustaqīm* (Mustaqeem) is an Arabic term which also denotes the quality of being 'upright' or 'righteous' in conduct.
23. All the verses cannot be cited here. They repeatedly appeal to Hindus and Muslims to follow *nirguṇ bhakti*.
24. The common idea between most *nirguṇ bhakti* and Sufi saints was that they identified God as one and as a formless entity. Many Bhakti and Sufi saints were poets or at least their sayings have been collected and transcribed in the form of poetry. Their philosophical positions ranged from monotheism

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and dualism to absolute monism. However, most saints were mainly regional, expressing variations in teachings, devotional practices and ritual observance. The world of Sufism and Bhakti cannot be understood as uniform sects or movements; diversity, complexity, ambiguity, complex interactions within and between the two are their major features. Avoiding essentialist categorisation of both must involve what Carl Ernst (2005) calls 'the polythetic approach to religion' (20), in which 'numerous examples of hybrid and multiplex symbols, practices, and doctrines can be at work in any particular religious *milieu*' (21). Bhakti and Sufism in north India reached their zenith between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many saints became identified as the founders of religions, *panth*s, orders, cults and sects. For instance, the Sikh religion was founded by a famous Bhakti saint Guru Nanak.

25. The concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* originated with the Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi in the twelfth century and has since been developed and discussed by many other Sufi scholars and philosophers. According to this concept, everything that exists is a reflection of the divine reality, and all creatures are ultimately one with the divine. In other words, the Creator and the created are not separate entities but rather one and the same. God alone is the all-embracing and eternal reality.
26. *Waḥdat al-wujūd* literally means 'the Unity of Existence' or 'the Unity of Being'. *Wujūd*, meaning 'existence' or 'presence', here refers to God. This concept has been interpreted in different ways by different scholars and practitioners of Sufism and has been criticised for being too abstract or mystical. However, for many Sufis, the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is a fundamental tenet of their faith and a source of spiritual inspiration and guidance. It is seen as a way to experience the divine presence in all things and to cultivate a sense of oneness with the universe.
27. While there is little explicit representation of Islamic aspects in the text, a careful reading of the couplets indirectly points to this aspect.
28. Here I borrow from Victor Turner's (1969) theory of liminality and its development by scholars such as Shail Mayaram and Dominique Sila Khan (D. Khan 2004a: 1–10, 2004b; Mayaram 1997c, 2004a). In his analysis of a three-phased ritual process, Turner (1969) notes that liminality is the transition phase of an individual from one state to another (94–96, 101–08). Participants are first detached from their previous social life and identity and spend most of the time in an inter-structural zone, which is neither here nor there. Liminal entities straddle thresholds; they are betwixt and between,

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representing margins and ambiguity. For instance, according to Turner (1969), 'deaths, being in the womb, invisibility, darkness, bisexuality, an eclipse of the sun or moon depict liminal situations' (94–130) and are stages of separation from fixed points in society. Liminality can be a permanent state or move into new phases (post-liminality) accompanied by transformed identities.

29. The concept of liminality itself requires the social recognition of bounded categories—a liminal entity generally falls between two such mutually inconsistent categories; for more information, see Douglas (2002). Douglas notes that the danger is perceived precisely because the liminal condition is not 'pure', not clearly within the categories.
30. Brahminical Hinduism has been criticised for its narrow and exclusive worldview. It tends to view the world through a lens of hierarchy and binary oppositions, such as pure and impure, good and evil, and us and them. This has led to a lack of tolerance for diversity and alternative perspectives and has resulted in conflict and violence against marginalised communities and religious minorities. Brahmanical Hinduism advocates visiting temples and offering ritual services to an idol or image. It bolsters the role of Brahmins as mediators between God and human beings. As per the sayings of many Bhakti saints and poets, who criticised the authority of Brahmins in their teachings, the mediation of Brahmins hinders any possibility of communicating directly or having a meaningful relationship with God.
31. Liminality implies an anti-structural stance and emphasises the phase of transformations and its emphasis on ambiguous scenarios. It is linked with the ideas of threshold and transition, referring to a betwixt and between status, or something which is neither here nor there. The term was used by Turner to understand the life of a Ndembu youth in terms of phases. Youth or the period of initiation was referred to as a period of transformation or a liminal phase.
32. Based on this understanding, both Mayaram and Sila Khan (D. Khan 2004a, b; Mayaram 1997b, c, 2004c) prefer the concept of liminality over syncretism as it implies the existence of 'a line of thought that emphasizes "fuzzy" thinking as an alternative to binary logic of "either/or"' (D. Khan 2004b: 212). However, Sila Khan uses 'threshold' instead of liminal in the study of understanding Hindu–Muslim religious identities in South Asia.
33. One problem in Mayaram and Khan's analyses of 'liminal' or 'threshold communities' is that all members of a liminal group are imagined to be ritually and religiously engaged in following a uniform set of practices, although

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their identities are rightly pointed out to be liminal. Understanding the life of liminal individuals of a liminal group as uniform leads one to believe that all liminal participants behave religiously, ritually and politically in the same way as other liminal members. It assumes that all liminal participants follow a set of liminal or threshold guidelines beyond which liminal participants do not go. In short, liminality has been considered a bounded category, without scholars problematising and reflecting on internal diversity. On the other hand, when such groups are taken as homogeneous, internal contradictions are completely erased. In most accounts, liminal groups are referred to homogeneously as if their liminal identity is synonymous with the behaviour of every liminal individual. The assumption is that everyone else is behaviourally the same in the betwixt and between period.

34. Taking into account the general consensus among scholars on the terms 'Islamicate' and 'Indic', the Mewat region represents a typical Indic world. It refers also to any other particular tradition followed and influenced by more than one religious community, which cannot be characterised purely in terms of Hindu, Muslim, Christian or any other religious categories but are generally influenced by South Asian religious narratives. However, Indic practices indicate a context where relationships, religious practices and beliefs in South Asia are not static even in liminal and shared pluralistic contexts. Indic forms of interconnections prioritise shared values and shared lives instead of a bounded, discrete and monolithic analysis of religious and other closely associated categories.
35. Such messages are common among the saints of Nath, Bhakti and Sufi backgrounds. The idea was to emphasise a form of religiosity meant for all humans, the one beyond religious differences. Often, their teachings promoted peace, love, harmony and equality by using a religious vocabulary. In the Bhakti tradition, spiritual leadership was most often in the hands of low and middle caste-class saints. The authority of the Brahmins and the Sanskrit traditions was replaced by devotional songs in vernacular languages to emphasise universal righteousness (Schomer and McLeod 1987).
36. Punjabi and Bengali Muslims were spiritually dependent on miracles and magic to a degree incompatible with a genuine belief in any omnipotent god (Eaton 2004; Mujeeb 1985). In the 1901 Census of India, Bengali Muslims were reported to be joining in the Durga Puja, worshipping the Sitala and Rakshya goddesses during epidemics and using Hindu astrologers and almanacs in their everyday lives (Eaton 2004: 110–25). The cult of mother goddesses had great popularity in the initial years of Islamisation in Bengal. For instance,

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the sixteenth-century Bengali poet Sayyad Murtaza addressed Fatima (the daughter of Prophet Mohammed) as Jagat Janani (the mother of the world) (Eaton 2004: 114).

37. Many anecdotes of offering a yellow heifer were repeatedly told to me.
38. The terms 'Indic' and 'peasant' continue to mutually define each other by borrowing tropes, symbolism, language, semiotic and elements of religious cosmology from diverse religious traditions, ways of being and various, including but not limited to hunting-gathering and agricultural, modes of resource use. Religious and caste communities of peasant origins commonly share similar stories with identical plots. There is a long history of peasant communities living an Indic form of life. These communities have their own distinctive cultural practices and beliefs, and they have played an important role in shaping the shared social and economic landscape. Their socio-religious customs continue to be deeply connected with Indic practices without strongly identifying with one institutional religious category or another. For instance, all these peasant communities continue to engage with what Afsar Mohammad (2013: 3) calls 'localised Islam' at the Sufi shrines of Muslim holy saints known as *pīr*s within a frame of peasant and rustic-inflected devotional religiosities.
39. Another typical example of Indic is the worship of the Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya as Krishna.
40. The Hindu *sādh*s belong to diverse communities (Brahmans, Gujjars and Badhai) and are currently performing priestly rites at two different Laldasi shrines. It is not clear when they began this role.
41. Nasimuddin suggested they eat meat outside the premises of the Laldas shrine but not within the premises where they live.
42. This committee was recently formed. More information about it comes in Chapter 4.
43. These protectors or guardians are called fakirs or *sayyed*s.
44. Interview with Sallu, 10 August 2016, Alwar.
45. People donated all kinds of things such as watches, money, images, calendars and so on to be kept in the shrines once their wishes had been fulfilled.
46. See Callewaert and Friedlander (1992) and Friedlander (1996: 106–23), especially for Saint Ravidas's concerns for salvation in the social context of the struggle between Bhakti saints and the orthodox Brahminical tradition.

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3

THE LALDAS SHRINES AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DISPUTES

> Sherpur, nine miles north-east of Ramgarh, is remarkable for the tomb of Laldas, whose body is said to have come to Sherpur from the neighbouring Bharatpur village of Nagla, six months after death and burial. The tomb is a very substantial masonry building 100 feet long, with a high dome, and walls 5 feet thick. The interior is vaulted and low. The body of Laldas lies in a crypt several feet below the surface. Many other members of Laldas's family were interred at Sherpur. (Powlett 1878: 153)

When I began my fieldwork, I visited the Laldas shrine in Sherpur under the impression that it was a temple. However, upon approaching the structure, I noticed that its dome was somewhat atypical and gave it the appearance of a tomb rather than a temple. Unlike north Indian temples, which typically feature tower-like canopies, the shrine of Laldas had the usual architectural style of an Indo-Islamic structure (as shown in Figure 3.1). Additionally, there were a number of saffron-coloured flags hoisted at the top of the domes. As I explored the site, it became clear that this building was not a conventional Hindu temple, even though there were many Hindu symbols present.

A massive hoarding with the slogan *pujaniya sant śrī 108 bābā śri lāldās mahārāj jī* (The holy saint *śri* 108 Baba Laldas *maharaj*), a common epithet for a Hindu saint, stood above the main gate of the outer wall with the Hindu *svāstika* marks on both sides. From outside, the symbols and iconography (except for the dome and the *sayyed*s' graves at the four corners) gave the

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FIGURE 3.1 A side view of the Sherpur shrine
Source: Photo by the author.

shrine building its striking appearance of a temple. Overall, these Hindu symbols currently overpower Islamic symbols and shared aspects in these traditional shrines transforming the overall appearance and nature of the order.

The Hindu devotees are committed to remove all the Islamic symbols from the religious order, which also includes replacing the Meo Muslim priests (*sādh*s) with Brahmins on the priestly seats. These attempts of omitting all traces of shared heritage and Islamic architectural remains, such as the domes and mosques, from the shrines indicate a strong desire among the Baniya community to appropriate the saint according to their own devotional practices. As a result, the Hindu Laldasis have been trying to erase or modify the symbolic and architectural traces of a shared religious history from the Laldas shrines. The matter has sparked numerous conflicts between the two factions of followers.

Initially, some Muslim residents of Sherpur indicated to me the presence of the two non-operational mosques inside the Laldas shrine complex, one on

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FIGURE 3.2 The decommissioned mosque at the Laldas shrine
Source: Photo by the author.

the top of the main shrine's sanctum-sanctorum and the other in the exterior courtyard in front of the main entrance (Figure 3.2). These mosques were once utilised by Muslim villagers to offer *namāz*, but they are now closed. In recent decades, Hindu Laldasis forced the decommissioning of these

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mosques. However, disputes over the Laldas shrines and these mosques first arose around the time of the Partition of India in 1947 and are attributable to the Hindu Laldasis' ownership of the shrines following the emergence of numerous conflicts with the Meo Laldasis.

Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there is no historical evidence of disputes at the three major shared shrines of Laldas.[1] But, during the twentieth century, these sites underwent a transformation and are now contested religious places between the Hindu and Muslim Laldasis. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the demonstration of one religious community's dominance over the other with reference to shared/mixed shrines has frequently occurred on a global scale (Hayden et al. 2016). One of the parties that share a sacred site either seizes or demolishes the existing symbols of the other religion from the shrines (Hayden 2002: 205). For instance, Hagia Sophia in Istanbul was converted from a Greek Orthodox Church into a museum and then into a mosque.[2] Similarly, in India, a great number of shared sacred spaces are in danger of losing their identity as liminal/hybrid ritual spaces and being labelled as 'Hindu' shrines (see Sikand 2002b).[3] These holy sites have become centres of contention, with fierce religious rivalry. The most notable example is the Babri mosque,[4] which became a disputed site around the time of India's independence (Ludden 1996). Likewise, Hindus and Muslims have contested countless other sacred spaces with time, particularly shrines of Bhakti and Sufi saints (Bellamy 2011; Sikand 2002b, 2003). Sikand (2002b), for example, lists five shared shrines contested by Hindu and Muslim factions in Karnataka alone. Most contestations were over identity, ritual and ownership of space. I investigate here the interreligious disputes at the Laldas shrines to identify what caused these antagonistic attitudes and sporadic acts of violence between Hindu and Muslim followers of the saint.[5] Passive forms of intolerance and disputes surrounding these shrines may be better described by using Hayden's (2002; Hayden et al. 2016) study of sharing sacred spaces. Some of the ways in which inter- and intra-religious and theological tensions result in new material developments around mixed sacred sites indicate the nature and changing patterns of dominance.[6]

Contestations often arise at Sufi graves and Bhakti saints' shrines due to frequent interactions between members of various religious groups, leading to a gradual display of dominance over each other (Hayden et al. 2016). Although many saints like Laldas preached the transcendence of religious boundaries, adherents of 'pure Islam' advocated by Sunnis and 'orthodox Hindus' are

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attempting to reinterpret the teachings of these saints to conform to their current worldviews. Consequently, members of both religious communities seek to either demonstrate a saint's irrelevance to a particular religion (by Sunni followers of 'true Islam') or assimilate them into the current standard definition of 'religion' (by most adherents of 'orthodox Hinduism'). As a result, with its preaching of a unique theological synthesis, the religious order of Laldas has been converted from a liminal collection of beliefs into a zone of intense religious conflict.

Contrary to the dominant scholarly view that disputes over sacred sites are 'the product of religious forces beyond the influence of political actors' (Hassner 2003: 4; Sikand 2002b), I argue that the contestations were not only reflections of local and national politics but also evidence of the evolution of new dimensions in local religious cultures. These developments were undoubtedly also influenced by the changing dynamics and co-relationships between social communities across time and space. Some of the main religious differences were primarily related to the emergence of new devotional patterns, newer forms of religiosity in conjunction with economic transformations and the reinforcement of some traditional religious beliefs among the Meos and the Baniyas. Laldas's shrines and symbols, as well as the Muslim custodians traditionally associated with the saint's sites, have been destabilised and transformed as the order's identity is being redefined. In the sections that follow, the emergence of competitive sharing, the passive meaning of tolerance and examples of low-intensity violence in the vicinity of the Laldas shrines are discussed.

THE EMERGENCE OF DISPUTES

Regarding the controversies surrounding the Laldas shrines, the historical records of Alwar from the first half of the twentieth century shed some light on the complexities of these interreligious contestations. From these records, it emerges that these confrontations at the shrines date back nearly a century. The first serious interreligious conflict occurred at the shrine of Dholidoob, where the saint's parents are buried; many Meos were arrested in 1914 and 1932 for offering *namāz* at this disputed site (Figure 3.3).[7] A police inspector who investigated the incident also reported similar communal tensions at the main shrine of Sherpur in 1939.[8] Laldasis of both Muslim and Hindu factions

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FIGURE 3.3 The Dholidoob shrine of Laldas, Alwar

Source: Photo by the author.

frequently levelled accusations against one another, claiming that the other party was either 'Islamising' or 'Hinduising' the shrines, respectively. The officer found no concrete proof to back up their respective claims, but several court documents from Alwar's archives confirm his version of the conflict in question. The matter of offering *namāz* at these two Laldas shrines arose sporadically throughout the first half of the twentieth century.[9]

In a lawsuit filed in 1945 in the princely court of the Maharaja of Alwar, the Baniya Laldasis accused the Meo Laldasis of transforming the Dholidoob shrine into a mosque by offering Islamic prayer (*namāz*) there.[10] The civil suit filed by Hindu Laldasis on 21 November 1945 included the names of six Meo Muslim individuals who allegedly 'desecrated' a 'temple' by organising an Islamic prayer. The court was urged to prohibit the accused from calling *azān* and offering *namāz*.

A month later the accused Meos lodged an objection to this appeal, and on 17 January 1946, the Munsiff Court issued a temporary restraining order against the Muslim Laldasis. Afterwards, the appellate court later ruled that

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> the Hindu Laldasis were entitled to full possession over the front part of the shrine and the Meo Laldasis were entitled to perform *namāz* in the back portion.[11]

This decision did not put an end to the controversy due to the insistence of both factions on removing completely the symbols of the other from the shrine. Consequently, there were a number of other episodes of confrontations between the two groups regarding defining the identity of the saint and the nature of his shrines. When the matter became more serious, the prime minister of the princely state of Alwar took an active part to deal with the ongoing conflicts. He consulted both parties to reach an amicable agreement. It was ultimately decided that the status quo would be preserved and that both factions would retain their right to worship at the shrine. Hindu-style prayers and Islamic *namāz* began to be offered in the front and the back portions of the Dholidoob shrine. These developments were unique as the Laldasis, according to the teachings of the saint, were not supposed to be much concerned with *ārtī* (Hindu prayers) or *namāz*. Laldas had urged his followers to rise above the religious identities and practices of institutional religions. But almost 300 years later, his followers were contesting against each other to define him within rigid institutional religious boundaries. However, there is no trace of disputes around such notions before the twentieth century.

Both factions continued to report occasional complaints of disturbances during their respective prayer sessions. The situation remained stable until September 1946, when the Hindu Laldasis insisted on observing Laldas's *srāddh* in the shrine, a Hindu ceremony for commemorating the death of parents and ancestors. This issue rekindled the conflict. The prime minister ordered the deployment of police at the site and instructed the district magistrate to fix separate times for *namāz* and *ārtī*. Hindu and Muslim Laldasis again continued to attend the Dholidoob shrine of the saint. The *srāddh* ceremony of the saint was observed on 24 September 1946 in the evening following the *namāz*. The celebration of this event apparently triggered a confrontation between the factions in which several Hindu Laldasis were hurt, including four policemen.[12] The whole incident eventually led to the arrest of many Meos who were holding a *pancāyat* (a caste-council meeting) related to the matter on the same day.

The debate and discussions surrounding the clash reflected the ongoing debate about nation and nationality at that time, which revolved around the status of Muslims in an independent India. The Hindu Sabha of Alwar, a

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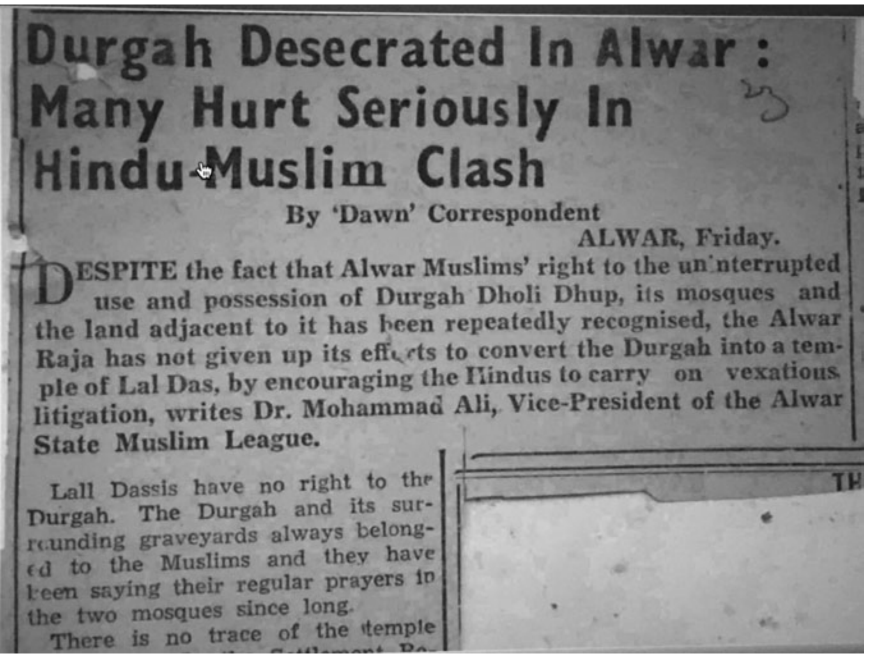

Durgah Desecrated In Alwar : Many Hurt Seriously In Hindu-Muslim Clash

By 'Dawn' Correspondent

ALWAR, Friday.

DESPITE the fact that Alwar Muslims' right to the uninterrupted use and possession of Durgah Dholi Dhup, its mosques and the land adjacent to it has been repeatedly recognised, the Alwar Raja has not given up its efforts to convert the Durgah into a temple of Lal Das, by encouraging the Hindus to carry on vexatious litigation, writes Dr. Mohammad Ali, Vice-President of the Alwar State Muslim League.

Lall Dassis have no right to the Durgah. The Durgah and its surrounding graveyards always belonged to the Muslims and they have been saying their regular prayers in the two mosques since long.

There is no trace of the temple

FIGURE 3.4 A news report about the dispute, 1946, by the *Dawn*

Source: District Archives, Alwar.

regional branch of the All India Hindu Mahasabha,[13] immediately condemned the attack on Hindus and demanded harsh punishment for those responsible for the incident. In a similar manner, the Alwar branch of the Muslim League defended Muslims in a lengthy letter to the prime minister of Alwar.[14]

Concerns of both parties were confined to their own respective religious communities, indicating the bounded notion of communities that had become entrenched in the region in the twentieth century. This issue also caught the attention of the media, religious organisations and political parties. For instance, on 6 October 1946, the *Dawn* newspaper, which was founded by Muhammed Ali Jinnah of the Muslim League, wrote: 'Durgah Desecrated in Alwar: Many Hurt Seriously in Hindu–Muslim Clash' (Figure 3.4). In the same edition, the *Dawn* cited this incident as evidence of Hindu oppression of Muslims to support the call for a separate nation of Pakistan:

> [I]t is high time that the Indian Musalmans tell their leaders that they are prepared to make all sacrifices which the *Qaed-e-Azam* [Mohammed

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> Ali Jinnah] in his political prudence may demand, and now they are in a position to stand on their legs in order to march to the gates of triumph. (*The Dawn* 1946)

Hindu and Muslim politico-religious organisations actively framed the discussion to serve their contemporary political objectives. Muslims accused Hindu Laldasis of desecrating the mosque in the *dargāh*, and Hindus accused Muslim Laldasis of converting the temple of Laldas into a mosque. Throughout the dispute, both Hindu and Muslim factions of Laldas remained highly critical of different symbolic religious aspects present in the shrine. Muslim advocates constantly referred to the Hinduising of the site and the desecration of Islamic symbols. For instance, the president of the Alwar Muslim League reported a conversation with the Imam of the mosque of Laldas's Dholidoob shrine, saying that the minarets in the west of the premises had been dismantled and the holy Quran thrown away.[15] Muslims also objected to the hanging of *jhālar* (furbelows) and garlands of flowers as in a temple. Similarly, Hindus protested that Muslims were converting the shrines into mosques by destroying Hindu symbols, such as idols and images of the saint, furbelows and garlands. Regardless of the reality of the claims, it is evident that these allegations of sacrilege were also an attempt to erase evidence of a shared past of the religious order.

These religious transformations are closely related to changes in socio-economic structure and the interrelationships of various social groups sharing a locale. The changes in religious forms also track changes in political dominance, locally and more widely—thus considering 'religion' as a reflective sphere rather than necessarily a causative factor (Hayden et al. 2016). Here, Hayden's notion of 'religioscapes' is useful in the sense that it refers to social space being marked physically by the religious use of a shrine by mutually competing religious communities. These religious groups not only see themselves as belonging to different 'religions' but also form their respective 'religioscapes' around a shared/mixed shrine (Hayden et al. 2016). Moreover, when two of these religioscapes remain in contact for long, the features of a sacred space in proximity to one another will reveal the power dynamics between the two groups.[16]

Although the entire dispute remained shrouded and attracted less attention than the Partition violence in the state in 1947, these contestations took on a new form in the post-independence period. Due to the persecution experienced during the Partition, a significant number of Meos either

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migrated to Pakistan or opted to settle in regions outside of the princely state of Alwar (Copland 1998; Mayaram 1997a). As a result, the Hindu Laldasis gradually gained control of these contested sites during this turbulent period. Once the Hindu Laldasis gained control of all the Laldas shrines against the backdrop of anti-Muslim violence in the state, they strengthened it further in the post-independent phase. So, between the 1950s and 1990s, the shrines remained relatively peaceful due to Muslims' vulnerability in the area and the comparatively increasing lack of interest in devotion to saints. The Hindu majority, however, had already begun the process of gradually capturing and transforming these shrines into temples. By this time, Hindu Baniya devotees had formed a trust to manage the temple properties, organise fairs and festivals, and keep the shrines as 'Hindu temples'.[17]

This process of redefining the religious identity and practice of the Laldas order was also aided by the stance of the Tablighis, who desired a complete dissociation between local Muslims and such saints.[18] Tablighi Jamaat activists encouraged Muslims to neglect these shrines and the graves of saints. The Tablighi form of Islam had already made inroads among the Meos following the Partition of 1947 (Sikand 2002a; Mayaram 1997a). Many Tablighis asserted that Allah did not protect many Meos during the violence of the Partition because they were not 'proper' Muslims (Sikand 2002a; Mayaram 1997a). In this way, the Tablighis began to change the traditional meaning and practice of 'local Islam' by completely discarding the role of saints in Islam. Instead, they attested a global form of 'Islam' strongly premised upon the idea of religious 'purity' dictated by Islamic texts such as the Quran and the Hadith. The notion of religious purity required the Meo community to renounce their 'mixed' traditions and the conventional religious association with a saint in favour of 'authentic' Islam by mostly its Sunni followers.

As far as the most recent dispute at the Sherpur shrine of Laldas is concerned, it occurred in 2012 (Parashar 2012), when the Hindu Laldasis who currently controlled the shrine tried to install an idol of the Hindu god Shiva. The Meo villagers and *sādh*s resisted this move on the grounds that it would bring about some 'dramatic' changes within the shrine. In response to this opposition, the Baniyas made an appeal to the local branches of right-wing Hindu organisations, such as the RSS, the Shiv Sena and the Bajrang Dal.[19] The right-wing activists outpoured in large numbers from neighbouring areas and demonstrated with firearms.[20] For the first time in the history of the dispute, Meo villagers were forced to flee their homes in order to protect themselves. Meo villagers had not witnessed anything of this magnitude

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since the time of the Partition. Moreover, Muslims did not respond in the same manner for two reasons: the Hindu majority's clear domination and the Tablighi Jamaat's success in preventing saint veneration among the majority of Muslims. In addition, Muslim political organisations were more concerned with preserving peace and order than with combating Hindus. But the idol of Shiva could not be restored finally. When the idol was placed on the premises, it unexpectedly shattered into pieces, leading Hindu worshippers to interpret it as a sign of the saint's anger. Consequently, they abandoned the proposal, and the disagreement did not escalate any further.

The Hindu Laldasis admitted in various legal proceedings that the Laldas order belonged to both Hindus and Muslims, but a process of slow Hinduisation had already begun and continues to this day (analysed in the next chapter). Hayden (2002: 228) contends that

> processes of competition between groups that distinguish themselves from each other may be manifested as syncretism yet still result, ultimately, in the omission of the symbols of one group or another from a shrine.

This perfectly describes the current scenario at the Laldas shrines. The omission of Islamic symbols and the simultaneous inclusion of new symbols is a well-planned strategy to place the Laldas shrines within Hinduism. The mosques in the shrines are completely abandoned, although not demolished. On multiple recent instances of renovation, the minarets have been remodelled to resemble temple domes. Saffron flags and Hindu symbols such as the 'Om' give the shrines an overwhelming appearance of Hindu temples. However, the Muslim *sādh*s, the graves in the shrines and the presence of two mosques on the premises continue to indicate the complexities of the religious order.

I contend that since the time of saint, there has been a substantial shift in the meanings of the terms 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'.[21] The terms 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' existed prior to British colonialism; they were not exclusively colonial inventions (Lorenzen 1999). Moreover, Hinduism was always defined by diversity in religious beliefs, practices and cultural life.[22] In fact, the term 'Hinduism' was not used in its contemporary political sense at least until the late British colonial period.[23] The anecdotes of Laldas evidently proved the complexity of these interactions in the evolution of institutionalised forms of religious identities.[24] Moreover, prior to the twentieth century, the Hindu

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and Muslim followers of Laldas were not concerned with situating the saint in a specific 'religion'. Before the twentieth century, religious identities were more fluid and marked by a more complex religious engagement in shared settings. An increasing conviction in the (need for) homogeneity of religious communities was the root cause of the current contentious nature of shared spaces. This idea also changed liminal and shared religious practices at the local level. The concept of a single Hindu or Muslim community in Alwar was gradually formed over time. As a result of numerous different influences, including the shifting form of religious cultures across social communities of varying economic backgrounds, these shared spaces began to reflect wider disputes in the state. Furthermore, the changing political climate in India has also contributed to the transformation of the dynamics of socio-religious interactions. The rise of Hindu nationalism and the increasing polarisation of communities in the twentieth century had further fuelled inter-religious conflicts. The disputes at the shared shrines of Laldas were also influenced by communal relations in Alwar, to which I turn my attention next.

COMMUNAL RELATIONS IN ALWAR

Since the political and religious worlds are often closely interwoven, disputes at shared sacred places can mirror broader societal concerns. In the twentieth century, India's divisive colonial and post-colonial religious politics reached their zenith, impacting all aspects of social and religious life, including socio-religious interactions surrounding shared shrines. The political sphere encompassed and profoundly affected the uniform notions of disparate 'religions' in making. Twentieth-century Alwar was no exception in this regard.[25] Alwar, unlike other princely states in Rajputana, had a substantial Muslim population.[26] Since the late nineteenth century, the Alwar state underwent some profound political changes marked by anti-Muslim rhetoric. Jai Singh (r. 1892–1937) and his nephew and successor Tej Singh (r. 1937 onwards), who ruled the state until 1948, implemented several pro-Hindu measures. In 1911, Hindi superseded Urdu as the state's official language and became the only medium of instruction in schools (Copland 1998: 117). In 1925, a new rule outlawed the establishment of private Urdu-language *maktab*s (schools) and forbade the construction of new mosques (Copland 1998: 117). In 1930, the government ceased its customary financing of the Tazia celebration and offered a substantial aid to Hindu festivals (Mayaram

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1997a: 60). In a state where one-fourth of the population was Muslim, these measures unavoidably influenced people's attitudes and shaped sentiments along religious lines.

Moreover, both rulers publicly embraced Hinduism throughout this period. Jai Singh reportedly assumed the persona of a pious Hindu saint (taking on the *rājrīsī* title), dressed simply in saffron clothes, presided over religious rituals and organised Hindu *dharm sabhā*s (Hindu religious organisations) for the purpose of preaching Hinduism to the masses. Hinduism was becoming more prevalent in the government, public places and the school curriculum. Earlier, Jai Singh had presented himself as an exoticised representation of native sovereignty at the beginning of the twentieth century, an Indian king who spoke fluent English and drove a Rolls Royce (see Mayaram 1997a: 53–84). In his subsequent transformation into a nationalist icon, he frequently displayed overtly 'Hinduised' religious behaviour. For example, he avoided using leather goods and wearing Western clothing in favour of *svadeshī* (homemade) items and clothing, shook hands with the British while wearing gloves and modelled the layout of the kingdom after the *rāmrājya* (kingdom of Ram) of ancient Ayodhya, including giving the streets names from the Ramayana (Mayaram 1997a). He saw himself as a descendant of Ram. He served as the president of the Sanatan Dharma Sabha and a member of the board of governors for Banaras Hindu University, two of the top Hindu organisations of the time (Mayaram 1997a). Overall, the state resisted colonisation and westernisation by adopting indigenous Hindu symbols. These measures were not just anti-British but also anti-Muslim in nature.

Hence, Alwar experienced a change in state policy defined by the adoption of Hindu symbols. Hindus also dominated the top positions in the bureaucracy. Hindus occupied about 95 per cent of prominent positions in the 1930s (Copland 1998: 117). The people's demand for democratic reforms in the state, such as the establishment of a responsible government based on popular representation under the supervision of the Maharajas, bolstered competitive feelings among the socio-religious groups manoeuvring for power. Consequently, competitions between religious communities in Mewat originated in the realm of high politics, despite the fact that the issues of mobilisation varied depending on the economic and social backdrop. The necessity to mobilise people for local councils and governmental bodies further exacerbated the religious sentiment. Under the rubric of responsible government—a demand of local movements such as Prajamandal in the 1920s throughout Rajputana (see Hooja 2006: 969–1096; Sisson 1971; Stern

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1988: 288–318)—princely rulers were compelled to appoint members of civil society as ministers in their councils. The plea was analogous to the Indian nationalists' demand for increasing Indianisation of services and posts. As a direct consequence of this, there was a fierce competition to mobilise communities on the basis of their caste and religious allegiances.[27] The entire state of Rajputana, including Alwar, saw an increase in the number of political activities taking place in both rural and urban areas (Hooja 2006: 969–1096; Sisson 1971; Stern 1988: 288–318). The electoral processes for forming local governmental entities increased the sentimental potential of the public in an effort to gain power for leaders belonging to their own religion and caste. Throughout post-colonial democratic politics, these alliances continued to remain active. In the Punjab province of which Mewat was a part, numerous religious organisations like the Arya Samaj were established in the late nineteenth century (Jones 1976, 1995). These reform organisations further aggravated communal feeling in the state through their programs (see Copland 1998, 1999: 116–19; Mayaram 1997a: 53–84, 2004b; Sikand 1997, 2002a, 2004, 2006).

Alwar, being a part of Mewat, drew the attention of the Arya Samaj due to the fact that a significant number of Meos and other Muslims, like the Jogis, still traced their ancestral lineage back to Hindu deities and goddesses. After a few decades, alongside its other objectives, the Samaj attempted to 'reconvert' Muslims back to Hinduism. Through its controversial *śuddhī* campaign, the Arya Samaj directed its initial reconversion efforts at the Muslim castes that had liminal identities—such as the Meos and the Muslim Jogi bards[28]—or who had retained some connection to Indic symbols and practices.[29] The rhetoric used against Muslims had the additional goal of isolating them from everyday public life.[30]

Śuddhī, which literally means 'purification', was an integral ritual part of traditional Hindu practices. Adherents would perform a set of rites, such as bathing in the Ganga River, going on pilgrimage or feeding Brahmins, to atone for their impure status. Defilement could result from a variety of circumstances, including crossing the sea, killing a Brahmin and so on (Jones 1976: 129). Rituals of *śuddhī* in orthodox Hinduism, such as feeding cows and Brahmins, were taken from the *Manu-smriti*, a book of ancient Brahminical laws (Jones 1976: 90–100). From 1910 onwards, the Arya Samaj reinterpreted the concept of *śuddhī* by including new practices such as the chanting of the *gāyatrī* mantra and the performance of *yagna* (fire ceremonies), among other means.

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According to historical accounts, the earliest instance of widespread religious conversion occurred in March 1908 in the Deeg region of Bharatpur that borders Mewat. Sikand (1997) notes that the Arya Samaj allegedly went around poisoning the minds of the ignorant and simple village Muslims by telling them that their ancestors had been forcibly converted to Islam by the Muslim kings. Mayaram (1997a) elaborates on the significant role that the states of Alwar and Bharatpur played in the process of organising *śuddhī*.

The Arya Samaj mounted a successful *śuddhī* (purification/conversion) campaign in and around areas where there was a large Muslim presence. Teams of Arya Samajists accompanied by a Brahmin would travel to villages in an effort to convert the heads of villages and households comprising Malkans and Meos. These two communities of Muslims were described as being '250 years old' and '500 years old', respectively (65–66). In official and Arya Samaji narratives, Meos were considered 'half Hindus' and needed to choose between becoming 'fully Hindu' or being exterminated (Mayaram 1997a).

As communalism had already taken root within the state, the inter- and intra-religious confrontations frequently occurred. In 1932, a communal riot broke out in the city of Alwar over the issue of religious processions during Holi and Muharram (Mayaram 1997a: 71–75). In the same year, there were many other clashes between Meo peasants, the state, the Chamars and the Baniyas. Opinions of scholars vary about the nature of these events. Mayaram (1997a) asserts that very few Meos took part in the Alwar city riots. Copland (1999) disagrees with Mayaram regarding the presence of Meos in the 1932 Alwar riot, characterising it as a case of communal and religious conflict. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, there was significant Hindu–Muslim animosity in several parts of Mewat. As a result, it was easier to consolidate people's sentiments along religious and communal lines against the backdrop of deteriorating communal relations.

The Partition of India put the final nail in the coffin of Hindu–Muslim relations in Mewat; in Alwar, there were widespread religious riotings. Locally, the Partition was called as *bhagā-bhagī* (push and run). Alwar had a mixed population of Hindus and Muslims, and there were several incidents of violence and tension between the two communities in the months leading up to the Partition. Throughout this period, the right-wing political campaign not only fostered an anti-Muslim political ideology but also promoted the use of force and violence against Muslims. The rulers of Alwar and Bharatpur endorsed this entire Hindu nationalist agenda against their Muslim subject. On 18 April

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1947, Narayan Bhaskar Khare, a member of the Hindu Mahasabha, a Hindu right-wing organisation, was named the prime minister of Alwar. He held sympathies with the RSS and endorsed the massacre of Mewati Muslims.[31] Police reports suggest that after the Hindu–Muslim riots in Tijara, there was a strong communal hostility in the Naugaon and Sherpur areas of Ramgarh.[32] Throughout the Partition process, soldiers of the princely kingdoms and neighbouring Hindu peasant communities assaulted Meo villages with the objective of *safāyā* ('clearing up') (Mayaram 1997a: 178–83). Mayaram (1997a: 181) provides an account of these forced conversions in 1947 by a captain in the Alwar state army:

> The women, if they were of marriageable age, were all taken. They were *shuddh* [purified] after drinking *ganga jal* [sacred water of the Ganga River] and could be taken. No, the Meos were not Muslims, they were half Hindu. In their marriages they had both *pherās* and *nikāh* [Hindu and Muslim rites]. They were not with the Muslim League. They did not want to go to Pakistan. But we had orders to clear them. Not a single Muslim was left in Alwar. Alwar was the first state to clear all the Muslims. Bharatpur followed. Yes, Bharatpur also supported the RSS.

Copland (1998) states that entire villages were destroyed, dozens of mosques were desecrated, thousands were slain or forced to convert to Hinduism under the threat of death and tens of thousands were forced to flee for their safety (215). He further describes the unprecedented number of killings as 'ethnic cleansing' (202). The Meos were given the choice to either convert or be killed. If they agreed to convert, the *śuddhī* squad would shave the men's beards and ask them to eat a piece of pork (Mayaram 1997a: 181).[33] Some of those who converted received land grants from the Alwar state.[34] The situation in Alwar worsened after the Partition of India in August 1947. There were reports of large-scale violence and massacres in which both Hindus and Muslims were targeted. Many people were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere. The violence continued for several weeks, and it is estimated that several thousand people lost their lives in Alwar and the surrounding areas during this period. The Indian government eventually sent in troops to restore order, and peace was gradually restored in the region. However, the communal tensions and violence that occurred in Alwar in 1947 remain a tragic chapter in India's history.

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The heightened focus of reform organisations on Muslims not only contributed to the promotion of communal and religious divisions but also instilled a sense of obligation among Mewati Muslims to adopt a more pronounced Islamic identity. In some cases, this pressure resulted in their further Islamisation. Islamic organisations like Anjmun Hidayatul Islam, Intekhab-e-Tehreek and the Muslim League responded to the Arya Samaj's *śuddhī* (conversion) campaign in the early twentieth century. These responses were shaped by the increasing communal tensions, growing political awareness and competition between the two religious communities during that time (Mayaram 1997a; Sikand 2002a, 2004). In response, these Islamic organisations urged Muslims to hold steadfast to their faith. The *śuddhī* campaign instilled fear among Indian Muslims as it posed a threat to the unity and integrity of the Muslim community in northern India. According to Minault (1982), '*śuddhi* and *tabligh* were two sides of the same coin' (193), but the idea of *śuddhī* was rooted in a fervent religious fanaticism.[35]

By the end of the nineteenth century, debates had already emerged between religious authorities of the Arya Samaj, religious clergies, *ulemā*s (teachers) of the Islamic Deobandi school and Christian preachers on the issue of the supremacy of their respective religions (B. Metcalf 1982: 198–234).[36] The Islamic scholar and one of the founders of the Deoband school, Maulana Muhammad Qasim, wrote a number of polemics directed against the Arya Samajis, showing that 'the theme of Muslim defence against newly aggressive Hinduism was to become increasingly important' (214). It is in this socio-religious environment of the 1920s, almost 50 years after the foundation of the Arya Samaj, that the Tablighi Jamaat became active in Mewat. The Tablighi Jamaat, founded in the 1920s by a Deoband trained Islamic *ulemā*, Maulana Ilyas, also focused on Mewati Muslims, with the objective of turning them into better Muslims. It promoted the slogan 'O Muslims, become Muslims' (Ilyas 1989; Troll 2008). Ilyas's fundamental concern was to change the behaviour of 'nominal' Muslims like the Meos so that they performed Islamic conduct such as offering *namāz* five times a day. He sought to refine and discipline the *dīnī* (religious) life of Muslims. Ilyas was born and brought up in Nizamuddin, Delhi, near the *dargāh* of the Chishti Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya.[37] He later moved to Deoband in Uttar Pradesh to receive an Islamic education at the *madrasa* there (Nadwi and Kidwai 1979; Numani 1991; Robinson 1988: 20–23).

The Tablighi Jamaat's main focus remained on disciplining the lives of Muslims according to the teachings of the Quran and the life of Prophet

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Mohammed. The faith renewal movement, as B. Metcalf (2000) calls it, had little success in the beginning, but the violence accompanying the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947 changed Hindu–Muslim relationships in the region. In the wake of the separatism and communal violence of twentieth-century India, religious identities came to be defined clearly. Demands from neighbouring Hindu communities and princely states to define Muslim religious identity vis-à-vis Hinduism translated into overwhelming support for the Tablighi Jamaat organisation by the Meos. Although the Meos had been practising a local version of Islam for centuries, the realisation of their Muslim self in relation to Hinduism was generated from their collective experience of alterity, the mutual and exclusive definition of 'the other' in terms of religious categories. Partition violence prompted the hardening of boundaries around Muslim identities.

As was demonstrated in the previous chapters, up until the late 19th or early twentieth century, the shrines of Laldas were shared places of prayer and religious interaction that were tolerant of different beliefs and peaceful in nature. In general, the differences were constructed along other measures of identification, such as caste, sect, clan, village and ethnic difference rather than on the religious differentiation of 'Hindu' or 'Muslim'. It was not until much later, when the circumstances changed, that the two identities of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' crystallised and elevated themselves to a higher priority than other identities, such as that of caste and sectarian order. As a direct consequence of this, the concept of toleration and the sharing of a sacred space came under attack as uniform notions of religious communities emerged.[38] Accordingly, diverse sets of religious practices around Bhakti and Sufi saints like Laldas who opposed identification with and categorisation in terms of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' were also subsumed under these categories. This uniform type of power espoused by reformers and political elites appeared for the first time in the twentieth century (described in Chapter 5) and worked against the diversity of religious practices and identities.

Nevertheless, before the twentieth century, this religious encounter, despite disputes and violence, was marked by consciously and unconsciously embracing mixed cultural-religious symbols and not so much by the notions of bounded segregation in public culture so that it contained a more dynamic form. This does not imply here that religious boundaries are not fluid today. Rather, both 'Hinduism' and 'Islam' still display multiple forms of plural religious practices functioning around a fluid religious consciousness and a malleable religious boundary. But institutional forms of religious

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consciousness around 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' identities (uniform, orthodox, political, inclusionary and exclusionary[39] and the narrow one as often traditionally defined by political and religious elites) gradually acquired more importance and a powerful existence. Nowadays, a visible and binary form of religious identities (Hindu and Muslim) does exist among Indians alongside the plural religious practices. These differences and identitarian trends can also be discerned in the religious ways in which devotees positioned their religious practices. Often, they continued to follow their own specific set of traditions marked by their respective community orientations. In the next section, it is shown how the Laldas shrines and the order underwent a radical transformation in the last three decades based on devotional differences.

DISPUTES AND DIFFERENCES IN DEVOTIONAL STYLES

Laldas identified himself as 'both Hindu and Muslim and beyond, all at the same time'. Unlike Kabir, who put forth a sharp critique of both religions (Lorenzen 2011: 20), Laldas, though closer to the *kabīrpanth*, advocated an innovative religious synthesis for his followers. He combined practices of 'Hinduism' and 'Islam' within the *bhakti milieu* of the time, departing from the teachings of his guru, Kabir. For example, Kabir rejected the boundaries of caste and religion, but Laldas appeared to partially accept religious boundaries by deploying messages of religious unity. These differences were based in their class and caste background as the saints of middle caste-class status (like Laldas) often acknowledged religious boundaries (Gold 1992), whereas gurus of 'lower-caste' backgrounds, such as Kabir and Ravidas, did not (Friedlander 1996, 2023; Lorenzen 1987).

As noted in the previous chapter, Laldas drew religious inspiration for his preaching from Gadan Tijara, a local Chishti saint. On this issue, Gold (1992) notes that Hindu *sant* piety has greater structural connections to Indian Sufism than to any other form of Indian mysticism. In the previous chapter, it was also discussed that various verses of the hagiographic text named the 'Bhakti' and 'Sufi' modes of piety as the 'true' path, as opposed to the institutionalised forms of 'Islam' and 'Hinduism'. In that story, Laldas and the Chishti saint Gadan Tijara concurred, implying that the Sufi path and the *nirguṇ bhakti* worship are complementary. For Meo Muslim peasants, Laldas represented an additional step; a religious framework in which the values of asceticism—as Burchett (2019) demonstrates, influenced by the

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yogic teachings of Bhakti, Nath Yoga and Sufism in the preceding centuries—could coexist with those of a settled household.[40] Meo peasants preferred the meditational style of devotion within a family set up. Renunciation or a complete withdrawal from worldly affairs was not the supreme goal of many Meos. Thus, strong renunciatory principles such as those of Nath Yogis are typically portrayed as submissive to Laldas's power.

The confrontation between Laldas and the Naths is narrated in another tale from the hagiography. His teaching attained a superior status over the Naths after a spiritual contest with a Nath guru called Naga Sadhu. The Naga/Nath Sadhu once asked Laldas to feed his 1,400 disciples. Laldas successfully met this challenge by supplying vast quantities of food from his *kamandal* (urn).[41] This contest also metaphorically shows two philosophically and religiously different worldviews based on sectarian (*panth*) differences. Although Laldas's devotion was rooted in the *nirguṇ bhakti* tradition, he introduced one major change: the promotion of household ascetic values in line with Vaishnava devotion. Here, a distinction needs to be made between two kinds of asceticism born out of the Vaishnava and Shaiva traditions. Vaishnava *bhakti* emphasises the importance of remaining engaged in the household and domestic system, while the Shaiva traditions, particularly the Nath teachings, often advocate for detachment from the household and material life. As described earlier, Saint Laldas's *Kabirpanthi* belief in *nirguṇ* Ram was also closer to the Islamic conception of Allah about the idea of one formless God; so it did not put him in conflict with his background as a Meo Muslim. Laldas's ascetic ideals were for a settled Meo household in line with the Meo Muslims' genealogical claims.

As a relatively powerful class of peasants, the Meos were eager to preserve their worldly advantages and superior standing.[42] Asceticism, such as that practised by the yogis of the Nath and other monastic orders, which emphasised detachment from material concerns, did not represent the supreme value system for them. Laldas's teachings, unlike those of the Nath, did not prohibit worldly attachments or power. This issue is further exemplified in the text *nuktāvalī*, which begins with a condemnation of begging, a central doctrine of the Nath tradition to curb one's ego by asking for alms. Laldas's emphasis placed on this point is not only different from Nath doctrines but constitutes one of the most striking and fascinating aspects of his teachings. The saint may be considered an advocate of household labour to feed oneself than to beg on the street, as the excerpts that follow will demonstrate:

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Lāljī bhagat bhikh na mange,
mangat aawe sharm
ghar ghar haudat dokh
hai kya badshah kya haram. (Powlett 1878: 56)

Devotees of Laldas do not beg
Begging is shameful
Wandering from house to house is wrong
Even if they be those of kings or queens.

This verse conveys the idea that the followers of Laldas should not resort to begging as a means of sustenance. Begging was considered shameful and inappropriate, and the saint emphasised the importance of self-sufficiency and dignity, encouraging individuals to earn their livelihood through honourable means. Furthermore, the saint instructed his followers to concentrate on God's service by keeping his name in their hearts:

Lāljī sādhu aisā cahīye
dhan kamākar khāy
hirde har kī cākrī
parghar kabhu nā jay. (Powlett 1878: 58)

Says Lalji, the Sadh should be [the] one
Who earns the food he eats
Let God's service be the heart's,
And go not about begging.

Moreover, he dismissed *yog* in favour of *bhakti* and *gyān* (devotion and knowledge). For instance, one of the couplets suggested, 'It is easier to throw oneself into burning fire and die than to bear the daily torture of yoga. It is like a constant fight with oneself and without arms' (Maheshwari 1980: 127–28). The main messages conveyed by these couplets attributed to Laldas are to exercise self-mastery over one's thoughts and feelings, to make a living via honest labour and to treat people with compassion among other similar precepts. Ultimately, his teachings were a mirror of the Meo agricultural world, which was partly 'Islamic' and partly 'Hindu' in character, connected to both belief systems by multiple socio-economic and cultural strands. Laldas himself was married (he had six wives), looked after cows and performed

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'miracles'. Simultaneously, the *nirguṇ bhakti* that he preached served as a meaningful cultural symbol that resonated with the Sufi Islam that Meo peasants adhered to while retaining the Hindu connections encoded in the Meo *pāl* genealogy.

Philosophically, the distinction between *nirguṇ* (God as formless and without attributes) and *saguṇ* (God as visible and with characteristics) may seem vague (Vaudeville 1987).[43] Due to the similarities between the two closely intertwined types of religiosities, scholars generally believe that the line between the two is extremely blurry (Hawley 1995; Gold 1992; Lorenzen 1995). *Saguṇ*, in a simplistic understanding, means 'worshipping god with a physical form' or 'anthropomorphic body'. However, the *nirguṇ* concept is closer to the Islamic concept of Allah (Alam 2004), both of which complemented the religiosity of the Meo Muslim Laldasis as distinct from institutional religions. Although roots of both visions already existed in Vedic and Puranic Hinduism and Sanskrit *kāvya* (literature) (Doniger 2014: 151–56), the *saguṇ* form was an expression of orthodox Brahminical image worship in Hinduism, whether in temples or elsewhere.[44]

Moreover, *nirguṇ bhakti* was an attack on both the Brahminical Hinduism of temple worship and caste society.[45] Several caste and class groups adopted and altered these divisions according to their own values (Gold 1992: 26). For example, the gurus from the lowest level of caste society, such as Kabir, Ravidas and Dadu,[46] rejected the Brahminical form of the Hindu religion and caste hierarchy categorically, whereas later preachers, such as Laldas, who came from a middle-caste background, were ambiguous in their criticisms of these institutions. Saints who did not belong to 'lower castes' appear to have partially accepted religious boundaries as a means of negotiating differences. Laldas, for instance, proposed a religious synthesis as opposed to a full rejection of religious borders. This was firmly entrenched in the liminal and rural social and religious experience of the Meos.

On the other hand, the middle-class Hindu Baniyas were connected to the Meos through a system of traditionally organised commercial and social relations.[47] Baniyas are a highly dispersed assortment of traders, merchants, shop owners and affluent businessmen whose economic status might vary enormously.[48] Although the Baniyas, as a class, maintained an upper hand over peasants in India (Hardiman 1996), their source of income also depended on peasants who utilised their money-lending and usury practices. In Mewat, through their various roles such as village grain dealers and small money lenders, the Baniyas were closely tied to the Meo agricultural world

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until a complete disintegration of their relationship of interdependence in the last three decades.[49] In the past, powerful Hindu, Jain and the Marwari merchants[50] had worked closely with the state and had financed pilgrims and patronised temples and shrines.

By the end of the nineteenth century, there was a new middle class of Baniyas (Bayly 1992: 369–75), whose position grew even stronger in the late colonial period (Hardiman 1996: 62–92).[51] Since the Baniyas are traditionally involved in trade, commerce, imports or exports, business and shop-keeping, money and wealth are fundamental to their daily concerns. *Nirguṇ bhakti*, or devotion to God without form, did not appeal them, as many devotees of Laldas suggested that they often prayed to an idol. Before beginning their day, a *darśan* of a deity, in this case Laldas's, was the main part of morning rituals. The act of *darśan* (seeing a divine image or idol) is the central part of Brahminical Hinduism (Eck 1998). Baniyas expected to see the saint Laldas and anticipated that he would always be physically present to assist with business-related difficulties and grant boons.[52] This requirement of the Baniyas is expressed in contemporary *bhajan*s (religious songs) distributed in new pamphlets, in which Laldas saved a merchant whose ship was sinking in sea:

śahar āgro modi shah, tāke grah dravya ki cāh
jākī jahāj samundra me atkī, puchat phire bāt ghat-ghat kī
jab bābā tumko yād kiyā, pahuce jahāj ubārī tumne bedā pār kiyā.[53]

In Agra lived Modi Shah, he desired wealth and prosperity
His ship was stuck in the sea, [he] wandered in need of help
When he remembered you, Baba [Laldas], you appeared and resolved his issue.

The merchant, Modi Shah, found himself in a dire situation and sought help from others. As he reached out to various individuals, he received conflicting advice and opinions. However, amidst the confusion, intrigued by the tales he had heard about Laldas, Modi Shah decided to pray to the saint, hoping to find solace by his presence. While praying to Laldas, Modi Shah expressed his desperation and made a heartfelt promise to offer him a tenth of his goods if they were to be saved (Powlett 1878: 55). Laldas had a reputation for his kindness and wisdom. Moved by the sincerity of the merchant's plea, Laldas, who possessed an extraordinary ability to perceive the thoughts and

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prayers of others, heard the distant cry for help. Acting out of his inherent benevolence, Laldas ensured that the merchant's materials were safeguarded and remained unharmed (Powlett 1878: 56). However, when Modi Shah tried to express his gratitude by offering a gift of thanks to Laldas, the saint humbly declined. Laldas, being a selfless soul who harboured no desire for material possessions, directed the merchant to donate the gift to those less fortunate instead. He believed that the true essence of generosity lay in aiding the impoverished and needy.

In a similar vein, the hagiography, popular narratives and cheap booklets also describe the story of a wealthy and influential Kayath, a clerk from Agra, who suffered from leprosy. Afflicted by this debilitating disease, the Kayath faced immense hardships in his life. When he learned of Laldas's extraordinary kindness towards the shipwrecked merchant, his heart stirred with hope (Powlett 1878: 56). Driven by curiosity and a desperate desire for relief from his affliction, the Kayath decided to seek out Laldas on a full moon night, knowing that it was the saint's preferred time to interact with people. When the Kayath finally encountered Laldas, the saint perceived the suffering in his eyes and immediately recognised the torment he was undergoing. With great compassion, Laldas instructed the Kayath to renounce his worldly possessions and embark on a path of righteousness. Eager to find relief from his condition, the Kayath faithfully followed the saint's counsel and relinquished everything he owned. As the Kayath bathed at the confluence of two rivers in Allahabad after a ritual ceremony, a moment of profound transformation occurred (Powlett 1878). The leprosy that had burdened him for so long was entirely eradicated, and he emerged from the sacred waters reborn, free from the physical and emotional pain that had plagued him.

These stories illustrate the prevalent expectations surrounding Laldas, a revered saint, who was believed to possess the power to alleviate the struggles of everyday life. People sought his assistance in their worldly pursuits, yearning for support and guidance. Laldas's acts of kindness and selflessness resonated deeply within the hearts of those he encountered, instilling in them a renewed faith and the belief that compassion and righteous living could bring about desired transformation and relief. Moreover, these stories invoke the popular expectations from the saint that were premised on the well-being of worldly life desiring assistance in everyday struggle.

Another important belief among Baniyas is the importance of family and community. Baniyas are known for being tightly knit and supporting each

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other in business and personal matters. Family and community are seen as the foundation for success in life. Laldas supported a devotion that coupled household asceticism with the fulfilment of one's social responsibilities. This was more appealing to the Baniyas but in a *saguṇ* mode of worship. The *nirguṇ* Ram of Laldas and the belief of his Meo followers were similar to the conception of an Islamic deity. By contrast, the Baniyas prefer the *saguṇ* form of Ram—an ideal husband, obedient son, a promoter of law, order and caste hierarchy. A *saguṇ* deity is believed to assist in fulfilling one's responsibilities to family and community, as well as in making a living through commercial pursuits. Therefore, the Baniyas historically required the bodily presence of a deity in times of business-related problems. Baniyas had a strong devotion to Laldas for prosperity and good fortune. They often worshipped the saint before beginning any new business venture, hoping to gain his blessings and ensure success. Their commitment to what Bayly (1992: 381) calls 'a highly orthodox and Brahminical style of life'[54] prompted the transformation of the imagery of Laldas. Baniyas began appropriating the saint into a *saguṇ* and a more orthodox and Hinduised form of Vaishnava worship in order to obtain his physical presence. They needed to see a physical form (Figure 3.5) of Laldas to perform daily puja, which involved the offering of prayers, flowers and food to the saint.

Several temples in Mewat and the adjoining areas now contain an idol of the saint, and many new ones are being built in the Hindu style with idols of Laldas installed. Newly built temples are run entirely by Hindu members, mostly by Baniyas. This transition from the *nirguṇ* to a *saguṇ* form of the saint also entails changes in meaning-making; his teachings are interpreted in the context of the ways of life of Hindu merchants and their connection to Brahminical forms of worship.

There have been considerable differences in Baniya and Meo religious cultures in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. But these differences became seminal in the twentieth century, when the social and economic relations between Baniyas and Meos totally dissolved. Changes in rural economic relations and the emergence of a new economic order in India, commonly referred to as the liberalisation of economy, further led to the collapse of their mutual dependence (Mohanty and Lenka 2016; McCartney 2009; Patnaik 2001; Vakulabharanam and Motiram 2011). For instance, as the 1990s progressed, Meo peasants were less reliant on Baniyas for petty loans. The perpetual economic distress for middle-class peasants like the Meos had relatively improved with the liberalisation of economy.[55] The state

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FIGURE 3.5 The deity Laldas in an anthropomorphic form for *darśan*

Source: Photo by the author.

made significant efforts to improve the condition of peasantry contributing to the demise of traditional economic relations in the rural areas. This is the primary reason why all new temples of Laldas have been constructed after the 1990s, when the Baniyas could afford to disregard their traditional social and

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economic ties with the Meos.[56] Historically, both communities required each other's assistance in daily life. Once this need was replaced and reshaped by the forces of liberalisation in the 1990s, resulting in the free mobility of labour, the emergence of a new banking system and loans advanced by the state to peasants, the Baniya Laldasis began to fiercely oppose the Meo Laldasis. They also began to strengthen their religious loyalties with 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' separatist politics. Following this period, the Baniyas, in the backdrop of the developing political power of Hindutva, exerted considerable effort to alter the Laldas religious order.

To sum up, the shared devotion of Laldas began to change with the Baniyas's rise to prosperity and the rupture of their customary bond with the Meos. Also, prior to the twentieth century, Hindu–Muslim politics were less polarised and the Meo population outnumbered the Baniyas. The local Baniyas have earned the backing of other local Hindu castes and Hindu organisations, such as the RSS, the BJP, the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council, or VHP) in the previous 30 years. The Meos as a Muslim community are now far more vulnerable facing a united Hindu opposition. The Baniyas have always been among the most vocal supporters of Hindu nationalism in India (Jaffrelot 2009; Sharma 2007). Consequently, the disputes around Laldas have now taken on the character of a religious conflict between Hindu and Muslim communities, rather than between Hindu and Muslim Laldasis or Baniyas and Meos. At the same time, social groups engaged in shared devotion were also undergoing economic and social transformations as well as religious ones. These processes also frayed the shared religious fabric, and the transformation of society and politics affected shared worship spaces. This subsequent shift in religious opinion concerning Laldas has been greatly aided by the money and power of wealthy Baniyas who deny Meos' claims that Laldas was a *pīr*, claiming instead that he was a Hindu saint. The Baniyas have signified this assertion recently by constructing new temples in the style of Hindu temples.

The objective of the next chapter is to understand what socially, spatially and religiously changed around the religious persona of Laldas. In particular, it looks at the processes adopted and considerable efforts made by Hindu devotees to appropriate Laldas. It is often the symbolism of the shared shrines that initially undergoes modifications, rather than the removal of (impure) faith in saints like Laldas, who are being currently assimilated into Hinduism by Hindu followers and encouraged to discard by Sunni Muslims.

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NOTES

1. As shown before, these three major sites belong to the tombs of the saint, his parents and his sons and daughters at different places in Alwar. There are other numerous places known as Laldas temples now in the region where he is said to have spent some time during his life.
2. From its construction in AD 360 until the capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire in 1453, Hagia Sophia served as an Eastern Orthodox Church. Up until 1935, it was a mosque before becoming a museum. The site was converted back into a mosque in 2020. It was converted immediately with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 to demonstrate Muslim dominance; converted into a museum by Ataturk in 1935 to demonstrate power of the secular state over religion; re-converted by Erdogan now to demonstrate the end of the secular state; see Aykaç (2018); and Oztig and Adisonmez (2023).
3. Shared shrines have attracted research aimed at examining, on the one hand, their role in promoting tolerance, peace and interreligious engagements (Albera and Couroucli 2012; Bowman 2012) and, on the other, the nature of competition between religious communities, the forms of communal and ethnic strife, and levels of intolerance (Barkan and Barkey 2014; Hayden 2002; Hayden et al. 2016). However, in the case of India, some shrines appear to promote religious conviviality and active social engagements between members of different religious communities (Bigelow 2009, 2010) while others display more contestation—albeit short-lived—and passive tolerance (Hayden 2002; Sikand 2002b).
4. The Babri mosque was located in the Faizabad district in Ayodhya, the mythical birthplace of the Hindu god Ram. It was one of the largest mosques in the state of Uttar Pradesh. According to the mosque's inscriptions, Mir Baqi, on orders of the Mughal emperor Babur (after whom it was named), built it in 1528–29 CE. In 1992, the mosque was demolished by activists from Hindu right-wing groups (Ludden 1996).
5. There are debates among scholars about whether shared shrines promote tolerance and peace or not. These debates have been multifarious and context specific. Tolerance is the main theme in cosmopolitan scholarship. The basic idea of tolerance is about respecting 'others' who are different in creed, colour, gender, religious belief, ethnicity and so on (Appiah 2017). Political dynamics play a significant role, with shared sacred spaces becoming contested or fluid depending on the local social and religious narratives. While some shrines promote peace and others interethnic and religious conflicts, this depends

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on what is happening in and around a particular shrine. For instance, in the Punjab region of north India, which experienced the most devastating impact of Partition violence in 1947, the tomb of a Sufi saint at Malerkotla became a central object in sustaining peace. Bigelow (2009) shows that the shrine at Malerkotla facilitated interpersonal engagement across social and religious lines, which helped the communities reject communalism.

6. The ideas of 'competitive sharing' and 'antagonistic tolerance' were originally developed by Hayden (2002; Hayden et al. 2016), who investigated the nature of tolerance among an assortment of faiths at shared sites in the Balkans, the Mediterranean regions and India. Hayden suggests that there generally appears to be 'antagonistic tolerance' and 'competitive sharing' within the dynamics of those involved with sharing religious shrines. In Hayden's (2002: 205) words, this kind of sharing of a religious space is 'compatible with the passive meaning of tolerance as non-interference but incompatible with the active meaning of tolerance as the embrace of the other'.
7. Dholidhoop Shrine, 1946, basta no. 72, file no. 39L/P/1946, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. 'The personal communication of Prime-Minister with District Judge of Alwar state', in *A Brief History of the Case as Derived in the Munsiff Court 1946*, 13 February 1946, Alwar, basta no. 72, file no. 39L/P/1946, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid. 'A confidential letter of the district magistrate to the prime minister of Alwar State', personal communication, 25 September 1946.
13. All India Hindu Mahasabha was formed in 1915 during a Kumbh Mela to protect the interests of Hindus in India. The organisation was highly anti-Muslim in its political rhetoric.
14. Dholidhoop Shrine, 1946, basta no. 72, file no. 39L/P/1946, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.
15. Ibid.
16. As Hayden et al. (2016) suggest: the features of these religioscapes will be the focus of competition in the form of either 'competitive verticality' between minarets or bell towers or 'competitive audibility' between *azaan*s, or prayers.
17. The present name of the trust is the Laldas Mandir Avam Vikas Samiti (the Laldas Temple and Development Committee). It looks after the work of organising annual celebrations, executing developmental works and

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managing offerings at the shrine. Almost all the members of this committee are Baniyas.

18. As discussed in Chapter 5, the stand of the Tablighis also partly helped the Hindu Laldasis to legitimise the Hindu status of Laldas, rather than the traditional view of him as a liminal figure.
19. Founded in the year 1925, the Rashtriya Sawayam Sevak Sangh (RSS, meaning 'National Self-Help Group') has advocated since then for the transformation of India into a Hindu nation. Their idea is based on political mobilisation of Hindu sentiments against Muslims and other religious minorities. All these organisations claim to belong to one Hindu nationalist family; for more information, see Jaffrelot (2009); and Sharma (2007). The RSS avoided direct involvement in politics. Instead, they focused on physical training, military drills and promoting the teachings of Hinduism. The RSS works as an umbrella organisation for the VHP and the Bajrang Dal.
20. I learned of this incident through interviews with Sherpur residents in 2016.
21. When Islam arrived in India around the twelfth century, it intermingled with and influenced local ideas to add further layers of diversity to the subcontinental religious world. Dalmia and Faruqui (2014) note that almost 40 major Sufi saints of different backgrounds belonging to different *silsilā*s (Sufi saintly lineages), such as the Chishtiyya, Qaddiriya, Suhrawardy, Madarriya and Nakhsbandi, traversed the territory over a span of a few centuries. The coming of Islam and its associated *silsilā*s added more cultural streams, and the local communities responded by wholeheartedly adapting them into their previously held beliefs. Borrowing from Cynthia Talbot's work (2009), I argue that Indian Muslims were deeply embedded in their local societies and cultures while participating in the cosmopolitan world of Islam. As Talbot puts it, 'local connections of people and communities were never weakened by their allegiance to Islam' (213).
22. According to Thapar (1989: 216), 'Hinduism is a mosaic of distinct cults, deities, sects, and ideas', that arose out of interaction, acculturation, incorporation and constant engagement in the vibrant social life of many caste communities. In this context, it may be argued that when Islam came to India (through Sufis, soldiers, traders and rulers), Hinduism was already so diverse that Islam, particularly the Sufi version, would not have been alien to its diversity. In other words, the coming of new religious traditions inevitably added to the range of this already diverse religious world.
23. There is a debate among scholars about whether Hinduism was or was not a colonial construct. While strong arguments suggest it was not (see Lorenzen

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1999; Pennington 2005), its evolution as a religious category was mediated by colonial milieu and thoughts of Indian urban nationalist elites and their use of religious symbols. I opine that the category 'Hinduism' acquired new meanings during colonial rule, but a sense of 'Hindu' was already there. It was to this incipient Hinduism that Kabir, Gorakh, Laldas and other religious figures were referring to. However, this Hinduism was an orthodox Brahminical construct according to the sayings of many saints.

24. Institutional forms of Hindu and Muslim identities and practices were mainly associated with Brahmins and Mullahs respectively and were closely tied to political power. It solidified more in the twentieth century.
25. During late Mughal rule in the seventeenth century, Bharatpur and Alwar were carved into two regional kingdoms by rulers from Jat and Rajput caste backgrounds, respectively. From the beginning of indirect British colonial rule in the area after the battle of Laswari in 1803, the two kingdoms were under indirect British rule like other parts of Rajputana until India's independence in 1947.
26. Meos were listed as the single largest caste in Alwar (Cole 1932: 129; Copland 1999: 118). Thus, Muslim homogeneity at least on caste norms was an important fact in Alwar.
27. Although caste has always been important in India, such moves of democratisation by the colonial state gave Indians a new impetus to define its importance. Caste discourse became closely associated with colonial politics, including in indirectly ruled princely states. Cohn (1987: 230) writes that 'through the asking of questions and the compiling of information in categories which the British rulers could utilise for governing, it provided an arena for Indians to ask questions about themselves, and Indians utilised the fact that the British census commissioners tried to order tables on caste in terms of social precedence'.
28. Jogis are also call Naths. These two terms have been interchangeably used.
29. Historically, for Arya Samaj reformers, the Muslims of Mewat and adjoining regions were ideal *śuddhī* candidates as their practices and beliefs drew on both religions. The organisation made Agra, a town 100 kilometres from Mewat, a centre of *śuddhī* activities. Initially, the Rajput groups, known as Malkans, who had converted to Islam underwent this process of reconversion. The Rajput Shuddhi Sabha—an offshoot of the Arya Samaj established in 1909 for the reconversion of the Muslim Rajputs—claimed to have converted more than one hundred thousand Malkan Rajputs of western Uttar Pradesh by 1910 (Hardiman 2007: 24–26). Further attempts at conversion among the

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Malkan Rajputs in the 1920s sparked uproar among Muslims, who suspected a systematic plan to convert Indian Muslims to Hinduism. Tensions around Muslim conversions became so politically and socially charged that Gandhi was impelled to write a letter in *Young India* in 1924 criticising the Arya Samaj *śuddhī* campaign (Adcock 2014).

30. In response to the British imperial focus on classification and difference, Indian nationalists used symbols of religion in their political mobilisation, thereby making society more religiously conscious. Gandhi, for example, adopted Hindu symbols in his nationalist politics of mass mobilisation (Minault 1982; Robb 1986). State policy and the goals of religious reform organisations all contributed towards a rise in the general animosity between Hindus and Muslims.
31. Members of the right-wing Hindu organisations such as the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS had close associations with the Congress party before 1947. Many political figures changed their loyalties frequently.
32. Meo Disturbance in Meo Area 1947, basta no. 58, vol. I, file no. D.o.R.-47, Revenue Department, Alwar State, Alwar District Archives.
33. Offering pork was a means to test converted Muslims' desire to renounce Islam.
34. Grants of Jagir to converted Meos 1947, basta no. 58, file no. D.o.R.-47, Revenue Department, Alwar State, Alwar District Archives.
35. The *śuddhī* movement had already converted more than 150,000 Malkan Muslims by 1925 (Sikand and Katju 1994: 2216), and other Muslim communities like the Meos were being targeted. In this context, Muslim religious leaders believed that only the active teaching of Islam (*tabligh*) could save their religion from the brink of extinction in India (Sikand 1997). Both orthodox and non-orthodox *ulemā*s united to resist *śuddhī*.
36. The Arya Samaj and the Deoband, Metcalf (1982) shows, used Christian techniques of proselytising, such as printed materials. Both Hindu and Muslim revival movements used newspapers, pamphlets and cheap books to engage in what was then called 'pamphlet warfare' (211).
37. Nizamuddin Auliya (1238–1325 CE) was, probably, the second most important saint in the Chishti order after Saint Moinuddin Chisthi. His tomb at Delhi has been a place of popular veneration. The Tablighi Jamaat's main centre is located in the vicinity of Nizamuddin Auliya's *dargāh*.
38. Brass (2010) talks about the non-existence of a single Muslim political community before the twentieth century. The formation of separate and bounded Hindu and Muslim political communities is, thus, a twentieth-

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century phenomenon. Although these categories existed in the pre-colonial period (Lorenzen 1999, 2011), they were organised around a fuzzy and fluid religious consciousness.

39. Inclusionary of diverse religious streams under the respective labels of Hinduism and Islam and exclusionary of each other's closely related religious traditions and practices such as Nath, Sufism and Bhakti. Nath and Bhakti traditions are subsumed under Hinduism, and Sufism under Islam.
40. Alwar is an important monastic centre of the Nath order. The Bharthari Dham (temple) of a great Nath yogi Bharthari is in Alwar. Nath yogis usually advocated leaving material attachments, household duties and family life behind to attain power and liberation.
41. This story was recorded in the saint's biography written by Dungarisi Sadh.
42. As noticed earlier, in their genealogical claims, the Meos connect themselves with the Hindu warrior gods and figures.
43. This division has been challenged by many scholars. In fact, imagining a *nirguṇ* deity is very difficult.
44. Doniger (2014) shows a *nirguṇ–saguṇ* tension in the Brahmin-authored Puranas such as Bhagwat Gita. She writes, 'Epic and Puranic Hinduism abound in examples of resistance to the *nirguṇ* ideal' (152).
45. One of the key criticisms of Brahminical Hinduism is its association with caste discrimination and social inequality. The caste system is deeply ingrained in Hindu society, and the Brahmin caste has traditionally held a position of power and privilege. This has resulted in a system of social and economic inequality that has marginalised and oppressed 'lower castes', such as Dalits or ex-untouchables, for centuries. Another criticism of Brahminical Hinduism is its treatment of women. Women have been subjected to social and religious restrictions and discrimination within the Brahminical Hinduism. They have been denied equal opportunities in education and employment and have been subjected to patriarchal norms and practices that have restricted their freedom and autonomy.
46. Kabir and Dadu are considered 'low-caste' Muslims while the saint Ravidas was an 'untouchable'. Historically, the existence of these gurus is still a matter of debate.
47. See Chapter 1 for my usage of the term 'Baniya' and their connection with the Meos.
48. The relationship between the Baniyas and the Meos and the issue of domination was far more complicated. Hardiman's work (1996) considers the Baniyas as a dominant group in western India on the basis of usury practices.

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In this system, the Baniyas, particularly the Mahajan and Shahukar, were backed by the state. However, in Mewat, usury practices have not been studied. Going by the current and historical situations, I find Meos to be more dominant numerically, politically and socially in Mewat. Although the Baniyas are economically well off, a large section of the Meos is equally economically powerful. The Meos' dominance is greatly affected by the rise of Hindu–Muslim politics. Baniyas use Hindu–Muslim politics as well as social-religious ties with other Hindu castes and the Baniyas of outside Mewat to fight against the Meo domination.

49. The reasons for the disintegration of the economic and social arrangement of the Meos with the Baniyas are multiple and interlinked. These are liberalisation, the free movement of labour, invention of new technologies, the increasing growth of banking system and the provision of loans by government.
50. Marwari means a person from the Marwar region of Rajasthan. The Baniyas of this region are called the Marwari Baniya. They are spread all over India and are a wealthier class than other Baniyas. There were fewer Jain Baniyas in Mewat and they, too, are idol worshippers.
51. Most Baniyas in Mewat are still small shop owners. The rise of their influential economic status as a class is recent in origin. For instance, in Punahana, most of my Baniya informants claimed success in their businesses, a result of their devotion to Laldas in the last 20 years.
52. Hardiman (1996: 84) notes that many Jain Baniyas of Rajasthan justified their worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, arguing 'Lord Mahavira (the founder of the Jain religion) was a renouncer who would not provide blessings for material gain, forcing them to turn to Lakshmi'. Carrithers (2000) refers to the spiritual cosmopolitanism of the Jains as 'polytropy'.
53. See Appendix A.2 for the full song.
54. The closest similarity between Laldas's teachings and Baniyas's conventional belief was vegetarianism. Both Jain and Hindu Vaishnavite Baniyas in Rajasthan were strict vegetarians (Hardiman 1996: 65–67).
55. Unlike poor farmers, whose conditions worsened, and were forced to commit suicide in various parts of India, the middle-class peasants benefitted from this policy change; see Mathur (2010).
56. Many Meos and Baniyas opined that we had cordial relations with each other in the past. Their relations were premised on the need for each other in commercial and economic activities centred around agricultural products

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of Meo peasants. Many Baniyas with small businesses still buy milk, wheat, pulses, grams and other food stuff from Meos to sell it in the local market and to supply them to Delhi. This kind of interdependence and economic relations were common in rural areas. Baniyas with their economic power advanced loans to small- and middle-caste peasants.

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4

A *FAIT ACCOMPLI*

THE COMPLETE HINDUISATION OF THE LALDAS ORDER

The formulation of the persona of Laldas from a *nirguṇ bhakti* follower to a *saguṇ* saint and deity is central to the rise and success of the religious order. The complete conversion of Laldas into a 'Hindu' saint requires a profound restructuring of his identity. This undertaking involves assigning him a new role while simultaneously erasing or modifying his traditional religious image, which had been distinguished by a shared form of religiosity. The changes observed within the Laldas order also signify a deliberate undermining of the saint's religious teachings and principles. This subversion of Laldas's original teachings implies a shift towards a more homogeneous understanding of the order, where the liminal elements of his beliefs are now incorporated into the broader narrative of neo 'Hinduism'.

This new imagery of Laldas has been achieved by first transforming the traditional shrines spatially and then constructing new temples in various parts of north India to practice anthropomorphic image worship. It is also an effort to achieve a new social construction of a religious space. In fact, spaces contested for ideological, economic and religious reasons generally reflect efforts to create new meanings for them in a changed context, leading to spatial transformations (Low 1996). Currently, the shrines of Laldas are examples of what Lefebvre (1991: 164–68) refers to as 'dominated space' and 'appropriated space'.[1] More importantly, the spatial changes at the religious shrines of Laldas signify ongoing efforts to transform the meanings of a traditional sacred space. This is being achieved by the process of what Low (1996, 2009) describes as 'the social construction of space'.[2] In this process,

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new symbolic meanings imbued with new religious significance of Laldas are created. Devotees' social interactions, memories and daily use of the material setting effectively transform Laldas's traditional shrine spaces into new arenas of ritual scenes and actions, ultimately Hinduising what was once a shared/mixed sacred space.

Most of these changes are quite recent in origin and are undertaken by the financially rich Baniya community. Moreover, their socio-economic power and traditional devotional beliefs also contribute to these spatial and architectural transformations at the traditional shrines. In analysing the domination of Hindus at these traditional religious sites, the main attention is paid to the structure, control, and agency of followers, on one hand, and new religious discourses and practices surrounding these sacred spaces, on the other. Spaces are contested precisely because they concretise the fundamental and recurring, but otherwise unquestioned, ideological and social frameworks that define everyday practice (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 18).

This transition of Laldas into a new form is impossible without simultaneously introducing new symbols, to which Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) would perhaps refer as 'the invention of tradition'. The ongoing processes of invention applied to the saint and his religious order highlight Hobsbawm and Ranger's notion that 'many traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented' (1). Laldas's liminal identity has thus been changed into a Hindu identity as a result of the pressure exerted by the Baniyas to adopt Hindu symbolism and remove the Islamic ones.[3] In the following sections, the current spatial as well as social-religious, economic, symbolic and imaginary transformations in the traditionally shared shrines of Laldas are explained as 'Hinduising' endeavours by the Hindu Laldasis.

THE INVENTION OF TRADITIONS: STRATEGIES OF APPROPRIATING LALDAS

Building new temples, celebrating Hindu fairs and festivals in his name and writing and reinventing legends, myths and songs are some of the ways in which the religious order of Laldas is being brought into the fold of mainstream Hinduism. Each of these processes is analysed in detail to illustrate the current changes and new additions to the order. These changes are also premised upon the idea of serving the saint by Hindu devotees in

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various ways, such as by providing material donations to *śram dān* (donation of labour). For instance, whenever a new temple was built or the renovation in the main shrine was undertaken, the devotees always framed such initiatives as performing *sevā* (service) to Laldas.

TEMPLES

In Mewat and surrounding regions, many Laldas temples have mushroomed in the last 20 years. These temples are in the style of north Indian Hindu temple architecture. Generally built on a platform, the central objects of worship in these temples are the well-adorned images/idols of the saint (Figure 4.1). Rather than worshipping the graves at traditional shrines, anthropomorphic stone idols are now the main objects of veneration among the Hindu Laldasis. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Powlett (1878: 53) had noticed a popular story about the incarnation of the saint that 'Laldas entered the world in this "*kaljug*" [dark age] because God was neglected, and men in their folly worship stones'. Clearly, the saint's primary emphasis was on refraining from idol worship. Contrary to the saint's original values of worshipping a formless God, as previously noted, the wealthy Baniyas currently worship the saint in the *saguṇ* form (God with attributes) of the Vaishnava *bhakti* tradition. These developments have turned the peasant household ascetic ideals of Laldas (ideals meant for the Meo peasants in the past) upside-down, transforming the religious order into an orthodox *saguṇ* Vaishnavite form of Brahminical Hinduism.[4]

In Brahminical Hinduism, the worship of idols is not seen as the worship of an object but rather as the worship of the divine presence that is believed to inhabit the object. The *murti* (idol) is seen as a representation of the divine and is revered as such.[5] While not all Hindus practice idol worship, it is a common practice among Brahminical Hindus and an integral part of their religious and cultural traditions. Traditionally, the *saguṇ bhakti* appeared to be an orthodox form of Brahminical devotion which did not want to compromise the authority of Brahmins since many religious figures of the *nirguṇ bhakti* generally rejected image worship, temple, ritual, pilgrimage and so on (Schomer and McLeod 1987; Vaudeville 1993). The orthodox Vaishnava tradition has although acknowledged that salvation is open to all regardless of social status; ritual barriers between high and low castes have not been seriously challenged on a practical level. More importantly, the religious leadership has remained almost exclusively in the hands of

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FIGURE 4.1 One of the new temples of Laldas

Source: Photo by the author.

Brahmins (Schomer and McLeod 1987: 8). Thus, the recent transformation of the religious order of Laldas by the Baniyas is consistent with Brahminic Hinduism that affirms the role of rituals, the mediation of the priestly class and the necessity of institutional religious practices for the devotees. For

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example, in many new temples of Laldas, Brahmins serve as priests, instead of Meo *sādh*s who were traditionally the main custodians and clerics at all shrines of Laldas.[6]

Historically, image/idol worship was essentially a more popular practice among Brahmins and high-caste circles than among lower-caste Hindus (Tarabout 2010: 56–84). 'Low-caste' communities worshipped a wide variety of objects, while Brahmin temples most likely housed anthropomorphic images and idols of Hindu deities. Together with objects, sounds, animals and rituals, the image was one piece of Hindu representation of the sacred. In particular, anthropomorphism was only one mark of 'Hinduism' among many and showed a particular form of religious orientation which best reflected the mode of praying of 'upper-caste' Brahminical Hindus in the orthodox Vaishnaivite form (Lipner 2017). Although the relationship between Brahmins and image is considerably complex, Brahminical devotional practices certainly shaped image worship over time. For instance, image/idol worship was not a major object of concern from the fifth and eleventh centuries CE among classical Indian philosophers, but Vaishnava temple worshippers—in other words orthodox Brahmins—popularised this practice (see Colas 2010). Thus, all the current religious practices that prioritise image/idol worship in temples over any other meaningful representation of God must be seen in the context of Brahminical Hinduism that directly or indirectly attempts to preserve the ritual and social position of Brahmins as priests intact.

Gradually, the practice of image worship evolved and reached its deepest manifestation within the Baniya merchant and trading community. This was primarily because it satisfied their spiritual aspirations and aided them in effectively carrying out their business endeavours. The famous example of this orthodox Vaishnava form of worship is Gandhi. It is worth noting that his perception of Ram differed significantly from that of Kabir's Ram (Agrawal 1994, 2010, 2021). Gandhi's affinity towards a *saguṇ* (with attributes) manifestation of Ram can be attributed to his own Baniya caste background and the prevalent beliefs within his community. Likewise, the ongoing transformation of Laldas by the Baniya community can be seen as their attempt to incorporate him into their traditional devotional framework. This objective has been achieved through many initiatives, such as the new temples built by the Hindu Baniyas. As recalled by many Baniya interviewees, a tangible presence or visual image of Laldas assured them of the saint's assistance whenever it was required. Be it daily life struggles or hardship in

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business, the physical presence of Laldas in new temples was assumed to be psychologically satisfying to devotees who could see the saint, touch or feel him, argue and fight with him or worship and pray to him. Therefore, they began to install idols to not only to respond to Laldas's growing appeal but also make him physically present. However, the emphasis on the visual led to an imaginary religious persona of the saint, which differs from temple to temple. All the idols installed in the newly constructed temples are distinct in appearance from one another. For instance, in Punahana, the Laldas idol wore no turban, while in a nearby Jat village in the same area, the saint's idol was adorned with a permanent turban and garlands (Figure 4.2).

FIGURE 4.2 Various new temple idols of Laldas with turbans

Source: Photos by the author.

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There was also a degree of differentiation and contestation within the religious order's inventions. For example, some temples had simultaneously built a grave to signify Laldas's *samādhī* status while others objected to it.[7] If a temple was located in a village, the peasant devotees usually had a symbolic grave to signify his yogic persona, whereas Laldas temples in urban areas and towns did not include any such representation by the Baniyas. More often, peasants perceived saintly virtues in austerity and sacrifice (*tyāg*) for the sake of others. Laldas's *samādhī* was the representation of his sacrifice or *tyāg* for public welfare. Various social sections of the Mewati society perceived religious values of the same personage differently from each other.

There is a set of contradictions in all these processes that indicate how peasant and non-peasant communities, like the Jats and the Baniyas respectively, differently associated their religious practices with Laldas. The idol installation and vivification processes also varied and followed separate patterns from temple to temple. In the temple of Punahana, this ritual process was performed by a Brahmin priest.[8] On the other hand, the temple in the nearby town of Hathin invited the traditional Meo Muslim priest (*sādh*) from the main shrine to undertake the vivification ceremonies. Although a Meo Muslim still inherits the seat of priesthood at the main shrine in Sherpur generation after generation, a Hindu Brahmin is appointed in most of the newly constructed temples to oversee daily rituals and offer prayers. These new temples denote not only the rapidly expanding religious order of Laldas but also the near completion of the saint's transformation into a Hindu deity.

NEW GENEALOGY

In the whole politics of appropriation, the saint's ancestry and Meo genealogies indirectly complement Baniya's claim on Laldas. The genealogy of Laldas reflects the Meos' connection with Hindu gods and warrior figures. The majority of Hindus today believe that Laldas is the current reincarnation of Yudhishthira, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, from the Hindu (Indic) epic called the Mahabharata. Many local temple committees have published brochures and booklets over the past decade telling this story in a hagiographic form (Figure 4.3).[9]

The main objective of these stories is to depict Laldas as a timeless figure who has existed in different incarnations throughout the four distinct Hindu epochs, representing the cyclical concept of time in Hinduism. Recent

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FIGURE 4.3 Newly published booklets and pamphlets about Laldas

Source: Photo by the author.

pamphlets illustrate this by presenting his latest and past reincarnations in the following manner:

> *satyug me harishcandra huye, tretā me prahlād,*
> *dvāpar me pāndav huye, kalyug me bābā lāldās.*
>
> In *satyug*, [you were] Harishchandra, Prahlad in the *tretā* epoch,
> A Pandav in *dvāpar*, and Baba Laldas in *kalyug*.

The Laldas incarnation story asserts that he was born as Raja Harishcandra in an 'upper-caste' family in *satyug*, in the Hindu epoch *tretā* into the *asura* (demon) category as Bhakta Prahalad, followed by two more incarnations in *dvāpar* and *kalyug* epochs as Yudhishthira among the Pandavas and Laldas among the Meos, respectively. The primary purpose of this incarnation narrative is to emphasise that Hindu gods and saintly figures have not only manifested themselves in supposedly 'high-caste' categories,

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such as Brahman and Kshatriya, but also in the middle-caste status peasant communities like the Meos and even among *asura*s (demons), as seen in the case of Bhakta Prahalad. This highlights the notion that divinity can transcend caste boundaries and encompass diverse socio-religious contexts.

The printed materials spread the message that Hindu characters and deities have always transcended caste, community and religious-class (god and demon) related boundaries. To fulfil this objective, stories in these pamphlets constantly cite the examples of Hindu gods and saintly figures taking incarnations into socially and religiously diverse communities. Assuming that this is not the first time a Hindu religious figure has been born outside a 'high caste' of the Hindu religion, the publications imply that it has been an ongoing trend. To provide the saint's recently invented 'Hindu' identity with an ideological legitimacy, a shifting range of incarnated identities is, thus, used here as evidence of Laldas being 'Hindu'. By doing so, a kinship relation and a genealogical lineage between Lal-Khan/Laldas (who belonged to a Muslim community with a comparatively 'low-caste' peasant status) and the Hindu figures has been invented. Given the distinctive differences between the Meos and other Muslim communities, Laldas needed to be legitimised by these stories of Hindu gods and figures who transcended religious boundaries. At the same time, these stories provided with an invented genealogy that could be helpful in incorporating Laldas as a 'Hindu' figure.

Meo genealogies also bolster the Laldas's 'Hindu' image through the Meo community's self-perception of a 'Hindu' past. The Meos do not deny the genealogical connection between Laldas and Hindu gods, since they also relate themselves to characters from the Mahabharata and with other notable Hindu religious figures. Nonetheless, the genealogy of the Laldas incarnation as Hindu characters helps current Hindu Laldasis' attempts to appropriate the saint and his order in Hindu form. In addition to the Meo community genealogy, there is also a list of ancestry connecting the saint to various Meo Muslim families of Laldasi origin.[10] Hindu devotees sometimes disputed Laldas's genealogy, whereas his ancestry was largely acknowledged. The reason for Laldas's contested genealogy is the shared nature of the sectarian order's beliefs.

The Meo ancestry is recorded by Brahmins called the Jaggas (record-keepers). The chronicles of the Jaggas are regarded as rich and reliable historical sources by the state. Often, a specific Jagga family preserves records of its peasant patrons for multiple generations. Once a year, the Jaggas visit the family and record all the significant occurrences, mostly births, deaths,

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marriages and so on. Commonly termed as *sajrā*, the family lineage details an individual's whole ancestry. In the case of Laldas, the ancestry or *sajrā* (see Figure 4.4) details the full family tree from the time of his birth in the sixteenth century until the present day, providing a wealth of historical

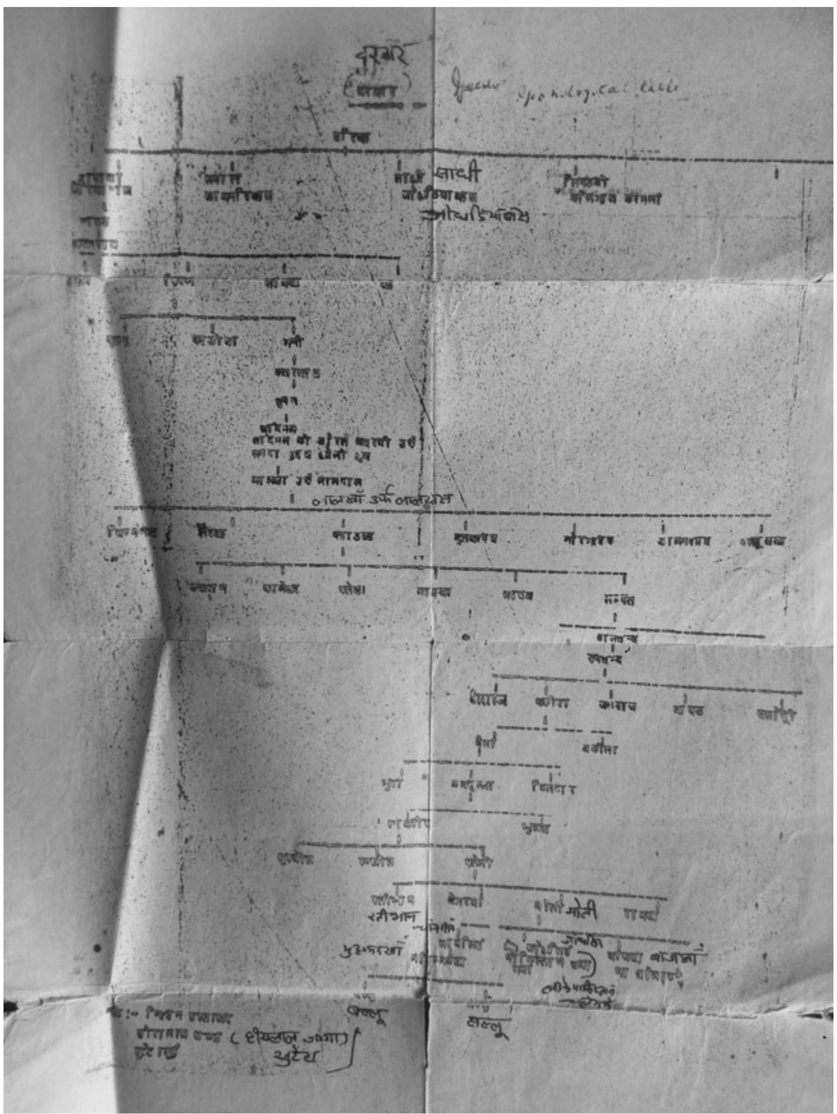

FIGURE 4.4 The *sajrā* (family lineage) of Laldas

Source: Hiralal Jagga.

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material that identifies his lineage and details his current descendants.[11] The present custodians of the Laldas shrine at Sherpur are his descendants from the Duhlot *pāl* of the Meos. The saint propagated devotion to the god Ram, but the Duhlot clan links its origins to the Hindu god Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu.

According to his ancestry, provided to me by Hiralal Jagga, his father's name was Chandmal and his mother's was Samda. He was born in Dholidoob near the present-day Alwar district in his maternal grandfather's house. A shrine is located there, and it is also his parents' burial place. The current Meo priests who sit at Sherpur and Bandholi (a shrine of his son Kutub) are descendants of the saint, currently representing the 11th generation. Among all the sons, only his second son Pahada was married. He is said to have been the progenitor of the current line of the *sādh*s, who are also fulfilling the duties of a custodian.

As the *sajrā* tells us, the saint Laldas simultaneously lived as a householder and as an ascetic. He had six wives, seven sons and seven daughters. The shrine at Sherpur contains 16 graves of his family members (Figure 4.5). According to the popular story in Mewat, his first son, Kutub, meaning 'polar star', lived for only 18 days. The reason for Kutub's short life was that the polar star cannot be held in captivity.

The birth of Kutub is linked with a series of other events in Laldas's life extolling his personal virtues. A voice at a mosque (Harmandir), where Laldas had gone to worship, predicted the birth of a son who would be a polar star (Kutub). Laldas responded to the announcement with a single word: 'bhala!' (goodness). A few months later, to put his faith to the test, a daughter was born instead of a son, who died immediately (Powlett 1878: 54). Laldas was not sad since he believed that God worshippers (*harbhagatan*) should always be pleased. Soon after, God talked to him about the 'Kutub' once more. Laldas showed no signs of impatience or nervousness. A second daughter was born, but she died as well. Laldas stated, 'I have faith in God' (*sain ko mero biswas*) (Powlett 1878: 55).

The birth of Kutub after 18 months of pregnancy is presented as a remarkable event in the saint's family, serving as an example of wondrous occurrences associated with him. Although the child was only 18 days old, he spoke and chastised his mother for not showing him his father. Laldas was summoned and had a conversation with the child, after which the child passed away in a state of contentment. A devoted *sādh* cleaned and clothed the corpse, and his sister Sarupa (firstborn) pleaded with her father to erect a

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FIGURE 4.5 The graves of Laldas (*top left*) and those of his sons, parents and wives (*clockwise*)

Source: Photos by the author.

shrine in his honour (Powlett 1878: 55). The child's remains were transported to Bandholi, where the two dead infant sisters (Riddhi and Siddhi) had reportedly been buried. The path was blocked by a wide creek, but as Sarupa continued walking, a dry passage surfaced. The body was then brought to Bandholi, where a *dargāh* (tomb) was built, and which now enjoys a great reputation of a shrine or temple. For generations, Laldas's descendants have been living in the vicinity of these shrines.

As already stated, all the descendants are called 'Meo *sādh*', and their beliefs and practices are different from other Meo Muslims. They do not

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observe a complete Islamic life despite being Muslims. When Hindus first attempted to expropriate the *samprādāya* (order), the Meo *sādh*'s relationship to the shrines was also questioned. Inside the main wall of the Sherpur shrine, there was a housing complex, consisting of some *kaccā* (mud) houses and three smaller shrines. The pink-and-white buildings that housed numerous graves were encircled by an exterior wall that served as the back wall of many rooms. These rooms also functioned as the temple office, shrine lodges, kitchens, stores and so on. In the middle of the shrine compound, the thatched houses with mud walls belonged to the families of former Meo *sādh*s (the priests of Laldas) who had been living here since before the outer wall fencing was constructed (Figure 4.6).

In 2016, every building within the temple complex, except the *sādh*s' residence, was undergoing renovations. Inside the shrine wall, the Meo Muslim residents of the *sādh* background were under immense pressure by the Hindu Laldasis to move somewhere else so that the shrine could fully be

FIGURE 4.6 The *kaccā* houses of the traditional Muslim *sādh*s

Source: Photo by the author.

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developed into a grand Hindu temple. The temple management continued to request these *sādh*s to vacate the premises. Hindu Laldasis regularly offered deals to these Muslim residents from time to time. But the Meo Muslim residents rejected such offers because, as one of the *sādh*s stated, leaving the shrine would imply an end to their claim on Laldas.

The Meo *sādh*s used the saint's ancestry to support their traditional custodianship claim. Currently, the district court has also accepted their claims.[12] However, the Hindu Baniyas are making strong efforts to remove the Muslim *sādh*s from the positions of priesthood in the traditional Laldas shrines, seeking to replace them with Hindu Brahmin priests. In an interview, a Hindu Laldasi of the Baniya caste background stated that the replacement of the Muslim priests is the Hindus' current goal.[13] In this debate, the record and production of ancestry lines and genealogical records provide a concrete historical significance. Genealogical information thus functions not only to satisfy the basic need of knowing how one is associated with other people within a community but also to create a cultural document. In the case of Meo Laldasis, the ancestry line legally supported their claims and provided 'evidence' to their connection with the saint.

PILGRIMAGE

Annual fairs and festivals have long been reported at the saint's main shrine in Sherpur. Powlett (1878: 59) wrote:

> … fairs are held at Laldas places three times a year. At Sherpur, on *asoj* 11 (October), on *asārh punam* (full moon) about July, and on *māgh punam* about November.

Powlett also reported the total gathering of at least 10,000 pilgrims from neighbouring areas. Whereas in the past this gathering of pilgrims was made up of Hindus, Muslims, Jains and Sikhs from distant places, currently it has acquired a distinctive Hindu character. These days, such *yātrā*s (pilgrimages) commence from a particular temple and end at the tomb. During a 60-kilometre pilgrimage from the Punahana temple to the Sherpur shrine, I noticed the immensely Hinduised nature of the religious order.[14] Hindu Baniyas carried saffron flags, a ribbon was tied around their heads and they were constantly chanting the Laldas *cālīsā* (mantra) and prayers, followed by

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a slogan, *laldas bābā ki jai ho* (hail to Baba Laldas). Pilgrimages like this one are routinely organised by different temple committees.[15]

Apart from regular pilgrimages from one temple or another to the tomb, each temple organises regular *shobhā yātrā*s (pageants) in its locality. I attended one of these pageants during which a small idol of the saint dressed in white saintly attire sat in the middle of a beautifully decorated palanquin carried by four men. The Hindu devotees—mainly Baniyas—followed the procession, which passed through Hindu-dominated local streets and *mohallā*s (parts of the town) in a Muslim-majority area. These pageants were generally organised to spread the fame of Laldas locally and attract other Baniyas who had not yet developed ties with the saint. It was expected by the temple committee members of various temples that with the rising fame of the Laldas it was the responsibility of every devotee to undertake initiatives related to the overall growth of the order.

PRAYERS AND BHAJANS *(HINDU RELIGIOUS SONGS)*

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the old religious text known as *nuktāvalī* was divided into various parts which included both life stories and *bhajan*s in different genres, ranging from classical Indian *rāg*s to dialogues and discussions with the saint. These days, newly composed religious songs have been added to these traditional materials. These new additions are found in published materials such as the cheap pamphlets and booklets (see Appendix A.2). The main motive is to articulate a Vaishnava-style *saguṇ bhakti* and to make Laldas a household figure in Mewat. The new prayer songs have similar themes and styles to those composed to worship a *saguṇ* Hindu god such as Vishnu, who is present all the time in front of the eyes of a devotee in the form of an idol. For instance, the *ārtī* song of Laldas cited ahead, which Hindu devotees sing every morning and evening in the temple of Punahana, renders this style of *saguṇ*-like Vaishnava worship more explicit:

> *om jai bābā laldas, om jai bābā laldas*
> *sab dukh hārī sankat tārī, āya tere pās (om jai bābā laldas …)*
> *balyā avasthā me van jākar tumne tap kīnā*
> *devan karī parīkshā, vahā pe bajāke mradu vīnā (om jai …)*
> *lakdī becan alwar jākar, karat pet uddhār*
> *cale bharotā uncā sarse, deo karat jai jai kār (om jai …)*[16]

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> Hail to Baba Laldas, hail to Baba Laldas
> O destroyer of all the sorrows and problems, I came under your patronage (hail to Baba Laldas …)
> You meditated in the jungle in the childhood
> Gods tested you, while playing the soft music of veena[17] (hail to Baba Laldas …)
> By selling woods in Alwar, satiated the hunger
> The bales (you carried) remained untouched and high above the head, gods hailing victories (hail to Baba Laldas …)[18] (Appendix A.2)

This hymn, which is sung during the morning and evening *ārtī* prayers, has not been mentioned in any of the historical accounts of the colonial ethnographer Powlett or in the text of Dungrisi Sadh.[19] Such prayers were not commonly sung at the traditional shrines of the saint. This song closely resembles the Hindu manner of praying in front of the idol of a god. Thus, it is clearly a recently invented tradition to fit the needs of the Vaishnava *saguṇ bhakti* tradition. At the main shrine, the same *ārtī* is sung in front of the saint's grave.

TEMPLE COMMITTEES

The management of the religious order operates at two levels: the temple committee at the main shrine and various local temple committees in the areas wherever new temples are built. Committees are named in the style of *Sri Baba Laldas ji Maharaj Mandir Vikas va Seva Samiti* (Sri Baba Laldas-ji Maharaj Temple Development and Service Committee—a recently adopted name) (Figure 4.7). The name of a temple is usually followed by a place name, which generally refers to government-registered bodies of different temple committees under the same name. However, the conscious use of a phrase 'temple development' in the nomenclature points to the fact that the integration process is still underway. All members of the local bodies except the main committee at the main shrine are Hindus, mostly members from the Baniya community. Since the main shrine is a place for shared worship, the Muslim priest had to be included when the committee was first formed in the 1960s.

Apart from the disputes between Hindus and Muslims about the identity of the shrine, a legal case about the formation of committees is pending in the court. This case provides more information about the history of the temple

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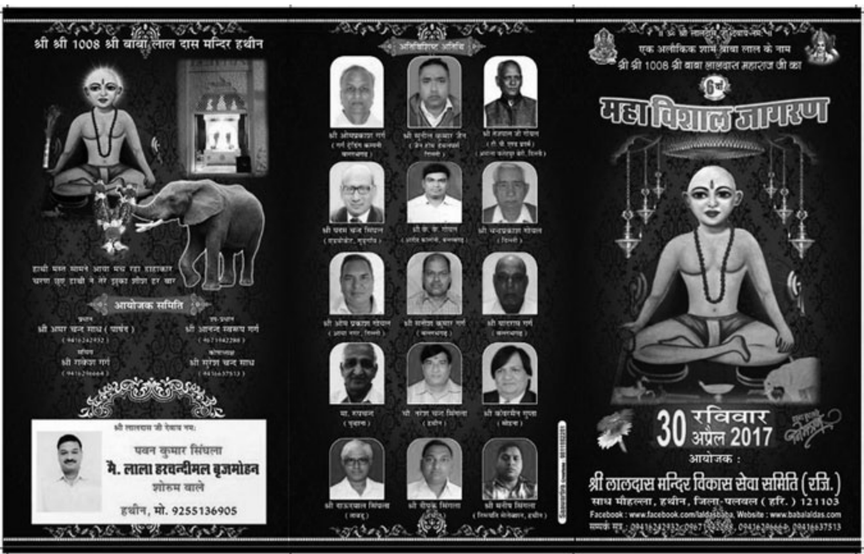

FIGURE 4.7 Invitation for a *jāgran* by a temple committee
Source: Photo by the author.

committees.[20] On 14 June 2010, another case was registered on behalf of 'Sri Laldas Dharm Pracharak Sangh' (Sri Laldas Religious Missionary Union), which became a registered body on 17 November 1966 under the Rajasthan Public Trust Act of 1961.[21] Without going into too much detail about the case here, the legal battle shows the role of various kinds of temple trusts, many of which are recently formed. Eventually, the temple and the trust gained control over a substantial amount of resources, primarily land, connected to several shrines and *baithak*s (resting place) of Laldas.[22] In the past, wealthy followers generally donated land to all the religious places connected to Laldas. The Baniyas, thus, have also staked their claim to the shrine properties by establishing these temple committees.

METHODS OF ADVERTISING

Popular narratives of Laldas as a 'Hindu' saint are widely circulated through cheap pamphlets and social media platforms, such as Facebook and WhatsApp. In this way, the invention of traditions is often the means to legitimise newer forms of religious practices. There are a series of advertising processes by which the Laldas order and the saint are being given a new outlook.

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These temple committees take Hindu-style measures to promote the religious order. For instance, to popularise the religious order and to give it a Hindu identification, they organise *kirtan*s and *bhandārā* (music and feasts), celebrate the saint's birthday and circulate news of any event through local newspapers. Members of the temple committee at Punahana were regularly invited to visit a believer's home for *kirtan*. The idea of *kirtan* was first advised by a very devout follower, the late Ramdas Aggarwal (a Baniya), who was said to have been blessed by the saint. Ramdas had gone through many struggles until he was introduced to the saint in the early 2000s by a friend. His family was in significant debt as his business was not profitable. In these circumstances, he thought he would try appealing to the miraculous saint Laldas. A miracle happened in his life and he became rich after visiting the shrine of Sherpur. He subsequently formed a deep association with the saint and continued venerating him wholeheartedly. Later in life, he devoted himself completely to the service of the saint after handing over the business to his sons. The story of Ramdas made the religious order more famous among merchants, traders and other Hindus in Punahana who expected similar miracles in their lives. In collecting stories of the saint, I was advised repeatedly during fieldwork to go and visit Ramdas's family as they were the ones most blessed by the saint.

Every Sunday, as a part of disseminating the teachings of Laldas, a group of his devotees performed devotional songs in private houses under the banner of 'Laldas Kirtan Mandali' (Laldas Music Society). Among local Hindus, the Baniya community overwhelmingly supported the religious order of Laldas. Their monopoly over the saint acted to exclude 'lower castes' from worship. However, 'lower-caste' individuals continuously made significant efforts to counter this by organising devotional musical programme consisting of prayers offered to Laldas. Invitations to such events were always accepted promptly by 'Laldas Kirtan Mandali', although many Baniyas felt a little uneasy about participating because they might have to accept water and food served by 'lower-caste' people. Usually, Baniya visitors to the homes of 'lower-caste' devotees politely refused food and water offered to them.

The practice of *bhandārā* (ritual feast), common in north India, is another ritual practice adopted by Hindu Laldasis at the main shrine and new temples. Although the act of performing *bhandārā*s has multiple meanings and significance for a person, from fulfilment of wishes to celebrating major life events such as births, deaths and marriages, over time this practice was adopted by Sikh and Hindu devotees of Laldas. It not only helped popularise

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the religious order but also gave Hindus the opportunity to perform selfless service to the saint.

The new advertising endeavours undertaken by devotees and various Laldas temple committees extended to both print and electronic media, as well as broadcast and social media, in order to widely circulate the stories of the saint's miracles. Cheap pamphlets, audio and video cassettes of songs, CDs and *bhajan*s on YouTube were popular hits. Devotees of Laldas also connected with one another using social media platforms such as Facebook. As his religious order increased in fame, more and more people began to come from Delhi to visit the Laldas shrines. They used social media to connect with other devotees, informing each other about events such as *bhandārā*, *sevā* or the celebration of festivals. For any material needs at the main shrine, the social media groups and individuals also circulated information on these online platforms. Various devotees responded very quickly, taking responsibility for providing the required materials in the form of *dān* (gifts), a return gift offered to the saint. Social media was thus used not only to circulate information but also for mobilisational purposes such as requesting a collective *śram dān* (gifts of labour), if the shrine had to be cleaned, painted or repaired. As a result, numerous webpages were created that were devoted to Laldas to actively respond to the queries from new urban devotees. Due to an active mediatised engagement and other forms of communication, the religious order has achieved a new height in the form of both material resources and new devotees. The immense flow of material resources has contributed to the overall transformation of the shrines.

THE ROLE OF MONEY

In the transformation of the meaning of religious order, the Baniya community's wealth is instrumental in the articulation of a new social and religious ideology. Money has played a significant role in the rapid transformation and spread of the Laldas religious order. As the religious order has a strong hold among the affluent community of Baniyas, it has attracted an enormous amount of money and resources in the last couple of decades. For instance, all the temples are being built on a grand scale, using expensive marble stones. Many smaller temples of Laldas have been transformed into marvellous-looking religious places throughout north India. These temples were rather small and simple until two decades. Building grand temples was possible due to this excessive flow of material resources and money. Although

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it is impossible to locate the reasons for this sudden increase in the flow of material resources, the period of this transition certainly has roots in the rise and circulation of stories about the saint's miracles. *Bābā naye bhakto ko jald pakadate hai* (the saint fulfils the wishes of new devotees very quickly)[23] was a statement circulating among devotees that attracted many people. Out of approximately 500 Baniya households in Punahana, the followers of the saint have risen from 20 households in the early 2000s to about 400 in 2019.[24] The motivation behind their belief in the saint stemmed from witnessing the prosperous growth of certain Baniya businesses after they began adhering to the religious teachings and practices of Laldas.

The celebration of any event related to the saint is marked by extravagant expenditure and grand displays, thanks to the abundance of resources available. The expenses incurred for these events are covered by the respective temple committees, primarily through donations. In the past, these donations mainly consisted of items such as oil, corn, millet and sugar. However, in present times, the shrines and newly constructed temples benefit from a regular influx of cash donations. The majority of these monetary contributions come from Hindu Baniyas who perceive the saint to be the provider of everything in their lives.

The excessive flow of money and resources, in the form of *cadhāvā* (offerings), has also given rise to a new type of succession dispute over the priesthood between the two Meo priestly families at the main shrine. A court case to determine the true successors of the Muslim priests has been going on in the high court of Rajasthan.[25] The succession dispute is connected to a larger dispute between Hindus and Muslims in 1998. During the outbreak of the conflict, the then priest Sallu fled, fearing for his life at the hands of the workers of the Hindu organisations, the Shiva Sena and the Bajrang Dal. Since, the main caretakers of the shrine were forced to flee, the district administration hastily chose another Meo to be the priest. The then district magistrate who had come to resolve the issue gave the keys to another Meo *sādh* from the village. He did it to open the shrine, ensuring that the daily rituals and prayers could continue to take place. When the original caretakers arrived back at their residence, they discovered that another priest had taken their place and refused to hand over the keys. They took this issue to the court and are still waiting for the decision to be delivered.[26] It is mostly the families of these displaced *sādh*s who still live inside the shrine. They believe that they were deceptively removed from the position so that the Hindu management of the shrine could appoint a Meo priest of its liking. The animosity between

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the 'temple' management committee controlled by Hindus and the main custodians of the shrines is still intact.[27] The current nature of the succession dispute over the priesthood owes much to the increase in offerings of money and other materials that the serving priest has the right to keep. This episode that sparked the controversy regarding the priestly succession among the Meo *sādh*s led to the discussion of replacing them with Brahmin priests. Therefore, the status of these traditional Meo Muslim priests of Laldas, who lived close to the shrines, was now under question.[28]

It is impossible for the Meos to halt the transformation of Laldas's shrines as the wealthy class of Hindu Baniyas are among his main followers. However, Muslims' opposition to the Hinduisation process is reserved only for the mosques present inside the saint's shrines, which are restricted from functioning at the hands of Hindu devotees. All these processes have contributed to shaping a distinct contemporary identity for the religious order and the saint that is altogether different from the past. The overall transformation of Laldas is simultaneously facilitated by the transformation of the Meo community from a 'Hindu–Muslim' group to a markedly Muslim community who discourage Meo devotion to Laldas as antithetical to Islam, just as they oppose the veneration of many other Sufi saints. They now identify Sunni Islam as the true religion. The primary reason for the Muslims disputing the claims of Hindus over Laldas and his shrines relates to the control of space. If they can control Laldas shrines, these shrines may provide for the Tablighi Muslims a space within which to encourage the true path of Islam. This reasoning impacts the number of Muslims attending the shrines of Laldas. Religious forces often strive to define a shared religious space in line with their respective ideological leanings by constructing and imparting some distinctively new characteristics to traditionally constructed religious spaces. Such processes are social as both the production and the construction of space are contested for ideological or economic reasons (Low 1996: 862). Likewise, the traditional shrines of Laldas are socially produced sacred spaces, but socio-religious forces are currently working towards redefining their meaning.

With the rise and success of the transnational Islamic faith renewal movement known as the Tablighi Jamaat, the Meos have come to imagine themselves more as Muslims. In Chapter 5, the impact of the ideological stand of the two reformist organisations, Arya Samaj and Tablighi Jamaat, with regard to Sufi and Bhakti saints of Mewat is discussed. It aims to understand the implications of the reformist notions on shared faiths and shared shrines.

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The situation around the shrines of Laldas and other saints in Mewat reveals the tension between the two kinds of followers of Laldas on the one hand and between the Sufi and Tablighi Muslims on the other.

NOTES

1. Lefebvre (1991) shows that the concept of domination of space is inseparable from the concept of appropriation of space. Both processes go hand in hand. In Lefebvre's words: 'Dominated space and appropriated space may in principle be combined—and, ideally at least, they ought to be combined. But history—which is to say the history of accumulation—is also the history of their separation and mutual antagonism. The winner in this contest, moreover, has been domination' (166).
2. Low (1996, 2009) contrasts 'the social construction of space' with 'the social production of space'. 'The social production of space' emphasises how in the past spaces were socially, religiously, politically and economically produced, alienating them from their natural settings. By contrast, 'the social construction of space' gives an account of the symbolic and phenomenological experience of space as governed by contemporary socio-religious processes such as religious conflicts, control, ideological and commercial exchanges, and technological developments. Thus, spaces are historically engendered (socially produced) into physical–material settings by various factors, but forces constantly try to construct new meanings around the use of space.
3. Previously, Laldas's liminal condition was a kind of inter-structural zone in which he advocated a unique religious synthesis, being neither a Muslim nor a Hindu. In the post-liminal phase, however, the dominant imagery of Laldas is of a Hindu saint marking a transformation of the religious order and his religious persona.
4. In Vaishnava form of worship, Brahmins have the ritual right to worship deity's idols in temples. As stated earlier, Brahmanical Hinduism reinforces the authority and traditions of Brahmins in Hindu society by various religious means including, but not limited to, maintaining hierarchy, following doctrines of purity and pollution, worshipping idols and assigning a central importance to priests and rituals among others.
5. The concept of idol worship is based on the belief that the divine can manifest itself in physical forms, and that the worship of these forms can help devotees

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connect with the divine. The *murti*s are seen as a medium through which devotees can communicate with the deity and receive blessings.

6. A follower of Laldas is generally called *sādh* meaning a 'yogi' or 'meditator'. The traditional shrines were mostly attended by Meo *sādh*s officiating as priests. The title *sādh* nowadays is also used by non-Meo followers of the saint who are not priests.
7. A *samādhī* is a temple, shrine or memorial containing the remains of the deceased (similar to a tomb or mausoleum). *Samādhī* sites are frequently constructed in this manner to honour Hindu saints or gurus, whose spirits are believed to have entered a state of meditative consciousness at the time of death.
8. Idol vivification at Punahana temple happened on 26 January 2016. The date is mentioned on an invitation card which contained details about the saint, prayers, *bhajan*s and *cālisā* (usually a prayer made up of 40 hymns) attributed to him. I am grateful to the Brahmin priest of the temple for providing me with this information and source materials.
9. Each Laldas temple has a temple committee. All these temple committees are linked to the main temple committee of Sherpur at the main shrine.
10. It is important to note here that the use of ancestry is somewhat different from genealogies. Ancestry generally concerns itself with a family rather than a whole community. It helps to establish a descendant's claim on an ancestor's heritage, although sometimes it can generate negative impacts.
11. The ancestral lineage of Laldas has given rise to a conflict between Hindu and Muslim Laldasis in the region, as both groups vie for ownership of the traditional shrines associated with Laldas. This dispute also extends to various branches of Meo *sādh* (priestly) families, who also compete with each other for the priestly positions within these shrines. The conflicting claims and rivalries reflect the complex dynamics surrounding the religious and communal ownership of the Laldas shrines.
12. *Sri Laldas Religious Development Organisation vs Sallu*, District Magistrate Court, Alwar, 34, 37, 38, 39, Specific Relief Act, 1963, 14 June 2010.
13. Interview with Mahesh Sadh, 19 July 2016, Punahana, Haryana.
14. I attended this pilgrimage during the course of my fieldwork at the beginning of 2016.
15. Field notes dated June 2016. Also see 'Baba Laldas *kā melā* 20 *ko*', *Dainik Bhaskar*, 16 June 2016, https://www.bhaskar.com/news/RAJ-ALW-MAT-latest-alwar-news-021003-374748-NOR.html, accessed 10 September 2017, for more details.

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16. I am unable to cite the full song here. This excerpt gives an idea of the way new songs are styled after typical Hindu *ārtī* songs.
17. An Indian classical music instrument.
18. Cited from, *Śri bābā Laldas ji mahāraj murtī prān pratisthā and bhavya jāgran*, public invitation booklet (2015), printed by Goyal Printers, Punahana, Mewat, Haryana. The English translation of the worship song does not rhyme like the Hindi version. It is provided to help non-Hindi readers understand the meanings in the song. For the full song, see Appendix A.2.
19. Powlett cites a large number of hymns, prayer songs and oral stories that include similar hymns mentioned in the hand-written text of Dungarisi. This also shows the historicity of the oral songs and stories related to the saint.
20. A copy of the court case was provided to me by a lawyer friend who practised in the District and Session Court of Alwar, which is where the hearing of the dispute was taking place. There were no such committees in the past until disputes began occurring at the traditional shrines. To legitimise their claims over the Laldas shrines, all of a sudden, Hindu followers formed a committee in 1963. One of the Meo *sādh*s told me that this was also a strategy to control all the resources of the shrines. The names of these temple committees have been changed a few times.
21. According to the filed petition, *Sri Laldas dharm pracharak sangh banam Sallu putra Mohammed Khan vagera*, 14 June 2010, District and Session Court, Alwar, Case/Acc No. 006452. The case is filed for stopping Muslims from allegedly preforming an Islamic prayer in a supposed Hindu temple.
22. *Baithak*, literally meaning 'meeting-place', are those places in Mewat where Laldas either meditated or spent some time preaching.
23. Field notes. The research participants usually mentioned many names during interviews whose wishes were granted by boon of the saint; Ramdas's name was mentioned again and again.
24. These statistics were mentioned to me during an interview with the then secretary of 'Sri Laldas Temple Development, Punahana'. The figures were mentioned in his private notebook. Though it is not a significant piece of evidence, in light of other events it certainly shows a growth in the number of followers of the religious order.
25. *Sallu versus Igris alias Pappu*, 2005, 7 July 2006, Civil Judge and Judicial Magistrate Court, Alwar, Diwani Case No: 1/2005. A judgment in this case on two occasions is given in favour of the previous priest Sallu which is disputed again by appealing in the high court of Rajasthan, *Sallu versus Igris alias*

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Pappu, 1 February 2010, Upper District Magistrate Court, Alwar, Diwani Case No: 08/09.

26. *Sallu and others versus Igris*, Junior Magistrate Civil Court, Alwar, jo 39. r.1-2, 151, 2005.
27. Pappu is distantly related to the traditional custodians of the Sherpur shrine. He does not belong to the main line of the descendants of Laldas.
28. *Sri Laldas Religious Development Organisation vs Sallu*, District Magistrate Court, Alwar, 34, 37, 38, 39, Specific Relief Act, 1963, 14 June 2010.

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5

RELIGIOUS REFORM AND SHARED SHRINES

During his regular Thursday visits to the Sufi tomb of the saint Shah Chokha,[1] Ram Singh, a schoolteacher of the Baniya caste from the town of Punahana, never forgot to donate money to Tablighi Jamaat volunteers. He believed that visiting a Sufi *dargāh* and providing funds for Islamic education and mosque renovation were acts of service to God.[2] Ram Singh lived close to the Laldas temple in Punahana (Figure 5.1). He or a member of his family visited the temple daily, either in the morning or evening. Ram Singh openly regarded Laldas as a Muslim, saying, *hamāre bābā musalmān the par hamen unki pahcān se koi lenā denā nahī* (our saint was Muslim, but we do not have any problem with his identity).

In 2015, the new temple of Laldas was built on the premises of an Arya Samaj school. The school building also served as a regional centre for the Arya Samaj. An open courtyard was located in front of the temple. Visitors arrived daily and waited in the courtyard while the Brahmin head priest,[3] made the required arrangements for Laldas's morning and evening prayers. Most of the devotees were shopkeepers in the nearby central market in Punahana and came to the temple for quick prayers to the saint. This market was dominated by Hindus, particularly the Baniyas who owned shops for selling items of daily use. On the outer circle of this market, which separated Punahana from Nakanpur (a very old Meo village that is today part of the Punahana town municipality), there were shops for selling garments, mobiles, and vegetable and fruits, among other items. These shops were predominantly owned by Muslims.

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FIGURE 5.1 Laldas temple in the premises of the Arya Samaj in Punahana
Source: Photo by the author.

The town was also home to considerable populations of Hindu 'low castes' such as Valmikis, Jatavs, Sainis (Malis), Nais and Punjabi immigrants from Pakistan. The everyday dynamics of social life in this town were significantly influenced by the presence of these communities. The demographic numbers of Hindus and Muslims were almost nearly the same, but the region had a Muslim majority. Hindus and Muslims interacted with one another, but there was a sense of insecurity among the Hindus, especially the Baniyas, due to the Muslim majority in the area. Hindu caste communities built strong networks with right-wing organisations such as the RSS, the Bajrang Dal and the Arya Samaj in response to their minority status, anticipating potential conflicts in the future. The more militant of these organisations—for instance, the Bajrang Dal and the RSS—had recently consolidated their political influence in the area. The Arya Samaj participated in political matters but directed more attention to social issues and practices such as marriages ceremonies, establishing temples and schools, and criticising non-Vedic practices. It claimed to be actively involved in the social sphere rather than in politics, though its work undoubtedly had political implications.

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The Arya Samaj was historically opposed to worshipping idols in temples. Since its foundation in 1875, the Arya Samaj engaged in aggressive religious proselytising.[4] Initially, the Samaj exclusively targeted Hindus, denouncing practices such as idol worship and calling for a return to the teachings of the Vedas. For Arya Samajis, true Hinduism consisted of only those practices and customs mentioned in the Vedas (Jones 1976, 1995; Fischertine 2013). All other forms of religious behaviour were considered to be erroneous additions to Hinduism. Influenced by the colonial knowledge of orientalist scholars, Arya Samajis came to believe that 'Hinduism' in the late nineteenth century had become degraded and needed revival.[5] In terms of politics, the Arya Samaj has been known for its nationalist and anti-colonialist views. The Arya Samajis believed that Hinduism was under threat from foreign influences, particularly from the British, and advocated for the revival of Hindu culture and traditions. They also played an active role in the Indian independence movement, with many of their leaders participating in political activism and civil disobedience (Jones 1976, 1995). The idea of a Hindu Rashtra (nation) is central to their ideology, and they believe that India should be a Hindu-majority state with a government based on Hindu principles.[6]

The Laldas temple was situated within a complex that housed several other interconnected temples. Adjacent to the narrow entrance of the complex stood the temple of Jaharpir, also known as Gogapir or Goga Medi,[7] which also contained a small temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Parallel to the Laldas shrine and on the right side of the Jaharpir temple, there was a temple devoted to the goddess Durga, separated by a thick wall from the Arya Samaj school building. Around 50 meters away, there was an Arya Samaj temple, and behind the complex, there was a Vishnu temple.

Among the temples within the complex, the Laldas temple stood out with its striking red sandstone structure. The walls of the Jaharpir temple, painted white in the past, had faded, creating a gloomy ambience inside. Similarly, the newly constructed temple dedicated to goddess Durga had brown cement plastered walls that remained unpainted. This temple, too, appeared to be dull at the time of my visit. Unlike the Laldas temple, the other temples received little money as donation, leaving them in a poorer economic situation. Almost all visitors to Laldas bowed to Jaharpir and Durga Mata but seldom entered their temples (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). Within the temple complex, most former members of the Arya Samaj had begun following the saint, Laldas. However, the Arya Samajis present on the temple premises could not openly express their resentment against this change. The fact that Laldas and Jaharpir were

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FIGURE 5.2 The temple of Jaharpir

Source: Photo by the author.

FIGURE 5.3 Goddess Durga's temple

Source: Photo by the author.

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'Muslim' saints venerated by Hindus constituted an even greater offence in the eyes of the Samaj and the priest of the Durga temple.

The elder brother of Ram Singh, called Shyam Singh, who was an uncompromising Arya Samaji, said, 'All who live in India are Hindus; therefore, we should not think much about Hindu and Muslim except their respective praying methods.'[8] He continued, 'Muslims pray rightly to one God though their books and praying methods are wrong'. Astonishingly, he also lamented, '… the Arya Samaj has not succeeded in bringing our Muslim brothers onto the right path but at least Muslims do not worship idols like Hindus'.[9] Unhappy with his own family members and their new god Laldas, he maintained a distance between his own 'religion' and that of his family. Shyam Singh's uneasiness was evident when his family decided to host a *laldas kīrtan* (devotional musical singing) in their house. Shyam Singh was anguished by what he saw as his family's fallen religious values. He himself lived according to the Arya *dharm* (doctrines)—using earthen vessels for cooking, chanting Vedic mantras (couplets) and using Ayurvedic products. He did not make a substantial distinction between Hindus and Muslims and considered that members of both religious communities are following faulty religious paths. In fact, he admired textual Islam for its emphasis on monotheism and for forbidding idol veneration.

In a similar vein, the priest who officiated at the goddess Durga's shrine complained that Hindus were deserting their own 'religion' in favour of Muslim saints. He was bitter about the decrease in the number of visitors coming to the temple: *log apnā dharam bhūl rahe hai* (people are forgetting their religion) was his recurrent concern.[10] This priest was aware that the charisma of the Laldas and Jaharpir saints was a major reason for their wide following. He tried to compete with the rising popularity of the Muslim saints by telling stories about the power and charisma of the goddess Durga. The traditions of these Muslim saints had historically developed on the basis of their miraculous powers. The priest of the Durga temple often invoked the same logic to tell stories to match the miracles of Laldas and Jaharpir.

One such miracle story shared by the priest drew on events in 2011, when a small idol of the monkey god Hanuman in the courtyard of the Laldas temple was damaged in a Hindu–Muslim skirmish, following violence in the nearby town of Gopalgarh, in which about 10 people lost their lives (Iqbal 2011; Chakrabarty 2011). The Hindus of the town and the priest believed that Muslims were the perpetrators of the damage. Around the time of this incident, the priest of the Durga temple claimed that some men attempted to

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damage the Durga idol but were repelled by the power of the goddess, who blinded them: *ye durgā mā bahut camatkārī hai* (this mother Durga is very miraculous).[11] The priest's claim that the goddess was miraculous parallels the narratives of miracles performed by the Muslim saints. The powerful religious order of Laldas had an adverse impact on the popularity of these traditional centres of Hindu religious beliefs and worship.

In Punahana, the volunteers of Arya Samaj adopted a strategy of avoiding direct confrontation with the followers of Laldas, whom they perceived as idol worshippers. This observation was made based on conversations I had with the headmaster of the Arya Samaj school. He engaged in respectful discussions with the followers of Laldas but did not actively try to persuade them to join the Samaj. In his statements, he skilfully employed a compartmentalised logic, distinguishing between 'us' (Arya Samajis, non-idol worshippers) and the 'others' (Hindus who worship idols), demonstrating a clear separation of beliefs. The headmaster's tone conveyed a sense of superiority for the Arya Samaj. During my observations, I noticed that he would occasionally engage in conversations with temple visitors, attempting to convince them that one could achieve success in life through good actions rather than by worshipping an idol. However, he struggled to debunk stories of the saint's miracles or provide guidance to individuals seeking assistance from Laldas to address their everyday challenges. The headmaster was frequently asked by temple visitors whether Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj, aided people in need by performing miracles.[12] The worshippers in this context had a desire to have a direct visual encounter with the saint or *pīr*, to engage in *darśan* (the act of seeing and being in the presence of a revered image or deity). In Brahminical Hinduism, there is a strong emphasis on the visual aspect, where devotees seek to see the divine image (as noted by Eck [1998]). However, the Arya Samaj, with its emphasis on the textual aspect of worship, did not offer this visual and sensory perception of God to Hindus.

Since Hinduism is a mosaic of different traditions, Hindus may move from the worship of one God to another depending on their context or stage of life; they may also worship multiple gods simultaneously. Such religious behaviour often led devotees in multiple religious directions, what could be described as 'polytropy' ('poly' = many, 'tropy' = direction) (Carrithers 2000), mainly to seek divine assistance from many religious figures.[13] Similarly, the Baniyas and other Hindus in Punahana were inclined to follow different religious beliefs and worshipped numerous gods according to their practical requirements and life stages. The local Arya Samaj had serious reservations

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about this cluster of temples but was unable to build an anti-idol and anti-Muslim consensus because of the fragmented and polytropic nature of Hindu religiosity. Many of Laldas's new devotees had to relinquish their previous devotion to a particular goddess in order to embrace their newfound affiliation with Laldas and receive his blessings and miracles. People often turned to Laldas when their expectations were not met by other Hindu gods or religious figures. The Arya Samaj's insistence on strict adherence to ritual texts contrasted with the dynamic and mobile nature of Hindu devotion, making their messages less appealing to the wider Hindu population.

To maintain their relevance and influence among Hindus in Punahana, the Arya Samaj took an assertive stance on various socio-political matters. One such instance highlighted their position on an inter-religious marriage. When a Hindu woman from a 'lower-caste' background decided to marry a Meo Muslim man against the social norms, the situation quickly took on the familiar dynamics of a Hindu–Muslim dispute. The local Arya Samaj insisted that for the couple to have a future together, the man must convert to Hinduism. In a meeting, local Hindu organisations came to a consensus that unless the man converted, the Hindu community would not accept the woman living with him. Meo Muslims responded by citing legal frameworks and regulations that protect the rights of individuals to choose their own faith and enter into interfaith marriages.

This incident revealed the tensions and complexities surrounding inter-religious relationships and the differing perspectives of Hindu and Muslim communities in Punahana. The Arya Samaj's insistence on religious conversion reflected their commitment to maintaining the Hindu identity and protecting what they perceived as the sanctity of 'Hindus'. However, it also highlighted the clash between personal choices, religious freedom and societal expectations in a multi-religious context.[14]

There was also the question of what the Arya Samaj understood by conversion in recent decades. For them, it was not a matter of 'honour', since the woman belonged to a 'lower-caste' community and her body, they presumed, was already 'defiled'. Therefore, Hindus transformed the issue of caste honour into religious honour by subsuming caste into a grand discourse about saving 'Hindus' and 'Hinduism', shifting the entire matter to the religious domain. Local Muslim and Hindu organisations debated the issue from the perspective of their own religious interests. However, the Arya Samaj's insistence on conversion resonated with their historical *śuddhī* campaigns to which many organisations, including the Tablighi Jamaat, had

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once furiously resisted.[15] Historically, both reform organisations interacted in a peculiar manner to counter each other's claims. The Jamaat hoped that the whole world will become Muslim in the future while the Samaj wanted Muslims to become Hindus. They expected Hindus and Muslims to not only know the truth but to embody it in behaviour. The Tablighi Jamaat has attained success among the majority of Muslims, whereas the Arya Samaj has failed to reach its objective.

Undoubtedly, fundamental differences between Hindu and Muslim social structures and religious practices have impacted the success or failure of these reform movements. The failure of the Arya Samaj to remain a dominant movement can be attributed to the 'Hindu' mode of devotion, despite its long history and initial political success. Its concept of ideal Hinduism is not reflected in the behaviour of Hindus, the majority of whom do not adhere to its principles. However, their agenda of converting Muslims has been appropriated by other right-wing Hindu groups such as the VHP and the RSS. There are striking parallels between the teachings of the Tablighi Jamaat and those of the Arya Samaj. Both organisations want to create ideal prototypes of Muslims and Hindus. The Arya Samaj and its *dharma* mirrored Abrahamic religions (Jones 1976) and preferred its adherents to know and use the sacred scripture (the Vedas) to guide their lives, comparable to the Tablighi's emphasis on the Quran (B. Metcalf 1993; Noor 2012). Members of the Arya Samaj and the Tablighi Jamaat also held similar opinions about the role of saints and shrines in one's life, eschewed idol worship and preached monotheism.

MAKING MUSLIMS 'MORE MUSLIM'

The Tablighi Jamaat defined the collective Muslim self of the Meos in the twentieth century by engendering the belief in them that adherence to 'proper Islam' was the only way to deal with their present degenerative condition. According to the Tablighi Jammat, every Muslim in Mewat had a duty to subscribe to the meaning of 'true' Islam. The sudden success and popularity of the Tablighi mission should be located in the context of the fear, intimidation and communal divisions of the period, as well as theological interpretations and identity transformations underway. Many scholars consider that the Tablighi Jamaat reform movement, which played a crucial role in shaping the Meos' Muslim identity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, is a purely

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Islamic movement (Mayaram 1997a: 53–84, 2004b; Sikand 2002a, 2004, 2006). On a closer analysis, the religious preaching of the Tablighi Jamaat movement maintains continuity with a form of peasant religiosity first articulated by Bhakti and Sufi saints. I argue that the Tablighi Jamaat's closeness to ascetic religious values helped to make it a highly successful movement among the Meos, as it allowed Meo Muslim peasants to maintain continuity with their previous religious-philosophical world. However, on a symbolic level, the Tablighi Jamaat completely negate any faith association with saints like Laldas, arguing that associating faith with such saints may force Meos to desert Islam once again. The Tablighi logic assumes that only purifying one's religious belief can help save a Muslim from the ills of the worldly life.

In the local context of Mewat, the influence of the Tablighi Jamaat was pervasive across various aspects of life. One could observe men of different age groups dressed in white kurtas and pyjamas, with Muslim skullcaps, regularly traversing the horizontal L-shaped metalled road (as depicted in Map 2). These Tablighi activists engaged in soliciting donations from pedestrians, seeking financial support for the construction of a new mosque, the repair of existing ones or to cover the expenses of *madrasa* education for children.

It was not uncommon to witness these activists carrying a substantial bundle of rupees, despite the fact that the region was economically impoverished and characterised by low income households. This indicated the presence of a generous enthusiasm among the local population for contributing to religious charities. The act of soliciting donations for religious purposes seemed to resonate with passers-by, symbolising religious piety and inspiring their willingness to contribute. The Tablighi Jamaat's activities in seeking financial support reflected their commitment to religious causes and their ability to mobilise resources for the development and maintenance of Islamic institutions in the area.

Such observations also pointed to the growth of religious consciousness among the Meo and other Muslims in Mewat. 'Religion' had an overwhelming presence here. For instance, roadside bookstalls sold books written in Urdu that told stories of Muslim kings, discussed ethics in Islam and outlined the duties of a Muslim wife towards her husband. There was an exponential growth in the number of new mosques in various parts of Mewat. A Google Maps search shows the preponderance of mosques—many newly constructed—in the area. The Tablighi Jamaat controlled almost all the key *madrasa*s and mosques in the area, including those in Alwar and Bharatpur.

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As far as its style of functioning was concerned, the Tablighi Jamaat in Mewat and elsewhere worked through a network of mosques. The concept involved the voluntary participation of fellow Muslims contributing their money and time. In order to learn about the life of a Tablighi follower, I asked my informant Islamuddin to help me get in touch with the main centre, or *markaj*, of Tablighi activities in Punahana. The duty of this *markaj* was to recruit local Tablighi volunteers for proselytising, receive *jamaat*s (groups of adherents) from outside Mewat and send reports to the Tablighi Jamaat headquarters at the Banglewali Masjid in Delhi. This local *markaj* also organised a communal weekly meeting on Friday, where a large gathering of Muslims prayed together. The prayer meetings were generally followed by a process of recruitment of volunteers for Tablighi work in the area and elsewhere in India. Muslims were encouraged to devote time to living a religious life full of piety, honesty and care for fellow human beings.

Four main spheres of Tablighi life—household, mosque, *markaj* and proselytising—were governed by the ideals of the Quran and the Hadith, frequently told and reminded by the Tablighi preaching. I wanted to participate in Tablighi life, so I asked Islamuddin, who promised to take permission from the head *maulavi* of the *markaj* after the Eid *namāz*. My journey with a Tablighi group, thus, began with an Eid *namāz* in the *markaj* of Punahana in July 2016. On that day, there were at least 10,000 people for the Eid prayer at seven o'clock in the morning. The faces of the *namāzī*s looked elated since the tedious, stomach-turning and thirst-driven summer days of Ramzan were over. After the prayers, Islamuddin conveyed my intentions to the *maulavi* when we were exchanging greetings. The *maulavi* smiled and granted permission for us to visit the neighbouring village mosques on Saturdays, but not to stay overnight with the Tablighi workers.

During my day visits to the mosques where the Tablighi proselytisers usually stayed, I found that the main emphasis of the Tablighi mission was to make Muslims aware of the 'true' religious practices of Islam. The notion of *tawhid*, meaning 'oneness of God', is the fundamental tenet of the Tablighi activities based on *dāvāh* work (premised upon inviting people to pray together). The most important among the six principles (*chhe bātein*) of Tabligh is the *kalimā shahādā* (the Islamic declaration of faith, 'There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah') (Sikand 2006: 180).[16] In its theological approach, the Tablighi Jamaat aims to persuade Muslims of the importance and centrality of the tenet, one God and the supremacy of Allah. Consequently, Tablighi preaching often encouraged Muslims to ignore Sufi

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and other shared shrines like that of Laldas in Mewat because it leads to a perversive association of faith with an entity other than Allah. It is considered a sin/crime of equating a human, object, image or a saint with Allah. My Mewati Muslim interlocutors repeated these views in their narratives.

Tablighi itinerant groups frequented the Muslim villages and spent several days in mosques of villages and towns on spiritual retreats. The mode of functioning of the organisation was based on the support of religious volunteers who were willing to share their money and time for the cause of Islam. Several groups often arrived at the same time in a village to undertake proselytising work. As soon as a new group of *jamaati*s arrived in the village, they were taken on a tour by the village headman. These Tablighis then invited the Muslim residents to accompany them to *dāvāh* (invitations for theological discussion) at a mosque.

The Tablighi volunteers were not interested in making new converts from other religions. Rather, they only wished to make Muslims adhere to a proper Islamic life. No Tablighi ever interacted with any Hindu villager to impart the teachings of Islam. In fact, some Hindu villagers used to ask them the importance of living a simple life away from home, to which they often responded with a smile. Male Muslim villagers and itinerant Tablighis usually prayed together every evening and then discussed various aspects of Islam. Sometimes, the discussions dealt with the nature of a particular religious practice of the Muslims in Mewat. The veneration of saints like Laldas, Shah Chokha and others was a common topic. For these itinerant Tablighis, mosques were temporary residence. They cooked their own food and took care of their daily necessities so as to give little trouble to their host villagers. They brought their own food items, cooking utensils, quilts and bed sheets and other necessary equipment for their stay. The Tablighi volunteers were detached from their normal household lives and encouraged to live simple and ascetic lives, eschewing luxuries, living on a meagre diet and choosing to communicate very little (Noor 2012).

In the village, there was a consistent presence of Muslim residents who eagerly extended invitations to Tablighi groups for communal meals. This feast, known as *dāvat*, held great significance as it encompassed the notion of inviting individuals for theological discussions and debates in accordance with the Islamic concept of *dāvāh*. Throughout the Quran, there are numerous references to Islamic *dāvāh*, emphasising the importance of inviting both Muslims and non-Muslims to engage in philosophical dialogues and discussions about Islam. However, in places like Mewat and

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other parts of India, these invitations were restricted solely to Muslims. The Tablighis typically initiated the invitations by first inviting Muslim men in the village, and then a resident, based on their financial means and capacity, would request the travelling preachers to dine with their family. Islamuddin, my informant and an active member of the Tablighi movement, consistently extended invitations to the *jamaati*s (members of Tablighi groups) in his village for dinner, intending to delve into religious matters during these gatherings.

The life that the Tablighi Jamaat workers and other Tablighi Muslims lived in mosques while on *tabligh* (proselyting) depicts the continuation of religious behaviour common in the practice of Bhakti and Sufism. Even though the Tablighi Jamaat is an Islamic revival movement, there is a close structural parallel between the organisation's approach regarding producing a 'pure' form of Sunni Islam among Muslims and the Meos' devotion to Laldas and other Sufi and Bhakti saints. Both religious traditions advocated asceticism and frugal living practices, as is the case in *tablighi* missions. In fact, Ilyas, the founder of the Tablighi Jamaat, was initially promoted as a charismatic Chishtiyya Sufi master. The Tablighi movement inherited certain Sufi practices, which they then modified for their purposes (Gaborieau 2006; Troll 1985).[17] Similarly, the Deoband school is concerned with reformism, but the mode of life and the preaching of major Deobandi advocates have revolved around the Chishti form of Sufi Islam (B. Metcalf 1982). It is possible to find an ascetic theme and belief in a mystical experience in all the sayings and correspondence of the first *āmīr* (meaning 'head' or 'commander') of the movement, Maulana Ilyas (Troll 1994). Although the Tablighi Jamaat rejects institutional Sufism completely, numerous of its practices derive from Indic spiritual and philosophical values of austerity and asceticism advocated by saints of Bhakti, Sufi and other monastic backgrounds. In particular, the mode of piety, worship and retreat on a spiritual *tabligh*, the time spent in the mosques and the forms of preaching by its adherents are some of the commonalities. In fact, the Tablighis often adopt Sufi forms of preaching, vocabularies and modes of communication (Gaborieau 2006; Troll 1985).

There are structural and sometimes unrelated parallels between the Tablighi Jamaat, Sufism and Bhakti ideals. The success of the organisation among the Meo peasants is, to a large extent, a product of the combination of these practices. Despite acknowledging the connection between Sufism and the Tabligh, many scholars do not acknowledge that the Tablighi movement is essentially rooted in an Indic form of spiritual mysticism and the close

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similarities between Islamic Sufism and the Bhakti and Nath doctrines. Specifically, for the Meos, as discussed in Chapter 2, the Bhakti religion of Laldas was as important as Sufism in Islam. It is reasonable to assert that the success of the Tablighi Jamaat among Meo peasants can be attributed, at least partially, to the organisation consciously or unconsciously incorporating some vestigial doctrines of both *nirguṇ bhakti* beliefs and Sufism into their preaching. In a more precise sense, the Meos' religious experiences and the transformation of their religious world from a Hindu–Muslim one to a more marked Muslim one even now is not in complete contradiction with a rustic form of peasant and Indic religiosity. Rather than looking at the peasant world and their religiosity from a Hindu–Muslim perspective, it is more useful to look at the shared religious life which the Meos still cherish even after undergoing radical religious transformation at the hands of the Tablighi Jamaat in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For instance, the kind of an itinerant life a Tablighi Meo Muslim lives while preaching Islam to fellow Muslims is not in a complete contradiction with Sufi and Bhakti values that Meos once imbibed in everyday religious and cultural practices like the ones associated with Laldas.

The book does not delve into the transnational success of the Tablighi Jamaat among Muslims outside of India. However, it is worth noting that the success of the Jamaat can be reasonably attributed to the organisation's implementation of meditation and spiritual retreat programs, such as *dhikr*, within mosques. These programs provide opportunities for Muslims to engage in contemplative practices and deepen their spiritual connection, thus contributing to the appeal and effectiveness of the Tablighi Jamaat on a global scale. For instance, Tablighi practices include Islamic-tinged asceticism, such as retreats of 40 days or longer in a mosque, obligations to perform prayer, the remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*/*dhyān*) and keeping one's heart pure. All of these practices are reminiscent of the traditional spiritual-religious ways advocated by saints across religious orientations.

Tablighi Jamaat philosophy may also provide an ideology of resistance to the worldly life of ordinary Muslims in India by exhorting them to turn away from material concerns. Given the low socio-economic condition of Muslims on the one hand and the political dominance of Hindus on the other, the Tablighi teachings about the importance of the afterlife become significant. In terms of politics, the Tablighi Jamaat has historically been apolitical and has avoided direct involvement in political activities. However, the movement has been known to have conservative views on certain social issues, such as

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gender roles, and has been criticised for its exclusionary practices towards Muslim women, non-Muslims and its narrow interpretation of Islam.

How, then, is the Tablighi Jamaat different from the older traditions? For one, most of the differences are in symbolic arenas. The Tablighi Jamaat emphasises the idea of 'Muslimness' in a uniform sense, rather than the idealism of the saintly traditions (*sant paramparā*). Essentially, without altering the religious-philosophical world provided by Sufism and Bhakti beliefs for Meos and other Muslims, the Tablighi Jamaat's main concern is to create a neo-Muslim whose identity and being are rooted purely in Sunni Islamic traditions. The impact of such continuous activities across the region was to create and reinforce a powerful religious discourse of purity. This working method of the Tablighi Jamaat has currently transformed the organisation into a powerful transnational movement. However, its success in Mewat has created a rift between two groups of Muslims, the Tablighis and the Sufis. My fieldwork gave me some ideas of the practices that the Tablighi Jamaat considered particularly non-Islamic including visiting a shrine by Muslims.

LOCAL NON-ISLAMIC PRACTICES OF *SHIRK* AND *BIDĀH/BIDAT*

The term *bidāh/bidat* refers to heresy or innovation in theological Islam, and believers in the Sufi or other saints are called *bidati* (innovators). The phenomenon of *bidat* emphasises the nature, character and importance of Islam developed after Prophet Mohammed's life. It emphasises that Muslims should not follow or introduce any new change in their life other than lived and told by the Prophet and his sayings which are contained in the Hadith. Sufi practices are, thus, considered a later addition in Islam and are hence discouraged as *bidat* because they are not derived from the 'Islam' told and lived by the Prophet. For example, celebrating *urs* (the yearly festival) of the Sufi saints, sacrificing animals in the saints' name, praying to or supplicating the dead or the saints or anyone else besides Allah (this includes slogans like *ya dādā Laldas madad kariyo*, 'Please help grandfather Laldas') fall into the category of *bidāh* and *shirk*.

The crime of *shirk* is a crime against God. The word *shirk* in Arabic means 'regarding someone as the partner' or 'ascribing a partner or rival to Allah'. This term was used by the Tablighi Jamaat to discredit the beliefs and actions of Sufi Muslims, especially their association with saints which they

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translated as 'acts of idol worship and polytheism'. The veneration of Laldas or other saints was conceived as a challenge to the monotheism of Islam and the sole authority of Allah, who alone is responsible for bestowing mercy and blessings and forgiving sins. One of the major disagreements between the Tablighi Jamaat's view of Islam and Sufism was therefore in regard to the place of Sufi saints in Islam. The main aim of all Islamic reformist organisations since their emergence in the eighteenth century in India[18] has been the promotion of *tawhid* (the unity of God) and the criticism of *shirk* (actions that compromise the idea of one God) (see Robinson 2008). As a consequence of this, all Sufi beliefs and customs have currently come under intense criticisms by the Tablighis. In Robinson's words, 'at their most extreme, these attacks aimed to wipe out Sufism altogether' (262).

This debate in Islam is an old one. The famous rivalry between the two schools, Barelavi and Deobandi, has historically contributed to the emergence of such debates about Islam in India.[19] In Mewat, the Tablighi Jamaat, a loosely connected missionary offshoot of the Deoband School, and its workers generally assumed the role of Deobandi *ulemā*s in this context. At the local level, the tensions between two factions of the Meos also reflected their respective loyalties to Alwar and Delhi.[20] Alwar is home to a renowned *majār* (tomb) constructed of striking white marble, dedicated to the Sufi saint Ruknuddin Shah. Followers of Sufism in the region were frequently referred to as *alwariya*, signifying their practice of visiting Alwar to pay homage to the saint. Today, this term has taken on a derogatory meaning, indicating a sense of shame. This shift in connotation is a testament to the success of Tablighi discourse not only in Sherpur but also in other parts of Mewat.

During fieldwork, observations of popular practices and everyday conversations and materials collected from *ulemā*s and the village residents showed that *shirk* was a recurring theme. Many Muslim villagers, usually men, gave the impression that the Tablighi Jamaat considered saint veneration a severe form of religious blasphemy. Many academic interpretations privilege the syncretic veneration of saints, usually as a reaction to the anti-syncretism preached by purist reform movements. Nonetheless, *tawhid* is the foundational principle in Islam that the Jamaat wished to restore. All of the movements in Islam, whether Wahhabism, Sufism or the Tabligh, insist on the oneness of God. The debate is about the authenticity of subsidiary Islamic symbols and practices associated with saints. Different strands within Islam have contested these for centuries, and they continue to do so. For the sake of ethnographic situatedness and

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because of the complexity of this issue in Muslims' lives, it was imperative that I look for locally rooted debates of *shirk* and *bidāh/bidat* 'without privileging the idea of "many Islams"' (Osella 2015: 5).

In Mewat, I learned that the Tablighis are taught to control their bodies, desires and worldly lusts, and encouraged to focus more on self-discipline, piety and honesty. While travelling from one mosque to another, Tablighis strived for 'the prophetic mimesis' (Noor 2012: 149), that is, to emulate the ideal Prophetic type. Followers tried to adopt the teachings of the Hadith—the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad—in their daily life. Since it was impossible to replicate the life of the Prophet, the Tablighi followers paid more attention to their intentions (*niyat*) (Noor 2012: 149). There were many mimetic prototypes which the Tablighi Jamaat recommended to Mewati Muslims, including adopting 'proper' Islamic sartorial practices. The common Tablighi apparel of white kurta-pyjama and skull cap was not unique in the area, and the discourses around this form of clothing are significant. For instance, my landlord Imran, who was of a Tablighi background, rebuked his younger son for his fashionable attire when he invited me to have dinner with his family. As we were enjoying the food and discussing the future marriage of his elder son, he yelled at his wife and the younger son: 'I see, no discipline in this house. One wears what he wants as if this is Bollywood and I am making films here.' He was complaining about the young man's bracelet, shiny shirt and long hair. Imran's concerns about his son went beyond mere worries about his future; they stemmed from a deep preoccupation with adhering to proper religious behaviour. He expressed his anxieties by drawing a parallel between his son's actions and those of Hindus, suggesting that his son's engagement in acts of *bidāh* (religious innovations) resembled behaviour that Imran associated with Hindus. Imran's fixation on religion and his commitment to purist Islamic discourse played a significant role in shaping his personal and family life. Imran believed that both Hinduism and modernity posed a threat to the Islamic faith. As a result, he saw his son's clothing choices as an indication of the growing sense of danger to Islamic identity and faith. Many common Muslims had similar feelings due to the religious discourse of the Tablighi Jamaat. Another event clarifies the Tablighis' fear of threats to 'proper' Islam. I met a 20-year-old man who was an alleged thief with a history of drug addiction. He grew up as a motherless child and, when his father remarried, he was left to struggle on his own. He visited the shop in front of my landlord's house frequently.

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Every evening, the space in front of the shop was lively with people cracking jokes and bursting into laughter. His sudden appearance always increased the merriment of the gathering. Mocking questions were often directed at him or somebody would taunt him for committing un-Islamic acts like stealing. This contempt frequently brought him to tears. He would usually try to defend himself in religious terms, citing the model of conduct for an ideal Muslim in Mewati society. Typically, he would say, 'I will become a better person, attend the Tabligh Jamaat's *cillā* [a 40-day retreat in a mosque], and eventually go on the Hajj, if Allah wishes'. He also considered, like many other Muslims, that the Tablighi way was synonymous with 'pure' Islam and the only one through which he could purge his sins.

In everyday life, Muslims in Mewat were aware of theologians' (*ulemā*s) views and enjoyed debating, discussing and repeating them. Opinions about 'pure' Islam were formed within these spheres of civil society, such as the spaces where day-to-day interactions took place, where people gossiped and exchanged news, at chai stalls, shops, mosques and other sites of everyday life. To my surprise, the Tablighi theologians generally avoided engaging in or discussing issues that were tied to the state or political authority in the public sphere.

However, this expectation that common Muslims in Mewat should behave according to Tablighi teachings put unseen pressure on Muslim individuals of Sufi and saintly inclination. Munis, a poor scrap worker, felt guilty for not reading *namāz* regularly when he was approached by Tablighi Jamaat workers. His excuse was that, although he wanted to pray regularly, his work kept him busy. Despite not being a regular *namāzī*, he understood *shirk* doctrines. He became angry when he noticed that his wife had put an amulet around their child's neck and tied a thread in his hand as emblems of the *barkat* (blessing) of the Sufi saint, Shah Chokha. He warned her not to do so again as the Tablighis would consider it the act of unscrupulous and unauthorised charlatans. When his wife asked, 'How do you know it does not work?' he replied, 'The power of the saint I do not contest, but the Tablighis do not like it so don't do it for their sake.'

According to the doctrine of *shirk* preached by the Tablighi Jamaat, no living or dead person, animal, plant, idol or any material object should be held in religious veneration. Traditional Sufi Muslims or the Muslim followers of Laldas and Shah Chokha gave an unusual response to the remarks, insisting that they were 'praying with' and not 'praying to' a saint (Osella 2015: 8). For example, they generally added the term '*yā* Allah' before the traditional

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slogan of *yā dada laldas or dada chokha madad kariyo* (O Dada Laldas and Dada Chokha! Please help!). Now, Sufi Muslims exclaim, 'O Allah, O Dada Laldas! Please help!' This invoking of Allah first before the saints was a direct result of Tablighi reaction and led to the creation of a supreme place for Allah in Mewati Islam.

Despite the complexity of the issues at stake in this sectarian debate between Sufis and Tablighis, the most important concern is the ultimate agency of one supreme God, Allah. Even if God bestows power to innumerable saints and objects, the important question for Muslims is their intentionality (*niyat*) when they tie a thread, go to a shrine or call upon a saint (Osella 2015).[21] From my interactions with Muslim interlocutors, it emerged that a range of issues seemed to affect their thinking: social class, caste, religion, needs, desires, education and modernity. However, the fundamental questions remained: How are we different from Hindus? And what should we do to become 'ideal' Muslims?

It is also important to mention here that under the impact of reformist activities, Sunni Islam has assumed an important and positive place in many aspects of the life of Indian Muslims. For example, in Mewat, this form of 'Islam' has been successful in eradicating certain caste discriminations related to access to a worship space (generally mosque), sharing of food with a 'lower-caste' person and annihilating other caste taboos around food and drinks.[22] This was not the case at least 20 years ago. Until then, untouchability was a prevalent customary practice followed by the Meos, especially with regard to the Mirasi bards (Dom caste). Nowadays, as one Meo put it to me, *Islam me hukkā pānī sab jāyaj hai* (Islam allows sharing of food and water-pipes).[23]

Another important feature of these intra-religious debates is that although the point of contention about Sufism in Islam is theological, both Sufi and Tablighi groups drew on the same scriptures, the Quran and the Hadith, to support their respective claims. Within Islam, pluralism is a well-established and commonly accepted fact: the same *surā* (hymn) is generally used by supporters of Sufism and by reformists who rally against it (Osella 2015). In Mewat, both the Tablighi Jamaat and the Sufi Muslims organised religious congregations, or *jalsā*, to prove their respective acts of veneration valid. Maqbul Khan, a friend from a Meo village, extended an invitation for me to attend a Sufi *jalsā* in his village, while Islamuddin accompanied me to a Tablighi *jalsā* on the border of Haryana and Rajasthan. As we set out on a late summer morning, our faces shielded by cotton scarves, the sun's heat was already intense. After an hour's drive, we arrived at a vast enclosure

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spanning approximately 15 square acres, resembling a grand wedding canopy. A raised platform stood at one end, facing the expansive open space within the enclosure. Islamic sermons echoed through loudspeakers, emphasising the importance of surrendering to divine commands, leading a simple life and treating fellow Muslims with respect and courtesy. The place swiftly filled up, reaching its maximum capacity. Local newspapers reported the following morning that over 100,000 individuals had attended the event. Such large-scale events were regularly organised by the Tablighi Jamaat.

Despite the attendance of so many people during this *jalsā*, it was not chaotic or unpleasant because of the unprecedented discipline of the crowd. This basic principle of the Tablighi Jamaat's teaching was clearly visible in the way the crowd behaved at this religious congregation. People greeted strangers smilingly and also helped them to navigate the cramped conditions. Such self-discipline is expected from every Tablighi and contributes to the power and efficiency of the organisation. Consequently, the Tablighi Jamaat has been able to function with little controversy until 2020, when many Tablighis were prejudicially criticised by the right-wing-leaning Indian media. They were erroneously accused of organising regular gatherings and preaching tours during the Corona pandemic as an act of purposely spreading the virus.[24] For the first time, the organisation became a topic of (negative) public discussions throughout India.

The Tablighi Jamaat is, however, a peaceful transnational movement, present in over 150 countries. Its annual three-day mass congregation, known as *ijtemā*, is an essential part of its mission. Most of its volunteers try to participate in the *ijtemā* at some point in their life somewhere in the world (mostly in South Asia). The *ijtemā* plays a significant role in the lives of Tablighi Muslims and is the largest congregation of Muslims after the Hajj. The popularity of the *ijtemā* is demonstrated by the fact that the *ijtemā* near Dhaka in Bangladesh in 2009 attracted more than 5 million people (B. Siddiqi 2010) and did so again in 2018 (Hossain 2018).[25]

When I attended the Tablighi *jalsā*, many *maulavi*s spoke about the importance of following the path of the Prophet. Quranic verses were cited to show the importance of living a moral life. Metcalf (1993: 590) suggests that the practice of the Tablighi Jamaat is aimed at reviving the past, stating, 'its very program is understood to make the past live'. I heard repeatedly the famous dictum *agar andar imān hogā to bāhar māhaul banegā*, meaning 'if there is faith inside then the outside environment will be better'. The fundamental difference among Muslims was articulated along the lines of

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'our Islam (Tablighi) versus their Islam [Sufis]'. The crowd listened to these discourses intently.

By contrast, at the Sufi *jalsā* in Maqbul Khan's village, verses from the Quran were cited to counter the notions of the Tablighi Jamaat. The discourse of the main *maulavi*s from Bareli—a centre of Sufism in India—focused on the 'radical' religious politics of the Tablighi Jamaat. The issues of religious harmony and a shared religious culture were first invoked and then consolidated by re-telling of the life stories of the famous Chishti saints, Moinuddin Chishti[26] and Nizamuddin Auliya. The *maulavi*s pointed out that many people in South Asia became Muslims through the teachings of these saints and emphasised their service to Islam.[27]

In their quest to discipline Muslims, the Tablighi Jamaat preached that any association with saints may make believers stray from the 'true' path. The idea of 'proper' religious conduct has always been an important theological issue. Modernity and politics have impacted the way in which religious consciousness functions within the uniform notions of religions and religiosity. Such reformist efforts from both the Hindu and Muslim sides work against diverse religious practices to replace it with uniformity. The followers of the Tablighi Jamaat, therefore, mainly attempted to distinguish themselves from non-Muslims and from Muslims on the wrong path such as Sufi believers. The organisation's negative characterisations of religious behaviour and its overemphasis on one single truth are also attempts to homogenise contemporary Muslim issues and identities. The Tablighi Jamaat believes that a larger transnational *ummāh* (Islamic community) can only come about through creating oneness and uniformity.

The changes in Meos' religious culture had a noticeable impact on their shared sacred spaces, including Laldas's and other shrines. I regularly visited the Shah Chokha tomb (as depicted in Figure 5.4) to observe the Tablighi perspectives on saints and shrines. This particular tomb served as a prime example of the Tablighi approach to utilising Sufi shrines, as it had recently undergone a transformation from being a Sufi site to becoming a Tablighi centre for 'Islamic' preaching. The teachings of the Tablighi Jamaat primarily revolve around disciplining Muslims' behaviour and reinforcing their Muslim identity. These teachings could be conveyed through various means, ranging from religious narratives and theological debates to even violent confrontations.[28]

I also spent a considerable amount of time with the head *maulvi*, sitting around in the courtyard of the *dargāh* waiting for visitors. One day the

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FIGURE 5.4 The tomb of Shah Chokha

Source: Photo by the author.

maulvi made a request. He said, 'Doctor Sahib, you know, our children are lagging behind in modern education. We cannot afford to hire an English teacher; would you kindly teach our *madrasa* children some lessons while you are here?'

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While I initially agreed to offer English lessons, I realised unforeseen situations, meetings and events arose more frequently than I had anticipated. As a result, I had fewer opportunities than expected to engage in this teaching endeavour. Nevertheless, the limited interactions I had during the few English lessons were valuable in helping me establish connections with the children. These children were mostly clad in kurta-pyjamas and Muslim skull caps. Most of the time, they were either reciting verses from the Quran in high-pitched rhythmic voices or playing rough and rustic-style games, including spinning whirligigs, kicking soccer balls made of clothes or simply chasing each other. The interaction with these children helped me to understand the early socialisation of a Tablighi Muslim.

Initially, the children were suspicious of my presence. At the beginning of my fieldwork, any attempt to photograph them met with an unpleasant collective stare. This hostility soon disappeared, and we bonded cheerfully after a few English lessons. Later, whenever I entered the *dargāh*, somebody would always welcome me with a bottle of water. At other times, such as during the Thursday rush of visitors, many children would encircle me asking the purpose of my visit and my progress with the book they presumed I was writing about *dādā* (Shah Chokha). Even though the *madrasa* children were playing near the saint's grave, it gradually became clear to me that they had strong opinions about it. They barely went inside the *sanctum*. These interactions with the children first directed my attention towards the ideological tension brewing on the issue of saint veneration among Muslims. Every Thursday, when children of the village gathered to receive offerings such as sugar balls from visitors to the *dargāh*, the children of the *madrasa* were forbidden to take such edibles. Their self-control was often breached when delicious sweets (*ladoo* or *rasgulla*) or rice pudding (*khīr*) were on offer and sometimes caused chaos. The children and teachers of the *madrasa* missed no chance to enjoy such occasions. Their ideological objections to the offerings seemed fragile in the face of temptation.

Within a 30-kilometre radius of the shrine, some villages and houses are identified as either *bidatī* (Sufi) or Tablighi. The strong influence of this reform organisation on Meos had, thus, divided the Mewati society along the line of pro-Sufi and anti-Sufi theologies. Most Meo men strongly advised their family members against visiting the shrines of Laldas and other similar saints, resulting in newer religious trends within South Asian Muslim communities. Since the majority of the Meos no longer actively participated in or encouraged the traditional practices of shared devotion, the saintly

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shrines were considered places of apostasy. At some places, Sufi graves were completely neglected or reportedly destroyed so that Muslims can no longer pray there. The Tablighi Jamaat was focused on discouraging Muslims from any form of worship other than that of Allah so that believers were not led into *fitnā* (chaos) or *irtīdād* (apostasy). On the other hand, Sufi Meos also countered Tablighi Meos by mocking them as the new Mullahs of Islam:

> *sānp ne chhoḍī kānchlī, khet ne chhoḍo leo,*
> *barkhā mandī par gaī, jab se hue maulvi Meo,*
> *hue maulvi Meo, pīron ki kare kain gillā,*
> *bhar bhar kundā khaye leven na kisī kī sallā,*
> *naktī unkī khusnī, mathe unke syāh,*
> *jaise cuḍahrān kā fatihā, aise unke byāh.*
>
> The snake has shed its skin, the wall is stripped of plaster,
> The rain has failed since Meos became Islamic scholars [*maulvi*],
> These Meo scholars criticise the *pīr*s,
> They eat vessel full of food and don't take advice from others,
> Their trousers are short, their heads are black,
> Like the death rites of sweepers ['low caste'] are their weddings.[29]

The Tablighis were also constantly trying to persuade the Sufis to follow their path. This concern to discipline Muslims' religious behaviour was deeply rooted in Muslim responses to the activities of the Hindu reform organisation, the Arya Samaj and others. These days, one of the principal identifications of a Muslim is whether a person is a Sufi Muslim or a Tablighi Muslim. Their deep-seated animosity is often evident in their everyday conversations. Those with a leaning towards Sufism commonly label the Tablighis as 'terrorists' due to their perceived promotion of a radical conformity in Islam, while the Tablighis, in turn, refer to the Sufis as *bidatī*s (innovators).

At various shared shrines, this call for ignoring the saints helped the rival group to incorporate a Muslim saint within their own system of beliefs. For instance, Laldas and Shah Chokha are neglected by the Tablighi Jamaat, and it encouraged other Muslims to do so, at the same time making it easier for Hindus to fully claim the saints as a part of the 'Hindu' religion. Tablighis have a vested interest in asserting their control over these shrines, driven not only by the economic value of these spaces but also by the belief that it is crucial to impart 'pure' Islam in locations visited by Muslims who may have

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deviated from the right path. The Tablighi Jamaat sees these shrines as an opportunity to educate and guide individuals who may have strayed from the principles of the faith, ensuring that they receive teachings aligned with their interpretation of authentic Islamic practices. As a result, competitive battles unfolded, not only between Hindus and Muslims but also among the two Muslim groups, the Sufi and Tablighi. At the Laldas shrines this battle was indirectly won by Hindus leading to a complete Hinduisation of the shrines.

Presently, the rise and success of the Tablighi reform movement in Mewat has created visible and invisible pressures which have important social, political and cultural implications. One of the major effects of Tablighi preaching, especially for Muslims, is the creation of a situation of political aloofness in which only 'pure' Islam in the form of the Tablighi mission can rescue them from their degraded life. The Tablighi Jamaat appeals to members of the *ummāh* all over the world to forego unacceptable Islamic behaviour such as the veneration of Sufi saints with the slogans like 'O Muslims! Become Muslims!' The reason behind the religious transformations of the Meos and other Muslims of the area was connected with the influence of the Tablighi's work. While there may not have been significant philosophical differences between the teachings of the Tablighi Jamaat and the devotional practices that people were already attached to, a significant shift was occurring in how individuals defined their Muslim identity. The Tablighi Jamaat played a central role in this transformation by emphasising the importance of certain practices and behaviours that were seen as integral to being a devout Muslim. This shift in focus was redefining the parameters of Muslimness and influencing the way individuals understood and expressed their religious identity. In the Tablighi Jamaat narratives, Muslim identity was linked to following 'pure' Islamic religious practices.

Although without any doubt, given the ordinary Muslims' conditions in India, the Tablighi Jamaat may also be considered 'a resistance and withdrawal movement from worldly affairs against a dominant consumerist culture and politics' (Metcalf 1999: 1283). But the Tablighi Jamaat has also produced an inflexible hierarchical situation between the powerful and the powerless, such as between the Meos and other low-caste Muslims (the Jogis and Mirasis), between men and women, and has widened the rift between the Sufi and anti-Sufi theology in Mewat. Such a change has put shared shrines and the faith of followers under a lot of pressure. The examples of concealment in Chapter 6 show how devotees negotiate with the rising reformist pressure

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in their personal lives that illustrate passive resistance to a certain extent in line with the discussion in Chapter 7.

NOTES

1. The tomb of Shah Chokha is located 3 kilometres away from the Laldas temple in Punahana. I often visited the tomb to observe the reformist impact of the Tablighi Jamaat on this shared worship space.
2. In Hinduism, giving money, regardless of the religious beliefs of the receiver, is considered to contribute to one's *punyā* (reward). Similarly, itinerant Muslim ascetics would, in the past, receive alms in the form of grain from Hindu households. Many of these Muslim ascetics belong to Muslim ascetic orders such as wandering *fakir*s (beggars) or Jogis. Even in the present, the distinction between Hindu and Islamic symbolism and beliefs does not affect the giving and receiving of alms. Religious distinctions do exist, but they are not the only factor affecting the interaction between Hindus and Muslims in the public sphere.
3. Having a Brahmin priest in new temples is a strategy of fully incorporating Laldas as a Hindu religious figure as discussed in Chapter 4.
4. The Samaj expanded its influence through various social endeavours, such as promoting women's education, agitating for the eradication of untouchability and advocating reform measures for equality among Hindus.
5. Colonial oriental scholars produced knowledge that claimed India was in a degraded situation and blamed Muslim rulers for it. For instance, James Mill (1817) divided the history of India into three parts: Ancient Hindu India, Medieval Muslim India and Modern British India. He considered that late eighteenth-century India was going through a 'dark age' as a result of Muslim rule. The Arya Samaj was a product of this *milieu* and followed this line of thought.
6. However, it is important to note that the Arya Samaj is a diverse movement with a range of opinions and perspectives. Some members advocate for a more liberal and progressive interpretation of Hinduism, while others emphasise a more conservative and traditionalist approach.
7. Like Laldas, Jaharpir is a famous saint of Rajasthan who also has a dual religious identity of a saint and a *pīr*. He was an ardent follower of Shiva.
8. Informal conversation with Shyam Singh, Ram Singh's elder brother and a staunch Arya Samaji.

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9. Shyam Singh spent most of his time in the Arya Samaj temple. Whenever I visited the Arya Samaj temple, the attendance was very low compared to other temples. I did not see more than two or three people each time.
10. Informal conversation with the priest of the Durga Temple.
11. Ibid.
12. This reasoning often came from devotees of Laldas who recounted several stories, while talking to the headmaster, from their personal lives centred around experiencing miracle due to their belief in Laldas.
13. Diana Eck (1998: 22) terms it a 'polytheistic imagination' of Hindus.
14. It was quite harrowing to notice this kind of oppression of women by men of both religions. Both religious sides practice gender, caste and class discrimination, asserting the right to make decisions about the lives of others.
15. The matter of the couple remained unresolved for some time. Later, I was informed that the woman and the man were separated.
16. The six *kalimā*s in South Asian Islam refer to the six parts of a Muslim's belief derived from the Hadith (words, actions and the sayings of the Prophet Mohammad). They are *tayyibāh* (word of purity), *shahādā* (declaration of faith in oneness of God), *tamjeed* (Allah is the greatest), *tawhid* (oneness of God), *astagfār* (forgiveness for sins) and *radd-e-kufar* (seeking in Allah refuge from disbelief).
17. The success of the Tablighi Jamaat has attracted many scholars to study its organisational structure and mode of functioning (Gaborieau 2006; Masud 2000; Mayaram 2004b; B. Metcalf 2000; B. Siddiqi 2018; M. Siddiqi 2014; Sikand 2006). Scholars differ on the nature of the Tablighi Jamaat movement. One group denies the influence of Sufism on the Tablighi Jamaat (for instance, Ernst and Lawrence 2016; Masud 2000), while the other finds a connection between Sufism and the Tablighi Jamaat (Gaborieau 2006; Reetz 2006; Sikand 2007; Troll 1994).
18. The first such attempt was carried out by a *maulavi* Shah Wali Allah (1703–62), who believed the root cause behind the Indian Muslims' decline or loss of power was their ignorance of the Islamic sacred scripture.
19. The two divisions, Sufi and Reformist (orthodox school), in Muslims among many differ from each other on the issues of ways of worshipping Allah, the place of Sufi saints in Islam, haram-prohibitions (music, painting, eating meats cut in one stroke and so on). One of the contestations between the two ideologies in India finds expressions in the traditional rivalries between Barelavi and Deobandi schools of thought; see B. Metcalf (1982, 2002).

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20. Delhi is the centre of the Tablighi activities organised from the Banglewali Masjid.
21. Osella (2015) has observed the same reaction among Muslims in Kerala, South India.
22. Muslims in Mewat generally intermingled with everyone except the caste of 'sweepers' who were considered 'impure' for eating 'pork'.
23. Quoted to me by an elderly Meo and brother of one of my informants. I used to spend evenings at their *addā* (gathering place) in front of their home, joined by other villagers. Our regular leisurely conversations were very informative.
24. The majority of Indian media spread the (fabricated) news as Corona-Jehad.
25. Visit https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/millions-attend-world-largest-muslim-gathering-180123064824287.html, accessed 23 March 2018.
26. Moinuddin Chishti (1141–1236), the twelfth-century Islamic Sufi saint, was the founder of the Chishti order whose *dargāh* at Ajmer in Rajasthan in India is a famous place of pilgrims among Hindus and Muslims.
27. Eaton (2004) considers the role of Sufis in conversion. Also see Eaton (1993).
28. The example of another type of violent confrontation can be seen in Pakistan, where the Sufi groups of Barelavis have killed many non-Muslims over blasphemy charges and sued Muslims to discipline their behaviours.
29. This couplet is also cited by Aijaz Ahmad in his paper; see A. Ahmad (2015: 76).

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6

CONCEALMENT AND SECRECY

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

He who hid well, lived well. (René Descartes)[1]
Wherever there is power, there is secrecy. (Taussig 1999)

How did devout followers of a saint respond when a dominant reform organisation deemed their beliefs and ritual practices as impure? Did they abandon all the 'impure' beliefs, or did they find ways to navigate the influence and power of the reformist ideology? In such circumstances, faith begins to operate through acts of concealment and secrecy,[2] which become potent tools for managing societal and religious pressures. Some of these practices of concealment/secrecy among the Muslims of Mewat ran afoul of the puritanical Tablighi Jamaat, which discouraged the veneration of saints as *bidat* (innovation/heresy) and *shirk* (polytheism), considering them as antithetical to Islam. Concealment and secrecy practices represent a significant form of social knowledge that helps sustain social institutions and human relationships (Simmel 1906).

Fluidity across religious boundaries between 'Hinduism' and 'Islam' is not a new idea; it has been analysed in a large number of scholarly works (Amin 2016; Assayag 2004; Bigelow 2010; Flueckiger 2006; Gilmartin and Lawrence 2000; Gottschalk 2000; D. Khan 2004a; Mayaram 1997a).[3] While these works effectively display the flexibility of religious boundaries, they fail to delve into the implications when reformist groups arise and promote the notion of a rigid, uniform and pure religious boundary. In Mewat, as in other parts of India, reformist groups strongly emphasised the segregation of

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religious communities based on their identities and ritual practices. However, little attention has been given to the phenomenon of resistance to, or passive negotiation with, these powerful reformist forces that oppose religious blending.[4]

Many Meo and non-Meo Muslims, mostly women, still venerate these saints, although they conceal their devotion to evade the wrath of Meo men and other Tablighis. Their stories of concealment reveal intricate processes of contestation and accommodation between the Sufi and Tablighi Jamaat ideologies, the divergent beliefs of male and female in a family, and different dynamics of the relationships between the powerful and the powerless.[5] To operate effectively, secrecy as a type of societal knowledge relies on three essential elements: individual actors who engage in concealment; an audience, from whom the secret is concealed; and a power structure that the secret undermines or challenges. Muslim devotees of Laldas, Shah Chokha and other saints hid their 'true' faith from close social groups, such as the male members of families, village superiors and Mullahs.[6] In these stories, the Tablighi Jamaat was the overarching power, Laldas's and other saints' followers were concealers and their family members were the audience and sometimes agents of the Tablighi Jamaat. It is crucial to note that power here is not regarded as a static phenomenon, nor is it concentrated in a single authority. Instead, power is perceived as a relative and widespread phenomenon that exists in various ideological forms, distributed throughout different levels and areas, akin to the network of veins in a body as described by Foucault (1978a, 1982).[7] My analysis considers the Tablighi Jamaat as a bastion of the power of male Meo Muslims in the Mewat area simply because of its immense appeal ideologically and otherwise.

Drawing on everyday stories of people, the aim here is to reveal how secrecy functions to secure a desired world alongside the 'real' one.[8] Although there were many similar cases of secrecy and concealing practices by Muslim followers of Laldas, Shah Chokha and other saints, the majority of the anecdotes presented here are from the Sherpur shrine and the Shah Chokha tomb in order to provide a thorough contextual account. Muslim visitors felt more at ease when visiting the Laldas shrine in Sherpur. This was primarily due to the fact that the shrine was not under the jurisdiction and control of the Tablighi activists. Muslim visitors to the shrine did not come into direct contact with the Tablighis, who were stationed across the road in front of the main gate of the Sherpur shrine. In contrast, at the tomb of Shah Chokha, the Tablighis had complete control over the entire complex. Both

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Sherpur and Shah Chokha were Tablighi-influenced villages; however, unlike the village of Shah Chokha, the number of Tablighi workers in Sherpur was much smaller. The Meos' strong backing for the Tablighi Jamaat mission had resulted in the establishment of a unified code of religious behaviour for the majority of Muslims in the area. However, there were still many Muslims who had not completely discarded their previous religious beliefs, customs and practices, despite the strong presence of Tablighi ideology. In order to protect these, they found concealment and secrecy very useful. The objective of the ethnographic narratives discussed here centred around concealment is to explore the significance of concealing practices as a means of passive dissent employed by believers to navigate the pressures arising from their devotion to saints. Following Hugh Urban's (1998: 218) suggestion, the focus here is not so much on 'the content of secrecy and instead toward the forms and strategies through which secret information is concealed, revealed, and exchanged'.[9] Some of the ways in which secrecy works as a useful form of skills and knowledge representing a certain degree of passive resistance in the face of unwanted attempts to discipline people's religious practices and beliefs may have universal forms.[10]

ETHNOGRAPHIC STORIES OF SECRECY AND CONCEALMENT

AHMAD'S SECRECY

The first story is that of Ahmad, a Meo Muslim taxi driver. Ahmad was born in the village of Bisru, currently a Tablighi village, at a distance of almost 5 kilometres from the temple of Laldas in Punahana. The story began one early morning, when Ahmad drove a group of Hindu devotees (who were his clients) on a ritual pilgrimage to the holy place of Vrindavan in the north Indian city of Mathura. The city is famous for being the birthplace of the cowherd god Krishna (who himself is an incarnation of the god Vishnu) and the site of Krishna's playful childhood stories. Throughout Ahmad's career as a taxi driver, he had several opportunities to visit sites associated with religions other than Islam. Despite these excursions, he had never felt drawn to these faiths until the day he witnessed a miracle.

Upon arriving in Vrindavan, Ahmad and his group of religious visitors discovered that the temple dedicated to Lord Krishna would be closed in the afternoon. Therefore, they decided to wait within the temple complex. As

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the afternoon progressed, Ahmad realised that the time for *zuhr*, the midday Islamic prayer, was approaching. In order to fulfil his religious obligation, Ahmad chose to perform *namāz*, prostrating himself within the temple complex. While in prayer, he closed his eyes and immediately had a vision of a finely dressed figure adorned with marigold garlands. Despite the unexpected sight, Ahmad tried to dismiss it as a mere daydream and refocused on his prayer. Surprisingly, the same vision appeared again when he closed his eyes for a second time, leaving Ahmad bewildered. Initially, he attributed it to his own imagination and temporarily ceased praying. Afterwards, he went to wash his face using water from the tank that was on the premises, before resuming his further attempts to pray. The same image kept following him and manifested itself as a shadow in the tank-water, just as he was going to splash some water on his face so that he could feel more refreshed.

The incident frightened him. He decided to go inside the temple that evening without sharing this incident with his customers about what had recently transpired. Following the customs of his Hindu clients, Ahmad purchased flowers, sweets and a coconut to present as an offering to Lord Krishna. To his amazement, the idol of Lord Krishna inside the sanctum was the exact same image that had appeared in his vision a few hours earlier.

In an effort to comprehend the possible significance of this event, Ahmad began collecting information about the god. Ahmad belonged to the Damrot clan of the Meo community. It is worth repeating here that the Meo Muslims assert a special kinship relationship with the god Krishna through their lineages (*pāl*). As mentioned previously, five of these thirteen *pāl*s have Jaduvansi ancestry (the descendants of Krishna). Ahmad's clan, the Damrot of Bisru village, attributes their identity to the belief that Jaduvansi Meos are descendents of the god Krishna (Jamous 2003: 1–25).

The episode, and the awareness of his *pāl* and community's history, prompted a profound religious transformation in Ahmad's life. He developed an immense respect for Krishna. While remembering Allah or Laldas or any other saint, he never forgot to acknowledge the authority of the Hindu god as well. Despite the fact that he prayed simultaneously to Allah, Laldas and Krishna without distinguishing between them, he never displayed his association explicitly with the latter two. Krishna and Laldas occupied a place of religious importance in his life but were the objects of secret worship.[11]

The story of Ahmad, while unusual, is not unique in its representation of meaning. Many people in South Asia have faith in the spiritual beings of other religions. In general, such tendencies are seen as 'polytropic' or 'syncretistic'

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religious behaviour (Carrithers 2000; Roy 2014 [1983]). For instance, when it comes to the religious activities of Jains, the religious distinctions between 'Hinduism' and 'Jainism' completely dissolve (Carrithers 2000). Not only do the Jain and Hindu religious identities exhibit characteristics of religious malleability and fluidity beyond religious boundaries, but so do other religious identities. Presently, however, the majority of incidents of religious boundary crossing involve Indian Hindus, Christians, Jains and Buddhists who believe in various Sufi shrines and ritual practices of other religions. Presently, examples of Muslims crossing religious boundaries do not occur as frequently or on a similar scale now.[12] Historically, there are many examples of Hindu–Muslim cultural interaction resulting in mixed practices among both religious communities. What could be referred as 'Indic eclecticism' or 'religious pluralism' was once replete with examples of Hindu–Muslim eclecticism.

What is significant about Muslim eclecticism is the contemporary choreography of religious faiths in an era characterised by narratives of religious separation that have caused changes in religious consciousness. This division can be explained in part by the political mobilisation of religious communities into separate entities, but it can also be explained in part by individuals' lived realities. The place of saints, particularly Sufi saints, has long been a source of contention in Islamic theology. For many Islamic faith renewal movements, veneration of saints is sinful or forbidden because it is not sanctioned by the Quran or Hadith. The veneration of Sufi and other saints, particularly among Muslims in India, is viewed as a corrupt form of 'Islam' inherited from 'Hinduism' and idolatry, a perversion at best and apostasy at worst.

This is further supported by an incident I witnessed within the precincts of Shah Chokha's tomb. During one of my regular visits to the *madrasa*, an older student named Saiket asked me in a casual conversation, 'What is the point of worshipping a dead person?' referring to the grave of Shah Chokha. This appeared to be a discourteous comment that may have annoyed a large number of visitors. In response, I said, 'Why do you believe that?' Saiket responded, 'Islam prohibits the worship of the dead … He is not different from us. He is one of us. If I die one day, would you start worshipping me?' The issue further became clearer one Thursday when I was in conversation with a devotee of Shah Chokha, Maqbul Khan (he invited me to a Sufi *jalsā* in his village). Saiket stopped to join our conversation and subsequently he and Saiket engaged in a heated discussion over the role and significance of

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saints in Islam. Saiket accused Maqbul Khan of being a Hindu in his religious practice since he visited the *dargāh*s of Sufi saints. Here is an excerpt of their conversation, which reveals some important issues of dissension between the Tablighi Jamaat and the Sufi followers about saint veneration in Islam:

Saiket: Hindus worship dead people, stones, trees, rivers, animals and anything that they find interesting. There is no difference between you and a Hindu?

Maqbul Khan: Yes, I respect him, not worship him. He is our *bujurg* [ancestor/elderly man] and closer to Allah. Why should we forget him?

Saiket: I have seen Muslims bending in front of him. The head of a Muslim should only bend for Allah. No one other than Allah deserves this conduct. You have equalled the status of Allah and a dead human being by worshipping him.

Maqbul Khan: We do not bend in front of the saint. We lower down our head to show respect as one does in front of his/her parents. You seem not to respect your elders. Do you disrespect your father because he is a human being and living on earth?

Saiket: It's not about respecting a person. We also go to the tombs but only to pray for the deceased so that Allah may grant them a place in *zannat* [heaven] not to pray for ourselves. We recite *Darood-ul-Sharif* [the verses of the Quran for a dead person]. All of you [mentioning names of the nearby Sufi leaning villages, Papra, Mamlika and Sikri] come here and ask for favours from the saint as if Allah is nothing in front of him. If you need anything, then why don't you directly ask from Allah sitting inside your home or praying at a mosque? The mosque is the right place to go and pray about things that you desire for.

Maqbul Khan: We do not contradict the power and authority of Allah. *Dene wālā to Allah hi hai* [Allah is the giver]. The Sufi saint is just a medium to reach to Allah. Suppose, if you want to meet the principal of a school, for that matter, you would have to meet his/her secretary first. Then, he would allow you to see the principal. Also, if you want to go on the roof of a building, you need a ladder to reach there. Similarly, the Sufi saint is that secretary or the ladder for us. There are people who are closer to Allah and they are not simple human beings. They are pious human beings like our dervish. We

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petition Allah through them. Allah never ignores the requests of such pious human beings. This is the way to get things done by Allah with the help of the saint. The Quran allows it completely.

Saiket: It's a lie that the Quran allows such things.

Maqbul Khan: Then, you need to come to our *jalsā* [a festive assembly] to listen to our *maulavi*'s *taqreer*s [theological discussions].

Saiket: All you are doing is committing *shirk* [crime against Allah], hence you are a *bidati* [heretic].

Tablighi workers from many villages held similar views as Saiket, and such encounters between Tablighi Muslims and Sufi Muslims were frequent and unpleasant. Sometimes arguments escalated to accusations and to minor violence. Tablighi workers held extreme views on the worship of Laldas and Shah Chokha saints which was disliked by Sufi-inclined Meo Muslims. During fieldwork, I noticed several verbal disputes leading to minor scuffles. I observed another dispute one day when I was conversing with Fakruddin, who visited the tomb regularly with his grandson. Some young villagers of Shah Chokha whom I knew also joined the conversation, which soon turned into a verbal spat between them and Fakruddin and his grandson. Fakruddin's grandson grabbed the collar of a person who had made a disrespectful remark about the saint saying, *yā mare huye buḍhē tum choḍo kyo nā* (why don't you leave this dead old man alone). I had to intervene to stop the fight. Most villagers were now Tablighi supporters, and the *dargāh* was under the control of a Tablighi *maulavi*; due to this, there were frequent encounters between Sufi and Tablighi believers. Meos and other Muslims adhering to each group were easily identifiable from the names of their villages, and the Tablighi-influenced villages outnumbered the Sufi ones.

Most Muslim residents of Mewat and Shah Chokha and Sherpur villages had been profoundly influenced by Tablighi preaching and appeared to be committed to the Tablighi's version of Islam. There was barely any celebration in the year 2016 when I visited the Shah Chokha tomb. Many elderly devotees claimed that the *urs* gathering at the *dargāh* was much smaller than it used to be. A small number of people offered a communal prayer and distributed *biryānī*.[13] There was no music. There appeared to be heightened tension between the villagers of Tablighi ideology and the traditional devotees of the Sufi saint from neighbouring villages. In 2011, there was a violent feud over the celebration of the saint's *urs*. Most villagers of Shah Chokha were against holding any kind of cultural event, especially one that included *qavvālī*

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singing and the usage of loudspeakers. The Sufi faction insisted on celebrating the event in their accustomed manner, despite the Tablighi villagers resisting furiously. The simmering tension turned into a violent clash with both sides hurling stones at each other. Although no one was seriously hurt, this incident was part of ongoing clashes from time to time. The origin of such confrontations can be traced to the late 1980s, when a similar dispute took place within the premises of the *dargāh*. A famous Meo *maulavi* of the area, Hasan Khan Gangehi, had taken charge of the *madrasa*. An ardent follower of Tablighi ideology, he discouraged villagers from visiting the saint's tomb. This led to a fight between the two camps of Shah Chokha villagers who were, at that time, equal in number.[14] Gangehi's actions were viewed as disrespectful to the saint by many Sufis. A large caste *pancāyat* was organised and later removed Gangehi.

When disputing the charismatic authority of a saint venerated by Muslims, Tablighis often framed Sufis as 'other Muslims' in their narratives. These 'other Muslims' were Sufi believers who did not adhere to the Tablighi doctrines and believed in the charisma of Sufi saints.[15] Contrary to this theological and ecclesiastical claim of the Tablighis, many Muslims in South Asia and elsewhere revere the Sufi saints or the saints of other religions (see Albera and Couroucli 2012; Bowman 2012; Dalrymple 2004). For Indian Muslims who continue to pay visits to saints and shrines like Laldas for a variety of reasons, including religious and materialistic, the development and success of religious reform ideologies like that of the Tablighi Jamaat have produced both a visible and an invisible pressure.

This type of (political) pressure, which was fabricated in the name of reform and piety, has, nonetheless, opened a new window for understanding the sociology of disguising one's 'true' beliefs. Ahmad's story offers a point of departure for contemplating the issue of religious synthesis as well as the performance of secrecy and concealment. At first glance, 'religion' seems to be a matter of experience and personal preference for him, rather than one of identifying association with a certain religious identity. Ahmad chose to hide his faith by keeping it secret. What makes Ahmad hide his faith in Krishna, a god whom the Meos themselves once admired and to whom they still link their origins? Why did the transition to a uniform and pure version of 'Islam' succeed in a community whose history and rich folk narratives demonstrate the equal importance of both 'religions' in their social lives, as we saw previously in the context of the Meos' veneration of Laldas? The Tablighis, through their current interpretation of Islam, have effectively

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created an environment that discourages the traditional Meo rituals and customs. Engaging in activities that go against 'Sunni Islam' is now seen as embarrassing or subjecting oneself to the scrutiny of other Muslims. Even Muslims that one does not know personally can cast doubt on the veracity of an Islamic ritual, such as paying homage to the graves and shrines of the pious saints. The members of the Tablighi Jamaat who worked outside the shrine of Laldas in Sherpur and at the Shah Chokha tomb, as well as the Muslim villagers who lived there, were known to engage in heated debates with Muslim visitors who came from other parts of India. They often argued about the position of saints like Laldas and Shah Choka in Islam and the objectives of their pilgrimage. This form of humiliation in the public has grown into a common habit. In the case of Ahmad, such enquiries might come from members of his family. His relatives were strongly opposed to the veneration of Sufis and actively discouraged any activity of this kind. Some of Ahmad's cousins were active clergy for the Tablighi Jamaat. In light of these circumstances, Ahmad was unable to share his experiences fearing that his beliefs would be completely dismissed. This line of inquiry from Muslims, whether they were known to the believer or not, generated societal pressure; nonetheless, the believer's trust in saints or Hindu gods and goddesses did not necessarily vanish as a result. Instead, the tactic was to conceal such beliefs and to practice the act of secrecy.

Ahmad chose not to reveal his experience to anyone, sensing that he might be mocked for his belief. He decided to hide his belief in Krishna and engaged himself in secretly practicing his faith. Purposeful concealment or secrecy is 'one of the greatest accomplishments of humanity' (Simmel 1906: 462). Secrecy helps to negotiate an intimate form of power to enable smooth functioning of family relationships and societal values, and to evade the wrath of patriarchal control. Secrecy, thus, secures a second world (the desired one) alongside the real one and implies that one wishes to live the former. Every human relationship is, therefore, to a certain extent based on various aspects of veracity and mendacity about social life. In these relationships, every lie, whatever its content, is a promotion of error with reference to the mendacious subject. Moreover, for the lie consists in the fact that 'the liar conceals from the person to whom the idea is conveyed the true conception he possesses' (Simmel 1906: 445).

In Ahmad's case, the true conception of his experience was open to multiple meanings and interpretation of religiosity other than to the issue of valid and invalid religious practices sanctioned by Tablighi Islam. The

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multiple meanings of 'religion' are generally layered within oneself, where every layer contains ideas, symbolism, values and notions of the religious others. To a lesser or greater extent, every individual in daily life performs actions, religious or non-religious, by taking symbolism, religious rituals, beliefs and practices from adjacent cultural-religious groups (including the hostile ones) consciously or unconsciously into account. In addition to Ahmad's personal experience, the following stories shed light on various facets of concealment and secrecy as well as the dynamics of these practices in response to varying degrees of societal and familial pressure, within the context of the veneration of the Laldas and Shah Chokha saints.

THE RELIGIOUS DILEMMA OF THE TWO SISTERS

The sisters Rabiya and Fatima (Figure 6.1) were born into a Meo household where their parents were strict practitioners of the doctrines of the Tablighi Jamaat. Their devout parents, especially their father, sincerely observed the religious duties of a Tablighi Muslim on a daily basis. Every Saturday, their father used to go to the Tablighi Jamaat *markaj* in Punahana to learn the basics of the Islamic religion and its true path, as dictated by the religious clergy. The evening communal prayer at the *markaj* was generally followed by the long hours of sermons and theological discourses by the clergies. At first, the speeches by the Tablighi Jamaat's *maulavi*s (Islamic preachers) revolved around the significance of adopting a pure way of Islamic life, before giving examples of the Islamic religious figures and narrating their biographies. Based on these stories, every member of the Tablighi Jamaat was expected to perform 'the act of prophetic mimesis' (Noor 2012: 149). At regular intervals, the attendees were constantly reminded of the actions and behaviours expected of a devout Muslim in accordance with Islamic scriptures. These reminders highlighted various practices that were deemed incompatible with the Tablighi or global version of Sunni Islam, which had been adhered to by people for generations.

The sisters Rabiya and Fatima whose husbands had become close friends with me, a friendship that started in the premises of the shrine, were closely associated with the two mutually opposing perspectives among the Meos. Akbar, husband of Rabiya, shared his and his younger brother's marriage story and, one day, invited me home to talk to their wives. Both sisters, as they narrated, were accidently married into a family of Sufi adherents, a fact their Tablighi father only realised much later. As stated earlier, under the

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FIGURE 6.1 *From right to left*: Fatima, Fatima's husband, and Rabiya and her children

Source: Photo by the author.

Note: When I took this photo, both sisters insisted that their photo must be in my book. I also had to give a print copy to them.

influence of the Tablighi Jamaat, there were a significantly greater number of Meo Tablighi villages than Sufi-dominated villages. Both groups rarely accommodated each other's perspectives. The tension between these factions within the Meo caste regarding the veneration of saints had intensified to the extent that marriages between villages of different clans and kinships, which were previously common, were now discouraged.

The everyday rhythms of both sisters' lives connected the two families, which oscillated between the traditions of Sufism on the one hand and the anti-Sufi theology of the Tablighi Jamaat on the other. Prior to their marriage, both sisters had never visited any tombs or shrines since their father considered it an act of *bidat* (innovation/heresy). Having been raised in a Tablighi environment, Rabiya and Fatima's lives revolved around the belief in monotheism or the supremacy of one God. Initially, their father was unaware of the Sufi-oriented ideology upheld by their husbands' families. As soon as he became aware of it, he immediately warned his daughters to not visit

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any shrines, assuming they had adopted their husbands' family traditions. He explicitly told both sisters that if they disobeyed his wishes, he would permanently cut off ties with them. Faced with this dilemma, they promised their father that they would never set foot in a shrine.[16]

In fact, after their weddings, as soon as the two sisters reached their new home, they were taken with their husbands to the tomb of Shah Chokha and the shrine of Laldas to seek the saints' blessings before embarking on their married lives. It was a tradition in the village of the bridegrooms' family to acknowledge the authority of the saints on any occasion of importance in their lives. Be it the birth of a child, a marriage or employment, people who lived in the Sufi villages would often pay homage to the saints. Rabiya and Fatima had no choice but to adhere to their new family's customary practice.

A few years later, the elder sister Rabiya was expecting a baby. Unfortunately, her child did not survive the birth. The problem did not end there, and doctors could not save her next three babies over the following years. Rabiya's harrowing experiences not only undermined her personal faith but also profoundly shattered her religious convictions. During this time, she had accompanied her husband to the shrine of Laldas and the tomb of Shah Chokha as an obedient wife, following in the footsteps of her husband. She confessed to me that 'We two sisters had no faith in either Laldas or Shah Chokha. Their shrines did not appeal to us.'[17] But, after the hardships and tragedies of losing her babies, she decided to commit to a complete faith in the saints. Rabiya remembered, 'I made a wish of offering a *caddar* [piece of cloth offered to the grave of Sufi saints] to the saints in case our next child survived'.[18] This time a miracle happened, and the fourth child survived. I asked Rabiya what impact this had on her previously held beliefs? Rabiya replied, 'I was simply told not to believe in the charisma of Sufi saints as they are nothing more than a dead personality. Now, no-one knows the saint Laldas's or Shah Choka's power better than me.'[19] She started visiting the shrine and the tomb at least once a month and performing all the required rituals. This transformation from a non-Sufi adherent to a Sufi adherent resulted from Rabiya's self-revelation.

This situation created tension for the two sisters, particularly for Rabiya, as it highlighted a contradiction between what she had been taught by her Tablighi father and what she had personally experienced. Despite all this, the sisters' faith in the saints had increased, disregarding the emotional blackmail of their father, who frequently demanded that they should not visit

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the shrines. On many occasions, he openly declared that he would disconnect all future communications and relationship if the sisters were found to practice the faith of their in-laws by worshipping the Sufi saints. To sustain kinship and family relations, both sisters kept their belief in the saints secret from their father, especially the miraculous experiences they had had. On the other hand, they also had a feeling that their father knew about their religious attachment to the saints. Here, Rabiya felt that her father might have sensed that his daughters have gone against his wish. Therefore, he also participated in maintaining the secret of their faith by not openly acknowledging it. At this point, known secrets prove to be an important factor in maintaining secrecy on the part of both participants. For instance, in the process where women hide their faith from men, the men must equally participate in the entire process by acknowledging and respecting the women's acts of concealing. The trick to keeping this type of secret is 'don't ask and don't tell' (Taussig 1999). As Taussig (1999: 7) writes:

> We are troubled by our own complicity, but we do not speak because we know that without such shared secrets any and all social institutions—workplace, marketplace, state and family would founder.

Taussig's comments on secrecy suggest that both the person who hides facts and the person who pretends to not know mutually respect each other's stance by indirectly allowing the former to keep a 'known secret'. Rabiya's father pretended to get angry, but, in reality, he respected his daughters' decision under the disguise of not knowing anything. On the contrary, Rabiya openly shared everything with her mother, fully aware that her father would eventually come to know about it.

Secrecy has been linked with various crucial functions in human society, such as helping to 'shape human relations' (Simmel 1906). When the mask of secrecy is exposed or 'defaced', this act has the power to 'destabilize social and political institutions' (Taussig 1999: 7). Most often, at the core of secrecy lies power. A secret is secret because it cannot be articulated in the face of power. However, almost simultaneously, secrecy—or more particularly public secrecy—entails a crucial paradox. For every secret to be realised someone must not only conceal something but someone else must know or suspect this concealment (Beidelman 1993: 1). In Rabiya and Fatima's case, the audience for the secrecy was slowly growing; therefore, it had the potential of becoming a public secret or known secret.[20] Over the years, not only close family

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members but also their distant relatives had an inkling of their closeness to the saints, but nobody asked about it.

Secrecy as a social phenomenon, thus, is an important aspect of everyday human relationships. This is a powerful form of social knowledge that relies on conscious denials of social reality. Such shared secrets are not meaningless and devoid of significance. They contain very useful information which sustains not only human relationships but also social and political institutions. For instance, secret deals between governments in diplomatic relations, the lies told by parents to their children, secrecy in socially illicit sexual relations—these are mainly disguised as secrets in order to belie the social construction of a reality. In most cases, a widely shared belief by a large number of people makes hiding a compulsive norm, creating a public secret which cannot be openly acknowledged. Therefore, 'public secrets' are those secrets that 'the public chooses to keep it safe for itself, which in turn, help them to slip into denial' (Daniel 2006: 2). The next example reveals a process of concealment among people who lived outside Mewat and who had invoked the name of Laldas, Shah Chokha and other saints at some point.

ABID'S LONGING FOR AND BELONGING TO THE SAINT

Large numbers of Meos and other Muslims from the Mewat region had migrated to distant places, mainly the Gulf countries as well as the regions of Mumbai and Gujarat, to find work. These migrants often visited the Laldas shrines and Shah Chokha's tomb upon returning home. They were easily recognisable as 'outsiders' because they did not frequently visit the shrine or the tomb—I noticed them, even though I was a first-time visitor. In moments of distress and disappointment, most of them looked for help or solace from their local religious deities and figures like Laldas. The story of one such person, Abid, is pertinent to this discussion.

Abid, aged 41, lived and worked in the Middle East. He looked frightened when I first approached him in the premises of Laldas's shrine. His uneasiness stemmed from the apprehension of being caught in an undesirable situation of visiting a shrine and expressing his admiration for the saint that he secretly admired but publicly hid. The members of his extended family were supporters of the Tablighi Jamaat and his family discouraged veneration of the saints. For Abid, the social burden of carrying the symbolism of religious purity in a society which had changed rapidly in religious terms of Wahabi[21] ideology was too much. The reformist politics had persuaded a major chunk

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of the population in the area of the importance of puritanical Islam in a way that the reformist view formed mainstream public opinion. In this situation, concealment or secrecy gave Abid a chance to accommodate, negotiate and exercise his personal belief vis-à-vis these dominant purist religious values.

While living in Saudi Arabia, Abid has faced many hardships including—as he revealed to me—the loss of his valuables, including his passport and work permit. Following an unsuccessful search spanning two days, filled with countless prayers and acts of worship, Abid eventually reached the decision to invoke the name of Laldas. Even though he was in the most pious place in the world for the Islamic religion, he felt he had no option except to look for help from the saint. He shared with me that within two hours of invoking the name of the saint, he received a phone call about his lost valuables. He took an immediate vow to offer a *caddar* to the saint upon his return to India. He further said, '… our gods are ours, we should never forget them. They always look after us no matter wherever we are and whatever we do.'[22] Abid's use of the term 'our god' reclaims a local form of popular Islam in India, showing Sufi saints are considered gods not only by Hindus but also by Muslims (Mohammad 2013).

Abid did not differentiate between the Hindu and Islamic conceptions of gods. Rather the two strands of Islam, Sufi and Tablighi, had a peculiar interpretation in his views. He identified his religious belief locally with the saint rather with a place meant to be the centre of Islam in the world. Without denigrating the status of any religious figures, Abid maintained, '… all religions and gods are equal, one should have freedom to invoke what one believes in'.[23] According to him, neglecting the saints of Mewat constituted a huge mistake by the Meos, including his family members. Abid did not begin his daily routine or any work without reciting the name of the shrine. For him, the saint connected him to the almighty (that is, Allah) because he is the medium, a ladder to reach him, since such saints are very close to Allah. However, under the changed circumstances produced by the success of the Tablighi Jamaat doctrines, he was no longer able to express devotion to the saint publicly. What is important here is that during our entire conversation he was very conscious of my presence. My encounter with him happened on the occasion when he was visiting to fulfil his vow. When he entered the shrine, he had completely covered his face with a cotton towel. He was afraid of being seen publicly. This and other actions indicated his uneasiness about visiting the saint. For instance, his son parked his car nearly a kilometre away from the shrine, even though vehicles normally drove right into the premises.

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He very politely declined my request to take a photo of him, and his face was covered when he came in and went out. Yet his action of visiting the shrine necessarily invokes the principles of concealment. His story shows that when it comes to religious belief, personal experience is a strong motivator, and a person will practice secrecy to avoid rifts with society and family.

HARUNI'S TRICK TO NEGOTIATE PRESSURE

Due to pressure from reformist groups, previously held beliefs do not necessarily disappear or succumb but instead adherents find their own ways to cope with an unwanted situation. In another narrative, a woman named Haruni, aged 60, successfully maintained her faith in the Sufi saint Shah Chokha, although overtly denying that she worshipped him.[24] On my regular visits, I used to sit at her small grocery shop for conversations about day-to-day life. Her life struggles were beyond imagination. Her husband was completely disabled after a paralysis attack, so the burden of running a household and taking care of four children fell upon Haruni. With the help of a government-run welfare program of the Mewat Development Agency, she managed to obtain some funds to start the shop. Throughout this entire period of struggle, she retained complete faith in the charismatic authority of the saint. Despite many formal conversations, for a very long time she was hesitant to disclose any information about her faith in the saint. She used to ignore all my efforts to direct her attention to the issue of worshipping the saint in her village. The main reason for her for not being willing to speak about her faith was the opposition from male members of her family to the idea of visiting the shrine. Her father-in-law used to fight with her over this issue. Due to her unpleasant experience, she felt compelled to conceal any outward manifestation of her faith in the saint. However, she did not relinquish her personal beliefs easily under the family and social pressure.

One particular issue to notice is that within the framework of male and female relationships—whether daughters and father (in the case of Rabiya and Fatima), or male in-laws and wives (in Haruni's case), the issue of opposing their belief in a saint was primarily mediated by exposure to the teachings of the Tablighi Jamaat. Mewat was characterised as one of the least developed regions in India, with an alarmingly low overall literacy rate. Notably, the female literacy rate was considerably lower compared to that of males.[25] As a result, women had limited exposure to Islamic scriptures. In addition to the literacy gap, traditional patriarchal norms played a significant role, restricting

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women from participating in male-dominated spaces. For instance, women were not allowed to sit with men during Tablighi Jamaat programmes. The Tablighi Jamaat also operated with a focus on prioritising male involvement and participation. In such contexts, it was interpreted as the role of males to discipline their wives, daughters and any females in the family by imparting the Tablighi Jamaat's doctrines and by preventing them from performing un-Islamic acts.[26] Tablighi Jamaat was largely a male-centric organisation; women had a very limited exposure to its public activities.[27] Particularly in the area near the shrine of the saint, the majority of Muslims believed in the Tablighis' doctrines. The Tablighi Jamaat had thus established a framework of power with constraining/disciplining objectives, operating through the mind-set of male adherents.[28]

It was often female family members who concealed their faith in order to avoid conflict with male family members. Concealment also helped female believers to sustain family relations, thus protecting social institutions and relationships with men of their families. Following Hegel, Taussig (1999) speaks of the dangers of defacement, the flow of negative energy, tensions and self-destructions of social relationships. Secrecy and defacement involve a significant relationship where, as described by Taussig (1999: 8, 221–30), 'the secret is not destroyed through exposure, but subject to a revelation that does justice to it' by being brought into the open.[29] But in this way if something meant to be secret is exposed (revealed) then it negatively impacts societal and political institutions, resembling 'the labour of the negative' (Hegel 1910).[30] Especially for Muslim women who visited these shrines, hiding faith in the saint Laldas and other saints helped them to evade unnecessary fights with their Tablighi husbands, fathers and family heads.

Haruni was an uneducated woman who was told all the time by her father-in-law what was Islamic and what was not. The practices of the Tablighi Jamaat had become a male sphere, where everything was a matter of male honour. What females believed and worshipped had the potential to bring dishonour to male family members and might even make a man hang his head in shame in front of his Tablighi peers and other villagers. The *maulavi* urged the Muslims of the village to abstain from paying a visit to a shrine or the tomb in the village. In such a challenging situation, Haruni faced great difficulty in upholding her religious inclinations. She found herself grappling with the complex task of managing multiple sources of authority, both within and outside her household, all of whom aimed to control her religious beliefs and suppress her inclination towards Sufi faith. She had to navigate a path

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that would enable her to deal with the influence of various agents representing the ideological power of the Tablighis. Later, when Haruni began to trust me, she disclosed her tactics of managing the pressure and secretly maintaining her faith in the saint. She revealed that at least once a month she visited the shrine of Laldas and did the same thing at the tomb of Shah Chokha in her village. To implement her plans effectively, she usually sent a child first to enquire about the *maulavi*'s presence on the premises of Shah Chokha. She kept sending a child to enquire until she heard of a suitable opportunity. As soon as the *maulavi* was absent from the premises, she went there and paid a quick tribute to the holy saint.

Hence, the devotees, predominantly Muslim women, of the saints in Mewat relied on concealment and secrecy to navigate the reformist pressures of Tablighi Islam, promoted by their male counterparts within their families. In a selfless act of service, many Meo men willingly embarked on preaching tours of the Jamaat, encouraging female family members to abandon the veneration of saints entirely. Despite ongoing debates and disputes regarding the role of saints in Islam, the history of the Laldas and Shah Chokha remained deeply ingrained in village narratives, intricately linked to the lives of the people. The inhabitants of Sherpur and Shah Chokha continued to identify themselves as descendants of these saints in various ways, thereby demonstrating the endurance and resilience of certain social practices and structures despite concerted opposition. Nonetheless, the pressure on the shared beliefs and practices of Muslims in the region, particularly those who adhered to Sufi and Bhakti saints, intensified. Their devotion to Laldas or other religious figures necessitated the concealment of their true faith.

FORMS OF EVERYDAY RELIANCE ON THE SAINT: HAZRA'S STORY

Hazra (70 years old) and her elderly husband performed the duties of custodians at the tomb of Shah Chokha. On the very first day when I entered into the premises of the tomb, I first came across the *maulavi*, who met people who were visiting him to seek guidance on spiritual or worldly problems. At 2 o'clock, the *maulavi* went to offer *namāz* with other Muslims. I then sat next to Hazra and started talking to her. Hazra told me that her sons had abandoned her, and she was very upset with the situation. She then started contradicting what the *maulavi* had been previously saying to me. She said, 'I believe in Dada Shah Chokha wholeheartedly, but I could not say that in

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front of him'.[31] She recalled that many of her wishes had been fulfilled thanks to the grace of the miraculous saint. Like Rabiya, Hazra had lost some of her children at birth, and she was hopeless and depressed. Then one day she decided to visit the tomb before the birth of her next child. Miraculously her next child survived, and the list of surviving children quickly rose to eight, including four daughters.[32]

She also fondly remembered a recent incident where her bag, containing 20,000 rupees, was stolen. After an unsuccessful search, she turned to the saint for blessings. In her plea to the saint, she declared, 'If I don't recover my money, I will stop believing in you'.[33] Shortly after, she spotted a man in the market carrying the same bag. In such instances, the worship of a Sufi saint often correlates with the fulfilment of desires. The attainment of worldly and material needs highlights the intricacies involved in the religious practices of individuals who are expected to adhere to a 'pure' religious path. The all-encompassing reform organisations and their endeavours to establish religious boundaries had become an everyday concern for many Muslims in Mewat. Nevertheless, instances of concealment resulting from pressure exerted by these reformists were not limited to the Muslim community alone. There were also numerous occasions where Hindu visitors, driven by political obligations and external pressure, routinely concealed their religious beliefs in an obvious Islamic figure.

THE RELUCTANT HINDU FUNDAMENTALIST: SHIVA SHANKAR'S ANXIETIES

Shiv Shankar Singla, 65 years old, lived in the Ballabhgarh region of Faridabad which borders Mewat. He was a shopkeeper by profession and a Baniya by caste. He had a long-term association with the Hindu reformist group, the Arya Samaj and with a right-wing political group, the RSS. The political opinion of the RSS is that India should be a Hindu country rather than a secular nation as it is at present. This kind of political mobilisation is often achieved through religious means. Shiv Shankar always blamed Muslims for denigrating the nation, based on the myth of the golden period in ancient India.[34] Religious notions and symbols can be used in mass mobilisations, and political-religious pressure created in the name of reform and purity creates spaces for the concealment of aberrant faith practices. Despite his hatred for Muslims, he explained his visit to the tombs of the Islamic saints of the area by saying *pīr bābā to sabke hai* (Sufi *pīr* belongs to everyone).[35]

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Behind his religious devotion to the Islamic figure (Shah Chokha) but hatred for Muslims as a community lies the concept of the miraculous or charismatic personality of the saint.[36] Charisma is usually a revolutionary force that involves a radical break with the pre-existing order, regardless of whether that order is based on traditional or legal authority (Weber 1968). The concept of power linked to a charismatic personality, such as that of the Sufi saints, is perceived as legitimate power that does not require enforcement. Shankar's belief in the charismatic Sufi was part of a universally accepted legitimate power as the power of a supernatural being cannot be questioned. In Shankar's case, the Sufi saints represented an ultimate source of power rather than being a representative of any institutional religion. However, his understanding of the Islamic religion and his opinions about the Muslim community were shaped by the everyday behaviour of ordinary Muslims rather than his personal association with Muslim saints. More importantly, Muslim saints, in particular, possess power lying beyond a Hindu's religious threshold (Bellamy 2011). But this kind of power is rooted in otherness. Hindu devotees often visit the tombs of Muslim holy persons to harness such powers in otherness (Bellamy 2011).

Every Thursday, Shiv Shankar either went to the tomb of Shah Chokha or offered a small piece of green cloth in the name of the saint at his personal religious space at home. Why Shankar left his strictly principled belief in the Arya Samaj ideology of a non-idol, non-human worshiper is an interesting story. His eldest daughter was diagnosed with breast cancer. The doctors dismissed any possibility of saving her life. Shankar not only travelled across regions and met healers, doctors and medical specialists but also tried every form of medicinal practice. Somebody suggested that he should visit the shrine of the saint Shah Chokha.[37] As this was contrary to his life-long beliefs, it was a difficult suggestion for him to follow.

However, seeing his daughter's condition not improving, he thought he should give it a try. Shankar, along with his ill daughter, went to the shrine on a Thursday and performed rituals there. Miraculously, as Shankar recalled it, his daughter started showing signs of improvement in her health within a short span of time of their visit to the shrine. Mesmerised by this experience, he felt bad about his long-held ignorance, as he pointed out to me. Profoundly shaken internally, he chose to keep his experience a secret, refraining from sharing it with anyone. Motivated by the desire to shield his daughter's reputation and driven by a profound fear of ridicule from others, he consciously chose to keep his belief hidden from public knowledge. Nevertheless, despite concealing it,

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he continued to steadfastly embrace the role of Sufi saints and rituals in his daily life. Concealment is thus an important aspect of social life that allows humans to navigate socially built non-navigable domains. Thus, 'knowing what not to know is the most powerful form of social knowledge' (Taussig 1999: 8). In other words, pretending to be unaware of or not revealing known things helps human beings to maintain already existing belief systems and institutions.

In summary, religious faith in saints and the methods of negotiating pressure with the ideologies of power that try to discipline that faith find ways and means to sustain. The shrines of Laldas and numerous other tombs like that of Shah Chokha have historically been the centres of devotion among Hindus and Muslims in the Mewat region. The evolution of the reform movements, stronger among the Meo Muslims in the region, has led the majority male Meo Muslims to adopt uniformitarian Islamic religious practices. Historical circumstances had contributed to the emergence and success of the transnational movement, the Tablighi Jamaat. Currently, however, the movement has been successful in applying a uniform code of conduct to the religious behaviour of the majority Muslims. One of the primary goals of the Tablighi Jamaat is to disband all associations of Indian Muslims who had liminal identities and links with non-Islamic traditions. The veneration of saints is the most severely criticised practice by the Tablighi Jamaat. In this context, people who still want to maintain their faith in saints such as Laldas and Shah Chokha for whatever religious reasons face difficulties.

Despite the changing circumstances, there were still Muslims who maintain faith in the saints but were unable to openly express it due to social and moral pressures. The public display of their association with the saints can lead to conflicts, as I regularly observed during fieldwork. As a result, believers, particularly women who hold a less powerful position in the region, adopted the practice of secrecy or concealment to navigate the pressure and passively resisted the imposed ideological power. Unlike Muslim men, Muslim women faced the dual pressures of the reform organisation and family members in their lives. Some female visitors to shrines had to conceal their faith in the saints to avoid jeopardising family relationships. Men, in an effort to preserve their male 'honour' within the community, regulated women's visits to Sufi shrines. Therefore, by examining the sociological practice of concealing faith, one can gain insights into the internal dynamics of the Muslim society in Mewat.

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Not all shared practices or what are negatively described as 'impure beliefs' in Islam or in Hinduism (in case of the Arya Samaj) succumb to the power of reformist uniformity. Instead, human beings are socially and culturally equipped with the skills that help them to navigate social barriers and pressures. Concealment or secrecy is one of the most accomplished forms of skill and shows how human social knowledge helps sustain not only individual desires to worship freely but also social institutions such as family, marriage and kinship ties.

Chapter 7 explores how, in the wake of religious separatism, Jogi and Mirasi bards articulate positive messages—containing forms of passive and civil resistance—about religious harmony, unity and synthesis through their new poetic songs. The desire to passively resist an unwanted situation of religious disciplining at the hands of Tablighi activists culminated in the poetic songs of the bards of the Meo community. An analysis of the lives of the impoverished and powerless bards vis-à-vis the reformist pressure of the Tablighi Jamaat constitutes a further example of passive resistance against the Islamic reformists and the former patrons, the Meos. Accused by the Tablighis of non-Islamic practices, the bards articulated their concerns through positive messages in new poetic songs.

NOTES

1. This is the epitaph inscribed on Descarte's tombstone; he may have chosen it himself.
2. Concealment and secrecy are closely related ideas, although there are some minor differences. Concealing, sometimes, could be an unintentional act while secrecy is a practice. I am aware of those differences, but I am using these terms interchangeably in their shared general sense because it was difficult to figure out the true nature of hiding one's faith from an audience. Over time concealing could transform into secrecy and secrecy into public secrecy. In defining secrecy, scholars Warren and Laslett (1977) refer to those behaviours that the mainstream public considers immoral or illegal, which therefore have to be hidden.
3. These are just few works among a plethora of literature.
4. Resistance to pressure and domination is a highly complex phenomenon which employs both passive and active means in its operation. But writings of the subaltern school in India, with its claim to recover the lost voices of

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subalterns in the writing of history, adopted a narrow idea of resistance. They focused only on visible forms of resistance, such as insurgency, peasant rebellion and tribal revolt (see Bhadra 1985; Guha 1997, 1999). For critiques of this lacuna of passive resistance in the subalterns works, see Hugh B. Urban (2003: 493–519); Bayly (1988: 310–20). Hugh Urban's writing describes the passive resistance in the context of religious sphere, but his focus, too, is on secrecy as a weapon of the marginalised. See Urban (1998: 209–48, 2003, 2008: 66–83).

5. All the participants for interviews were either regular visitors or occasional saint worshippers. Apart from normal conversation for a brief period at the shrines and the tomb whenever I met a new person, interesting and pertinent stories were followed by an extensive interview with the person. To respect anonymity, all the names in this chapter have been changed. I chose the stories of only those people who fully agreed and had no problems with mentioning what they told me. I anonymised every character by changing names and places.
6. The idea of passive resistance was obvious because many women used to get very angry about the reformist ideas being imposed on them. Some elderly women used to argue with *maulavi*s and other unrelated Muslims over the veneration of saints. However, they mostly did it with unknown Muslim men. About their male family members, many women expressed unhappiness about constant religious disciplining by them.
7. Although I am aware of Foucault's works, I have no intention of engaging with them in this book to avoid an unnecessary digression from the main themes. My fieldwork observations reflected Foucault's concerns about the relationship between knowledge and power. I cite him to acknowledge his body of work.
8. Most stories of concealment were recorded from women. Most of them were in a hurry to leave the place as soon as possible. On some occasions, elderly women were more vocal; one woman said, 'we are not afraid of anyone'. However, this woman was from a far-off village. They openly criticised the stand of Tablighis for stopping and persuading people from visiting the shrine. The stories discussed in this chapter are among multiple similar stories that I came across. I have chosen the ones which best reflect the themes underlying our discussion here.
9. Secrecy also implies 'cultural knowledge important for rituals in initiation and medical practices' (Beidelman 1993, 1997) and helps the 'secularization of religious identity' (Malesic 2009). With regard to secrecy of faith and

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public life, Malesic suggests that Christians should conceal their identities in American public life so as to better protect it from the public sphere. Citing Christian traditions, he further argues that this approach would allow Christians to live their religious life without threatening the multicultural fabric of society and the faith of their religious others.

10. For instance, in *Managing Invisibility* (2014), Hande Sözer describes dissimulation and identity maintenance among Alevi Bulgarian Turks through protective concealment, a well-thought-out strategy to maintain group cohesion vis-à-vis a dominant majority. Similarly, such practices were also prevalent among Shia Ismailis across the world.
11. Ahmad revealed his secret to me after a long time when he started trusting me.
12. Although this seems like a sweeping generalisation, at least in Mewat the process of religious uniformity has been on the rise. Many Muslims shared that they visit Laldas, whom they consider as their *pīr*, but they denied praying at religious spaces of other religions unlike in the past.
13. The reference to the size of the gathering was pointed out by many elderly attendants, who claimed it used be much larger in the past. In 1882, Channing noted that the gathering was of almost 10,000 people. In 2016 it was only around 500 people.
14. There are now only two families in Shah Chokha who openly claimed to be Sufi supporters.
15. The total number of Muslims who believe in Sufi saints has drastically gone down after the success of the Tablighi Jamaat in the area.
16. Interview with Rabiya and Fatima, 9 March 2016, Nuh, Haryana.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. It is important to differentiate a 'public secret' from other types of secrets. A public secret is known by a large number of people.
21. Abid used this term. Wahabi refers to an eighteenth-century Islamic reform movement that originated in Saudi Arabia. There are a number of works available on Wahhabism.
22. Informal conversation with Abid, 25 June 2016, Sherpur, Alwar.
23. Ibid.
24. I am grateful to Islamuddin for putting me in touch with Haruni.
25. District Census, Mewat, 2021. Decennial Census Operations, GoI.
26. There are also separate Tablighi groups for women. These proselytise among Muslim women, but they are very few in number.

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27. Although Barbara Metcalf (2000) talks about the participation of women in Tablighi activities in her work, this is not a common practice in Mewat or elsewhere. Such examples are exceptional in nature.
28. However, at the same time, I am also aware of the fact that both Muslims and the Tablighi Jamaat could be positioned as powerless groups vis-à-vis the Hindu majority in India.
29. Taussig takes this phrase from Walter Benjamin's work, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928).
30. Hegel's (1910) philosophy is known for its dialectical approach, which involves the interplay of opposing concepts or forces leading to their synthesis. The labour of the negative in Hegel's philosophy represents the transformative and creative power of contradiction and opposition. It illustrates how conflicts and negations lead to the development and evolution of concepts, entities, and ultimately, our understanding of the world.
31. Informal conversation with Hazra, 30 January 2016, Punahana.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Terming ancient India as a golden period in Indian history was a colonial orientalist construction to defame Muslim rulers.
35. Writing about charisma, Weber (1968) suggests an allegiance is shown to the person who carries the unique attributes and abilities by virtues of performing unimaginable tasks. Such charismatic appeal creates the authority of the person.
36. As pointed out in an earlier chapter, the Arya Samaj discourages any form of human or idol worship and expects followers to live their life according to the Hindu sacred scriptures, the Vedas. Returning Hindus to the Vedic ideology is its main motto. The RSS, on the other hand, does not intervene in ways of worship. The RSS's focus remains on politics.
37. Interview with Shiv Shankar Singala, 3 February 2017, Punahana.

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7

POETIC RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS PURITANISM

> Where there is power, there is resistance.
> (Foucault 1978a: 95–96)[1]

At the Sherpur shrine of Laldas, I was introduced to Jogi and Mirasi bards during a religious performance.[2] These bards were traditionally supported by the Meos under the *jajmānī* (patron–client) system, which gave the dominant Meos control over these socially and economically marginal Muslim communities. The landless and small landowner bards were hit most by the slow collapse of this patronage system. Additionally, the rise and popularity of the Tablighi Jamaat led most Meos to condemn their musical performances as perversion from Islam, which had once been greatly admired by them. Since the Tablighi doctrine frowns upon music, most Meos today see the bards' performances as incompatible with Islam. Consequently, the Jogis and Mirasis felt pressured to abandon their performances, even though this was their livelihood, and they cherished their artistry.

As socially and economically marginalised communities, the Jogis and Mirasis had to negotiate the opinions and stances of their erstwhile patrons, whose hostility to their performance now threatens their everyday survival. The Jogi and Mirasi minstrels are employing the lyrics of their new poetic songs as a form of passive resistance in response to the Meo patrons' interpretation of religious piety. More specifically, these minstrels are promoting a version of righteous behaviour that is universal and does not depend on organised religions.[3]

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Earlier, it was noted that when Muslim devotees of saints faced pressure, they resorted to tactics such as secrecy and concealment in order to deal with the Tablighi idea of religious discipline. The examples in Chapter 6 were not related to issues of livelihood but rather to the right to freely profess one's religious beliefs in saints. It was evident that the attempted imposition of the religious authority of the Tablighi Jamaat had severe consequences for many individuals beyond Sufi believers. This same theme is now being explored in relation to Muslim bards and their passive resistance against their former patrons, the Meos. The Meos frequently encouraged the bards to abandon their musical profession, join the Tablighi Jamaat and adopt its reformist principles. Considering the Indic theme of cultural interaction in the formation of all these communities, it is important to analyse the past and present forms of their interrelations and the nature of their religious subjectivity. However, the emergence of the Tablighi Jamaat under the changed circumstances of the political economy[4] in Mewat altered the mode of social interaction among these communities. Hence, it is essential to provide an overview of the events that unfolded after the social dynamics in Mewat underwent a gradual transformation following the breakdown of the *jajmānī* system.

THE PATRONS AND THE CLIENTS

The *jajmānī* system, also known as patron–client relationship, was a significant aspect of rural relations around peasant communities in India, with social, political, economic and cultural dimensions that have been extensively studied (Breman 1993; Commander 1983; Fuller 1989; Gould 1986; Mayer 1993). Meo peasants served as patrons for many castes in Mewat, utilising the services of the service castes for ritual and economic purposes and offering them gifts or payments in exchange. In the Meo *jajmānī* system, the Meos' land-ownership was the primary determinant of the power dynamics between patrons and clients. Their domination was not necessarily confined to requiring labour of 'lower castes' and being able to offer them payment.[5] The service castes or clients also performed various rituals in the social life of the Meos, and their social status varied. Meo dominance can be seen in all aspects of Mewati Muslim life, social, political and economic spheres including control over landholdings. According to F. C. Channing's late nineteenth-century settlement report, Meo peasants controlled most of the land in the southern part of the Gurgaon district, which includes

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present-day Meo-dominated areas of Nuh, Ferozepur and Punahana tehsils (Channing 1882: 17–20). Ownership was under the *bhaicārā* (brotherhood) settlements, in which all holders were related to each other by blood ties (18). Similarly, most positions of social, political and economic importance in Mewat were and still are generally controlled by the Meos. The numerical domination of the Meos is also reflected in politics. For example, none of the elected politicians in Mewat's three Muslim-majority legislative units (Nuh, Punahana and Firozpur Jhirka in Haryana) have ever been from a non-Meo Muslim background.[6]

The *jajmānī* system was a complex social and economic system in which the service castes fulfilled various roles for the Meo peasant community and were compensated for their work with a portion of the grain harvest. While the system was hierarchical and based on notions of social status, it was also characterised by a sense of obligation and reciprocity between patrons and clients. The relationship was not necessarily always based on the idea of exploitation. In some cases, such as the *kāmiyā* (labourer) and *mālik* (master) relationship in rural colonial Bihar, the master would provide food to their labourers during times of hardship, like drought or severe famine (Prakash 2003). The dissolution of the *jajmānī* system has had a significant impact on the landless castes such as Jogis and Mirasis, who were once closely tied to the Meos and relied on them for their subsistence income. This is illustrated by the experience of one of my interviewees, Harun. Harun was a young folk artist from the Muslim Jogi caste who had developed his traditional art of storytelling and singing into a professional career by performing in schools, for state-sponsored programs and at various national and international forums for the promotion of folk arts. According to Harun, he was forced to take his art beyond the traditional confines of Meo culture.[7] He used to accompany his father and grandfather to perform at Meo marriage festivities in the late 1990s. During traditional Meo marriage ceremonies, relatives from the bridegroom's side used to stay for four–five days in the village of the bride's family.[8] The bards were employed as the main public entertainers on these occasions, which presented them with abundant opportunities. Harun mentioned that under the influence of the Tablighi Jamaat's ideology, the new trend was to stop them from performing in the traditional marriage ceremonies of their Meo patrons. He recalled further that it was an acutely distressing experience to see that, just as they were about to perform, they would be stopped in marriage after marriage by the Meos saying, 'Don't sing, we will give you your share of money'.[9]

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Under the traditional *jajmānī* system, the Jogi and Mirasi were entitled to receive money or grain for their work. Although the Meos still felt obliged to pay their traditional clients, they were no longer interested in their services because of their non-Islamic nature. 'More than a matter of money, it was a complete disrespect to our profession', Harun further claimed. Not being dependent anymore on the Meos or on begging alms for subsistence, Harun believed in using his art to earn income as a respected professional. This disintegration of the patron–client system did not happen suddenly but over a long period.

Over the past few decades, patronage towards folk artists has significantly decreased. Although many elderly Jogis and Mirasis continue to remember and recite folktales and folk stories, the extent of this practice has considerably reduced. The primary reason for this is the loss of their audience and the simultaneous emergence of alternative forms of entertainment, such as television, which gained popularity in the 1990s. This shift is also attributed to the growth of a new market economy, especially after India's economic liberalisation in the 1990s.[10] These new circumstances meant a weakening of the tie between patrons and musicians. Thus, the artistic skills of the bards, which had once flourished under the patronage of the Meos, were no longer required in the changed mode of economic production and social relations. The majority of these bardic caste members have, thus, been turned from a group of folk artists into labourers due to the necessity to earn a living. Without patronage, landless (or small landowning) culture-oriented communities like the Jogi and Mirasi fell under the yoke of free labour market forces. Consequently, the subsistence of the landless castes mostly depended on them selling their physical labour. For instance, many of the respondents from these two communities seasonally migrated to Mumbai and Gujarat in search of generating some additional income until the next harvesting cycle, at which point they returned to work in the area. Presently, the customary bardic profession is perceived as having minimal value, so performers are forced to seek better opportunities or struggle hard to maintain their daily survival. The majority of the younger generation did not want to take up the bardic profession as a medium of livelihood.

Members of these communities, Meo, Jogi and Mirasi, also criticised each other. The contradiction between public and private behaviour of Muslims from Meo and other Muslim castes may, however, be best understood by studying what James C. Scott (1990: 4–9)[11] calls 'the public transcript' and 'the hidden transcript'—the open and off-stage interactions between subordinates

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and those who dominate. According to Scott, the public transcript refers to the open (public) interaction between subordinate and dominant groups. On the other side, every social group produces its own hidden transcript in which the private discussions among the members of the group contain offensive remarks about the other in contradiction to what they normally say publicly.[12] Thus, to identify the passive resistance practised by the bards of the Jogi and Mirasi castes, one needs to rely on James Scott's description of 'hidden transcripts'. Both groups create public and hidden transcripts in their own ways. A hidden transcript is, thus, an off-stage product that subordinate groups use behind the backs of the powerful. While sharing the public transcript, both subordinate and dominant groups embody etiquette and politeness.[13]

Scott refers to 'hidden transcripts' in the context of discussion about the public roles played by powerful and powerless groups, and the mocking, vengeful tone both groups display off stage. In the case of the landless castes of the Jogi and Mirasi, the bitterness of their thoughts was hidden from the socially and economically superior Meos but was expressed in front of fellow caste members. In their respective 'public and hidden transcripts', in Scott's terminology, the public transcripts upheld the idea of Muslim equality and homogeneity, while the hidden transcripts revealed an awareness of socio-economic difference. The expressions used by 'low-caste' Muslim communities echoed Scott's analysis of what the practice of dominance generates: '… the insults and slight to human dignity that in turn foster a hidden transcript of indignation' (Scott 1990: 7). In everyday life, the dominant Meos invoke their caste superiority and the 'low-caste' status of others both consciously and unconsciously. For instance, my close friends and informants from the Meo caste often made disrespectful remarks in the presence of 'low-caste' individuals. Such behaviour had two implications: first, it displayed Meo dominance; second, it denied 'lower-caste' members their human dignity.

Moreover, the presence of two self-conscious beings was evident in my frequent encounters with individuals of different castes in the villages of Mewat indicating disjunctions between public and private narratives. Often, the public behaviour of the village residents was entirely different from what people shared with me during personal interviews. Publicly, everyone talked of equality, brotherhood and harmony, but in one-to-one conversation, the central stage in my interviewees' narratives was occupied by differences and criticisms of each other. Their relationship also proved Hegel's analysis with regard to the dynamic arrangement of social relations. In the Hegelian

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treatment of power, the mutuality of the relationship between the dominant and the dominated was a very dynamic one.[14] From this relationship or encounter, two distinct, self-conscious beings emerged (Hegel 1910: 163–219). Caste and labour relations under the *jajmānī* system and current tensions in their respective narratives reflected two distinct Hegelian self-conscious beings. The self-consciousness of the subordinates (Hegel's 'bondsmen') is realised through their work and labour.

Since the bards cannot leave their art as it is still a source of livelihood, an idea of passive resistance and the positive articulation of religious synthesis based on the messages of universal righteousness is taking root in their new songs. As most Meos believed in the reformist ideals of the Tablighi Jamaat that discouraged the culture of art and music, traditional musicians had been left without patronage. The next section explores the impact of Islamic reformism on the traditional bardic practices.

ISLAMIC REFORMISM AND MUSLIM BARDS

Jogis and Mirasis' cultural resources for oral performance were drawn from Indic historical traditions that emphasised universalism, expressing ideas beyond the narrow confinement of religious categories. Communities like the Jogis and Mirasis were traditionally both 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', and beyond at the same time, while being closely interwoven into the power structure of the caste society. This type of universalism among such groups has had a long and important history in the subcontinent. The Bauls[15] of Bengal, for instance, conveyed in their songs the idea that ultimate reality did not lie in dogmatic creeds and doctrines but within oneself. Central to the Bauls' religious imaginary was divine love that is common to both 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' (see, for instance, Capwell 1988; R. Datta 1978; Urban 2003).[16] The Bauls faced disapproval from orthodox Muslims and Islamic organisations, leading to occasional issuing of *fatvā*s (legal decisions) against them by Muslim reformist groups.[17] Similar to the songs of the Bauls, the themes of universalism and divine love found their way into the Mewati bards' performance. In one of their poetic songs, they sang a metaphoric Krishnaite song of divine love, human feelings and universal values:

krisn is rūp me jab āpkā darśan hove
aur āp dulhā bane aur jānkī dulhan hove

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prem ki bāt jamāne mein nirālī dekhī
aur prem se prem ki falte huye dālī dekhī
ki prem darasal hai, ādarśh hai jivan ke liye
aur prem mein sānti miltī hai sadā man ke liye
ki prem hi vair ki diwār hatā detā hai
aur prem hi duśmanī varso ki mitā detā hai
prem insān ko insān banā detā hai
aur prem pathhar ko bhi bhagvān banā detā hai.

Krishna when I see you in this form
And you are groom and Janaki is your bride
The idea of love is very amazing in this world
And [I] see the branch of love blossoming from love
That, love is real, ideal, for life
And in love the heart pacifies
That love separates the wall of grudge
And it is also the love that mitigates the years-long enmity
The love makes a human, human
And the love also turns a stone into god.[18]

This song was generally sung at urban venues. It adopted lyrical tones in imparting a message about universality and the essence of human life. The interviews conducted with other bards of Jogi and Mirasi origins opened up a window into the personal experiences of the Muslim bards in the face of pressure from the reform organisation. The stories of one of the Mirasi musicians, Ustad Rammal Khan (aged 55 years), from the Alwar district in Mewat, who had turned his house into a *sangeet kendra* (music centre) reveal various responses to these pressures.

Ustad Khan imparted teachings in harmonium, *veena* (an Indian chordophone) and various other musical instruments to children from both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds. Ustad Khan's Hindu students, attending his training centre, respectfully referred to him as *gurūjī*, while Muslim children chose to address him as *ustād*.[19] Hindus (especially girls) outnumbered Muslim learners at his centre. His well-organised and very clean house was located in an urban *bastī* (slum) in the Alwar city. Upon entering the house, one would be greeted by images of musical instruments adorning the walls.

On the day of my meeting with him, Ustad Khan's Muslim appearance was signified by a skullcap, which immediately gave me a sense of his religious

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beliefs. After offering refreshments—a cup of syrupy tea and snacks—he took me directly to a room filled with various musical instruments. On one wall of the room hung a portrait of a collective *namāz* offering at Mecca in Saudi Arabia. To my surprise, on the other side of the room, there was a large portrait of the Hindu goddess Sarasvati (the goddess of knowledge). Just below the portrait, a bundle of incense sticks was lit, filling the air with a delightful fragrance. Like his Mirasi ancestors, Ustad Rammal Khan believed in both religions. During our informal discussion he said, 'This is our heritage and livelihood'. Every morning, either he or one of his daughters cleaned the room and prayed in front of the image of the goddess. At the same time, his family also offered Islamic prayers. Such practices indicate the possibility of religious connections and influences that existed across faiths and religious boundaries historically.

During the conversation with Rammal Khan, I inquired about the theologians or Mullahs' opinions on his profession. He revealed that his art had faced pressure from within the Muslim community, particularly from Tablighi workers who attempted to convince him to abandon his work in favour of Islam. Rammal Khan explained that this had not been an issue in the past and added, 'Religious disciplining is a new concept in Mewat; it was not a major concern for Muslims and Meos in particular'.[20] Although Rammal Khan believed that the teachings of the Tablighi Jamaat were useful in promoting Islamic religious values, he also thought that they had created divisions not only between Muslims regarding Sufi ideology but also between Muslims and Hindus. To illustrate this point, he recited a couplet from an Urdu poet, Shafiq Jaunpuri (1903–63), concerning the implications of the Tablighi Jamaat's work:

vō andherā hī bhalā thā ki qdam rāh pe the
rōśni lāī hai manjil se bahut door hamen.

That darkness was still better so that our steps were on the path
The light has brought us very far from the goal.[21]

This couplet expressed Rammal's views on the reformist teachings, that the knowledge that generates no love in the heart is not knowledge. His anxieties were directed against the unwanted imposition of discipline by the reform organisation. He could not openly express his views against many Meo Mullahs and the members of *ummāh* (the notion of a community based on

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the idea of brotherhood in Islam). Rammal Khan told me that whenever a group of Tablighi workers approached him, he would take them into the room filled with the instruments. The reformist thinking on music found immediate expression by designating the instrument room 'a place of *harām*' (a place of prohibited practices in Islam)[22] where *namāz* cannot be offered. Nonetheless, Rammal Khan used his music as a starting point for dialogue. He always raised the question of his livelihood to counter the reformist ideologies. He would often say to the reformists, 'This is my work. If I leave it, my family and I will die'.[23] He further used to say to the workers of the Tablighi Jamaat, 'Give me a regular income, and I will leave the work, and join you'.[24] The rationale behind his arguments was thus not a theological one but was entangled with his everyday life and survival. The Tablighis could not respond to these questions by Rammal Khan.

In the late twentieth century, the *jajmānī* system experienced varying degrees of disintegration, with some social relations completely breaking down, while others persisted or underwent changes based on the relevance and resilience of specific occupational groups. Although the Meos currently strive for a Sunni Muslim identity and practice, it was challenging for the bards to abandon their profession in favour of Islam, as advocated by the Meos and Tablighi clergies. For the bards, their livelihood was at stake. In contrast, the affluent peasant status of the Meos allowed them to embrace a purist Islamic movement without jeopardising their means of living. In such circumstances, the construction of a 'new' religious identity was intricately intertwined with everyday livelihood concerns.

In order to fill the void left by the cessation of patronage, bards like Harun, Yusuf and Rammal Khan sought alternative avenues for employment. For example, when the Manganiyar community (literally, beggars) in western Rajasthan lost the support of the Rajputs, they turned to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the global music industry to maintain their cultural traditions (Ayyagari 2012, 2022).[25] Likewise, many Mewati bards economically survived by performing at local Hindu cultural-religious events. Festivities and ceremonies like *jāgran*s ('all-night awake'), Hindu marriages and the birth of a child provided new performance opportunities. More renowned artists, though few in number, had opportunities to perform at local, national and even international levels. The second-grade artists formed music bands to perform whenever opportunities arose. This new pattern of employment differed from the traditional patronage system, in which bards were tied to Meo families regardless of their talent. Instead,

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bards were now hired for various social, religious and political events, such as singing *bhajan*s at temples, performing for foreign tourists and dignitaries in palaces and recording songs for the thriving local music industry.[26] While these activities helped sustain the culture and the artists to some extent, they could only support a small number of musicians, and the new opportunities also demanded new technical skills.

THE STYLE OF RENDITION

As their main vocation was to sing and perform folktales, successive generations of the Jogi and Mirasi bards were trained to become oral performers and storytellers. Their tales were passed on from generation to generation, by either fathers or grandfathers, through memory and recital practices. Both minstrel castes used to sing and recite the two great 'Hindu epics', the Mahabharata (locally known as *pandun ke kade*, the couplets of the Pandavas) and the Ramayana, called *lankā kī caḍhāī* (the raid on Lanka) for their Meo patrons. Both the performers (Jogi and Mirasi) and the audience (Meo) were Muslims who enjoyed the cultural performances of the two 'Hindu epics'. Likewise, there are multiple oral recitations of the Meos' experiences with colonial and pre-colonial states, folk tales of feuds between the local Meo heroes and other symbols of power, and the relationship with other castes and groups in the area. The bardic castes sang mythic instances of Meo bravery in relation to pre-colonial, colonial and princely states (Mayaram 1997a, 2003, 2004a). The Meos were centrally placed in these performances by virtue of being the patrons of these bards.

Apart from narrating and performing the Meo community's history, the Jogi and Mirasi castes were also singing accolades about a living person to increase their earnings during some particular events. Mewat's history and important Meo political events had been recorded orally for the past several centuries by these groups in the form of what I call the 'human archive'.[27] The effectiveness of this human archive was entirely dependent upon the capability of the bards to recollect folktales and stories that amounted to several hundred hours of narration.

Most of these folktales belong to a genre called *mewāti bāt*[28] (see Mayaram 2003: 318–19) and are sung in the form of couplets designed and performed in the manner of a dialogue with an audience. The *mewāti bāt* is closer to the prevalent western Indian oral genre of the *vāt* (tale), widespread

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across Rajasthan. In Mayaram's words, 'the Rajasthani *vāt* means "tale/epic" or "prose narrative" [and] is rooted in Sanskrit *vārtā* (accounts) traditions' (Mayaram 2003: 315–19). A closely related term *vrat* stands for 'fasting'. A *vrat* (meaning vow/fasting) also has religious significance when females in South Asia undertake a vow of fasting in the name of a particular deity, either for the well-being of the entire family or most commonly for the long life of their husbands. In Sanskrit *vrat kāthā*s (fasting tales), a story is often recited by a Vyas[29] (pundit) to an audience mostly made up of religiously fasting women (Wadley 2005: 36–52). These fasting ceremonies usually end in the evening, with the audience listening to a tale attributed to the particular god in whose name the fast was observed. During the narration of the folktale, a *vrat kāthā* requires the audience to intervene actively from time to time. This is done simply by nodding or hailing the god's name—a gesture signifying the audience's attentiveness. Likewise, the Mewati and other bards employed similar methods[30] in most of their folktale performances in a style of performance known as *dohā-dhānī śāīli* (*dohā dhānī* style).[31]

In classical Hindustani music, the rendition of various *rāg*s conveys the feeling (*ras*) or desire of spiritual and worldly love. In the folk music of Rajasthan, as Shalini Ayyagari (2012: 13) shows in the case of the Manganiyars, the feeling is expressed through the *dohā*s or 'the poetic couplets'. In the *dohā dhānī* style of folk music, the Mewati bards fused a classical music genre *rāg dhānī* with *dohā* (couplets). Thus, it shared features of both classical and folk music and thus attains what Peter Manuel (2015: 82) terms 'an intermediate sphere'—a betwixt and between zone neither fully classical nor fully folk music. All the traditional folktales of Mewat including the telling of the Indic (Hindu) epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, corresponded to the *dohā dhānī* style of folktale renditions. Generally, the couplets (*dohā*) were sung by a lead singer, followed by an in-depth description (*dhānī*) of each couplet. The second part (*dhānī*), which was both sung and narrated description, was always accompanied with instrumental music, melodies and rhythms.

While the traditional style of oral storytelling used the *bāt* form, the new songs in which passive resistance ideas surfaced belong to another popular folk music genre called *rasiyā* (literally, 'epicure'). More particularly, the songs belonged to the Mewati-style *rasiyā*—a subgenre. Historically, the Mewat has also been influenced by the Braj literary and music cultures. Inspired by the myths of Krishna and Hindu themes of love and devotion, the area has also experienced an intermingling of diverse cultural traditions. Although the region is now heavily influenced by Islamic culture and religion, it retains

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the zest of the vernacular Braj tradition and culture. *Brajbhāṣā*, the language of the Braj area of Mathura, Agra, Aligarh and Bharatpur, was primarily associated with vernacular literature and music about the god Krishna (Busch 2010a, b). Mewat constituting a neighbouring region of the Braj was heavily influenced not only by the Braj language and culture but also by mainstream 'Hindu' (Indic) traditions.

The Braj region has also been a leading centre in the development of numerous folk poetry and folk musical styles. Inspired by the themes of *krishnaite bhakti* (devotion) and romantic tropes about the love of Radha and other peasant girls, the folk art of these bards intersected the divine and the profane world.[32] In the *milieu* of the love affairs of a god, the folk genre *rasiyā* spread into adjoining local areas in diverse local forms. In modern times, a new form of *rasiyā* has been adopted into saucy and spicy songs depicting mundane feelings about love, teasing and erotic desires (Manuel 1994, 2015). *Rasiyā* when sung has the power to evoke love, romance and erotic emotions. However, the Mewati bards did not model their current songs on the spicy style but instead modelled their prosody in the traditional manner of *rasiyā*. Performed in this way, *rasiyā* can generate powerful feelings in one's heart. Using the traditional-style *rasiyā* prosody in Mewati *bāt* form, all the new songs performed by the bards expressed messages of religious unity and the transcendence of religious differences.

It is noteworthy that during the recitation of the initial verses of a 'Hindu' religious text known as the *shiv katha* (the story of Shiva), the Jogi singers would chant the name of Allah and the Prophet as a gesture of reverence. They then invoked their *ustād* (master or teacher) who had taught them their artistic skills. These Islamic invocations were then followed by the main attractions of the night—singing, dancing and reciting Lord Shiva's wedding story:

avval soch allāh, pahal mābūd manāū
mitā jikr kā fíkrā, gīt hajrat kā gāū
mero dile umange daryāv, hūkam mūrśad sū cāhū.

Allah is the supreme idea, first and foremost [I] worship him
the concern of mentioning him is fulfilled, now I sing the song of Hazrat [Mohammed]
My heart is full of passion like the ocean, it seeks the permission from my teacher.[33]

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The only instrument these balladeers used was the Bhapang (see Figure 7.1), which looked like Shiva's *damru* (a small hand drum) but produced different melodies. The name of the instrument involves a curious blend of the Vaishnava, Shaivite and Nath *panth* (path/orders). The first Hindi word *bha* stands for Bhole (another name for Shiva), *pa* for pundit means the god Vishnu, and *ga* for guru Gorakhnath—whom all the Jogis consider their patron saint. Like the Muslim Jogis, the Mirasis commemorate the patron Hindu goddess Bhavani (Durga) before beginning a performance. The Mirasis used to offer homage to Bhavani at her shrine at Dhaulagarh near Lachmangarh in the Alwar district of the Mewat region (Mayaram 1997b: 7).

FIGURE 7.1 A Bhapang

Source: Yusuf Khan.

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The stories about the origin of the Bhapang provided further insights into the origins of the Muslim Jogis and the various synthesising processes of 'Hinduism' and 'Islam'. For instance, in the following couplets, Allah is responsible for creating the Hindu god Shiva in the process of creating life on earth:

yā duniyā me dekho bhapang kahā su āyo,
dharan nahī, ambar nahi, nāthe surajbhān
śeṣani pe kutbī tāro, huye ujādo bhān
śankar ko allah-tālā ne pahlo but banvāyo
yā duniyā me dekho bhapang kaha sū āyo.

See brother! How Bhapang originated in this world,
there was neither the earth and the sky nor the sun and the moon
only the polar star gleamed above
first of all, Allah made the body of Shankar [god Shiva]
See brother! How Bhapang originated in this world.

Thus, their art derives sacred inspiration from the (Indic) symbolism of Hinduism, involving strands from diverse religious traditions: Nath, Shaiva, Vaishnava and Islam. In the Jogis' performative traditions, elements of both 'Hinduism' and 'Islam' figure prominently. For instance, the verses above bring together the elements of both religions, dealing with the demands of monotheism through the creation of Shiva by Allah. Shiva is popularly known as *bābā ādam* (literally, grandfather *ādam*, the first man sent to the earth by Allah in Islamic theology) and thus has a high status in the narratives of Jogis. This kind of reverence for Shiva translated into musical renditions of genealogical narratives that indirectly connected the Jogis to the Nath and Shaivite traditions:

bhapang-2 sab kare, bhapang hai apne hāth
bha se bhole, pa se pandit, ga se gorakhnath
gorakh ke augarh huye, augarh ke ismail nath
vākī hum aulād hai, suno hamarī bāt.

Everyone iterates Bhapang-2, Bhapang is in our hand,
'Bha' for Bhole, 'pa' for Pandit, 'ga' for Gorakhnath,
Augarh became disciple of Gorakh, of whose disciple was Ismail Nath,
We are the sons of him, listen to our words.

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The Muslim Jogi tradition suggested that Ismail Nath (note the Muslim first name) is responsible for founding the Muslim Jogi sub-order within the Nath belief system. Through their performances, the Muslim Jogis connected with both Shiva and Allah at the same time. But I argue here that their choice of ascetic ideals to articulate their collective self is rooted in their marginalised socio-economic experience. In contrast to the Meos' claim to *kṣatriya* status, the Muslim Jogis believed that their community descended from the Hindu ascetic god Shiva and his disciple Gorakhnath. Gorakh, a revered guru of the Nath order, advocated the renouncement of household life and material attachments in order to be a true *yogi*. Such ideas are essential to the Nath tradition. In Nath folklore, there are also stories of kings (Bharthari and Gopichand) renouncing their kingdoms to join the order, and Gorakh saving his Guru Machhendranath from sexual and worldly desires, signifying the futility of the material world (Gold 1999). Individuals were inspired to leave household and material attachments behind to attain the true meaning of life. Although these ascetic ideals of the Nath order were transformed by the insertion of a household category among the Naths (Gold 1999; Gold and Gold 1984), the inspirational values still run high among the lower socio-economic groups, including peasants.

Both kinds of Jogi bards, the Hindu Jogi and the Muslim Jogi, derive their identity from the Nath cult of the Shaivite tradition (see Briggs 1998 [1938]).[34] Oral traditions claim that Ismail Nath settled in the Bengal region where there was an inevitable confrontation between him and the goddess Kamakhya of tantrism or the Shakti cult:

kangrū des me kumkā devī jāne duniyā sārī,
jahan base Ismail jogi
sahja jogan ko hai ismail, vāki carcā bharī
kumkā devi kū bas me karke, jogī muslim dharam calāyo.

Kumka devi lives in Kangru *dès* [region], the whole world knows,
In the same region settled Ismail Nath Jogi,
Ismail is the son of Sahja Jogan, people talk a lot about him,
After controlling Kumka Devi, he spread the religion of the Muslim Jogis.

Thus, a Nath *yogi* was responsible for the dissemination of the Muslim Jogi form of Islam. Kamakhya Devi, whose main shrine is in Assam in eastern India (historically part of colonial Bengal), was famous for black magic and

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tāntric practices (Fell 2000; Urban 2001).[35] Apart from this, the differences between religious communities seem not to have been organised in terms of religious identities. For instance, according to the origin story of the Jogi bards, the emergence of Islam among the Muslim Jogis took place in Bengal under the patronage of Shiva, when Ismail Nath controlled the negative forces of the goddess Kamakhya, an idea which is rooted in the Indic nature of the creation of sacred things.

Colonial ethnography put the Meos in the category of 'lax Muslims' (Mayaram 1997a, 2004c). Their blended culture gave them a complex religious identity. Like the Meos, the Jogi and Mirasi bardic castes have a blended religious history and a liminal identity. For instance, as already mentioned, the Muslim Jogi community, like the Hindu Jogis, worships both Shiva and the founder of the Nath order, Gorakhnath. All Jogis consider Shiva and Gorakh as their patron god and lord (Nath) respectively. Similarly, the Meos still consider themselves as the descendants of the Hindu gods and mythological figures. Therefore, a significant aspect in the histories of the Meo, Jogi and Mirasi communities is the issue of the religious synthesis of some common strands of Hinduism and Islam in their life, marked by shared narratives of the Indic world.

NEW SONGS OF HINDU–MUSLIM COMPOSITE HERITAGE

In 2010, an interview with the highly renowned Bhapang artist Umar Farookh Mewati[36] was published in a local edition of a newspaper (see Figure 7.2).[37] The headline in Figure 7.2 reads, *dil me Allah, kanth me Shiva* (Allah in heart, Shiva in voice). Umar belonged to the Muslim Jogi caste. He and his many associates of both Hindu and Muslim Jogi caste backgrounds voiced the idea of religious indifference. They advocated Hindu–Muslim unity through lyrical artistic expression. The lyrics of the poetic songs sung by Umar Farookh and his associates can be seen as passive resistance and a desire to be attached to a Hindu–Muslim dual cultural heritage. The lyrics of the new songs by these bards constitute a type of hidden transcript.[38]

Indeed, power can manifest in various ways and not solely through negative means that lead to physical resistance. It can also have positive outcomes by 'generating forms of pleasure, systems of knowledge, goods, and discourse' (Abu-Lughod 1990: 42). In the same manner, the bardic castes produced songs in order to create a discourse based on positive messages. The

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दिल में अल्लाह, कंठ में शिव

शिव का गुणगान करते हैं मेवात के मुसलमान

पीढ़ियों से चल रहा है गाना-बजाना

अलवर, 15 मई (का.सं.)

नमाज-रोजे के पाबंद मेवात के हजारों मुसलमान परपंरागत तरीके से भगवान शिव का भी गुणगान करते हैं। शिव के गुणगान की परंपरागत विद्या ने मेवात के कुछ परिवारों को देश-विदेश तक ख्याति दिलाई है। पीढ़ियों से चला आ रहा यह परपंरागत हुनर आज भी कुंछ परिवारों में जिंदा है। शेष पेज 10 पर

"मेवात अंचल के जोगी मुसलमान व मिरासी आदि जातियां पीढ़ियों से भपंग बजाकर शिव का गुणगान कर रही हैं। विदेशों में भी कार्यक्रम प्रस्तुत किए जाते रहे है। उनकी संस्था इस लोककला को आगे बढ़ने के लिए प्रयासरत है।

- उमर फारुख मेवाती, भपंग वादक

उमर फारुख मेवाती

शिव के डमरु से निकला भपंग

मेवात में अंचल में मुसलमान जोगियों की ओर से बजाया जाने वाला वाद्ययंत्र की उत्पति शिव के डमरु से बताते हैं। तीन अक्षरों से बना भपंग को भ से भोले, प से पंडित (विष्णु), ग से गोरखनाथ है। यह शिवरात्रि पर शिवालयों में शिव अराधना में बजाया जाता है। जो जोगिया सारंगी का सहयोगी ताल वाद्य है। शिव के डमरु से बने भपंग वादन को विश्व स्तर पर अलवर के जहूर खां मेवाती ने पहचान दिलाई। अन्य लोक कलाकार भी इस विद्या को पल्लवित कर रहे हैं।

लोक उत्सव आज

अलवर, 15 मई। जहूर खां मेवाती भपंग एवं शिक्षा समिति की ओर से जाने माने भपंग वादक जहूर खां मेवाती की प्रथम पुण्यतिथि का कार्यक्रम शुक्रवार शाम छह बजे सूचना केन्द्र में लोक उत्सव के रूप में होगा।

समिति के उपमंत्री घनश्याम प्रजापत ने बताया कि शहर के नंगली के चौराहे के पास स्थित सूचना केन्द्र में होने वाले कार्यक्रम में दूरदर्शन की निर्माता निर्देशक रमा पाण्डे मुख्य अतिथि होंगी व मेवात विकास बोर्ड अध्यक्ष नसरू खां विशिष्ट अतिथि होंगे। लोक कला के कार्यक्रम प्रस्तुत किए जाएंगे।

समारोह में भपंग वादन, कालबेलिया नृत्य, खारी नृत्य व रिम भवाई सहित लोक कला के कई कार्यक्रम प्रस्तुत किए जाएंगे। कार्यक्रम में पश्चिम क्षेत्र लोक कला उदयपुर की टीम भी शरीक होगी।

FIGURE 7.2 The newspaper cutting of Farookh's interview

Source: Yusuf Khan.

new songs concern the question of power. But they also take a high moral position by creating a tone and language that express resistance through harmonious messages. They do not openly criticise Muslim reformism, Hindu fundamentalism or political behaviour. They take an anti-hegemonic stand and express a firm belief in a shared religious culture. For instance, the song cited here eloquently raises the issue of artistic concern about religious differences. It respectfully adds a different perspective to the divisive nature of current socio-political processes:

idhar ko masjid, udhar ko sivālā
ek pe tasvī, ek ko mālā
vahī ālif, vahi kakke main
vahī kāsī, vahī makke main

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ranj ko samjhe nahī
yā rab kya andher hai
bāt to kuch bhi nahī bus samajh ka pher hai.

this side mosque, that side temple [of Shiva]
one is bowed [as in during *namāz*], the other is offered garland [*mālā*]
the same sound in both *ālif* and *kakkē* [Urdu and Hindi alphabets respectively]
he is in Kashi [Banaras], he too in Mecca
no one understood this difference
O, my lord! what is this darkness
Nothing is this issue except a matter of understanding.[39]

The new songs of the bards have evoked the notion of religious synthesis against a background of Hindu–Muslim antagonism. The lines cited earlier suggest a spiritual-philosophical interpretation of the oneness of God. Despite differences of symbols, the couplet assumes a fundamental commonality across religious divides. The lines of the couplet have themes of presenting the true human essence beyond narrow religious classifications. In the changed circumstances, the bards opted to express their uneasiness and concerns of religious disciplining through their artistic medium and folk musical compositions. After the loss of their traditional audience, current performances raise issues not only of identity and cultural heritage but also of livelihood. Significant in these changes is the way that the medieval Indian themes of the Nath, Sufi and Bhakti religious streams[40]—which conventionally stressed upon the conception of transcending Hindu–Muslim religious divides—are moving towards the expression of a discourse of religious synthesis. Despite their compulsory identification with Islam now, the bards continue to advocate for a Hindu–Muslim composite heritage. By expressing messages of universal righteousness in their songs, the Mewati bards indirectly questioned the ascendant Islamic purist ideologies and reform groups on the one hand and the divisive Hindu versus Muslim politics on the other.[41] From such oppositions, the Muslim bards drew on an Indic theme and the symbolism of Hinduism to represent a 'Muslim self' in contrast to the rhetoric and symbolism of the unfamiliar version of Islam (the Tablighi one) that represents the 'Muslim other'.[42]

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The songs for local consumption were circulated in audio-visual forms through recordings on mobile chips, pen drives and CDs. These songs did not express the resistance theme, as this risked attracting the wrath of the Meo patrons. The local music industry also did not record songs containing messages of passive resistance or promoting religious unity by celebrating mixed religious practices. Such songs were unlikely to find consumers. For these bards, remaining in the Meos' favour was still necessary for political and social reasons, even if it means not performing anymore.[43] Only the more famous bards could afford to voice passive resistance in the songs. They performed most often for non-Meo gatherings in large cities and urban areas. Employed to display the distinctiveness of their culture, the singers would start by emphasising the unique religious blending.

Unless otherwise shared with a documentary film-maker or given to a researcher like me, the lyrics of the songs are restricted for personal use only. They are sung on specific occasions to express special feelings about the vitality of the bards' art and livelihood, the value of religious unity and above all culture. Anonymous and obscure references in the couplets are open to multiple interpretations by different audiences. For a gathering in cities, the references could refer to Hindu–Muslim politics at the national level. To someone familiar with the area, the lyrics could express uneasiness about Tablighi Islamic theology. For the bards themselves, as many of them recalled in interviews, the lyrics are both a reference to their own plight and a message to both Hindus and Muslims.[44] While different groups may interpret the lyrics differently, what is obvious to all listeners is the uneasiness the lyrics evoke about the ideologies of religious extremism, puritanism and divisive politics.

The loss of the Meo audience has without doubt negatively impacted the bards' lives. Nonetheless, their main concern within the subsistence economy remains to articulate positive messages of their Indic historical tradition. What are these characteristics of Indic life? And how do they help the bards navigate the pressure of reformism or the politics of Hindutva and Islamic reformism? One of the songs written by Umar Farookh, but also widely performed by other minstrels, is helpful in unpacking these Indic meanings. Before reciting a few lines on the tune of Bhapang, Umar Farookh used to make a disclaimer: 'I am from a Muslim Jogi family, but I am a follower of Shiva too. I keep a special feeling in my heart'. Somebody from the group

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would then ask him, 'What is that special feeling?' and the musicians would begin the song. The couplet generally starts like this:

ki hum hātho me gītā rakhēngē
aur sinē main qurān
hum kābā bhi rakhenge aur kāsī bhī
aur mel badhāye āpas main
vo dharm aur imān rakhenge
hindūyo ka mandir, muslmāno kī masjid
sikho ka gurudvārā, īshaiyo ka girjā
yahā girjā, vahā girjā
idhar girjā, udhar girjā
aur ye cāro usi ke dar hai
cāhe jidhar girjā.

that we will keep the 'Gita' in our hands
and the 'Quran' in our hearts
we will keep Kaaba [Mecca] as well as Kashi [Banaras]
and that which promotes harmony
is the religion and faith we will keep
temple of Hindus, mosques of Muslims
the gurudwara of Sikhs, the church [*girjā*, literally, 'bow down' in Hindi] of Christians
you can bow down here or there
bow this side or that side
all four are his abodes
bow down wherever you want.[45]

While this appears to be a well-thought-out strategy to please a Hindu audience, it also served as a stage from which the bards could voice a contrary opinion to that of the powerful. Thus, neither the bards' former patrons, the Meos, nor the Tablighi Jamaat were confronted directly. Hindu gatherings would cheer when they heard Muslims invoking the name of Shiva. The bards' critique of their Meo patrons' version of religious purity is thus performed not to Meos but to a different audience. In practice, the critique did not reach the ears of Meos. Irrespective of the change in the patrons' behaviour, the bards still respect the social-religious relationships. However, contrary to the Meos' stand, they emphasise

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religious righteousness that is universal and thus needs no organised religion.

Among the possible explanations for the lyrics of the couplets above is the Muslim bards' contemporary concern for religious unity and brotherhood. It is entirely ahistorical to assume a historical past without violence or skirmishes happening. Violence, feuds and struggles have been present in all historical epochs. At a very fundamental level, the bards of Mewat reflect the reality of 'new age religious intolerance' (Nussbaum 2012).[46] This new age of religious intolerance is more exposed in the wake of growing consciousness of the two fundamental cognate categories of 'Hindus' and 'Muslims'. Interest in this intolerance was renewed in India after the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992. Like all other social identifications, religious identification seeks solidarity in what could be called the burden of fundamental commitment created under the impression of false consciousness. 'False consciousness' alludes to the broader processes of contemporary Hindu–Muslim politics. Fear and danger, for example, are predicted to be existing all the time citing some previous instances of actual violence such as the partition violence of 1947. The fear of such violence is used by social, religious and political groups like the Tablighi Jamaat, the Arya Samaj, the Congress and the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). However, in such situations, this false consciousness created by political and religious elites makes it seem that there is danger and fear all the time in everyday life. The Mewati bards respond to this fear manufactured by political-religious elites. The bards refer to the mixed origin of cultures to present a rich and complex heritage. Their cultural references demonstrate a long tradition of resisting institutions and institutional ideas. The couplet cited earlier is not merely a reflection about the past but also draws material from the cultural context of medieval India, Nath, Bhakti and Sufi themes to resist the ideological and political power domination in the present.

Previously, the bards did not face the same danger of making their patrons unhappy. Their messages about transcending religious boundaries drawn from Nath, Sufi and Bhakti teachings could, in those times, find easy expression in highly personalised and self-referential couplets. More importantly, the songs of the Mewati bards take a didactic approach and respectfully present the issue of the religious divide without radically denigrating or mocking the stand of the Meos and their ideological and social power. Their art—and their need to earn a living—requires that they remain civil in expressing disagreements and anxieties. However, their songs are neither completely hidden nor entirely offstage. But these days they are

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performed for a different audience. More importantly, the very act of making, producing and performing these didactic songs provide a domain through which the performers can convey messages they cannot express directly, and they do so by disguising them in an artistic form.

The lyrics of orally performed new songs, thus, act as a strategic tool. Their performances thus help them express issues of religious identity and everyday livelihood through poetic artistry. Scott comments throughout his writings on the passive resistance of subordinate groups (or subalterns) through means such as folk songs, gossip, jokes and mimicries. Such domains create a hidden transcript which can be displayed openly (Scott 1990: 77–90) but which often works indirectly behind the back of power.

Sometimes, the tone of a language in an artistic work shows the intensity of the resistance, with a more direct verbal demonstration of anger. In the aforementioned case, however, the philosophical orientation of the lines does not compromise the civility of the art. Despite the existential danger to their folk art, the bards maintained a civil discourse. In response to the ideologies of the religious fundamentalists, the Jogis and Mirasis performed passive resistance and acts of dissent through a positive articulation of their worldviews. The bards' desire to regain a lost audience is not as evident in the songs as is their foregrounding of the question of shared culture and identity.

Another song written and compiled by the Jogi bards (recited and provided to me by Yusuf, the son of Umar Farookh) is worth citing here. It evokes a sense of an ideal human (*insān*). Many saints including Kabir, Nanak, Gorakh, Ravidas and Tukaram evoked in their teachings the notion of a 'human' who represented neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. Similarly, in their lyrics, the bards evoke the idea of a true human being who could be anyone based on good actions. The lines of the song below imply a lesson about Hindu–Muslim unity relevant to current circumstances. Yusuf revealed the song lyrics as follows:

(*i*) *ser-i-hindū kā kahnā hai ki musalmān burā hai*
muslim bhī yahī kahtā ki hindū hī burā hai
nā hindū burā hai, nā musalmān burā
aa jāyē burāī pe to vo insān burā hai
ye hi hindū–muslim me rad-o-badal hai
udhar ābe-zamzam, idhar gangā jal hai
(*ii*) *idhar bhī to sita pe tohmat lagī thī*

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udhar bhī to maryam pe ungalī uthī thī
udhar abu zayd paidā huyā thā
idhar kans, ravan bhī paidā huye thā
udhar bhī khudā pe sitam dhāne vāle
idhar bhī prabhu ko burā kahne vāle
duniyā me dekho kitna-kapat chal hai
(*iii*) *mandir bikate, masjid bikte*
śaikho, brahaman, mullah bikte
masjid ke vo cande bikte
gitā bikatī, qurān bikte
yahā tak ki vo imā(n) bikte
madīna ka vo pānv biktā
gangā kā vo jal bhī biktā
dono ko milākar dekho, dono ek jal hai.

(*i*) The Hindu patriot claims Muslims are bad
Muslims also iterate that Hindus are bad
neither Hindus nor Muslims are bad
the one who commits bad actions is a bad human
this has been falsified/altered [*rad-o-badal*] among Hindus and Muslims
that side is the well of Zamzam, this side the water of Ganga
(*ii*) this side too was Sita blamed
that side too was finger pointed out at Maryam
that side Abu Zayd was born
this side too Kans and Ravana were born
there are people on that side who enrage *khudā* [god]
there are people on this side too who ridicule *prabhu* [god]
See, how much cheating and fraud prevail in this world
(*iii*) temples sell, mosques sell
Sheikhs, Brahmins, and Mullahs sell
the donations of that mosque sell
the Gita sells, and the Quran sells
Even that integrity sells
The water of Madina sells
that Ganga's water too sells
put two together and see, both are the same water.[47]

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What is significant in the song is the distinction between 'we' and 'they' in the form of 'this side and that side'. The division is not articulated along the lines of religious self-identification of the bards with Islam. Despite being Muslims themselves, the Muslim Jogi and Mirasi bards and writers position themselves as representing Hindu religious symbols and culture in comparison to the Islamic self. The symbols of the Arab or Islamic world in the song—Abe-Zamzam, Maryam, Abu Zayd, Khuda, mosques, the Quran—are put into the category of 'that side'. The parallel is the symbols of religion and culture of 'this side': Ganga's water, Sita, Kans and Ravana, temples, the Gita and so on. The two categories of 'this side and that side' are not simply geographical differences between the Indian and the Arab world but express the Muslim bards' embeddedness in 'local' religious symbols. The lyrics express a culturally deep-rooted Hindu, or more particularly an Indic, derivation of notions of 'good and bad, sacred and defiled, justice and injustice, and honesty'.

The bards' self-identification with 'this side' is represented through familiar mythic-historical characters like Kans, Ravana and Sita. Traditionally, the bards sang or narrated stories about the virtues of these figures in the cultural performances of Mewati folk tales and folk songs. While proud of their Muslim identity, through songs like the one mentioned earlier, the bards suggest that what is more meaningful to them is to maintain the tradition of Hindu–Muslim synthesis.

Another notable point in the song is the issue of female sexuality. Maryam and Sita are paralleled with one another to compare shameful instances where women's chastity has been questioned in both religions. Here, 'Maryam' is the name Muslims use for the Christian religious figure and the mother of Jesus called 'Mary'. The tradition of associating Christian figures with Islam is an old one. But the Tablighi Jamaat used this reasoning to link such figures to an Islamic claim for Mohammed's (570–632 CE) preceding era, thereby incorporating the figures of other religions under Islam. According to this logic, many of the gods, pious beings, messengers and charismatic authorities of other religions are among the thousands of prophets sent by Allah before the final one who brought Islam. In Islamic belief, therefore, Maryam (Mary) is not a Christian figure but the mother of one of their prophets. The Muslim bards' conscious choice of Maryam to represent an instance where a woman's chastity was questioned, as happened with Sita in the Ramayana, is also an attempt to juxtapose parallel symbols of different religions and their cruel attitude to women.[48] The parallel of the two women figures is also mediated by the discursive rationale of Islamic

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theology, considering both women related to Muslim 'prophets': Maryam, the mother of Jesus, and Sita, the wife of Ram.

The Tablighi Jamaat tries to deny the claims of the Meos and Jogis to be descendants of the Hindu gods Ram, Krishna and Shiva by placing these gods in the long list of prophets within Islam.[49] I noted an immense respect among the Meos for the two Hindu gods, Krishna and Ram. The Meos like to invoke the names of Krishna and Ram as *autāri*s (incarnated ones) and as their prophets. During sermons in religious gatherings, the Mullahs of the Tablighi Jamaat advised the Meos to abstain from using the language and signs of disrespect for these two and other Hindu gods.[50] Similarly, among Mewati Muslims the Hindu god Shiva is remembered as *bābā ādam* (the Christians' Adam). Hindu as well as Mewati Muslim mythology claims that Shiva was the first creation to be sent to the earth by Allah. In Mewat, these gods and the Muslims' stories related to them are thus a symbol of the Indic world. The pertinent question here is what messages the bards are trying to convey through their songs. They express the assumption that religions are human constructs, and that the ultimate truth does not lie in our religious identities but in our actions. In response to the reformists and other seen and unseen pressures at social-political levels, the bards invoke the idea of being a good human first. For the bards, Hindu and Muslim identities can be likened to water from separate sources. Once the waters are blended, it becomes indistinguishable as to its true origins. Similarly, the lyrics convey the idea that Hindus and Muslims, like water from distinct sources, are fundamentally the same in essence. When kept within separate containers, just as how society categorises people, the waters can be associated with either the stream of the Ganga or the water from the well of Zamzam. However, once they are mixed, it becomes impossible to distinguish the two different sources of its origins.

NOTES

1. The fundamental concern of resistance is power. Power in a Foucauldian sense is not static; it is a historically evolved and culturally perpetuated phenomenon dispersed through various means. Power relationships are hierarchically organised around groups and individuals in any social-economic set-up (Foucault 1982: 777–95).
2. The Jogi and Mirasi are two different communities; they used more or less the same oral resources in their folk artistry. Socially different from the Mirasis,

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who were 'untouchables' for the Meos 30 years ago, the Muslim Jogi caste enjoys a comparatively higher social status. The Jogi community exists across the religious divides as Hindu Jogis and Muslim Jogis, unlike the Mirasis, who are only Muslim. Until recently, the experience of both the Jogi and the Mirasi communities has been of extreme poverty and marginality contrary to the experience of the Meo community. Both communities were dependent on the Meos under the patron–client (*jajmānī*) system.

3. It was a passive resistance for various reasons. Many bards felt uneasy to voice their opinions in front of Meos, but they were vocal about these issues behind their back. Many musicians were also unhappy because Meos used to coerce them to stop playing an instrument in front of a gathering. There were various such instances where these bards were not allowed to perform during marriages.
4. I am using the term 'political economy' more in the sense of cultural materialism here to understand the link between the Meos, their peasant/landholding status, centrality in the *jajmānī* (patron–client) system and the implications of the reformist politics of Meos upon the subordinate groups such as the Muslim Jogis and Mirasis, and for Meo and non-Meo women. The disintegration of the *jajmānī* system has both positively and negatively affected religious practices in Mewat.
5. The use of the term 'domination' here does not mirror the concept of power in the Foucauldian sense of power as a medium of coercion and oppression. Rather, I am using the term in the Hegelian perspective of social relations, in which domination also operates in cultural terms in subtle ways.
6. See a list of all the winning MLAs so far from three legislative assemblies here: https://www.mapsofindia.com/assemblypolls/haryana/ferozepur-jhirka.html, https://www.mapsofindia.com/assemblypolls/haryana/nuh.html, https://www.mapsofindia.com/assemblypolls/haryana/punhana.html, accessed 3 June 2018.
7. Interview with Harun, 15 July 2016, Alwar, Rajasthan.
8. This period has now been reduced from four or five days to one night or so, which has also negatively impacted the bards' profession (Mayaram 2003: 318).
9. Interview with Harun.
10. The policies of economic liberalisation expanded the market and made it more service oriented and created conditions for the movement of labour. Both foreign and domestic investment increased after the liberalisation process. However, the impacts of this policy on the poor and its role in increasing income inequality in India are still debated.

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11. James Scott is the pioneer thinker on the issue of everyday resistance to power through passive means. His numerous published works analyse the hidden meanings in the actions of powerless groups. Borrowing from his understanding from the book, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Scott 1990), the purpose in this chapter is to look for messages of resistance in the new songs of the minstrel castes in the wake of pressures like religious discipline and intolerance.
12. Thus, the public transcript requires a certain degree of civility, a willingness to smile at others and a little acting. Contrary to the public transcript, the hidden one exposes the reality of the social relationship between the dominant and the subordinated. When the mask of the hidden transcript is removed, both the powerful and the subordinated are found to use opprobrious expressions about one another, mostly off stage and within their respective like-minded group members.
13. Scott's (1990) observation holds true when he states that the public transcript often necessitates the exchange of pleasantries and smiling at others, even if our personal opinions or evaluations of them do not align with our outward behaviour during social interactions.
14. Hegel makes it quite obvious that 'the social relation in which domination operates is always based upon some cultural form as a practice, and this form is inherently contradictory' (Miller, Rowlands and Tilley 1995: 64). In analysing the master–slave relation, Hegel (1910: 182–88) shows that power is dialectic in nature.
15. The Bauls are a liminal group like the Meo Muslims and the Muslim Jogis. They are considered 'low caste' and are despised for their anti-institutional behaviour. They play an instrument known as the *ektara*. Engaged in esoteric practices, the Baul songs emphasise religious universalism.
16. These works cite Baul songs that necessarily express a different viewpoint to institutionalised religious orientations. For example, one Baul song reads, 'The Lord is fixed at the door of devotion; whether Hindu or Muslim, in his vicinity there is no discrimination'. A similar Baul song of Lalan Fakir, the head figure of the sect, points out a Kabir-like critique of sectarian motives,

> If you circumcise the boy, he becomes a Muslim—what's the rule for women, then? I can recognise the Brahman man from his sacred thread; but then how am I to know the Brahman woman? Tell me, just what does caste look like? I've never seen with these eyes of mine, brother. (Capwell 1988: 129)

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17. Urban (1999: 29) writes that 'the Bauls were among the most immediate object of this reformist attack. The apparent licentiousness, immorality and religious syncretism, not to mention the unorthodox, seemingly antisocial and antinomian lifestyle of the Bauls represented, for the reformers, the worst corruption of Islamic culture by Hindu polytheism and idolatry'.
18. I am thankful to Mirasi Sadab Khan for providing this song. The song was a part of *krisṇ-līlā* stories that he performed for.
19. The Hindu/Sanskrit word *gurūji* and the Urdu word *ustād* have the same meaning, that is, 'teacher' or 'master'.
20. Informal conversation with Rammal Khan.
21. The English translation is mine. For more information about the poet Shafiq Jaunpuri, visit www.rekhta.org, accessed 10 March 2018.
22. The Islamic prohibition or *harām* categorises permissible and prohibited actions. Polytheism is a strictly prohibited act in Islam. It is assumed that keeping idols and images generates faith and causes one to deviate from the devotion to Allah. Rammal explains that he was undergoing moral policing at the hands of regular Tablighi Jamaat visitors.
23. Informal conversation with Rammal Khan.
24. Ibid.
25. The Manganiyars is a community of bards in west Rajasthan like the Jogis who depended on Rajput patrons.
26. These opportunities to perform were also limited and available to well-connected bards.
27. The reason I call the Jogis' and Mirasis' memories a form of 'human archive' is simply because of their ability to remember tales of historical and mythological importance. Their tales and songs do not differ from an official state archive. If the memory of the folk singers could be contested, so could the facts kept in archives. I interviewed many bards and singers who helped me to understand not only Meo and Mewat history but also their tradition of telling folktales and folklore.
28. *Mewāti bāt* is a style of folktale rendition. The term *bāt* means the lines in quotidian dialogue or conversation.
29. Vyas is a Brahmin scholar specialised in reading religious stories and tales. He is invited to narrate *vrat kathā*s (fasting tales) such as *satyā nārāyan ki kathā*, a story widespread across north India and attributed to Hindu god Vishnu (Wadley 2005).

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30. To continue with this style of oral reciting, the Jogi and Mirasi engaged in dialogues on the stage, with the lead singer posing a question and somebody in the group offering an answer.
31. The term *dohā-dhāni* is made up of two words: the term *dohā* means 'couplets' and the *dhāni* stands for 'a form of classical *rāg* music'.
32. For instance, the *rītī* poetry and the folk music genre *rasiyā* originated and prospered in the Braj region. More details about *rītī* poetry can be found in Allison Busch's works (2010a: 267–309, 2011).
33. This and the following are excerpts cited from my interview with Bhapang artists of the Muslim Jogi community. I am immensely indebted to Yusuf Khan and his father—the late shri Umar Farook Mewati—an internationally renowned Bhapang artist, for providing me with detailed information about the Muslim Jogis, their history and performance. The collection of *dohā*s or more particularly the *Mewāti bāt* was translated by me with the assistance of a Mewati friend, Aadil. Fieldnotes, August 2016.
34. For more information on the Nath order, the classic work of G. W. Briggs is important. Although much has been written primarily about the Hindu Jogis, Briggs's work provides a detailed account of different kinds of Jogis found all over India and Nepal. Briggs's work also helps in understanding various nuances of the Jogi (Nath) cult.
35. This opposition to a Shakti cult appears to be a narrative strategy to differentiate the practices between them and the Naths, even though the Jogi traditions valued both religions equally. In this case, however, there is an opposition between the two cults; thus, these oral traditions show the differences were sect based instead of religious communities.
36. Umar Farookh wrote a good number of new songs. He formed a group with many Mirasi and Jogi friends to promote the art. The group has performed at numerous national and international events. After his sudden demise in 2017, his son Yusuf is determined to take the art to a new level. I conducted a few meetings and interviews with Umar Farookhji and his son Yusuf. I am immensely indebted to both for not only providing materials for this chapter but also their assistance in making me understand the material and their careful translation of certain words.
37. 'Rajasthan Patrika', Alwar edition, 10 February 2010, Bharatpur Hindi Pustakalaya, Bharatpur.
38. Less obvious forms of resistance were overlooked in the writing of these Subaltern scholars. In contrast to the Subalterns, the famous works of James

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Scott (1990, 2008) on themes such as 'weapons of the weak', 'domination and resistance' have led to considerable writing and debate about the passive resistance of the marginalised. But in this context, too, there is little scholarly engagement with the issue of passive resistance to religious reform ideologies conveyed through the artistic means of folk songs.

39. The song was given to me in both handwritten and video forms. Translation of songs was done with Yusuf's help. Any error in the translation is entirely mine.
40. Apart from singing local versions of the great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, the bards mostly sang life stories of various religious figures of Nath, Bhakti and Sufi backgrounds. These themes were very prominent in their songs that I would unfortunately not explore here due to the thematic limitations.
41. Hindu reformist groups such as the RSS, the VHP and the Arya Samaj see these bards' performances of 'Hindu' religious epics and songs as a connection to Hinduism. Therefore, they target them to convert to Hinduism. This aspect of the impact of Hindu reformist politics on Jogi and Mirasi musicians is not dealt with in this chapter because it primarily concerns with Islamic reformism. The impact of Hindu reformist politics upon Muslims is explored elsewhere (see Kumar 2022b).
42. The bulk of the fieldwork for this chapter was carried out among those Muslim Jogi and Mirasi singers who still practice their art in Alwar. Much of their lifestyle still oscillates between symbolism of art that draws on Hinduism (for example, praying to the goddess of knowledge, Sarasvati) and their personal religious faith (Islam). Not only do these groups see themselves as rooted in a caste society but also consider their local practices such as venerating Hindu gods and goddess as a completely natural phenomenon. Thus, their indigeneity creates a different Muslim self, one that is rooted in local practices. An idea of the 'Muslim other' appears in their narratives, indicating a version of Islam alien to India.
43. The bards are seen as Muslims. The Meos are social and political elites among Muslims in the area. So, it is imperative to remain in the Meos' favour for several reasons.
44. This was expressed by many bards and singers such as Jumme Khan, Umar, Yusuf, Rammal Khan and others.
45. This song was collected from Yusuf. The song is also available in a documentary film; see Sudhir Gupta, 'Three Generations of Jogi Umer Farookh'. The documentary was filmed in 2010, by the Public Sector Broadcasting Trust &

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Prasar Bharati, http://www.cultureplugged.com, accessed 17 April 2018. The English translation is taken from Sudhir's documentary.

46. I am using the term 'the rise of new religious intolerance' to refer to the emergence of a different kind of religious consciousness. This consciousness was shaped as much by the British colonial forces as postcolonial politics.
47. This song was provided by Yusuf. Again, the translation is mine completed with Yusuf's help.
48. In the epic Ramayana, Sita was condemned by the god Ram as an unchaste woman when she returned from the captivity of the demon king Ravan. She had to undergo a fire test to prove her innocence. Similarly, Maryam's chastity was questioned when Jesus was considered to be conceived before she married Joseph.
49. The Tablighi Jamaat claim that before the arrival of Prophet Mohammed, Krishna and Ram were among the millions of messengers sent by Allah.
50. This is not to suggest that such practices among the Meos have disappeared entirely but that the majority people now accept the Tablighi Jamaat's version of Islam. As this study has shown, many mixed practices are still alive but have significantly shrunken compared to the past.

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8

AN EPHEMERAL LINE IN THE SAND

In order to comprehend various interconnected aspects, such as the historical transformation of identities, shared places of worship and blended socio-religious customs, it is imperative for scholars of religion to adopt a comprehensive viewpoint that considers the dynamic nature of evolving religious cultures. Understanding the diverse religious landscape of South Asia requires going beyond rigid categorisations of 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' and instead recognising the historically embedded connections and conflicts among 'locally' developed religious practices. Without acknowledging these complex interrelationships, it is impossible to grasp the full extent of Indic religious diversity. Pre-existing elements of religious cultures may take different and separate routes, can mould and be moulded by social and political forces. But, despite these changes in the (re-)structuring of a new religious worldview, certain shared devotional aspects remain in vestigial forms.

When the Laldas religious order was established in the sixteenth century, it was based on various strands of 'Sufi' and 'Bhakti' doctrines that promoted the transcendence of two institutional religious identities, 'Muslim' and 'Hindu'. In accordance with the teachings of the saint Kabir, Laldas formed a unique religious synthesis that gave priority to a popular expression of a distinct religiosity. The religious traditions associated with Laldas underwent a gradual transformation, eventually being categorised under a specific religious category. In this process, the concept of 'religion' itself, which is a dynamic and evolving network of power, also transformed

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its meaning. Whether it was the devotion of a 'Sufi' or 'Bhakti' saint or the creation of 'locally' based 'Islamic' and 'Hindu' reformist movements, they all interacted with one another in a highly intricate manner, often adopting features of their religious opponents in order to accomplish their own goals. The emergence of the Laldas order in the sixteenth century needs to be explored in this context of diverse religious trends vying to establish supremacy over each other. His teachings centred on the promotion of non-binary identities deeply rooted in the local context of Mewat. He is revered to this day for his ability to bestow blessings and perform miracles. Studying the historical interconnections between different conceptions of 'Sufism' and 'Bhakti' allows for a clearer understanding of popular religiosity associated with Laldas, which stands in contrast to institutionalised expressions of 'Islam' and 'Hinduism'.

In South Asia, beneath the uniform description of religious categories, there exist intricate networks of alliances and conflicts encompassing diverse religious orders, beliefs, cultures and practices. These multifaceted interactions often transcend the idea of 'religion' and emphasise the notion of an ideal 'human' in 'Sufi'- and 'Bhakti'-inflected devotional sensibilities. It is crucial to acknowledge and embrace a pluralistic and diverse range of religious orientations that defy simplistic binary divisions when addressing complex issues of religion, faith and identity. Instead of adopting a binary mode of thinking, scholars should aim to critically challenge it and explore the various responses to attempts aimed at imposing such a binary perspective on pluralistic religious identities that are forced to acquire homogeneity by reformist agendas.

The book highlights that until the beginning of the twentieth century, the notions of 'Hinduism' and 'Islam' were associated with forms of religious consciousness that were fuzzy in nature. For instance, religious antagonism was often expressed in terms of one *samprādāy* or *panth* (order/path/sect) against another, rather than being framed as a Hindu versus Muslim dichotomy (Dalmia and Faruqui 2014: xxi). Exploring the stories of Laldas and their relevance to 'local' identities and religious practices sheds light on the evolving nature of this religious order. Importantly, the book argues that in this process, institutional religions did not overshadow the significance of sect/order. But they gradually became the dominant framework for behaving and thinking. Nowadays, 'religion' and religious identities generate more 'cacophony', surpassing discussions of other social identities, such as caste and sect, at least in the public domain.

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More importantly, the formation of caste, clan, village and diverse religious identities can be better understood by considering the significant role played by primordial social attachments, such as kinship relations and descent lines. Many individuals and communities establish connections to saints, deities, animals or other humans, which in turn shape their sense of identity. These primordial attachments serve as the foundation for the formation of various identities, highlighting the intricate interplay between social and religious affiliations. However, caste and religion are identities often articulated along the lines of differences.[1] In many theorists' treatises on social identities, 'difference' has occupied central stage, with the routine usage of homogenised notions of 'culture' and 'society' (Jenkins 2008: 24). The attention to difference to emphasise caste and religious collectivities is still prevalent in most academic writings in India. This issue of repeatedly describing collectivities as one uniform group such as 'the peasant', 'the Meos', restricts scholarly works from critically presenting internal diversity of the objects and community they choose to study. With the advent of colonial modernity projects and the emergence of socio-religious reform groups, there has been an increasing trend of seeking religious homogeneity by categorising diverse religious orientations as belonging to specific religious communities. However, change and continuity have been immanent in these mutually constituting and competing forms of religiosities. These religious sensibilities also reflected the socio-economic connection of Meo lineages with both 'Hinduism' and 'Islam' in the past as well as indicated the presence of incongruent symbols within a collectivity.

Boundary making or identity construction of a collectivity is a long-term historical process. The origin of claims about the legitimacy of religious, caste and reformist group boundaries is often significant, as are the implications of those boundaries, closely tied with the construction of 'religion' and 'faith' as categories of thinking, analysing and behaving. The monolithic and bounded conceptualisations of religion, religious identities and symbols became a way of both differentiating socio and religious communities and unifying them into a nationalist force.

However, the boundaries are constantly evolving, getting shaped and reshaped by multiple forces ranging from social and economic changes to the rise of newer forms of religious politics. When religious boundaries were more fluid, the freedom to practice one's faith was rooted in an unconscious religious self and the cultural imaginations of a social group. This unconscious identity was, in turn, the result of socio-economic processes which generated,

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as analysed in previous chapters, diverse cultural forms, such as multiple versions of religious epics, folk stories, myths and forms of genealogies rooted in the socio-economic experiences of communities like that of the Meos and Muslim Jogis.

Of course, change and continuity also reflect the changing dynamics of internal group structures. Groups, categories, boundaries, religious practices, beliefs and identities are in constant interaction. History shows that religion, culture, belief and identity (once these categories were used in the public domain and accepted by people) commonly shape one another. But the previous practice of classification in terms of collectivities often ignored the fact that 'a collectively is a plurality of individuals' (Jenkins 2008: 103).[2] How does this plurality of individuals relate to a collectivity of religion, community, caste, village and so on? Rather than focusing on the religious behaviours of different kinds of collectivities, it is more fruitful to look at the interaction and co-activities among individuals in daily lives or sharing a shrine to understand change and continuity. In doing so, the focus should remain on 'individuals in co-activity', such as in revering a shared saint or site, engaging in similar religious and cultural practices within a cultural zone—as was explored here in the context of the Braj, Mewat and Rajasthani—but also at diverse ways of negotiating co-activities in conflict. The sharing of the shrines of Laldas by various religious communities also presents a challenge to understand the idea of sharing and mixing beyond syncretism.

LALDAS AND SYNCRETISM

Is the traditional image of Laldas closer to what most scholarship on religion would consider as syncretism? Can the inclusion of 'Bhakti' and 'Sufi' elements and norms within the Laldas order be classified as syncretism, or does it deviate from this concept? The idea of syncretism generally refers to the synthesis of different religious forms.[3] In most analyses of religious synthesis the concept of syncretism is interpreted as having both positive and negative attributes. For many scholars, any form of religious mixing is syncretism.[4] The metaphors evoked to describe religious mixing and synthesis often imply that religions are organic (for example, terms like 'hybrid' or 'half breed'), 'alchemical' (mixing) or 'constructed' (bricoleur) (Stewart 2000: 22). Despite its varying usages and the meaning attached to the phenomenon, syncretism has never lost its central significance. It points

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out different aspects of religions, sects, identities and other domains of life that are engaged in interaction. However, analyses of syncretism have failed to provide a sufficient explanation for the convergence of various factors into one entity or identity. Much controversy has also erupted over the possible implications of the phenomenon, which has been accused of unconsciously giving more attention to supposedly 'high' forms of institutionalised religious traditions such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and so on. Furthermore, it also misrepresents the co-existence of diverse values and symbolism as a derogatory idea. However, in some other contexts, religious synthesis has been described as having positive connotations as 'a form of resistance to cultural dominance, as a link with lost history' (Stewart and Shaw 1994).[5]

Within Christian theological discourse, syncretism is frequently employed in a negative manner to describe phenomena within non-Western churches that do not neatly conform to Western Christian traditions. Some see syncretism as a disparaging, ethnocentric label applied to religious traditions (such as independent African churches) that are deemed 'impure' or 'inauthentic' because they are permeated by local ideas and practices (Stewart and Shaw 1994). However, from the nineteenth century onwards, the discipline of religious studies shows that syncretism was present in the earliest forms of Christianity (Droogers 2008: 9). Thus, the Christianity of the West is itself 'syncretic', and even more so than when employing the distinctly Western construct of 'religion' (Richard 2014).

Building on the Western understanding of syncretism, many scholars have uncritically extended the use of syncretism in Indian contexts. Medieval Indian society is often believed to have displayed significant cultural tolerance when it comes to religious and cultural synthesis. As Islam and Christianity expanded their presence in India, both religions integrated themselves within the existing framework of beliefs and practices rather than completely discarding them (S. Bayly 1989: 73–86). In studies of Bengali, Punjabi and other regional societies where Islam had a deep impact on the lives of the masses, syncretism is adopted as a conceptual tool to explain the complex processes of religious intermingling (Burman 1996, 2002; Courtright 1999; Das 2006; Roy 2014 [1983]). For instance, Asim Roy (2014 [1983]) pointed out that Bengali Muslims and Hindus continued to share textual forms, myths, rites and festivals until the late nineteenth century. Many cults, Bhakti saints and Sufi *pīr*s, who attracted communities and individuals cutting across the religious divide, have been subjected to analysis under the term 'syncretism' by scholars. These studies aim to present a narrative of positive interaction

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and peaceful coexistence, which contrasts with the present-day hostility observed between the two religions (Burman 1996, 2002; Courtright 1999; Das 2006; Roy 2014 [1983]). Thus, the phenomenon of syncretism came to imply that it promotes the objectives of harmony and tolerance. However, the term was generally applied without any differentiation to refer to all kinds of religious movements that appeared to be complex, hybrid or ambiguous, even when positive outcomes are not apparent.

In Muslim reformist theology, *shirk* (polytheism) and *bidāh* (innovation) are considered Hindu influences. They have long been linked to Muslim politics in India, since they deal directly with the boundaries between the two communities (Van der Veer 1994b: 202). Reformers engage in discussions within the confines of the Quran and Islamic theology, focusing on interpreting and implementing religious teachings and principles according to Islamic scripture and theological frameworks. Syncretism is never considered as an important religious value, common to both Hindus and Muslims. Both Islamic theology and academic discourses considered syncretism in India as a Hindu phenomenon that was crucial in encouraging the worship of Sufi saints (Van der Veer 1994b: 202). Although the belief systems in Mewat are multivocal and multifaceted, currently the discourses of purity and religious separation are privileged over those of religious diversity.

The centre of Hindu–Muslim synthesis in India is mostly the shrines of the Sufi and Bhakti saints like Laldas. Both Hindus and Muslims have their own patterns and reasons for visiting these shrines. Several questions arise: Can the nature of such shrines be identified as syncretistic solely on the basis of sharing? Or, do Hindu participation and Hindu influence in the worship of Sufi saints amount to syncretic values? If a Hindu visits a Muslim shrine or vice versa, is syncretism the right framework within which to interpret such actions? Some scholars have suggested that the answer is 'no' (D. Khan 2004b: 213–14; Van der Veer 1994). Merely visiting a shrine is not syncretism until and unless the values and symbols of various kinds coexist together (Van der Veer 1994).

With regard to Laldas, the use of syncretism accords a secondary status to shared religiosities as distinct forms of 'religions' compared to Islam and Hinduism, especially when all religions are a construct (Asad 1993; Dubuisson 2003; Bloch, Keppens, and Hegde 2009; Pennington 2005). By characterising the Laldas order as syncretistic, it implies that the institutional structure of both Hinduism and Islam influences it, suggesting a blending or impurity within the order. This interpretation also enables present-day Hindu

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devotees to claim ownership or affiliation with Laldas. Laldas, along with numerous other *bhakti* figures, has played a significant role in the emergence of distinct religious traditions that are not inherently syncretic in nature. While Hindus and Muslims have both been involved in these traditions, their participation alone does not make these traditions syncretic. Assigning the label of 'syncretic' to Laldas would not only suggest a perceived superiority of mainstream religions but also undermine the fundamental concept of diverse trends in *bhakti* as a unique expression of religiosity that aims to transcend religious boundaries. Therefore, scholars analysing shared religious figures like Laldas should not privilege the institutionalised forms of religion while adopting syncretism as a theoretical concept. One of the major limitations with the concept of syncretism is that it is confined to a narrow focus on boundary making and does not view ambiguities positively (Mayaram 1997c: 39). Syncretism seldom deals directly with its object, preferring institutional versions of religions over folk/popular ones and orders like Laldas.

But then the question arises: How should one see the religious order and shrines of Laldas if not through the lens of syncretism? The religious order characterised by shared saints like Laldas ought to be viewed as composite heritage sites, signifying more than a mere convergence of institutional 'religions'. Instead, they symbolise the emergence of new 'religions' in their own distinct forms. Several verses of the *nuktāvalī* referred to the inward search for a direct personal experience of the divine emphasising the concept of *tawhid* (the oneness of God) and endorsing Hindus and Muslims for selflessness, love and devotion in their relationship with God. Diverse religious cultures can occasionally coexist, borrow from and influence one another. For instance, Laldas not only questioned the relevance of religious and caste categories but also followed and blended *nirguṇ bhakti* (formless devotion) to the Hindu god Ram with the devotional practices of Sufism and its concept of the *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of God) and *mustaqīm* (the correct path). Both the *nirguṇ bhakti* of Laldas and the *waḥdat al-wujūd* complemented each other in his conception of God, exhorting everyone to walk on the right path. Laldas's teachings, although not explicitly tied to any particular religious tradition, encompass universal spiritual principles that align with the broader concept of *mustaqīm*. Moreover, the path of Laldas and the notion of *mustaqīm* are interconnected through their shared concept of spiritual guidance and righteousness. His teachings emphasised the significance of moral conduct, self-discipline and the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. Laldas highlighted the need for individuals to align their

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actions with higher principles and values to lead a meaningful and purposeful life. The saint did not reject the Sufi notion of piety marked by themes of love and devotion to God, even if he advocated a *bhakti* view of God and 'religion' in his teachings.

One gets an essence of the 'religion' of Laldas from numerous sayings and couplets attributed to him illustrating that diverse religious orientations may form their own distinctive 'religioscapes'. Laldas firmly believed in the unity of all religions and preached a message of non-difference between them. Similarly, he rejected caste distinctions and emphasised the equality of all human beings. The saint encouraged his followers to lead a virtuous life, to practice meditation and to live a life of contentment and detachment. Therefore, religious orders like Laldas are distinct 'religions' in their own right with values of universal righteousness.

Laldas believed that 'religion' should promote moral and ethical values, such as compassion, honesty and selflessness. He expressed that these values are essential for leading a virtuous and fulfilling life. Syncretism does not recognise this kind of diversity in the religious worldview of many Indic saints. Instead, the term privileges the idea of 'world-religions', neatly categorised with clear doctrinal principles, implying that these religions are the only 'real' religions that exist globally. There are many other religious traditions and practices that are not included under the category of 'religions' because they are considered to be 'impure', 'mixed' or in other words syncretistic. Some of these forms of religiosities may have equal or greater significance for people in different parts of the world. Moreover, the term 'syncretism' assumes that all religions are coherent and unified entities, with clearly defined boundaries and doctrines. However, each of these 'religions' is made up of a diverse set of beliefs, practices and traditions, and there is often significant variation within each tradition, both across time and across different geographic regions.

In discussing the religious diversity of Laldas, 'Indic' is a more useful term to describe shared practices which were generally influenced by many localised themes of devotion across religious boundaries. Indic refers to religious practices beyond the boundaries and doctrines of Hinduism, Islam or any other religion. It is a way to understand the diverse and numerous practices marked by shared idioms that cannot be restricted to one religion or the other. Indic practices have certain common tropes specific to South Asia, such as the veneration of cows even by Muslims or the veneration of a Muslim or Christian saint in the form of a Hindu god by Hindus. Peasants'

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world often contains a rich repertoire of such engagements consciously and unconsciously shared with each other. Any attempt to separate these saints, shrines, groups, and individuals based on a single and bounded category would be unrewarding. The shrines, saints, and their histories, when examined from 'the *longe durée* perspective' (Albera and Couroucli 2012: 5–9) highlight the changing nature of religious mixing and sharing over time. The lens of syncretism can hinder our ability to fully comprehend the diversity within the religious world. Attempting to understand such diversity solely through present-day religious classifications does an injustice to the historical context of orders like Laldas.

MIXING, SHARING AND BORROWING

'Mixing' of diverse values and boundaries characterised Laldas and his order, therefore, his spaces should be approached analytically as 'mixed spaces' (Bowman 2010; Hayden 2022), considering 'mixing' as historically the norm of every aspect of daily life than mere 'aberrations'. Although interaction between the religious communities may lead over time to change the ways in which mixed spaces may be both shared and contested (Hayden 2022), 'mixing' still remains the paradigm of continuation and change around religious personas. Scholars in religious studies, anthropologists, historians and sociologists who study the idea of 'religion' should take intermixing as an origin point of their analysis to question and investigate the construction of 'religions' as bounded categories. Religions and religious views in India like elsewhere have diverse origins, producing a complex religious world that is an amalgam of multiple religious traditions.

When individuals from different religious backgrounds interact or when a specific religious tradition expands to new regions, there is a potential for cultural exchange and adaptation. A notable example of this can be seen in the Caribbean, where the African diaspora fused elements of African traditional religion with aspects of Christianity, giving rise to mixed religions like Vodou and Santeria. These practices reflect the dynamic nature of religious expression and the capacity for traditions to evolve and incorporate 'local' customs and beliefs. Similarly, Buddhism adapted to local customs and beliefs when it spread to China, resulting in the development of Chan (Zen) Buddhism. These multiple religious practices and traditions were also shared across religious communities. A sense of commonality engendered through

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common sharing of culture binds 'local' communities, whose members belong to different religions, into a closely-knit thread of inter-communal dependence and alliance, that enhanced, enriched and made cohabitation a historically possible phenomenon. Although this type of local alliance is often susceptible to dangers and conflict, common cultural practices play a vital role in the sustenance of co-existence, irrespective of religious divides. Such practices include language or dialect, symbols such as the cow, sacred locations, pilgrimages, shared saints, and shared myths and stories constituting an Indic world that defies and surpasses a binary classification of 'Hindus' or 'Muslims'. Beside their religious loyalties, each community and caste group contribute its own set of socio-religious values towards making a specific region culturally vibrant and liveable.

As the frontiers of Islam moved eastwards around the twelfth century, it had a striking influence on the lives of non-Muslims in Mewat and elsewhere. New converts did not abandon 'local' practices. This is still evident in practices such as marriage and caste norms prevalent among Mewati Muslim communities. The present cultural practices of the Meos, Jats, Ahirs and Gujjars along with other peasant castes in the area are a result of the synthesis and sharing of common cultural traits. For instance, the religious path of Laldas emerged in the sixteenth century at a time when the devotional aspects of the saint's teachings reflected the concerns of a rural world that were at odds with both institutional Islam and Hinduism. Many couplets of Dungarisi Sadh attest to this idea. Since then, the meanings of the shrine, saint and his teachings have undergone transformation over time. Those transformations are vital to understanding the process of social and religious changes.

Contrary to existing works on the Meos and the area, it is evident here that despite being a Muslim community, as a result of mostly Sufi influence, the Meo's peasant status prompted them to root their sense of a collective peasant self in Hinduism and the Indic symbolism common to other peasants. For instance, it was the peasant status of the Meos that required a connection to Hindu gods such as Ram and Krishna, two warrior–king figures, to legitimise a cultural claim over their land in the context of emerging ideas about private property in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus, practical necessities often led to semiotic changes in the cultural-religious order of a community. However, such cultural and religious ordering of a popular world may not always have an ulterior motive. This phenomenon potentially demonstrates both a collective desire among the middle-class peasants and diverse strategies employed to establish themselves as a landed community. Indeed, the Meo

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community like others endeavour to construct a meaningful understanding of reality and an 'ideal world' for themselves, with power and prestige being paramount concerns. This drive for social recognition and influence shapes their collective aspirations and motivates their actions in various spheres of life. This desire compelled the Meos to function as a cohesive collective, while at the same time, individuals within the community sought individual autonomy. This juxtaposition brought together the individual and collective intentions, desires, religious beliefs and cultural practices, creating a dynamic interplay between personal aspirations and the shared values and norms of the community. For instance, the majority of Meos as a community desire to form an ideal Muslim self for themselves as Sunni Muslims, while several Meos deviate from such a collective intention due to its exclusionary nature. Many Meos still promote shared religiosities deeply ingrained in devotional traditions and follow 'locally' rooted cultural forms, such as language, dress, food, customs, habits, marriage practices and rituals similar to 'Hindu' peasant castes, surpassing the attempt to generate monolithic religious blocks.

OPPOSING AND APPROPRIATING

Disputes at shared religious spaces are manifestations of a new trend of competition between religious communities who mutually oppose each other's religious symbols at a shared site. The common cultural-religious sharing of saintly figures and religious orders by Hindus, Muslims, Christians and other religious groups has in recent times generated what Robert Hayden et al. (2016) call 'antagonistic tolerance' and 'competitive sharing'. This has been defined as a negative definition of tolerance which is not based on the idea of an active embrace of the other. This trend has become a worldwide affair persisting on a global level from the Mediterranean regions to South and South-East Asia and other parts of the world (Hayden et al. 2016). Therefore, many shared religious spaces worldwide are undergoing transformations by making forceful architectural and symbolic changes at the shared sacred spaces to fit the criteria of a region and culture centric hegemonic 'religion' by eliding the traces of a shared history and a common past.

However, contestations at shared shrines may not be fully understood by only analysing social and political relations around such spaces. Such changes are closely tied to changing forms of the idea of 'religion' and religious cultures prompted by a combination of religious, political and

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economic forces. To adopt a comprehensive approach, it is crucial to consider various aspects, such as the conceptualisation of God, the diverse forms of ritual practices, the nature of competing belief systems, the meaning-making efforts of the groups involved in sharing a shrine and the transformation of intercommunal relations. These factors, along with political changes, need to be taken into account in order to understand how and why a shared shrine has evolved to possess its distinctive form and modern identity.

In current thinking, Hindus and Muslims, in India are trying hard to locate shared saints and their religious shrines with either one religion or other, by appropriating these shrines as either a temple or a Sufi *dargāh*. Contestations at the Laldas shrines in Mewat are evidence of the emergence of new patterns in religious cultures. These include the power of the Baniyas who adhere to *saguṇ* Vaishnava *bhakti* contrary to Laldas's *nirguṇ* teachings, alongside the emergence of the robust notions of Islamic purity among Meo Muslims. 'Religion' as a political category has thus infused with other social categories, boundaries and practices of social and political relevance. The emergence of notions of Islamic purity played an important role in the rise of Muslim intra-religious contestations at the shrines of Laldas which had crucial links with Meos becoming Sunni Muslims, a sign of transformations in a 'locally' rooted religious culture.

The instances of conflicts observed at the Laldas shrines serve as indicators of the shifts in religious culture and religious consciousness. These conflicts highlight the need to legitimise mixed, liminal and shared practices within the present-day context, reflecting the evolving nature of religious practices and the challenges associated with accommodating diverse beliefs and rituals. This separation of complex Indic phenomena such as the figures of Laldas and other saints like Shah Chokha into neat and tidy religious boxes was a gradual process that is certainly related to the discourse of colonial and post-colonial modernity and politics that needed clear definitions of religious boundaries but was equally affected by economic forces and changes in India. Already divided along caste lines, 'Hindus' continued to identify themselves as a bounded community in opposition to the 'Muslim' other. Since the first half of the twentieth century, the politics of Hindutva essentially became anti-Muslim.[6] In the twentieth century, Hindu and Muslim religious and political communities were in the process of hardening their boundaries and purifying their religious behaviour. These notions of segregation were first manifested in the political arena and later in shared sacred zones. The hardening of religious boundaries was shaped by both local and national politics, reform

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organisations and changes caused in religious cultures by transformations in their devotional apparatus and religious worldviews. After the gradual disintegration of traditional forms of social relations formed around peasant and landholding communities like the Meos and caused by the slow collapse of this system (a collapse that is still ongoing), the shared devotional spaces and the interdependence of Hindu and Muslim communities in Mewat were negatively affected. The religious culture and devotional pattern is usually tied to their respective socio-economic status, and their meaning-making is usually mediated through religion.[7] Changes in religious worldviews of a community thus most often reflect changed socio-economic experiences.

Although, historically, inter- and intra-religious-theological debates have always occurred, this active display of antagonistic attitudes at shared shrines is a comparatively recent trend that originated in the twentieth century partly due to the rise of communalism in India. Identities are typically contested at sites of border crossings and transgressions. However, differences were put aside during the fairs and festivals when the shrines became particularly vibrant religious spaces. Religious boundaries still existed, but cooperation between people (the Muslim priest, Hindu, Muslim, Jain, and Sikh devotees, the 'lower-caste' attendants and the temple trustees) seemed enhanced, and differences became ephemeral. It is possible that 'antagonistic tolerance' or 'competitive sharing' is among a number of strategies deployed by claimants to the shrines.[8]

As was observed in the preceding chapters, these divergent processes of and contestations about defining identity and the religious practices around the shared shrines of Laldas have left enough space for the slow Hinduisation of the saint and his religious order. Respective agents of power such as the Baniyas (the Hindu merchant class) at the Laldas shrines (the saint's main followers apart from the Meos) and Tablighi Muslims in Mewat in general, including at numerous shrines such as that of Shah Chokha, are harbingers of current religious transformations. While none of the features of Laldas's 'Hindu' status can be completely denied since he preached formless devotion to Ram, he attracts relatively little attention among Muslims nowadays due to the strong impact of the Islamic reformist Tablighi Jamaat among most Muslims of Mewat and their purist ideas about not worshiping such saints.

By the operation of transformation processes and the invention of traditions in Hinduism, Laldas is being gradually converted into a Hindu saint. Numerous connections between symbols of Hinduism and other

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religious streams and sectarian orders made the conversion of identity and appropriation of Laldas an easy process. Since Hinduism is not a clearly defined religion but represents a mosaic of different traditions, orthodox Brahminical Hinduism was able to appropriate any tradition with a link to the diverse set of Indic practices. An example of this interplay can be seen in the case of Laldas, where his religious order is being assimilated into Hinduism due to the association of the saint with the chanting of Ram's name. The Baniyas were historically the followers of an orthodox Brahminical form of *saguṇ* image/idol worship in Hindu temples. In order to attain their traditional form of *bhakti* and worship, the *nirguṇ* follower of Ram, Laldas is being given an anthropomorphic form in the new temples, with Brahmins appointed as priests, in contrast to the Meo *sādh*s at the traditional shrines of Laldas.

Simultaneously, the Baniyas, through their wealth and influence, are actively creating new religious traditions to assimilate Laldas as a Hindu saint. Here, it is worth noting that close intercommunity relations for economic purposes traditionally kept some social and religious differences under control, especially between those communities which were interdependent upon each other, so that public disputes between communities were minimised due to shared interests. The 1990s in India greatly disrupted the traditional arrangement of social and economic relations necessitating changes in socio-religious relations.

This study has further shown that the rise of the Tablighi Jamaat among the Meos can be seen as the continuation of a religious tradition and philosophy among the Meos as advocated by the saint Laldas. The Tablighi Jamaat emphasises an extreme form of religious piety, living a simple austere life, endorsing prayers, retreats and meditation. These religious-philosophical traditions of the 'Bhakti' and 'Sufi' saints were not totally different from popular practices of the Tablighi Jamaat. Thus, the Meos could act in continuity with their traditional orientation when they adhered to the Tablighi version of Islam. The life Tablighi Muslims live in *dhikr* (remembrance of God) in the mosque is similar to the teachings of 'Sufi' and 'Bhakti' saints and the life they lived and promoted. This demonstrates that shared religious values exist in vestigial forms among the Meos. Therefore, shared saints, religious symbols, stories, narratives and shared beliefs and practices are hard to erase from the 'locally' rooted conceptions of 'religious life' despite the notion of purity being strongly present. Then the doctrines of purity must indirectly imbibe culture-specific traditional religious values, as the Tablighi Jamaat does in Mewat,

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by introducing similar forms of religious notions once prevalent in the past. For instance, the Tablighi Jamaat adopts various Sufi doctrines once greatly admired by Meos without properly acknowledging the importance of it.

Hegemonic theological considerations with political implications have long monopolised the domain and discourse of several closely related disciplines in analysing the connections between the formation of nation, nationalities, secularities in South Asia; therefore, scholars have rarely moved beyond the old-fashioned obsession with these themes. The reason was precisely related to the emancipation of India (and other countries) from a colonial subjugation and deciding the course of its future as a nation prioritising collectivity over individuals. The oft-repeated phrase of 'the idea of India' pushes the agenda of nation as a collectivity, composed of separate chunks waiting for their respective places to be found and fixed by political ideologies, systems of governance and democratic institutions while discarding the role of individuals shaping and acting upon these boundaries with their deeply felt personal experiences of belonging.

The significance of this study is to show some of the ways in which the religious world is a complex web of social-cultural connections that are constantly transforming. A change in any aspect of believers' social, religious and economic spheres brings changes to related aspects of their lives. Sometimes these changes are hegemonic—led and imposed by the economically and politically dominant groups in society. Additionally, if the notion of religious purity acquires a hegemonic form, the most pressing issue emerges regarding the response of devotees about their faith in a shared saint. Do all traditionally shared forms of beliefs, customs and rituals, judged to be impure, disappear? This issue is hardly analysed in any academic writing. Scholars need to recognise and value the significance of diversity in ways of dealing with the contemporary religious pressure upon devotees of shared shrines to reform and purify without assuming them to be passive recipients of new changes. Human beings can exercise agency, manipulate power and maintain what deems to be important to them even under most compelling situations. Often scholarly works tend to focus solely on the establishment of boundaries between religious communities, overlooking the crucial aspect of individuals directly or indirectly opposing such boundary-making efforts by religious reformists. The experiences of Meo women and other Muslim individuals exemplified a broad spectrum of transformations and reactions in relation to a dominant interpretation of 'religion'. These responses encompassed intricate transformations in devotional practices, the resilient

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nature of some specific religious beliefs and symbols and subtle acts of passive resistance to undesired changes.

NOTES

1. In particular, in the late nineteenth century the politics of caste and religion adopted new narratives. For instance, when the British army began to recruit Indians on the basis of whether they were members of a martial caste, many castes from all over India filed petitions, each claiming a higher status than other castes (Constable 2001).
2. Anthropology is necessarily comparative in nature: it is never an isolated study of networks and relations in a particular society (Gingrich and Fox 2002: 1–24). Jenkins (2008: 121) warns that 'the open-endedness of everyday life should recognise the routine imminence of change and transformation'.
3. Syncretism is a term used to describe the blending of different cultural or religious traditions into a single system. It is a 'contentious and contested term' (Stewart and Shaw 1994) that has undergone many transformations in meaning privileging the problematic idea of 'religious purity' and 'high religions'. The ancient meaning of syncretism was used by Plutarch to refer to unity among Cretans. The sixteenth century's theological use of the term was to denounce syncretism as the illegitimate mixing of pure religious units. Since then, the term has been then subjected to differing meanings and values (Adogame, Echtler and Vierke 2008: 5–8).
4. A large body of literature has been devoted to the study of syncretism, variously understood as acculturation (Herskovits 1941), hybrid or mixture (Turner and Turner 1978), a means of transforming religious symbolic systems (Droogers 1989), politics of religious synthesis (Stewart and Shaw 1994) and a process intertwined with contextualisation (Adogame, Echtler and Vierke 2008).
5. Some scholars may view syncretism negatively for reasons such as cultural appropriation, dilution of traditions, cultural imperialism and potential conflicts between different groups. However, it is important to note that syncretism can also have positive outcomes such as promoting cultural exchange and creating new cultural expressions. Ultimately, whether syncretism is viewed as good or bad depends on the perspectives and values of the individuals and communities involved.

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6. A new dimension to this anti-Muslim politics appeared with the rise of Mandal politics and after the Babri mosque demolition in 1992.
7. The leading theorist of cultural materialism, Marvin Harris, claims that social-cultural life is often a response to practical necessity on the earth. In a somewhat similar sense, social life and practical necessities are displayed in the cultural behaviour of people, including their religious practices. A change in any aspect brings changes to other aspects of human life as well.
8. By the time I realised this aspect, I was approaching the end of my fieldwork. The main reason for not exploring this aspect further was, thus, time constraint.

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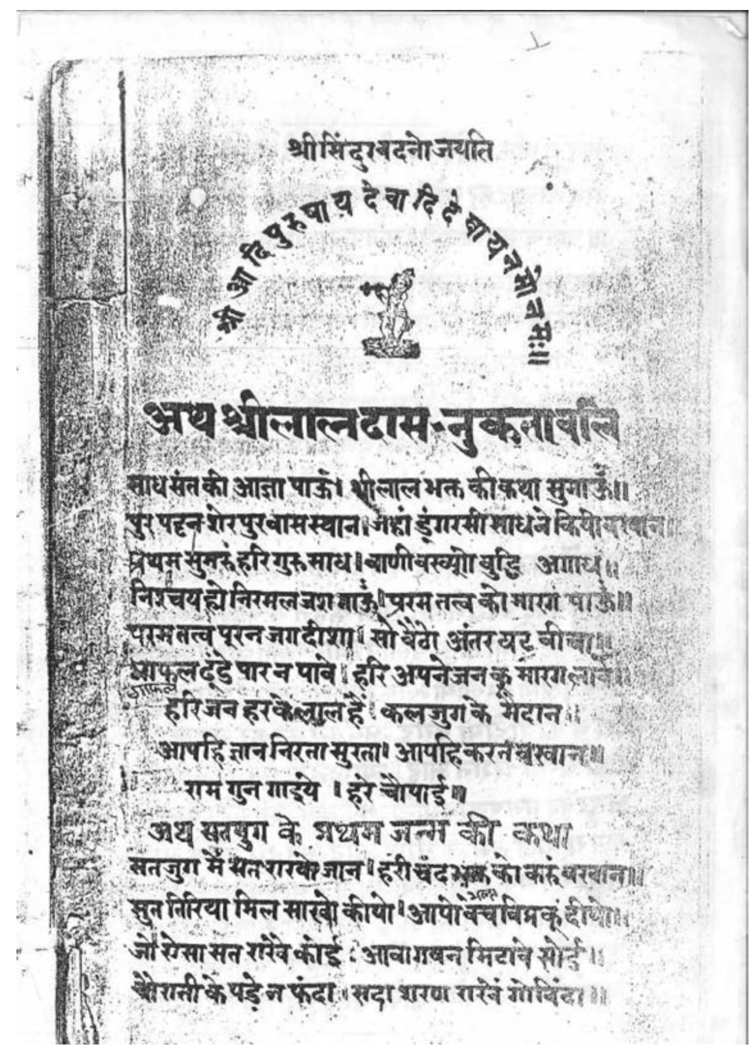
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.1



श्री सिंदुरवदनो जयति

श्री आदिपुरुषाय देवादिदेवाय नमो नमः॥

अथ श्रीलालदास-नुकलावलि

साध संत की आज्ञा पाऊं। श्रीलाल भक्त की कथा सुनाऊं॥
पुर पट्टन शेरपुर वास स्थान। जहां डूंगरसी साध ने किये [illegible]॥
प्रथम सुमरूं हरि गुरु साध। वाणी वस्यो बुद्धि अगाध॥
निश्चय ह्वे निरमल जश गाऊं। प्रम तत्व को मारग पाऊं॥
परम तत्व पूरन जग दीशा। सो बैठे अंतर घट बी[illegible]॥
आफूल ढूंढे पार न पावे। हरि अपने जन कूं मारग [illegible]॥
हरि जन हर के लाल हैं। कलजुग के मैदान॥
आपहि ज्ञान निरता सुरता। आपहि करन बखान॥
राम गुन गाइये। हेर चौपाई॥
अथ सतयुग के प्रथम जन्म की कथा
सतजुग में सत राखे जान। हरी चंद भक्त को करूं बखान॥
सुत तिरिया मिल साखो कीयो। आपो वचविमक दीयो॥
जो ऐसा सत राखे कोई। आवागवन मिटावे सोई॥
चौरासी के पड़े न फंदा। सदा शरण राखे [illegible]॥

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२

जो आवे तो भक्ति बधावे । ताकी गत कोई बिरला पावे ॥
ऐसे हरचन्द हर भजे । तन धन त्यागरु देह ॥
जा पहोंचे सतलोक में । पलपल अधिक स्नेह ॥
पलपल अधिक स्नेह हैं । कीरत अगम अनंत ॥
नौ क्रोड़ किये परायण । पार ब्रह्म सुमरंत ॥
राम गुन गाइये । हरे चौपाई

अथाह्लां द्वितीयजन्म की कथा

त्रेता को तप कहूं बखान । प्रहलाद पिता को तोड़ी कान ॥
निशवासर हरि का गुन गावे । आप कहे औरये कहलावे ॥
पिता रीस पुत्र पे आया । राम कहन तू किने सिखायो ॥
पुत्र कहें दोऊ कर जोर । मैं नहीं पिता तुमारो चोर ॥
गांठ न कांटू ग्रंथ न हरूं । राम कहत मैं कासू डरूं ॥
तब संकट संगी असुर बुलाये । चार कहत दश दौड़े आये ॥
भक्त बांध आगे धर लीयो । लेकर शैल शिखर चढ़ दीयो ॥
दरद न कीयो दीयो दुरगई । अब तेरी को करे सहाई
दौड़ी धरनी दरशन आई । ज्यों जननी सुत कंठ लगाई ॥
असुर बैठ मन पथर बधायो । भक्त कूप दिये डार पानी ॥
जल सूं भीजे रूम न अंगा । आद अंत हरि जन के संगा ॥
असुर बैठ एक मंत्र कीया । या पुत्र कछु काम न कीया ॥
दौड़ी बहाण होलका आई । मेरी बात सुणो रे भाई ॥
पुत्र नहीं यह शत्रु तेरो । मैं जो कहूं तू चेत सवेरो ॥
धरनी में एक बल्ली गडावो । तासूं मेरो तन लिपटावो

जी॰ च॰ ३

ओड़ पास ले काष्ट दीजे । ऊपर आय हुताशन दीजे ॥
भक्त बैठ दृढ़ आसन कीयो । पिंड मान ले हर कु दीयो ॥
जबै हुताशन लागी धाय । मानों भक्त सील जल न्हाय ॥
असुरन के मन भयो उदासा । संतन के मन भयो हुलासा ॥
तब तो असुर रिसायो गाढ़ो । दोऊ कर जोड़ खडग तब काढो ॥
छांडो पिता राम मन मानो । काम न सीको कहा भुलानो ॥
झूठी बात कहा कहे होई । अब तोय आन छुड़ावे कोई ॥
मैं नहीं मानू भजूं भगवाना । जिन मोय दीनो पिंडर माना ॥
ज्यों जैसे जल में जगदीशा । तोय मोय खड़ग खंभ के बीचा ॥
चलो भान जब गिरवर जाई । रजनी उदो करती आई ॥
जन हेत प्रगटे आय । खंभ फाड़ नरसिंह हो धाय ॥
नख बधाय जब असुर पछाड़े । प्रहलाद भक्त के कारज सारे ॥
आय तिरे अरु पिता भी तारे । सात क्रोड़ नरक सु न्यारे ॥
सुरपत करे सकल के ईशा । ध्यान धरें जहां सुर तेतीसा ॥
ऐसी भक्ति प्रहलाद की । तन मन त्याग शरीर ॥
जहां जहां भीड़ पड़ी संतन में । तहां पहोंचे रघुवीर ॥
रामगुन गाइये । हेर चौपाई ॥

द्वापर जग्य सेर सब काजा । पंडु भये युधिष्टर राजा ॥
सत के पूत धरम के नाती । जुग जुग भक्ति करी अति सांची ।
द्वापर जग्य रची असमेधा । बेद उचार लिये बहु भेदा ॥
ध्वजा गाड़ जब भारत रोपो । असुर गर्व कर मन में कोपो ॥
ताती पौन सघन नहीं थाई । गोपाल जनन को भीड़ मिटाई ॥
काटे फंद मिटे संतापा । सदा सहाई गोविन्द आपा

४

निरभय राज कियो नो खंडा ॥ हर भक्तन के सदा अनंदा
सुकरत दान करे विधि पूजा ॥ हर बिन धावे और न दूजा
निश वासर सुमस्त सुख पाया ॥ आप देहां बी कलजुग की छाया
छोडे विषाण सकल सहदेही ॥ जाय मिले जहां राम सनेही
देखत चरण रहे लिपटाय ॥ आनन्द मङ्गल उर न समाय
मांग मांग बोले भगवाना ॥ भक्त देख मोय बहुत कल्याना
आय नरक कू दरशन दीयो ॥ पांच क्रोड परायण कीयो
ऐसी भक्त युधिष्ठिर की ॥ निश वासर लो लाय
आय तिरे जुग तारियो ॥ दिन दिन भक्त बढाय
रामगुन गाइये ॥ हेर चौपाई

अथ चतुर्थी जन्म की कथा,

अलख सुनो संतन निज भाखा ॥ अब प्रगट कहुं लाल की साखा ॥
कलजुग घोर अंधेर सकल भो भीना ॥ विरला करे राम सु चीना ॥
माया देख फिरे तन फूला ॥ जन्म गंवाय रामगुन भूला ॥
भरम भुलाना पत्थर पूजे ॥ वा अंधे कू राम न सूझे
मन में सोच किया तब हरी ॥ या कलजुग पे दया करी ॥
मैं हूं लाल तू मेरो दास ॥ निरगुण भक्ति करो प्रकाश ॥
निरंकार को सुमरण कीजो ॥ यही सीख साधुन कू दीजो ॥
निरदावा को उद्यम करियो ॥ दया भाव घट भीतर धरियो
परहक भीख धिये मत हाथा ॥ पर त्रिया कू जाणो माता ॥
अपणो हक जाण कर लीजो ॥ बित समान दान कछु दीजो ॥

कौल बोलदे लाल पठाये । कलि में हलो देश खंदाये ॥
भरत खंड जहां उत्तम ठाम । धोली दूब नाना को गांव ॥
पिता बसे सासरे सुखवास । जा घर जन्म लियो लालदास ॥
धन धन विधना सिरजनहार । धन वा कूंख औतरे आय ॥
धन धन घड़ी धन वह रैन । मात पिता सुख पायो चैन ॥
चेद कृपाली हो निज दास । आ लीनो उदर में वास ॥
पिता चांदमल समदा माय । जिन की कूंख औतरे आय ॥
सदा सुचेत रहे दश मास । सतशील जहां देखो सांच ॥
तबे गर्भ सूं बाहर आये । जननी सूं सन्मुख बतलाये ॥
औंधा आसण सूधा कीया । दया करी जब सब भर दीया ॥
जोई कहे सो सांची होई । जाका मरम न जाने कोई ॥
मात पिता मन मांय विचारी । पुत्र नहीं कोई है औतारी ॥
मात पिता मन कीया सोच । देखत दरश पाप गये मोच ॥

संवत पन्द्रहसे सतानवें । लाल लियो औतार ॥
हिन्दू तुरक विच बैठ कर । होत भक्त परगास ॥
रामगुन गाइये हरे चौपाई ॥

भोर भयो जब दाई आई । हाथ लगावत सुध बिसराई ॥
पांच बरस जब रहे अचेत । अपणे मन कू सिख बुध देत ॥
कृपा करी जब दीन दयाला । दीनानाथ भये किरपाला ॥
चार मलायक बेग पठाये । उत्तम बन में खेलत पाये ॥
पल मारत ही ले पहुंचे आय । निरंकार के चरण दिखाये ॥
देखत चरण भयो उजास । दोऊ कर जोड़ करी अरदास ॥

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६

आधीन होबोले निजदास। मो जन कू राखो चरनन पास।
जब हर अपने जन सू बोले। हर सुमेर ते दास अमोले
या कारज तुम बेग जावो। साध संत कू राह गहावो
जहां मेरो साध तहां में आऊं। पल २ में दीदार दिखाऊं॥
कौली वाह ले हरि को आये। साधन सुख आनंदा है आवे॥
कोई दिन बात गुप्त ही रही। ना किन बूझी ना उन कही॥
हर सुमरन नित भली बिहाई। सूखी लकड़ी बेची खाई॥
एक दिन मारग लोग जाई। मय मंता गज नाड़ न चाई॥
मै मंता गज बहुत अलाम। करी संड सू तीन सलाम॥
हाथीवान उतर कर खोजे। नहना होय निरत कर बूझे॥
आपन कौन कहावो भाई। मैं तेरी गत कछु न पाई॥
जात कहन कू काहे मेव। लकड़ी बेचे कोई लेव॥
नित अलवर गढ बेचण जाय। उद्यम कर के उदर भराये॥
बात कही कछु मन नहीं मानी। हाथीवान और बुध ठानी॥
बार बार मोहि मत बहकावो। राखो चरनन राह गहावो॥
कहें लाल तू सुणरे भाई। सांची बात न भावे काई
बात कहूं एक तोसू सांची। काई के मन आवे कांची
तू पर त्रिया सू रहो लुभानो। साहब जाणे जग सू छानो॥
यह मारग नू छोड़ें भाई। तोसू राह कहूं समझाई॥
गुरु का शब्द सुनत भो भागा। हाथीवान चरण उठ लागो।
तजो कुटम अरु लोक बडाई। हाथीवान साध बुध पाई
साधु मिले सू अनत फल। जो मिल जाणे कोय
नुकता एक पहल का कहें सु सं फल होय ॥६०॥

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६

अर्थ नुकता द्वितीय

ऐसी करनी लालन करो । परमारथ कूं दृढ़ो धरो ॥
एक दिन अलवर गढ़ पे गये । धरो ध्यान निशंकां ही रहे ॥
भोर भयो जब लकड़ी बीनी । सूखी लेर इकट्ठी कीनी ॥
उलीएक जब चलो सकालो । चिश्ती गजन तिजारे वालो ॥
लाल संग ले तभी चले । पैंडा ही में प्रीतम मिले ॥
दिव्य दृष्टि हो देख जोई । या की गत क्या जाने कोई ॥
शील वंत और सहज स्वभाव । सवा हाथ धरतो सु पांव ॥
तन मन रहे सदा ही सांचा । सिर सु चले भरोदा ऊंचा ॥
उलीलखा एक भेद विचार । तुम साहब के खासा यार ॥
कहूं बात एक मेरी मानो । अपनी बात आपही जानो ॥
तुम सु आप किया इतबार । फिरे मलायक तुमरी लार ॥
बात कही सो हिरदे आणी । लालन चार सुनाई बाणी ॥
या दुविधा को हर मोहि लागे । जैसे छाया धूप सु भागे ॥
या दुनिया की राह अपूठी । साच कहूं कल माने झूठी ॥
अपने पाप आप ही जले । दलक देख कर गिला करे ॥
गदन कहे तुम डर मत मानो । दीन दुरस्त कर दुरमत भानो ॥
दुरमत कुतिया दूर उडाओ । हिन्दू तुरक कूं राह गहावो ॥
हिन्दू तुरक का ऐसा हेत । जैसे धरा बिजारा खेत ॥
पैसे बिंद का यह जश खिय । साई कहे सोहो कहइय ॥
इतनी बातें गदन सू भई । अलवर गढ के पास ॥
नुकता मानो दूसरा हात भक्ति परगांस
शम सुनगोइय हरखोपाई

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८

अर्थ तृतीय नुकता

भक्त चले जब चितंद छाजे। धोलीदूब में आन विराजे॥

धोलीदूब सू किया पयाना। बांधोली आ कीना थाना॥

बांधोली करते गुजरान। मन नहीं राखें मान गुमान॥

नाम लेव अरु दीन कमावे। उद्यम करे अरु खाय खुलावे॥

उद्यम करते आवे न लाज। ज्यों तरवर फले पिराणे काज॥

मांय भोगरी यह जश लीयो। घर को भेद बेरणी दीयो॥

कहूं बेरणी बात अगाध। तोय बताऊं निरगुण साध॥

निपट गरीब बहुत आधीन। साईं नाम सू हे मुस्तकीन॥

जो कछु तेरे हैं विश्वास। वास आज करो अरदास॥

तेरो पुत्र तो सू जो मिले। और आगा कू मारग चले॥

तेरा पुत्र को सब दुख जाय। अन धन सेती सदा अघाय॥

बात बेरणी लीनी मान। जा नादी बणिया के कान॥

भोर भया जब हुवा उछाह। आ कर लिया लाल का पांव॥

लालदास कै सत की बात। रिजक मोत साहब के हाथ॥

जिन पिंड दिया सोही दुख हरे। और किसी स काज न सरे॥

नाम लेवो अरु पुण्य करो। सतगुरु वचन हिरदा में धरो॥

बणिया के निश्चय भयो सत को रीत पिछाण॥

पहला अंक शुभ करम का अब प्रगट हुवा आन॥

राम गुन गाइये. हेर चौपाई

गुरु का शब्द पाप दुख हरना नुकता सुनो तीसरा भरना

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९

अथ नुकता चतुर्थ

बांयोली करते गुजरान। शैल शिखर चढ़ करते ध्यान॥
जेठ मास तप ऐसो करैं। मन कू खैंच सुन में धरैं॥
सिंह शिला पै आसन मारो। नीचे सिंह गुजारे ठाडो॥
सिंह सर्प की शंक न मानी। वे सत गुरु सत वादी ज्ञानी॥
सिंह सर्प में और न कोई। एकहि ब्रह्म सकल घट सोई॥
जेठ मास तप ऐसो करें। मन इच्छा के कारज सरें॥
जेठ मास तप कोई करै। गुरु परताप परम पद लहै॥
जेठ मास की कथा सुनाऊं। गुरु परताप परम पद पाऊं॥
या तप कू निश्चय कर जानो। पर हक त्यागो हक पिछाणो॥
याई शब्द जो माने कोई। आपा गवन मिटावे सोई॥
चौरासी के पडै न फंदा। सदा शरण राखें गोविन्दा॥
जो आवे तो भाति बधावे। ताकी गत कोई विरला पावे॥
बडी भक्ति भगवंत की कहें सुनें फल होय॥
जो कोई सुण हिरदे धरै। जीवत मुक्त गत होय॥
राम गुन गाइये हरे चौपाई॥
सत बचन के हिरदे आया। चौथा नुकता मुख से गाया॥

अथ नुकता पन्चम

कोई दिन और रहे बायोली। जहां सेवक एक अलैयो नेली॥
सतगुरु सेवा हित कर करै। दूजी आशा मन नहीं धरै॥
गुरु किरपा कर बोपे रीझे। जो आवे सो याही बूझे॥

१०

माथे धरो लाल ने हाथ । शक्कर बांट दिन और रात ॥
वहीं बिठायो तखत मकान । सतगुरु करें इकंतर ध्यान ॥
त्रिया एक पर पुरुष से राची । भूल रही जोबन मद माती ॥
देखो एक बिजली भारी । विषय कामना मन में धारी ॥
चाली आई जहां बैठे साथ । हाथ जोड़ मांगो परशाद ॥
कैहे अल्हैयो दरशन आई । मनोकामना कहां कमाई ॥
भई खिसाणी उल्टी नारी । भरी सभा में काढ़ दीनी सारी ॥
अंतर जामी लाल रिसाये । खरख तेली भूल गये ये ॥
जो कोई करै सो भुगते आप । जाको आप लगत है पाप ॥
वाको कोनो पड़दो पोस । जाको लेय लगत है दोष ॥
हाथ जोड तब ठाडो भयो । मैं सतगुरु तेरा भेद न लयो ॥
तुम हो सतगुरु गहर गंभीर । अब बक्सो मेरी तकसीर ॥
तभी लाल भये महर वान । फिर बैठायो वाही ठांव ॥
खोटी बात करो मत कान । मन मत राखो खुदी गुमान ॥
एक दिन बात ऐसी बन आई । त्रिया एक उमाहे आई ॥
पूछत आई बैठे तहां । देखूं दरश लाल है कहां ॥
कैहे अल्हैयो शक्कर ले । मन इच्छा सोई कहदेय ॥
मन की कहूं न शक्कर खाऊं । दरशन कर के घर कूं जाऊं ॥
तेली कैहे सुनो एक बात । उन सब सोंपो मेरे हाथ ॥
धन पुत्र मांगे सोई दूं । लाल ही लाल पुकारे क्यूं ॥
त्रिया एक कही बात विचार । धन पुत्र जग को व्योहार ॥
श्रवण सुनो लाल को नाम । या कारण आई या ठांव ॥

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२१

जाका दरशन देख अनंत सुख होई॥ वा बिन देखें और न कोई॥
त्रिया मन में कियो अंदेशो । भाय भोगरी दियो संदेशो॥
तुम साहब समझो मन माहीं॥ आवे आशा निराशा जाई॥
दया करी भक्ति के भाय । [illegible] अन्दर लई बुलाय॥
त्रिया सू सुख बोले लाल । दरशन दीना करी निहाल॥
दरशन कर के घर कू चली । सतगुरु मन में समझी भली॥
जबै अल्हैयो लियो बुलाई । तुम सिर लीनो बहुत भलाई॥
बहोत धडाई बहुत ई भार । भौ सागर कैसे उतरे पार॥
रहना मन करज्यो कोई । रीझे आप मुकत गत होई॥
बिना मुकत जब का मन आवे । जरा जगत में मूल गंवावे॥
सत गुरु ऐसी कृपा करी । ओछे बरतन पूंजी धरी॥
सत गुरु लाल भये मुशनकीन । अपनी पूंजी लीनी छीन॥
मान बडाई जगत में । करत फिरे अभिमान॥
शब्द ~~शब्द~~ भेद जाणा नहीं । लखा न गुरु का ज्ञान॥
राम गुन गाइये । हुरे चौपाई॥
सतगुरु शब्द सुनाया सांच । नुकता हुवा पूरा पांच॥

अर्थ नुकता षष्ठम्

सत लोक सू आई अवाज । काल करियो (करेसो) आज॥
सोच किया सू होय अवार । सन्मुख सीरय देखो संसार॥
धुर की बात मत जानो बेली । प्रगट जगत रची बांधी ठेली॥
सायब तेयब सबका मूंडा । साध पुरातम सभी ढूंढा॥
संत समीपी सब्बी आये । जो सतगुरु ने चरन लगाये॥

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12

१२

साध पुरातम पहलो खोजी ॥ तुरत बुलायो मभु जोगी ॥

भजन पुडी घट भीतर धरि ॥ शुभ बाणी की कृपा करि ॥

पूंजी देर किया इतवार ॥ राम नाम को किया वेवार ॥

ऐसी बुद्ध लाल की ओंडी ॥ जात छत्तीसों सभी मंडी ॥

जीव दया अरु सत को ठाट ॥ मुंडा साध तीन सो साठ ॥

ऐसी करी भक्त सूं भीत ॥ जग माहीं आये जगदीश ॥

आंणर जन की पूछी बात ॥ यह जग नहीं चलो शब्द के साथ ॥

कठिन पंथ खांडे की धार ॥ सावधान हो उतरो पार ॥

यह संसार असत को साखी ॥ येतें बहुत लगाई मांखी ॥

दीन बंधु हो करें बड़ाई ॥ तुम हो साहिब सदा सहाई ॥

तुम हो जन के सदा सुखदाई ॥ बैठी मखी देवो उड़ाई ॥

धसो मुगल के जम अरु दूत ॥ तुरत मुगल वह भयो विरूत ॥

पर त्रिया के हाथ लगायो ॥ तुरत मुगल वह मार गिरायो ॥

असुर सिमट कर बहुतई आये ॥ शंक न मानी लूट मचाये ॥

भजा घत को लूटो अथाह ॥ भजापत मन भयो उछाह ॥

सन्मुख रहो क्रोध नहीं कीयो ॥ जो सतगुरु मर बस कर लीयो ॥

गाफल गये भरम सूं भागे ॥ सन्मुख रहे चरन सूं लागे ॥

चुगलखोर ने चुगली करी ॥ अज्ञानी ने मन में धरी ॥

कूड़ी छंडी बात बनाई ॥ फौजदार के कान सुनाई ॥

फौजदार कछु भेद न लादा ॥ कर दीना असवार पधारा ॥

देहाद आये धाधोली ॥ अपनी बानी बोली ॥

कोई कहे कछु हम कू लाव कोई कहे दाणा घास दिलाव ॥

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१३

कोई कहै कछु हम कदे ॥ कोई कहै आगे हो देव ॥
लाल भक्त कछु ज्वाब न दीया ॥ शब्द सुनत आगे हो लीया
चले वहादरपुर की बाट ॥ साध संत हो लीना साट
एक ठौर सब जा बैठाये ॥ लोग नगर के देखन आये
फौजदार जब पूछी बात ॥ फकर कौन तुमारी जात ॥
दीन तुमारा किनहून जाना ॥ जिने सुणा तिन अचरज आणा ॥
राव रंक सब कोई बूझे ॥ हिन्दू तुरक एक सा सूझे
कहै लाल साईं को प्यारो ॥ श्रवण सुनो एक शब्द हमारो ॥
हिन्दू तुरक एक सा बूझे ॥ साहब सब घट एकाहि सूझे ॥
बोलन हार किने बताया ॥ आतमा एक भेव घर पाया
शब्द विवेक मोरथल हाथ ॥ सरस होय सो पूछे जात ॥
वस्त
इतना वचन लाल ने सुनाया ॥ फौजदार के लालच आया ॥
रूपैया पांच मुंड का लूंगा ॥ जब मैं तुम कू जाने दूंगा
कहै लाल साईं को प्यारो ॥ या माया ने सब जग मारो
हमतो दाम गांठ नहीं बांधो ॥ हाजर होते कभू न नांटो ॥
इतरी बात सुण असुर रिसायो ॥ चोबदार जब वेग बुलायो ॥
इनके मत तुम हाथ लगावो ॥ इनकू जहर कुई का पानी प्यावो
वा पाणी इन देवो पिलाई ॥ जास पशु पक्षी मर जाई
असुर सुणत कछु विलम्ब न कीना ॥ पानी ले आगे धर दीना ॥
लाल भक्त के सत्त की बात ॥ पानी पीवें आपने हाथ ॥
जहर कुई कू चरण खलाये ॥ निगह बान सब लोग आये

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१५

१४

तब इतबारी साथ बुलाये । जाकू श्रवण शब्द सुनाये ॥
गांद खील परशाद मंगाये । लेर वरुण की भेट रूकाये ॥
पहला कुंजा काढर लीया । उल्टा वरुण देव कू दीया ॥
दूजा खेंच धरती कू दीया । तीजा खेंच आपने पीया ॥
चौथा खेंच संतन कू प्याया । शक्कर कुई वाका नाम धराया ॥
पानी पीर हुवा उर धार । बैठा रहा घड़ी दो चार ॥
वाई ठौर सब आ बैठारे । साध संत आ बैठा सारे ॥
चार पहर निश बंदगी करी । साईं सुमरत भली परी ॥
भोर भयो जब हाकम जागे । चाकर चार जटेरन लागे ॥
वा फकर की खबर जो लावो । वाकू अकल मंजल पहुंचावो ॥
सुनतेही चाकर दोड़े आये । पीर मुरशद ध्यान में पाये ॥
उल्टे चाकर फिर आये । नाहक ऐसे फकर सताये ॥
उनका ऐसा सांचा दीनं । साईं नाम सू हैं गुरतकीन ॥
फौजदार जब दौड़ा आयो । दोऊ कर जोडर बिगार बुलायो ॥
लालदास तुम सच्चे पीर । अब बख्शो मेरा तकसीर ॥
जहर कुवां तैं मीठा कीया । साईं भरोसे यह जश लीया ॥
जो कोई पीवे सो धन धन कहें । साको अमर लाल को रहे ॥
फेर लाल आप घर आये । साध संत मिल मंगल गाये ॥
जगत भक्त विरोध है । मत कोई करो सिहाय ॥
पावक में पग देत हैं । दाज दाज पीछताय ॥
रामगुन गाइये । हरे चौपाई ॥

सतरारवे कोई सत सुजान ॥ छटा नुकता कहूं बखान ॥

अथ नुकता सप्तम

जाको जश कहू अगम अपारा ॥ जोई सुनै सो करै विचारा ॥
बांधोली स बुध बखानो ॥ तब सत गुरु मन में और बुध ठानी ॥
बांधोली स किया पयाना ॥ तब टोडी में दीना थाना ॥
टोडी में करते गुजरान ॥ राखें टेक धनी स ध्यान ॥
अन्न चून बांटें मिष्ठान ॥ नित्त व्रत दें नित्त समान ॥
जहां आन बैठे दश भाई ॥ असुर बैठ एक बुध उपाई ॥
खेती करै न बिणजी जाई ॥ और बांट आये खवाई ॥
कै कहीं स पारस लायो ॥ कै याय माल परायो पायो ॥
सभी के मन उपजी बात ॥ घर में ढुके आधी रात ॥
ढूंडे ढांडे कछु न पावें ॥ बिगर दियो कछु हाथ न आवे ॥
तब आकर लिया लाल का पांव ॥ कैसे तिरे हमारी नाव ॥
तुम साहब ने आप खंदाये ॥ तुमारा हम कछु भेद न पाये ॥
तुमारा तो साईं स ध्यान ॥ बिन जाने मूरख हैरान ॥
कहे लाल कोई करै सो पावे ॥ बिना गुनाह कोई आन सतावे ॥
जाको कियो जाई पै पड़ै ॥ असुर आन साधन स अड़ै ॥
साहब सब घट एक हि जानो ॥ वैर भाव मन में मत आनो ॥
भीखन बात बुध ही कही ॥ जन की कला सदा ही रही ॥
बात एक ऐसी बन आई ॥ माती फौज मुगल की आई ॥
आदे चालो यहां स टालो ॥ चद चालो परबत के मालो ॥
निपट दीन हो बुध बखानी ॥ असुर लोग कछु मरम न जानी ॥

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16

१६

येतो सुरख असुर अज्ञान। तुम कर चलो इकंतर यान॥
कुटुम संग ले चढे पहाड़। तबे गांव में माची राड़॥
छूटे तुपक बहुत असराल। लोग नगर के चढ़े पुकार॥
काई नाके बरह चलाई। दौड़ मुगलखाना के आई॥
फकर एक बरह के बीच। पहुंचे मुगल दौड़ दश बीस॥
काढ़ें खड्ग शमशेर संभाले। गहगहते फकर पे डारें॥
ऐसे पड़े फकर पे सोट। ऐसे खाती दर खत काटें॥
अन्तरजामी ध्यान न खोले। बरह लुटे औज नहीं बोलें॥
दलक देख कर आई कारी। जब भीखन ने अरज गुजारी॥
बरहे बीच फकर है एक। दयावंत नेक उधर देख॥
नेक अधर जब आसन लीयो। तले हाथ दे ऊंचो कीयो॥
फकर देख दया जब आई। लेर मोरछल तुरत फिराई॥
मारमार सुख सेती कही। अज केती मार फिरस्ते दई॥
चौदह मुगल मार जब डारे। जबै गांव के लोग संभाले॥
परमारथ के कारज सारे। लोग कहें ये हमने ही मीरे॥
सदा अदोष आपही रहे। ताको भेद न कोई लहे॥
ताका जन ऐसा ही होई। मन मुक्ताहल राखो पोई॥
जिन मारग जाणा नहीं। मोडा हरस हाव॥
फिर पछतासी बापड़ा। चूको औसर दाव॥
रामगुन गाइये। हरे चौपाई
सतगुरु कहें अगम की बात. नुकता हुवा पूरा सात
इति सप्तम नुकता सम्पूर्ण

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17

अध्याय

अर्थ तुकर्ता

हरिजन मूरख लोग सताये। तब टोडी सू चरन चलाये॥
कुटुम संग ले निकल आये। तब न्हाराली आगे आये॥
न्हारोली का बैठा लोग। कोई आन वनो संजोग॥
नहिं मन में कछु भूख न प्यास। जा चंगा कीनी निज दास॥
मुख बोले अरु बात सुनाई। पानी होय तो प्यावो भाई॥
बोला असुर बहुत गुमराई। पानी सिद्ध कहां सू आई॥
अब तू सिद्ध कहां कू जाई। अपना गांव चलो लुटाई॥
जो तो में कछु आशक होतो क्यों मर जातो भाई गोती॥
कहै लाल साईं को प्यारो। मर हक पाय जगत ले हारो॥
लिखा लेख भुगतेई छूटे। सदा लुटे जो औरहि लूटे॥
लाल भक्त समको मन माहीं। तुम सच्चे यहां पानी नाहीं॥
हम तो पानी पीयें आगे। तुम क्या पीवो भाग अभागे॥
धरती खोदें घालें घाव। पै संगी सू हेर दाव॥
पानी होय तो भागे प्यास। मूरख झूठी राखें आस॥
पत्थर रेख डारे धोय। साध वचन पलटे नहीं कोय॥
जुगन जुगन जिन हर भजा। जग सू रहा निराश॥
हर सुमरंत सांसा मिटा। पलपल हर विश्वास॥
राम गुन गाइये हरे चौपाई
जिनके राम भजन का ठाट। तुकता हुवा पूरा आठ
॥८॥

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१४

अथ सुरूपा नवम

बाटोडी का भाग अभागा । नवै भाग रसगरा का जागा ॥
होरोली स रसगण आये । महूर मुकदम बैठ पाये ॥
सब ने मिल करी प्रणाम । जिन के प्रसन हुये काम ॥
शेखर भाय भये महरबान । बात सुनाई का दिकान ॥
जो तुम कहो करें गुजरान । म्हारे निरदावा की आन ॥
दावा में तो दाजन होई । दावा मुक्ति न पावे कोई ॥
दावा में सुख नाहीं कहिये । निरदावा में साहब सहिये ॥
सब राजी हो बात बिचारी । जहां रहो जहां जगह तुमारी ॥
तुम हो साध साई के प्यारे । तुम स भेव करे सो हारे ॥
शीतल बचन भेव ने कहा । जब कोई दिन रसगरा में रहा ॥
नामलेन कू नगले जाय । जो कोई आय जाय पंथ गहाय ॥
बैठ रहें धनी के हेत । साध संत कू शिख बुध देत ॥
सतवंती शील सरूपा ताके । शीलधन अरु सत ही भाये ॥
सतरूपा ऐसा दीन कमायो । गुप्त दीन प्रगट दिखलायो ॥
सखी बाती दिवलो बालो । च्यार पहर निश रहो उजालो ॥
काचो करवो काचो सूत । अपने हाथ उसारे कूप ॥
सतशील स ले भरलाई । लेर पिता के आगे आई ॥
शीतल बचन कहे जब तात । सुनले सुता हमारी बात ॥
अजमत करामात है ऐसी । समय बायु बह गई जैसी ॥
हर का कठिन पंथ है न्यारा । हरि सुमरे सो उतरे पारा ॥
सतशील जो राखे कोई । हरि के लोक सदा सुख होई ॥

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15
३८

बेर न लागे पहोंचे जाई । जिन की आवा गवन मिटाई ॥
जो जो पिता कही सो मानी । सांची बात हिरदा में आनी ॥
धन पुत्री अरु धन पिता । धन संतन सोभाग ॥
कलजुग का मैदान में । लियो कठिन बैराग ॥
राम गुन गाइये । हेर चौपाई
सतगुरु कल में औतर आयो । नुकतो नवों निरत कर गायो ॥

अथ नुकता दशम

धन धन पुत्र पहाड़ा नाम । धन धन जन्म लियो जा गांव ॥
धन धन शेरखां गोलखां भाई । निरमल कुंवलाल की पाई ॥
जन्म जन्म हरि जी के दासा । कदे न करी आन की आशा ॥
सतगुरु देह धरी अति के भाय । निशवासर दरशन कू जांय ॥
एक दिन बोले श्री महाराज । जो मानो तो कहूं अवाज ॥
तुमरे ग्रह कुतुब औतरे । जन्म जन्म के कारज सरे ॥
मान लियो तब हरि को कहो । भली भई फिर जवाब न दयो ॥
सांची बात जाके मन रही । सोई आज ग्रह में कही ॥
नोदश मास गये जब बीत । कन्या आई ले परतीत ॥
नित नित निज कन्या आई । मान तजे अरु मुक्ति चलाई ॥
यह तो आई कुतुब के हेत । सो पहुंचायो वाही खेत ॥
हरि भक्तन के सदा अनंदा । निशवासर सुमेरे गोविन्दा ॥
एक दिन बोले श्री भगवंत । लाल भक्त को देखूं अंत ॥
यह संजोग भलो बन आयो । तुमरे गृह कुतुब पठायो
धन धन कही सो सांची सुनो । बिलम्ब भयो फिर वात न बूझी

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20

२०

हरि सुमेर तें भली बिहाई। दूजी कन्या औतर आई॥
खुशी होर बोले लालदास। साहब को मेर बिश्वासं॥
ई तो आई कुतुब के नाव। ले पहुंचावो याही ठांव॥
तीजे प्रभु कृपा करी। भक्त हेत तन आशा धरी॥
धन धन पल पल धन वह घड़ी। कल में कुतुब दहायो हरी॥
ऐसी कृपा करी बलिजाय। ध्रू सा कुतुब कहाये आय॥
कुल मंडन आबे निजदास। रहे गर्भ में अठारह मास॥
ऐसा श्रवण साका सुना। कलि में रहे अठारह दिना॥
पुत्र पिता पे अमरय कीयो। हम कू दरश कदे न दीयो॥
तन मन खेंचो देह दुराई। खिदमतगार जब बेग बुलाई॥
बंगला माहिं बिराजें लाल। निरख उठ दासी की चाल॥
कौन काम कू दौड़ी आई। कुशल क्षेम कछु कहो सुनाई॥
तुमरो दरशन देखे सदा अनंदा। दरशन देख मिटें सकल के फंदा॥
आज कुतुब बूंबी नहिं लेय। चला कृपा कर दर्शन देय॥
बात सुनत घर कू उठ धाये। सुन के श्रवण शब्द सुनाये॥
म्हारे प्रान बसें तुम पासा। अब तुम भजन करो प्रकाशा॥
कुतुब पिता कू पलटो दीयो। अब हम दरश तुमारो कीयो॥
म्हारे तो दरशन की आशा। दरशन देख मिटी जम फांसा॥
छाड दई जब कल में देई। जाय मिले जहां राम सनेही॥
तब इतवारी साध बुलाये। न्हाय धोय वस्त्र पहिराये॥
वहाण सरूपा वाली साथ। कहे पिता सू मन की बात॥
तुम तो साहिब दीवान। हुक्म करो एक बन्दे निशान॥

२२/ २३

अथ [illegible]

लालदि कलमें लाल खंदाये। लाल ही लाल भक्त कहलाये॥
लाल लाल का जाणें भेव। मूरख लोग कहें या सू मेव॥
बहुत भक्ति कीनी परगाश। नगला में ही कीनो वास॥
बैठ रहें धनी के हेत। साध संत कू शिख बुध देत॥
नित की भक्ति करें अधिकारी। निताब्दत ओट न्यामत सारी॥
च्यार जना एक मतो उपायो। असल भक्त एक साध बतायो॥
जात छतीसों ओढ हाथ। सदा बरत बांके दिन रात॥
एके मन में कियो अकीदो। सही पीर जो देहू मलीदो॥
दूजो कहे सही वह पीर। आज लाल के खाऊं खीर॥
तीजो कहै यही भेजो जीव। खाऊं चावल शक्कर घीव॥
चौथो कहे दरशन कू जाऊं। सखी लाल के शीरो खाऊं॥
यही मतो कर नगले आये। बैठे लाल भजन में पाये॥
साध साधनी दरशन आवें। अपनी २ भेट चढावें॥
चारों वस्तु तुरत ही आई। लाल साईं कीकरें बडाई॥
जैसा मांगा वैसा दीया। ऊपर बोल भक्ति का कीया॥
चारूं शोच करें मन माहीं। ऐसा साध कहूं देखा नाहीं॥
मुख सू कछु कहन नहिं पाये। अंतरजामी ने शब्द सुनाये॥
ह्यां क्या लीजे दीजे भाई। दाता बोर आप हि लाई॥
धन्न वह साहब का साखा। ह्यां तो बैठा फकर खुदा का॥
कीरत अगम अपार है। गिनत न आवे ओड॥
परमारथ कू औतरे। लालन तरि बारह कोड॥ राम गुन०
ग्यारहवां नुकता ज्ञान मताप। जान परवाने सतगुरु आप॥

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पिता कहे सबको मन माहीं । ई किसीके सहारे नाहीं ॥
जहां रहे तहां दीन कमावे । सफल दख्यो चरन लगावे ॥
सब कोई देखत है संसार । नदी बहत है अपरम्पार ।
नाव खेवैया लगे न कोई । जल देखा डरपे सब कोई ॥
ब्राह्मण सरूपा आगो कीयो । पांडेत ही मारग दीयो ।
चले साथ जब हरि के हेत । लासोपों बांधोली खेत ।
जहां लाल ने जग्य रचाई । साध संत सब के मन भाई ॥
सहजे सहजे कित कदिन बीते । जेठ मास आये रनजीते ।
साढ मास जब ओलरी । करमी अपनो करम करो ।
जमीदार हल जोडो आय । खेत हमारो चूको काय ॥
च्यार मसायक पहोंचे आय । जिन के अजबगी मार दिखाय ॥
बाघ मुश्क अरु भैं सु पटको । असुर आन साथ सु अटको ।
सबे कुटुम कांपो थहराय । या के गाढी लगी बलाय ॥
के कोई दानो बिन शिरदेव । मूरख लोग जाने नहीं भेव ॥
वाही के घट प्रगटे आन । तें मूरख तोडी मेरी कान ।
अपनी अपनी करें अचेत । जुगन जुगन का मेरा खेल ॥
जमीदार उठ बोले सोर । धन धन सीका भाग हमारे ।
सकल पंथ मिल भाग नपायो । सही पीर खरेंवैत आयो ।
भूम बांधोली उत्तम ठांव । जहां कुतुब कीजनो मुकाम ।
कुतुब कठिन करनी करी परमारथ के काज ॥
कलजुग का मैदान में लाल गद्दी संतन की लाज ॥
राम गुन गाइये हेर चौपाई
सत राखेवे कोई संत सुजान दशवां शुकता कहुं बखान ॥

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अथ मु[illegible] बारहवाँ

शीलवंत संतन सुखदाई । सत जुग की सी राह चलाई ॥
दौड़ी खबर तिजारे गई । साहबखां सूं जा कही ॥
जात मेव अरु मुसलमान । हिन्दू राह चलाई आन ॥
रोजा बंग निवाज़ न पढे । ईद बकरीद कू [illegible] नहीं धरे ॥
रोजा राखे न कलमा कहे । हिन्दू तुरक सू न्यारा रहे ॥
नबी रसूल कहे न कहावे । राम राम मुख सेती गावे ॥
केता हिन्दू मुसलमान । सबकाहि राह चलाई आन ॥
इतनी बात जब असुर ने सुनी । तुरत युद्ध जब अपनी धरी ॥
केते संगी आवो प्यारे । चलो पयादा अरु असवारे ॥
शुरु करो चल अपना दीन । घोड़े बेग करो वो जीन ॥
वह घोड़ा है कहर स्वभाव । वांपे कौन धरसके पांव ॥
जो कोई पांव पावंडे धरे । तोड़ खाय अरु घायल करे ॥
उस फकर कू देखो जाय । इस घोड़ा पे लावो चढ़ाय ॥
देहादे जब लगले आये । मक्का महजत बैठे पाये ॥
सख्त वचन जब कहे जरूर । साहबखां पै चलो हजूर ॥
तभी लाल ने शब्द सुनाया । खाना दाना तुरत दिलाया ॥
दाना देर बताई छांह । सतगुरु शोच करें मन मांह ॥
हमने काहू को घर नहीं फोरे । गांठ न काटी [illegible] न हरे ॥
कीडी कुंजर कू दुख नहीं दीयो । [illegible] परमारथ कीयो
गई रैन परभात सुभायो । तामस होकर असुर बुलायो

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२५

कहै लाल त सोचे कि जाये । क्या पाखण्ड भरे इ नारे आये ॥
हिन्दू तुरक चलाया सीर । अजमत बिना कहाया पीर ॥
कै कछु हमकू परचो देय । कै नातर आगे हो लेय ॥
कहै लाल साईं को प्यारो । श्रवण शब्द सुनो हमारो ॥
आप ही पीर आप ही अमीर । आप गृहस्ती आप फकीर ॥
कहीं गुनी हो निवत करावे । कहीं चौतरे न्याय चुकावे ॥
कहीं कमल हो शोभा देय । कहीं भौंरा हो वासना लेय ॥
सब घट रहै सकल सन्यारा । जानेगा कोई जानन हारा ॥
हमारे तो राम नाम की बात । इतनी करू उठ लागे साथ ॥
सब संतन मिल लारो लीयो । अननेतन मनसे खस कीयो ॥
कहै लाल संतन सुखदाई । साध संत सब लिये बुलाई ॥
घर ही बैठ हरगुन गावो । काची बात हृदय मत लावो ॥
सन्मुख रहियो सेवा करियो । राम नाम हिरदा में धरियो ॥
करी प्रणाम अरु उल्टे सारे । बारह साध टेरन नाहिं टारे ॥
हम दरशन बिन कैसे जीवें । दरशन बिन अन पानी न पीवें ॥
सतगुरु ऐसी राह बताई । गुरु के चरण रहे मिल साई ॥
सांची प्रीत रीत जब देखी । चले संग ले लाल थिर की ॥
जभी पांव पावडे धरे । तभी गरदनो नीचा करी ॥
तभी पीठ पर बैठे लाल । गाजी मरद भये खुशहाल ॥
हाथ लगावत मिट गई बाण । सहज स्वभाव चलय दृ आण ॥
देखें तुरक सब अचरज में रहें । दौड़ यार यार सों कहें ॥
आंखन परवा देखो यार । इस घोड़ा से लेवो उतार ॥

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अब घोड़ा से उतरे लाल । गाज़ी मरद कोथही रख्याल ॥
तुरकन के कैसी परतीत । चालें अपने कुल की रीत ॥
असुर चले आगे से जाई । जीव दया जिनके कछु नाहीं ॥
मृग एक सुरख आगे आयो । भर कर शीशो मार गिरायो ॥
बूंद भाय पड़ो भै माहीं । ऊले धरो छीतरा नाहीं ॥
असुर आन मारग में डाडो । लालभक्त के हूवो आडो ॥
या कू तुम माथे धर ले चलो । जो कछु चाहो अपनो भलो ॥
साध कहें ला हम ही लें । चेला होते गुरु नहीं लें ॥
असुर कहे मैं नहीं मानूंगा । या ही के माथे धर लूंगा ॥
कहे लाल ला हम ही लें । भाग जाय तो कहां सू दें ॥
असुर रिसायो काढी गाली । रातै नैन किया अति भारी ॥
पत्थर की मूरत पानी पीवे । तो यह मूवा मुरदा जीवे ॥
अचरज कछु दिखावे हम कू । सही पीर हम जानें तम कू ॥
धरा सिंह कभे नहीं भाखे । साध नाम को बिरद न लाजे ॥
साध भेक संतन सुखदाई । साध भेक की आय सहाई ॥
जन हेत प्रगटे आई । अपनी आपहि करें बड़ाई ॥
लेकर छुरी मृग के छुवाई । कूदत मृग गयो बन मांहीं ॥
जिनके आगे कूदत गयो । सब कू देख अचम्भा भयो ॥
साईं सुमरो सुरत कर । छांडो जगत को ख्याल ॥
भौसागर पीछे रहा । लाल जी हर भज जीता दाव ॥
राम गुन गाइये हेर चौपाई ॥
सतगुरु का गुण अगम अगाध । बारह तुकना बरना साध
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अथ [illegible]

देख सुने अचम्भा आवे। मुवा मुगा आप जिलावे॥
असुरन के कैसा ईमान। मुरग छूट गया अभिमान॥
लेकर संग लिजारे आये। साहब के आगे लाये॥
साहब खां ने पूछी बात। सबको भोंह कर जोड़ा हाथ॥
कहो पीर का क्या उनमान। देखा धीर सबूर की खान॥
साईं कई हम कू चिन्ह दीया। साईं भरोसे यह जश लीया॥
तबे मुग़ल ने स्वागत करी। बैठो पीर क्या तुम करी॥
रोटी खाना करो कबाब। भूख खा था बड़ा सबाब॥
खान यार तो बड़ा अजीज़। ऊपर मुसलमान की चीज़॥
मुसलमान होय खाय खुलासे। सो वह राह खुदा की पावे॥
रोटी दई लाल के हाथ। मानो पीर हमारी बात॥
कहैं लाल साईं को प्यारो। साहब एक बनावन हारा॥
हिन्दू तुरक को एकहि साहब। राह बनाई दो अजाब॥
दूजा होय दुबिधा मत करे। जीव कू मारे मुरदा करे॥
जो कोई पै घाले घात। गला कटावे अपने हाथ॥
वह वो उल्टा बदला लेय। साईं हिसाब दोजख देय॥
ऐसो कोई हमें बतावे। साईं की दरगाह छुड़ावे॥
साईं आप अदालत करे। वा दिन सू कोई साधु डरे॥
सब घट वा साईं के हेत। हम तो दयावंत दरवेश॥
हम सू तो चींटी नहीं मरे। तुम होस सब कारज सरे॥
इतनी बात मुग़ल सू भई। तब रोटी लाल हाथों पे लई॥

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धाक नजर देखे लालदास ॥ शेदिन पेचायल सुखदास ॥
सतगुरु की शरणागता ॥ संतन लागे दाग ॥
शब्द भेद जाणा नहीं ॥ जिनका बड़ा अभाग ॥
राम गुन गाईये ॥ हेरे चोपाई ॥
जिनके हिरदे हरगुण ज्ञान ॥ तेरह नुकता कहुं बखान
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अथ नुकता चवुदेश
मुगल देख उ.चम्भा आवे ॥ अंधा मारग कैसे पावे ॥
या फकर का गादा हीया ॥ जड़ा दीन में खयला कीया ॥
असुर वचन ऐसे कर भाषे ॥ या कूं नजर बंद कर राखो ॥
असुर उठे अरु लाल उठ आये ॥ पड़ तेरखाने ला बैठाये ॥
जो मांगे सो देखो तयार ॥ निगह बान कर दीना चार ॥
चारु शेक रहे निश द्वार ॥ बारह साध लाल के लार ॥
बारह साध लाल के लारे ॥ पौन सरूपी होगये सारे ॥
पवन सरूपी होगये लाल ॥ निगह बान सब देखें ख्याल ॥
ढूंडें दाहें पावें नाहीं ॥ चारु शोच करें मन माहीं ॥
फौजदार के आये आगे ॥ चोर तुमारा बड़ा अभागे ॥
ऐसी टहल हमी कूं दीनी ॥ भाग हमारा हमने लीनी ॥
फौजदार जब बहुत रिसाये ॥ वह साधु तुमने कहां चलाये ॥
कै मनसा कै मारो दो ॥ छोड़ दिया कछु लेर अकोड़ ॥
असुर रिसायो दीनी मार ॥ एक एक के लागा चार ॥
चाकर बोला दोऊ कर जोर साहब हैं सांचा की ओर ॥
तेरा मुंदा रहा दरवाजा पार ॥ वह तो फकर खुदा की नार ॥
जागत जागत रैन बिहाई ॥ चार पहर निश नींद न आई ॥

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या में नाहिं हमारो दोष । वह साहब सब को सिर मोर ॥

दयावंत हुर वेशी लाल । जग में आन दिखाया ख्याल ॥

जबे लाल वहां ठाड़ा भया । इन कू क्यों नकारा किया ॥

चोरदोर हम आगे आये । नेक मरद ये क्यों सताये

मुगल डरो जब पूछी बात । अब के मारो साला सात

दुनिया मारग जाणें नहीं । साध भक्त की रीत ॥

साहब सुमरो बाहरो । बूड़ गई भय भीत ॥

राम गुन गाइये हेर चौपाई ॥

भरमत फिरे सकल संसारा । चौदह नुकता कहूं विचारा ॥

१४ ॥

अथ नुकता पंचदशम्

हरिजन हरि का भाव उचारे । बाहर भीतर साहब सारे ॥

हरि का साध सदा ही सुखी । भक्त दुखावे सदा दुखी ॥

कन्या एक मुगल के प्यारी । रूपवंत कुल में उजियारी ॥

भूत एक बहुत दुख दीया । स्याना भोपा केता कीया ॥

स्याणा सुगना केते आये । करें उतारा भोग बनाये

काज़ी मुल्ला पढ़ें कुरान । पचपच गये वहां के कतान ॥

काज़ी मुल्ला देखें सारे । भूत न उतरे सब पच हारे ॥

मुगलाणी दौड़ी लाल पै आई । लाल भक्त तुम करो सहाई ॥

तुम साईं के पार सभी थी । मेरा बिथा हमारे जी की ॥

तुम साईं के खासा यार । साईं सू तेरा इतबार

तब लाल की मनशा फिरी भूत भूत सब दूर करी

सुन के भूत जब हुवा हजूर मेरा राज रहे भरपूर

स्याणा भोपा मार डिगाऊं तुमरे कहे मुलुक तज जाऊं ॥

२९

उतर खईस जबलाशोराह। यहां सू उतर कहीं कू नाह॥
आयो मुलुक आण नू लेय। यहां तो उलट पांव मते देय॥
सुख माहीं दिन बीते चार। मुगलाणीं मन में कियो विचार॥
सुख में कही मुगल सू बात। देखा पीर खुदा की जात॥
सखुन हमारा मानो एक। जा कर करम पीर का लेख॥
देखा पीर निपट मासूल। हार मुगल तब हुवा हजूर॥
धन धन पीर तुमारा खुदा। तुमने पाया पूरा मुदा॥
अब बख्शो तुम गुनाह हमारा। दिन २ जुल्म होय तुमारा॥
लालदास तुम सच्चे पीर। अब बख्शो मेरो तकसीर॥
कहे लाल न सुणो भाई। साध सतावे सो जख जाई॥
तबे मुगल नै तोबा खैंची। तुम साई के पहिले समीपी॥
मैं तो खानेजाद तुमारा। अब बख्शो तुम गुनाह हमारा॥
चलो अयादो पहुंचो आई। अब अरवल कू मुल्क उठाई॥
रहे तिजारे दिन चालीस। कोई कैदी नहीं दुरसीस॥
अवाज एक अरस सू आई। लाल साई की करे बड़ाई॥
जो कारज सिध होय तुमारो। आज तिजारो मोय़ो मारो॥
दुनिया में परचा को भाव। सब दुनिया उठ लागे पांव॥
साध भेक कोई ना सेरू। पड़े गजब जब सज कोई छेरू॥
सुख दुख है जग को व्योहार। मेर नहीं कोय अहंकार॥
मो सू ता चोटी नहीं भेरे। तो हो सू सब कारज सेरे॥
कहे लाल संतन सुखदाई। तुम हो जन के सदा सहाई॥
जो कोई करे सो आप ही पावे। नरक होय सो साध सतावे॥
दुख सुख नहीं साध कू व्यापे। अपनी आग जले जग आपे॥

३०

३०

जवतो रीझे दीना नाथ । माथे धरो लाल के हाथ ॥

साध मेक ऐसा ही चहिये । राखें दया भाव जो कहिये ॥

साध मिले सुख ऊपजे । सुखें सकल के पाप ॥

जिनकों दुष्ट कहा करे । जिन का सिर पे साहब आप ॥

शाम गुन गाइये । हरे चौपाई :— ॥

साधु होय सो हर कू भजे । पन्द्रह नुकता चित दे सुने ॥

अथ नुकता सोलहवां

शहर भोजपुर उत्तम गांव । जहां साधु एक केर विश्राम ॥

नाम साधु को मनसुखो माली । जिन सांची प्रीत राम सू पाली ॥

अन्नदान बहुतेरा दीया । भर भर गाडी त्यागन कीया ॥

एक दिन मन में ऐसी आई । संग त्रिया सू बात बनाई ॥

सुण त्रिया मन में धर लीजो । ऐसी बात किसी सू न कीजो ॥

सतगुरु करो सरब को हीयो । कथु सुगल कू परखोन दीयो ॥

भेद बराई छेडे कोय । परचा तुरत दिखावे सोय ॥

अंतरजामी लाल बिराजे । जाका । शरणे साहब गाजे ॥

पल पल रहें मलाब के साथ । घट घट की ले आवे बात ॥

सहजे सहजे धून आई । मनसुका मन में उमंग उठाई ॥

गाडी जोड़ चले वह वाट । त्रिया पुरुष हो लीना साथ ॥

चाव चाव चले वह आये । बहुत प्रीत सू दरशन पाये ॥

सतगुरु देख दुराई दीठ । अभिमानी मूर्दानी पीठ ॥

मनसुका के मन ऐसी आई । लाख लाख सब पैर बनाई ॥

३१

बसतर चादर परे बगाया। नंगा हो सतगुरु आगे आया॥
अब मनसुका ने अर्ज गुजारी। अब कहि बे सतगुरु चूक हमारी॥
तब बोले सतगुरु लाल विवेकी। तेंने कह्या [illegible] हमारी देखी॥
जह, स् आयो तहां कू जा। सेड बराई औज् ध्या॥
मनसुको बोलो गुरु रिसायो। कपट हमारो निकल आयो॥
ज्यों हीरा फोड़ो नहीं फूटे। रेशम गांठ घुली नहीं खूटे॥
करम किवाड़ कौन स् खुले। भयो उदास जब उल्टो चले॥
उल्टे गये खेत दो चार। सतगुरु मन में कियो विचार॥
ज्यों जननी पुत्र कू मारे। पलक एक में गोद पसारे॥
महर वान हो प्यावे शीर। जब पुत्र की आवे पीर॥
कहें लाल संतन सुखदाई। मनसुकाय पेगी आवो बुलाई॥
जिनस् वहोत किया इतबार। एक कहते ई उठ गये चार॥
मनसुकाय लेकर उल्टे आये। आन गुरु के चरन दिखाये॥
देखत चरन मिटे संताप। महर वान हो सतगुरु आप॥
धन धन सतगुरु दीदार तुमारा देखत कर गये पाप हमारा॥
कहे लाल तू सुणरे भाई। जग तो चाहे जगत बड़ाई॥
जोर करे सो जग में हारे। साधू नाय जगत के सहारे॥
मानबड़ाई छोड़ दे। यही साध की रीत॥
गुरु मारग जब पायसी। मन लावे परतीत॥
राम गुन गाइये हेर चौपाई॥
सोलह कला कहे सब कोई जो दरशे सो साधू होई॥

१८

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32

३२

अथ नुकता सत्रहवाँ

शहर आमेरा मोदी साह । ताके ग्रह द्रव्य की चाह ॥
जाकी जहाज समुद्र में अटकी । बुधत फिरे बात खटके की ॥
कोई जोगी हो सौख बतावे । कोई वेद खोल समझावे ॥
कोई सुमरे पीर सईद । कोई दई देवता अरु प्रामोद ॥
सब को कह्यो सुनो चित घट में धरो सब पच हारे काज न सरो ॥
जबै साह मन उपजी बात । राम बिना कोई संग न साथ ।
पुण्य धर्म जो कोई करै । बिना वसीले काज न सरै ॥
मरु देश मेवात मंझार । जहां एक साध कहै संसार ॥
शहर खोहरी नगली ग्राम । जा में सुनो लाल को नाम ॥
वह मेरी जो करै सहाई । तो मैं दरशन देखूं जाई ॥
काटदसौंध अरु चरन चढाऊं । बहुत भीत सदर्शन पाऊं ॥
चली अवाज लाल पै आई । महरवान हुवे आपई जाई ॥
सतगुरु लाल ध्यान लें बैठे । ओढ गूदडी तभी लेटे ॥
तुरत उठे अरु आये पसीना । सरव देख अचम्भा कीना ॥
सोच रहे कोई संत सभागे । धीरे धीरे पूछन लागे ॥
तुम सतगुरु साहब की जात । सुख खोटा अरु शिरघ बात
अंतर घट की तुम ही जानो । कहन राखें कछु आन बखानो ॥
कहे लाल संतन सुखदाई । मेरी बात सुणो रे भाई ॥
ऊंठा सु सांचा भ्या बोले । यह जग सारे ठगता डोले ॥
छटे महीने आवे साह । आंख न देखे जब परवाह ॥

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३३

सहजे सहजै बीते छै: मास । मोदी साह की पूंजी थाय ।।
तुरत दरब को लेखो लीनो । दसवें हिस्से कादर लीनो ।।
मिलो कुटुम सूं चाहे घर । चाले तब चलो साहूकार ।।
गैला में दिन बीते च्यार । आपहों चा सखा लालदास दरबार ।।
बैठे ध्यान धरें लालदास । साध संत सब बैठे पास ।।
जहां सहा ने आके शिरदो करे । लेर द्रव्य चरनन में धरे ।।
कहे लाल संतन सुखदाई । वा दिन याद करो रे भाई ।।
साध संत सब रवेड़ हजूर । छठो महीनो हुयो भरपूर ।।
साध संत सब को मन लीयो । द्रव्य किन हू न हाथ न छीयो ।।
कहे लाल हम आप वियोगी । ना हम मलंग सन्यासी जोगी ।।
जो कोई मांगे जाकू दे । म्हारा सेती सौदो ले ।।
मन ही मन में साह रिसान्यो । यह तो दरब कुमारे आन्यो ।।
या कू तो मैं घर नहीं धरूं । तुम फुरमावो सोही करूं ।।
कहें लाल तू सुणरे साह । कर दे द्रव्य पुण्य की राह ।।
द्रव्य लेर तू घर कू जाई । साध वैश्नू दे भुगताई ।।
साध संत की सेवा करियो । हरदिश्वास हिरदा में धरियो ।।
सकहि भस्म सकल घट माहीं । साध संत में दुविधा नाहीं ।।
शाह सीख ले घर कू चलो । रूम रूम तन सारो खिलो ।।
जबै शाह घर पहोंचो जाय । देख कुटुम कू बहुत सिहाय ।।
भाई बंधु त्रिया अरु माता । पिता सहोदर और बिलाता ।।
सबै कुटुम आ बैठो पास । जैसे मन की पूजी आश ।।
पूछें सकल साध की बात । जैसे पेड़ देव की जात
कहे साह कछु कही न जाई । कैसे कहिये साध बडाई

३५

३४

जाका मुख पै परसै नूर । पल पल हर के रैहे हजूर ॥
निर्मल भति अरु निर्मल चाल । दर्शन देखत भया निहाल ॥
जिने सुनो जिन श्रवधनकहो मारे ते अमर लोक को रहे
समदर अंत विरला लहै । धरती करे शुमार ॥
अम्बर के तारा गिने । तोऊ कठिन साध को पार ॥
राम गुन गाइये । हेर चौपाई ॥
सतरावें कोई संत सुजान । सतरह मुकता कहूं बखान ॥

अथ मुक्ता अठा[illegible]

शहर आगरो उत्तम ठांव । कायथ एक महानंद नाम ॥
जाके घेर द्रव्य बहुतेरो । मान वडाई हुकम घनेरो ॥
करम की रेख टरै नहीं टारी । सुन्दर काया थिगसी सारी ॥
करम अंक कोई उयड आयो । काया में एक बिन्द बन आयो ॥
कहै महानंद सुनरी दासी । या जीवा सू मर बो आछी ॥
जब घरनी ने भलो उपायो । महानन्द के कान सुनायो ॥
हम रहती पीहर पोसाल । मात पिता संग आती साथ ॥
मात पिता संग दरशन पायो । जाको तोकू भेद बतायो ॥
जाके बारह पन्थ दरशन होई । राम शब्द गावे सब कोई ॥
जात छतीसो दरशन आवे । भला बिरदो जैसा ही पावे ॥
दुखिया आवें सुखिया होई । साध अंत पावे न कोई ॥
वाको दरशन देखो जाई । देखत दरश पाप मिट जाई ॥
त्रिया वचन सांच कर माने । करी तयारी छाने ही छाने ॥

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35

३५

अपनी टहल और कू दीनी । आपन गेल दरशा की लीनी ॥
बहली जोड़ चले वह बाट । त्रिया पुरुष हो लीना साथ ॥
चौंप चाव चले वह आये । बहुत भांत सू दरशन पाये ॥
दोऊ कर जोडर अर्ज सुनाई । मन मन की तुम जानो साईं ॥
तुम तारन हो बूडी जहाज । शरन आये की राखो लाज ॥
कहें लाल संतन सुखदाई । कहो हमारो मानो भाई ॥
अरब खरब सब देह लुटाई । तो तेरा ई सब दुख जाई ॥
महानन्द के सांची आई । अर्ब खर्ब सब दियो लुटाई ॥
दूजी कला और भी खेलो । लोक लाज कू गेर बगेलो ॥
काला मुंह कर जग दिखलायो । भया ताज हथियार बंधायो ॥
देखत जगत अचम्भा आवे । साधू कहें करे सो पावे ॥
जा त्रिवेणी वेग न्हाये । साथ संत मिल मङ्गल गाये ॥
सुन्दर काया निकस आई । लाल भक्त की करे बड़ाई ॥
जब त्रिया समझी मन माहीं । कुल की बात हिरदे में आई ॥
नाक माहिं नकबेसर होती । वामें बहुत अमोला मोती ॥
वे तो रहे लोक के लाज । जासू गूंऊ ऊपर दो दाग ॥
सब जन देख बहुत सिहायो । गंदाय देख बहुत पछतायो ॥
तब भागी सतगुरु पै आयी । सबे गुनह तें माफ करायी ॥
दोऊ कर जोडर अर्ज सुनाई । मेरा मन की जानो साईं ॥
सबै गुनाह के काटे रूख । यह कोई रही करम की चूक ॥
कहें लाल न सुणो रे भाई । औरन दोष न दीजो काई ॥
तेरे तो कछु न विश्वास । दो मोती त्रिया के पास ॥

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36

३६

त्यागी वस्तु न रारवै कोई ॥ कव्वा रवांय अमर नहीं होई ॥
जहां सांच तहां सब कछु ॥ कूड जहां अकरम्म ॥
सतगुरु शब्द बिचारिये ॥ जिनका मिट गया भरम्म ॥
रामगुन गाइये हरे चौपाई ॥
हरि की भक्ति करै सो उतरे ॥ अठारह नुकता हिरदे धरै ॥

अथ नुकता उनीसवां

कल में आन दियो दूवो ॥ च्यार कूट जश प्रगट हुयो ॥
जो जश सुनो हयैले ढाडी ॥ सुनते प्रेम प्रीति अति बाढी ॥
च्यार पहर निशा कीया सोच ॥ तन के पाप गये सब मोच ॥
भोर भयो दरशन कू आयो ॥ श्रवण सुनीं अरू दर्शन पायो ॥
अलरव लरवो अरू हरगुण गायो ॥ हरीदास तब नाम धरायो ॥
हरीदास तब अर्ज गुजारी ॥ तुम सतगुरू हो परम उरधारी ॥
निशवासर तेरो गुन गाऊं ॥ महर करो तो नेत्र पाऊं ॥
सतगुरू शब्द सुनाया एक ॥ एक बार धू माहीं देरव ॥
धू की तरफ करी जब दीद ॥ रवूटे नैन हुई परतीत ॥
शुकर शुकर ढाडी करै ॥ देरवत दरश चरनन में रहै ॥
मैं तो चरण छोड नहिं जाऊं ॥ निशवासर तेरे गुन गाऊं ॥
कहें लाल तेक रारवो बिशवास ॥ नाम लेवे सो हरि को दास ॥
टोक देर न घर कू जाई ॥ जहां देरवे जहां आप इलाई ॥
जब ढाडी अपने घर आयो ॥ देरव कुटुम कू बहुत रिझायो ॥
आंरव दई जब घर कू आयो ॥ पूरबला पुण्य से सतगुरू पायो ॥

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37

३७

जिन्हें सुनो जिन धन २ कहो ताको अमर लाल को रहो ॥
धन परमेशुर परम गुरु ॥ धन साध निरबंध ॥
लाल मिले नेत्र खुले ॥ नहीं सब जग अंधर धुंद ॥
रामगुन गाइने हेर चौपाई
हर सुमेर सो हरि जन होई ॥ उनीसवां नुकता हिरदे पोई ॥

अथ नुकता बीसवां

श्रवण गुनो जिनको साको ॥ संत बखाणें सो जग्र ताको ॥
सीखे सुणे सकल संसार ॥ हर जन के आये इतबार ॥
रहा मुसाफिर दो असवार ॥ वे आये मेवात मंझार ॥
आये शहर खोहरी माहीं ॥ जिन की गांठ द्रव्य कछु नाईं ॥
तन में भूख लगी अति भारी ॥ पूछत फिरें नर अरु नारी ॥
कहा खबर पूछें मिल यार ॥ देखा कहा जगत ज्यों हार ॥
ऐसा सखी कोई हमें बतावे ॥ ताजा न्यामत हमें खुलावे ॥
बात सुणत बोले नर लोई ॥ ऐसा सखी बतावें तोही ॥
नगलो गांव भरियो वास ॥ जामें रहै सखी लालदास ॥
जो कोई मांगै जाकू देय ॥ हिन्दु तुरक की भीख न लेय ॥
इतेक बात मुसाफिर सुणी ॥ भाग हमारे भली बणी ॥
जाकी सिफ्त करे संसार ॥ वाका आज करें दीदार ॥
पूछत पूछत नगले आया ॥ बैठा लाल भजन में पाया ॥
दोऊ कर जोड़र अर्ज़ सुनाई ॥ कछु ताजा न्यामत देऊ मंगाई ॥
कहें लाल नेक धीरज खावो ॥ मन इच्छा सोही फल पावो ॥
कहें मुसाफिर दोऊ कर जोर ॥ साहब देनहार सब ठौर ॥

३८

२६

जैसी सुनी तुमारी साख। दर्शन देख भया मुश्ताक॥
हाजर हाथे तो देया मंगाई। नातर हम कू राह बताई॥
कहें लाल अपना मन सेती। राम पन्हां दे या कौल सेती॥
यह जग अपणा कुल कू चाहे। सब दुनिया पर वो ही चाहे॥
लाल भक्त एक बुद्ध उपाई। कोरी हाडी तुरत मंगाई॥
जलसे लेर तीन बर धोई। उज्ज्वल वस्त्र लेर ढकोई॥
मान वचन कर सुमर पीव। वामें चावल शक्कर घीव॥
देख मुसाफिर अचम्भा रहें। अपना मनमें धन धन कहें॥
पानी लाया न आग बलाई। न्यामत बेग अरस सू आई॥
करी प्रणाम अरु खाना खाया। ऐसा स्वाद कदे नहिं आया॥
खाना खाया मिट गई आह। चले मुसाफिर अपनी राह॥
तेंने शकुन पूरा किया हमारा। दिन दिन जुल्वा होय तुमारा॥
साध संत एक बुद्ध उपाई। न्यामत बेग अरस सू आई॥
या न्यामत हम तुम भी लें। महर वान हो सतगुरु दें॥
मुख सू कछु कहन नहिं पावे। अंतरजामी ने शब्द सुनावे॥
वैर करो मत वैसा आवे। अपना अपना बरतन लावो॥
सब साध मिल बैठा आई। बहुत भांत सू दर्शन पाई॥
देखो अपना अपना भाग। भाजी खाना रोटी साग॥
जैसी बनी करम की लीक। एकहि हांडी एके चीज़॥
सतगुरु कहें सुनो नर लोई। होड करे सो ऐसा होई॥
जैसा देवे वैसा पावे। मूरख अपना मन समझावे॥

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३८

सत शीलन पलाल के दया धरम अरु भाव
पुण्य करे हर कु भजे साधू यही स्वभाव
राम गुन गाइये हेर चौपाई
बीस बिस्वा वह जगदीश साधू नुकता बरना बीस
अथ नुकता इकीसवाँ

शहर खेवाहरी रसगरा गांव। साधू एक मयालो नाव॥
एक साध रसगरा में रहे। निश दिन हर हर हर हर कहे॥
जात कलाल कर्म सु पायो। गुरु प्रताप सु साध कहायो॥
नित की दरश लाल को करे। सतगुरु वाणी हिरदे धरे॥
नित की भक्ति करे अोध कारो करम। कोरे रब टरे नहीं टारो॥
शुद्ध स्वभाव कछु नाहिं कीया। टोला ले बीछया के सीया॥
आई कौन कुबुध की घडी। टोलो सेत बीछया मरी॥
मुख सु कछु न उपडा ज्वाब। बीछया दई फूस में दाब॥
जब बलारु सु आई धेन। रांभे और पुजावे नैन॥
फिर फिर आवे फिर २ जावे। रांभे बहुत २ डिढावे॥
कौन जन्म का उघड़ा पाप। बीछया बिन आगो संताप॥
जागत २ रैन विहाई। त्रिया पुरुष दोनू नींद न आई॥
भोर भयो दरशन कु आयो। दरशन देख महा सुख पायो॥
दोऊ कर जोडर विनती करे। बूढो नाय सतगुरु सु गिरे॥
सतगुरु कहे करो कछु शल। धरम डंड कछु करो कबूल॥
कछु राम सु है नहीं न्यारा। मवा जिवावे वह रखवाला॥
सतगुरु वचन माना सांच साधु कबूल किया रूपरा पांच॥

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५०

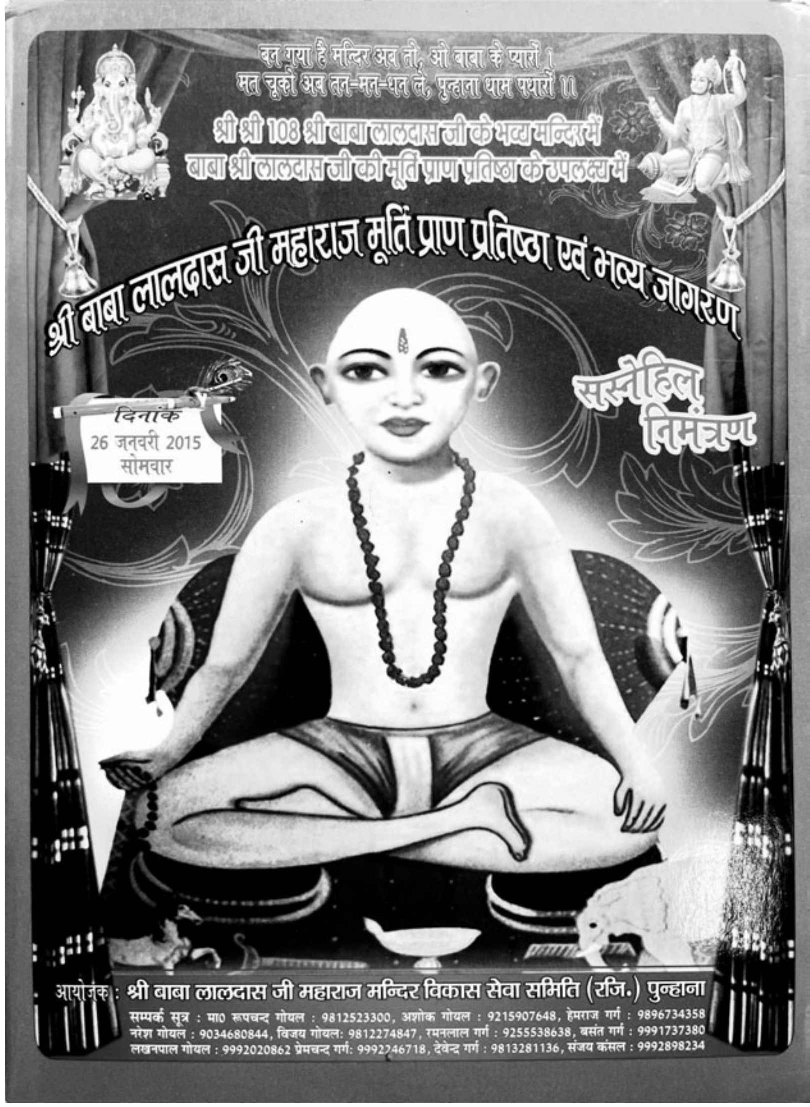
५०

जुगनजुगन परमारथ कीयो। कोरे करवो जलभर दीनो॥
जब साधू अपने घर आयो। वह अम्रत बोछिया क्यावो॥
मूंड हिलायो खोले नैन। जब बोछिया ने देखी धैन॥
उठी बोछिया अरु चोंखन लागी। जब साधू की शंका भागी॥
त्रिया पुरुष देन करें बड़ाई। धनधन सतगुरु तेंने राह बताई॥
ऐसा कारज तुम से होई। मूवा मरा जिवावे न कोई॥
मूवा मरनै कोई विरला जाणे। साधू होय सो आप बखाणे॥
साध मिले सुख ऊपजे। असुर मिले दुख होय॥
औगुण मेटे गुण करे। सतगुरु कहिये सोय॥
राम गुन गाइये हरे चौपाई॥
नेम राम के विश्वा बीस। नुकता हुवा ये इक्कीस॥
॥२०॥

अथ नुकता इक्कीसवां

सतगुरु सतजुग औतर आयो। अंतर भेद किनहू न पायो॥
राह चलंतेक दिन बीते। जेठ मास आये रणजीते॥
संवत सोलह से सितासी। लाल भक्त कथु अगम भगासी॥
कहें लाल तुम साधू सुणियो। बचन हमारा हिरदे धरियो॥
अलख गुरु स्यूं आगे कीयो। आगे पड़े काल चौरासी॥
काल दुकाल जाको सत रहै। जो कोई साध पन पद लहै॥
सब साधुन ने सरवण सुनी। सुण तेई मन उपजी घणी॥
कोई कहे हल जोड़ो अन्न। म्हारे घरे बहुतेरो धन्न॥

APPENDIX A.2



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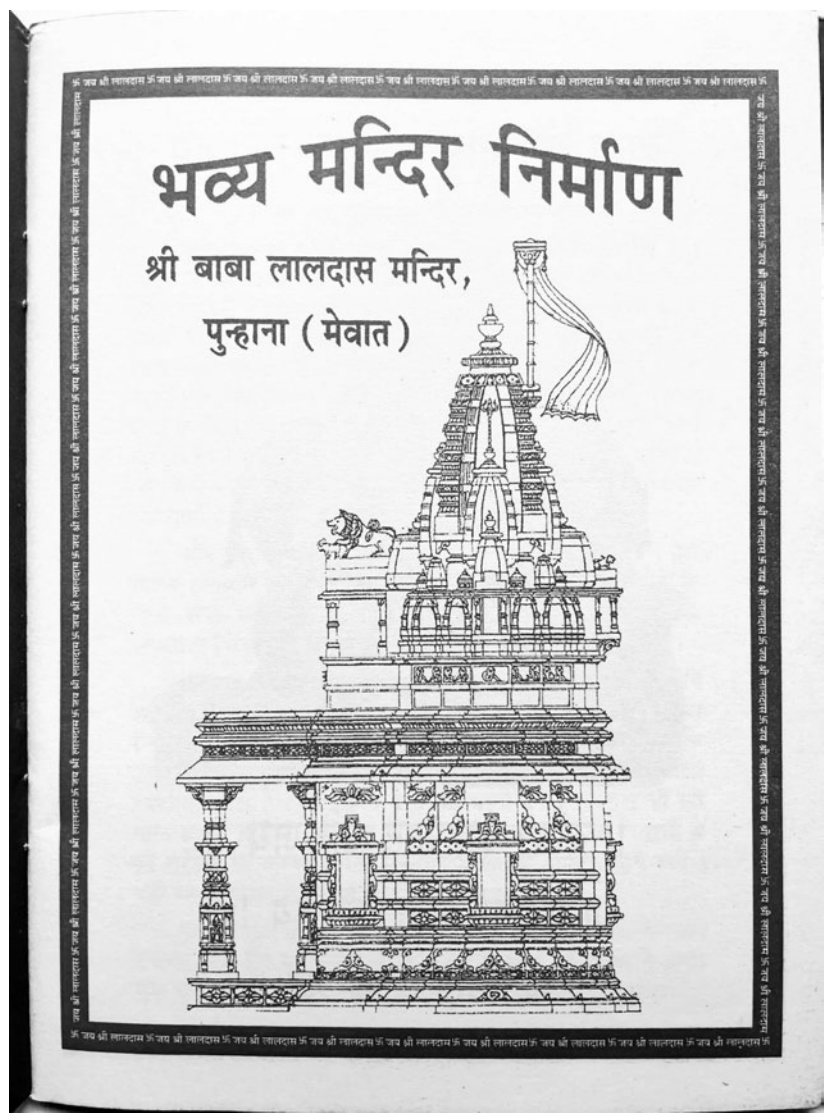

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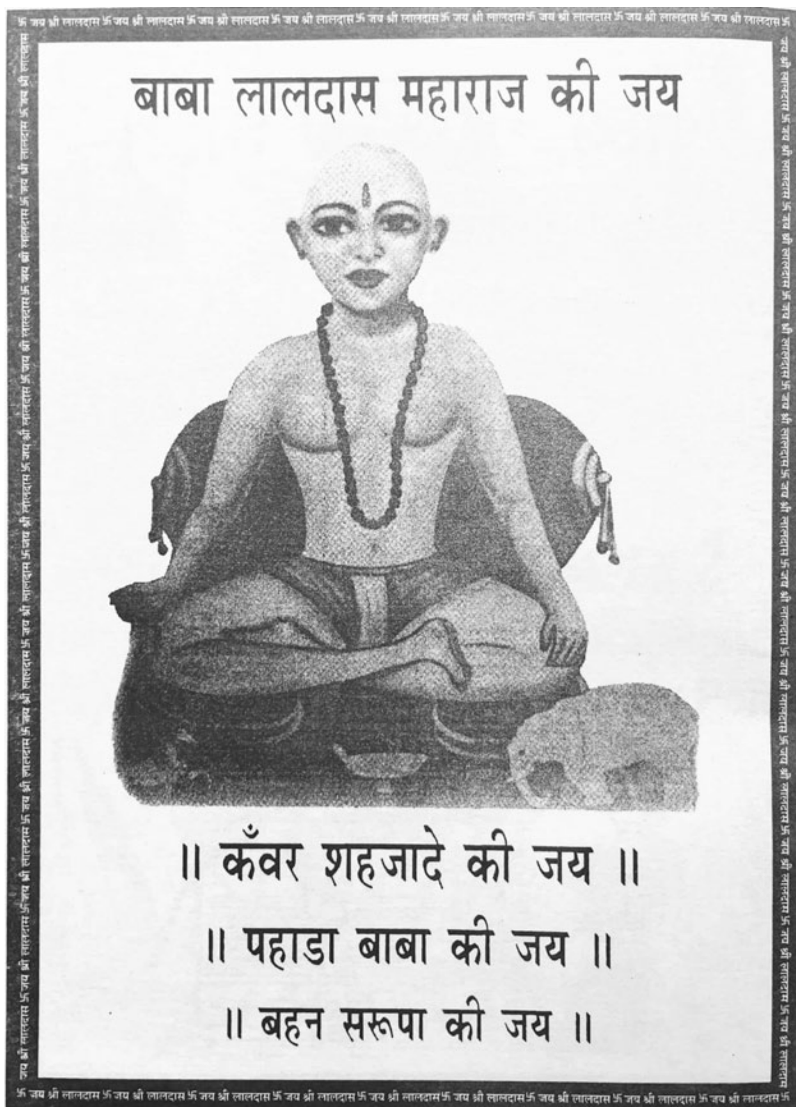

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श्री लालदास अवतार (कथा)

सत शील तप लाल के, दया धर्म और भाव ।
पुण्य करे हर कू भजे, साधु यही स्वभाव ॥

चमत्कार के प्रति नमित होना एक स्वाभाविक प्रवृत्ति है । संसार में असम्भव को संभव करने की क्षमता को चमत्कार नाम दिया गया है । यह कार्य सहज नहीं, दुःसाध्य है ऐसे दुःसाध्य कार्य करने वाली विभूतियाँ पुण्यों के प्रभाव को प्रसार करने के साथ-साथ पापों की अति के प्रसार में इति कारक होती है । उन विभूतियों का निष्प्रह जीवन-दर्शन भीतर-बाहर से निर्मल तथा विशुद्ध रहता है । फलतः विभूतियों के प्रत्येक कार्य मन-क्रम-वचन की त्रिवेणी से शुद्धता के साथ सिद्ध होते हैं । यही सिद्धि जन-मानस को प्रभावित करने में सक्षम रहने के कारण चमत्कार कहलाती है ।

वीर प्रसु राजस्थान वीरता की गाथाओं से परिपूर्ण है । ऐसे पावन धराधाम का सिंह द्वार अलवर क्षेत्र शौर्य का साक्षी होने के साथ सन्त लालदास, चरणदास, सहजोबाई तथा दयाबाई के आध्यात्म चिंतन की भी पावन-स्थली के गौरव से गौरवान्वित है ।

सन्त लालदास जी इसी धराधाम में वन्दनीय सन्त हैं । जिन्होंने साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव का सन्देश देवकर व्यास दुरमति को दूर किया । संत लालदास जी की जन्म स्थली धोलीदूब है जो अलवर नगर के उत्तर में अरावली पर्वतमाला के अंक में शोभित करने वाला रमणीक स्थल है । यह देहात मेवों की बस्ती है । लालदास जी की माता समधा व पिता चांदमल गाँव टोडली (अलवर) के निवासी थे जो गरीबी के करण अपनी ससुराल धौलीदूब आकर रहने लगे । यहीं पर ननिहाल में लालदास जी का जन्म हुआ ।

प्रत्येक युग में पाप के बढ़ने पर उनके नाश के लिये भगवान अवतार लेते हैं । महाभारत के युद्ध क्षेत्र में स्वयं श्री कृष्ण ने अपने मुख से अपने दायित्व का ज्ञान कराने अपने सखा अर्जुन से कहा-

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卐 जय श्री लालदास 卐 जय श्री लालदास 卐 जय श्री लालदास 卐 जय श्री लालदास 卐 जय श्री लालदास 卐 जय श्री लालदास 卐 जय श्री लालदास 卐 जय श्री लालदास 卐 जय श्री लालदास 卐 जय श्री लालदास 卐

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत,
अभ्युत्थानम् धर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ।
परित्राणाय साधूनाम् विनाशाय च दुस्कृताम,
धर्म संस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥

इसी कथन की पुष्टि के रूप में सतयुग में राजा हरिश्चन्द्र के रूप में उच्च कुल में, त्रेता युग में भक्त प्रहलाद के रूप में असुर कुल में, द्वापर युग में धर्मराज युधिष्ठिर के रूप में यादव कुल में तथा इस कलयुग के मध्यकाल में सन्त लालदास के रूप में मेव परिवार में अवतरित हुए ।

जन श्रुति एवं 'डूंगरसी साध' के अनुसार इस महान शक्ति ने भ्रमर का रूप धारण कर माता के गर्भ में दस माह निवास किया तथा अपने पूर्व प्रण की सम्पूर्ती के लिए अवतरित हुए ।

संवत् पन्द्रह सौ सत्तानवे, लाल लियो अवतार ।
सावन कृष्णा पंच रवि, जग हित भक्ति प्रसार ॥

इस साखी के अनुसार विक्रमी संवत् पन्द्रह सौ सत्तानवे के सावन माह के कृष्ण पक्ष की पंचमी वार रविवार की अर्धरात्रि में १२ बजे जग में जन-जन में भक्ति प्रसार हेतु इस धराधाम पर अवतरित हुए ।

पौराणिक व प्रागैतिहासिक काल की अनेक विभूतियों के जीवन परिचय जनश्रुतियों से ही मान्यता प्राप्त किये हुए हैं । ऐसी ही एक जन श्रुति श्री लालदास जी महाराज के जीवन परिचय का मूलाधार है ।

कहते हैं कि परम शक्ति सम्पन्न सच्चिदानन्द आनन्द कन्द परमपिता परमेश्वर का अंश धर्मराज युधिष्ठिर यज्ञ का आयोजन करना चाहते थे, जिसकी सफलता के सम्बन्ध में तत्कालीन विशिष्ट राजाओं से विचार विमर्श करने के हेतु राजा बलि से परामर्श लेने उनके पास गये । राजा बलि अपने समय के परमदानी राजा थे । ऐसे समय पर उनसे परामर्श लेना आयोजन की सफलता का विशेष अंग माना गया । धर्मराज युधिष्ठिर से राजा बलि ने बातों ही बातों में तीन प्रश्न किये ।

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पहला प्रश्न – गीता का भावार्थ क्या है ?

दूसरा प्रश्न – ऋण लेते समय जो भाव लेने वाले का होता है, क्या वही भाव ऋण अदा करते समय होता है ?

तीसरा प्रश्न – तुम्हारा पिता कौन है ?

धर्मराज युधिष्ठिर ने उत्तर दिया–

मन की तो मन जाने, तन ही जाने आपदा ।
गीता का अर्थ कृष्ण जाने, माता जाने सो पिता ॥

अर्थात् (१) गीता का भावार्थ श्री कृष्ण ही जानते हैं और वे ही सदैव दिन-रात इसके प्रचार-प्रसाद में सहायक रहे हैं ।

(२) मेरे द्वारा कभी कर्ज न तो लिया गया और न अदा किया गया । अतः कर्ज लेने वाला ही उसके मन की वही जानता है ।

(३) तीसरे प्रश्न के उत्तर देने में बहुत ज्ञान व चतुराई की आवश्यकता थी । क्योंकि धर्मराज युधिष्ठिर माता कुन्ती की तपस्या से सिद्ध किये हुए आह्वान मंत्र द्वारा उद्भूत थे । अतः भरी सभा में उस प्रकरण को विलोपित कर गये और उसी भावना से जिस भावना से प्रश्न किया गया था, उत्तर देते हुए कहा 'माता जाने सो पिता' ।

इस प्रश्नोत्तर पश्चात् जब धर्मराज युधिष्ठिर अपने घर वापिस आये तो समस्त वृत्तान्त अपनी माता कुन्ती को यथावत् कह सुनाया, जिसे सुनकर माता ने उन्हें 'गंवार' का सम्बोधन दिया । धर्मराज युधिष्ठिर ने मातृ भक्त होने के कारण अपने हृदय में अंकित कर लिया और कहा कि मुझ गंवार की माता तुम्हीं को होना है तथा मैं आपके आदेश का पालन करेने के लिए कलियुग में गंवार जाति में आपकी ही कोख से जन्म लूंगा । माता के प्रति धर्मराज की यह निष्ठा उनके स्वभावानुकूल है ।

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लालदास जी के अवतरित होने का समय आने पर परमपिता परमेश्वर भगवान विष्णु ने समय-समय पर जिस भावना से अपने अंश को राम रूप व श्री कृष्ण रूप में ढाला, उसी भावना से कलियुग के मध्य में अपने अंश को अवतरित होने के लिए लालदास रूप में अवतार लेने को कहा तो लालदास महाराज ने अवतार लेने से पूर्व भगवान विष्णु से निवेदन किया कि भगवान मेरी मुक्ति कैसे संभव होगी ? क्योंकि मृत्युलोक में एक साधारण नर रूप में एक जिह्वा का प्राणी रहूँगा जबकि आपके शेषनाग के सहस्त्र फन हैं और प्रत्येक फन में दो-दो जिह्वा है । इसलिये शेषनाग एक बार में ही हजारों नाम का जाप करता है । मुझ एक जिह्वा वाले से कैसे संभव होगा ?

शेषनाग के सहस्त्र फन, फन-फन जिह्वा दोय ।
पापी नर के एक हैं, नाम न बिन गति होय ॥

इस पर भगवान विष्णु ने 'राम तेरे सहस्त्र नाम, पैदागर तेर सहस्त्र नाम' मंत्र देकर कहा कि यह मंत्र तुम्हारे मुक्ति का आधार तो होगा ही साथ ही तुम्हारे भक्तों द्वारा इस मंत्र का जाप करने पर भक्तों की भी मुक्ति होगी । इसी के साथ भगवान विष्णु ने लालदास जी महाराज को उपदेश दिया कि-

निराकार को सुमरण कीजो, यही सीख साधन कू दीजो ।
निरदावा को उद्यम करियो, दयाभाव घट भीतर धरियो ॥
पर हक भीख छीयो मत हाथा, पर-तिरिया को जानो माता ।
अपनो हक जान कर लीज्यो, वित्त समान दान कछु दीज्यो ॥

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इस उपदेशानुसार लालदास सम्प्रदाय का यह प्रमुख सिद्धान्त है, जिसमें भारतीय भावना की प्रमुखता है, पर मूर्ति पूजा नहीं, क्योंकि निराकार को किसी आकार में नहीं समेटा जा सकता । मूर्ति पूजा तो आध्यात्म का प्रथम सोपान है, इसका चरमोत्कर्ष तो निराकार स्वरूप ही है।

"बिन पगु चलै सुनै बिनु काना, कर बिनु कर्म को विधि नाना ॥"

इसी आश्वस्ती तथा उपदेश के पश्चात् परमपिता परमेश्वर का यह अंश विष्णु लोक से भ्रमर रूप में मृत्यु लोक तक आ पहुंचा और अपनी गुनगुनाहट में सहस्त्र नाम का अनवरत् जाप करता हुआ अपनी माता को ढूँढने निकल पड़ा । इस खोज यात्रा में धौलीदूब के निकट एक कपास के खेत में कपास चुनती हुई अत्यन्त उदारमना नारी को देखा, जो हवा के झोंको से दूसरे के खेत की कपास अपने खेत में आने पर चुन-चुन कर वापिस उसी खेत में डाल रही थी ताकि दूसरे की कपास अपने पास ना रहे । नारी हृदय की विशालता तथा न्यायशीलता देखकर भ्रमर रूपी लालदास ने जान लिया कि यह भक्ति पारायण नारी ही मेरी माता कुन्ती है । इसी समय माता समण रूपी कुन्ती को भ्रमर रूपी लालदास ने अपना रूप दिखाया तो माता समधा ने भी अपने पुत्र को पहचान लिया और कहा कि 'आ मेरे लाल' तथा भ्रमर रूप में कर्ण कुहरों के मार्ग से गर्भ में रूह द्वारा ही प्रवेश कर गये ।

चढ़े कपाली हो निजदास, आकर लियो उदर में वास ।
पिता चांदमल समदा माय, जिनकी कूँख अवतरे आय ॥

यह नारी धौलीदूब गांव में अपने पिता के घर मेव जाति में समदा के नाम जानी जाती थी और मेहनत मजदूरी करके अपना व

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परिवार का पालन ८५ वर्ष की अवस्था में भी कर रही थी। यहीं पर अपनी माता की कोख से लालदास जी महाराज ने जन्म लिया।

इस प्रकार से लालदास जी का अवतरण और उनके द्वारा लालदासी सम्प्रदाय का प्रसारण आरम्भ हुआ, जिनके आराध्य देव निरंजन निराकार थे, वे उस महान शक्ति का आभार अणु-अणु और कण-कण में मानते थे। इसीलिये उन्होंने स्वयं ॐ शब्द के साथ निरंजन निराकार तेरे सहस्त्रनाम पैदागर तेरे सहस्त्र नाम का जाप मंत्र अपने भक्तों को दिया। भक्तों द्वारा अपने प्रथम पूज्य आराध्य गुरू को उनकी कृपा को मंत्र-जाप में लालदास महरबान अपनी भक्ति भाव के साथ जोड़ दिया।

मंत्र का मूल ओंकार का 'ॐ' शब्द है, जिसमें निराकार रूप से महान शक्ति सदैव निवास करती है। इसी कारण साधारण वाक्य के साथ भी 'ॐ' को प्रथम स्थान देने पर वह वाक्य-मंत्र मंत्र-शक्ति से सम्पन्न हो जाता है।

अतः प्रचलित सहस्त्र नाम जाप निम्नानुसार है –

सहस्त्र नाम जाप

ओ३म तेरे सहस्त्र नाम। निरंजन निराकार तेरे सहस्त्र नाम।
राम तेरे सहस्त्र नाम। पैदागर तेरे सहस्त्र नाम।
बाबा लाल महरबान।

लाल साहब के दरबार में, कभी कछू की नाय।
कर्महीन भटकत फिरे, चूक चाकरी माँय॥

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श्री लालदासजी महाराज का जाप मन्त्र

अतुल कुर्सी वेद, कुरान तू हकलात तू रहमान ।

हम बन्दे तेरे तू साहिब, सिरजनहार मेहरबान ॥

ओड़ पास तेरा विस्तार, तुम साहिब सिरजनहार ।

ताँबे का कोट सपाफन ताली, सोने जड़ी किवाड़ी ।

अलहमियाँ आप करो रखवाली ॥

रेन राखे चन्द्रमा, पास राखे सूरज साद राखे थरथरी ।

इक्कीस लोक में आप करे रखवाली ॥

कहे लाल निरन्जन प्यारो,

हर कू मिले सो हर को प्यारो ।

अलह लाल की रक्षा, सतरह दुहाई ।

उपला, परायो ताप, तिजारी कछु रह ना पाये ।

लालदास की रक्षा सही, अपनी भेंट लीजे ।

हमारा काम कीजै ॥

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मंगला चरण

श्री परम श्रद्धेय श्री श्री १०८ श्री सनकादिक ऋषि की स्तुति

बन्दों बारम्बार, सनक सनन्दन गुरू चरण
मोहि उतारों पार, कोष अखंड अध्यात्म के ॥ १

शोभित चारों वेद, विमल विशद भण्डार के ।
अन पौरूष समवेत, श्री गुरू सनकादिक प्रवर ॥ २

सतगुरू के गुरू देव हैं, सनक सनन्दन आदि ।
परम गूढ गत भेद को, दीजे गुरू प्रसाद ॥ ३

चार वेद सम चहुँ ऋषि, चार वरण उद्धार ।
चार आश्रमन पार कर, देत विमल फल चार ॥ ४

पिता श्री चांदमल जी का स्तवन (स्तुति)

धन्य भगत जी चांदमल, धन्य धन्य तव भाग ।
लाल वली कुल चन्द्रमा, पावों रतन चिराग ॥ १

पिता चांदमल तुम बिना, कौन पाय यह भक्ति ।
कुल तारन कुल जन्मियो, धन्य धन्य तव शक्ति ॥ २

तुम परि पूरण तय कियो, पूरण ही फल लीन ।
सतत भक्ति रत ही रहे, परमारथ ही कीन ॥ ३

दूहलोत का गोत में, तुम दूलह भये आन ।
दम्पति की सम्पत्ति रही, राम भक्ति रस खान ॥ ४

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माता श्री समदा जी की प्रार्थना

दोहा – माता समदा सुमति, जननी की सर ताज ।
त्याग तपस्या मूर्तिवर, सभी सँवारे काज ॥
कूंख सुफल सब भाँति से, माता तेरी आज ।
हरि दास सुत जन्मियों अटल कमायो राज ॥
शील संतोषी खान तुम, समता की सम राशि ।
कुन्ती कर्म स्वभाव की, बलिहारी सुख साज ॥
धन्य पिता श्री चाँदमल, धन्य सु समदा मात ।
चन्दन के बेडे चन्दन भये, मोती निपजे स्वाँत ॥

गुरू श्री लालादास जी की वन्दना

श्री गुरू सद वैद्य हैं, रूग्ण हृदय के काज ।
निर्मल उर कर त्वरित ही, देहिं राम अनुराग ॥
लाल मिलावें लाल सों, भव वारिध सों तार ।
लालदास बन जानिये, लाल ख्याल की सार ॥
लाल लाल सब कोई कहै, सेवक साध अनंत ।
लाल ख्याल के भेद को, पावैं बिरला संत ॥
लाल तुम्हारे चरण की, रज को धन्य अनेक ।
धन्य धन्य तव बचना को, बिगड़े बने अनेक ॥
लाल लाल के जौहर को, मूरख जानै नाहिं ।
जानै कोई जौहरी, जो गुण लालन माहिं ॥
भव वारिध के भंवर में, डूबे बहे अनेक ।
लाल दास बोहित बने, बूढ़े तरे प्रत्येक ॥
कौन सुने तेरे बिना, हे लालन के लाल ।
आतम परम प्रकाश की, गल तेरे में माल ॥

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श्री पहाड़ा जी की वन्दना

परम सनेही राम के, बीर पहाड़ा नाम ।
पापन पर्वत क्षय करो पुण्य पुण्य के ठाम ॥ १
यात्री आवें देश के, कर दर्शन अभिलाष ।
सब की मनसा पूर्णकर, अड़े सँवारो काज ॥ २
सतगुरू पूत सपूत तुम, धन्य आप को भाग ।
जग मंगल कारन करन, हरन द्वेष सब राग ॥ ३
धर्म भीरू की प्रार्थना, कर जोरे महाराज ।
राज काज के कर्म मैं, पूर्ण तुम्हारो राज ॥ ४

श्री कुँवर ध्रुव जी वन्दना

परम कृपालू ध्रुव कुँवर, संतन को सोभाग ।
धन्य धन्य साधून को, दर्शन मिले सुभाग ॥ १

स०- काज किये बड़ सन्तन के, धन भाग उन्हें जो मिले हर्षाये ।
संकट टार किये उजले, मंतगन के पोषण करवाये ॥ २
कितने अनाथ सनाथ किये, उल्लास भरे घर को उठ धाये ।
धर्म भीरू की तरणि भंवर विच, तुम बिन कौन किनारे लगाये ॥३

दो०- ध्रुव मंगल ध्रुव देश के बैकुंठ द्वारै वास
करत दरस पापज कटैं, ज्यों रवि तिमिर विनाश ॥ ४
कोढ़ी काया कंच सी, कर देते तत्काल ।
चक्षु हीन को नेत्र दे, पल में करो निहाल ॥ ५

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श्री राम स्तुति

श्री रामचन्द्र कृपालु भजु मन हरण भव भय दारूणं ।
नवकंज-लोचन कंज मुख, कर कंज, पद कंजारूणं ॥
कन्दर्प अगणित अमित छवि नवनील-नीरद सुन्दरं ।
पटपीत मानहु तड़ित रूचि शुचि नौमि जनक सुतावरं ॥
भजु दीनबन्धु दिनेश दानव दैत्यवंश-निकन्दनं ।
रघुनन्द आनन्द कंद कौशलचन्द दशरथ-नन्दनं ॥
सिर मुकुट कुण्डल तिलक चारू उदारू अंग विभूषणं ॥
आजानु-भुज-शर-चाप-धर, संग्राम जित-खरदूषणं ॥
इति वदति तुलसीदास शंकर-शेष-मुनि-मन-रंजनं ।
मम हृदय-कंज निवास कुरू, कामादि खलदल-गंजनं ॥
मनु जाहिं राचेउ मिलहि सो बरू सहज सुंदर सांवरो ।
करूणा निधान सुजान सील सनेह जानत रावरो ॥
एहि भांति गौरि असीस सुनि सिय सहित हिय हरषी अली ।
तुलसी भवनिहि पूजि-पुनि-पुनि मुदित मन मंदिर चली ॥

दोहा :

जानि गौरि अनुकुल सिय, हियं हरषु न जाइ कहि ।
मंजुल मंगल मूल, वाम अंग फरकन लगे ॥

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प्रार्थना

जय-जय सुरनायक जन सुखदायक प्रनतपाल भगंवता ।
गौ द्विज हितकारी जय असुरारी सिंधुसुता प्रिय कंता ॥
पालन सुर धरंनी अद्भूत करनी मरम न जानई कोई ।
जो सहज कृपाला दीनदयाल करउ अनुग्रह सोई ॥
जय-जय अविनाशी सब घट बासी व्यापक परमानंदा ।
अविगत गोतींत चरित पुनींत माया रहित मुकुन्दा ॥
जेंहि लागि बिरागी अति अनुरागी विगत मोह मुनिवृंदा ।
निशि बासर ध्यावहिं गुन गन गावहिं जयति सच्चिंदानदा ॥
जेहिं सृष्टि उपाई त्रिविद्यि बनाई संग सहाय न दूजा ।
सो करउ उधारी चितं हमारी जानिव भगति न पूजा ॥
जो भव भय भंजन मुनि मन रंजन गंजन विपति बरूथा ।
मन बच क्रम बानी छाडि सयानी सरन सकल सुर जूथा ॥
शारद श्रुति सेवा रिषय असेषा जा कहूं कोउनहिं जाना ।
जेहि दीन पियारें वेद पुकारे द्रवउ सो श्री भगवाना ॥
भव वरिधि मदर सब विद्यि सुन्दर गुनमंदिर सुख पूंजा ।
मुनि सिद्ध सकल सुर परम भयातुर नमत नाथ पद कंजा ॥

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श्री बाबा लालदास चालीसा

दोहा : संत शिरोमणि सद्गुरू, दीन गरीब निवाज ।
भक्तिन के हित करन को, धरयो दिव्य तनु आज ॥

जय जय श्री लालदास बाबा । बड़े भाग्य जिन दर्शन पावा ॥
भक्त जनन के हैं हितकारी । दीन दुःखी या होय सुखारी ॥
दरश करत सब पातक कटहीं । ध्यान करत सब संकट हरहीं ॥
रूप आलौकिक अति हितकारी । दीनन के पितु औ महतारी ॥
नाथ तुम्हारी आलौकिक शोभा । भयो सुखी सम्मुख महं जोभा ॥
प्रीति आलौकिक बरीन न जाई । गयो निकट जो सो वह पाई ॥
नाथ दास पै कृपा करीजे । दीन जान मोंहि आशिष दीजै ॥
जाके सुख आवें तब नामा । मिलै ताहि चित्त महं विश्रामा ॥
रोगी भोगी जोगी आवे । दरश करत वाँछित फल पावे ॥
चरण शरण में करै मुकामा । होय सकल परिपूरन कामा ॥
भटकट ठोकर खात उबारो । दीन जान बाबा उद्धारो ॥
पाहि पाहि तब शरण नमामी । मातु पिता तुम अन्तर्यामी ॥
ध्यान धरै जो कोई निशिदिन । मिटे दुःख पावे सुख तत् छिन ॥
अर्चा पूजा ध्यान लगाई । धूप दीप नैवेध बनाई ॥
करैं निवेदित चरणिन मांही । सकल अमंगल मूल नशाहीं ॥
ध्यान ज्ञान सो पूजा करहीं । बाबा चरणिन महं जो परहीं ॥
जो बाबा की पूजा करहीं । मिलै परम सुख नरकन परहीं ॥
लेय चित्त जो बाबा नामा । सकल होंहि नित पूरन कामा ॥
चरण कमल महं ध्यान लगाई । करै नाम को पाठ अधाई ॥
ताको तुरतहिं शोक नशावै । जो बाबा परसादी पावै ॥

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राम रामेति रामेति, रमे रामे मनोरमे ।
सहस्त्रनाम तत्तुल्यं, राम नाम वरानने ॥

मंगलाचरण

'श्री जी बाबा' चरणरज, गणपति बुद्धि अगाध ।
लालदास की दया से, मिटें सकल बहु व्याधि ॥
गुरु कृपा में समाहित, ब्रह्मा-विष्णु-महेश ।
जब गुरु कर सिर पर रहे, कभी न व्यापै क्लेश ।
सतगुरु लाल सुहावने, दें हरजश-सन्देश ।
सहस्त्रनाम के जाप का, मन में हुआ प्रवेश ॥

श्री लालदास चालीसा

दोहा- श्री गुरु पद्म-पराग का, अंजन आँखन आँज ।
तप्पराग से बहुरि तू, मैले-मन को माँज ॥
हरजश-गा हरिभजन कर, दुई भाव को त्याग ।
सबका मालिक राम है, उससे कर अनुराग ॥

॥ चौपाई ॥

जय निरगुण-निधि सन्त समाजा, सहज सुधारक सबके काजा ।१।
जय श्रम-साधक जय उद्योगी, भोगी रहकर भी बड़योगी ।२।
तुमरी कीर्ति साध जनभाखैं, साखी-शबद-सुधा-रस चाखै ।३।
चांद चन्द समदा-सुत साँचै, गृहस्थ-धर्म भोगरी मन राँचै ।४।
तुम घट-घट की गति पहिचानो, कुमति-निवार सुमति संधानो ।५।
धौलीदूब जन्म-थल पायो, जग में वा थल नाम बढ़ायो ।६।
बत्तीस बरस चिन्तन चित्त धारो, लाल-गुरु शुभ मंत्र प्रचारो ।७।
भक्ति करी भव-भीति भगाई, रहे सभी के सदा सहाई ।८।
गिरि से चुन-चुन ईंधन लाते, काठ बेच नित काज चलाते ।९।
एक निशा पर्वत पर काटी, भोर वही निश्चित परिपाटी ।१०।
अलवर में पहुँचे जब आई, हाथी ने वहाँ धूम मचाई ।११॥
भगगी मच गई चारों ओर, बचो-बचो का गूँजा शोर ।१२॥
हाथी-मस्त निकट तुम आयो, सहज-भाव हो शीश नवायो ।१३॥
प्रथम पूज्य गणपति कहलाते, वे भी तुमको शीश नवाते ।१४।

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तुम अलमस्त न मन में शंका, निरभयता के बज गये डंका ।१५।
लोपी रहकर परम अलोपी, कभी न काहू पै मति कोपी ।१६।
अधर चले न धरती छूवै, बोझा सू ना गरदन मूवै ।१७।।
'चिश्ती-गदन' तिजारा वासी सिद्ध-पीर 'औ' जगत उदासी ।१८।
अलामात लख अजब अनोखो, मन ही मन 'चिश्ती' ने घोखी ।१९।
यह तो पहुँचा हुवा मलंगा, पैदागर का असली संगा ।२०।
अलवर हुवा दोनों का मेला, रचना रची उपाया गैला ।२१।
चिश्ती-अर्ज लाल स्वीकारी, दुई भाव 'औ' दुरमति मारी ।२२।
हिन्दु-तुरक नव राह दिखाई, दुरमति कुतिया मार भगाई ।२३।
प्रेम-प्रीत का पाठ पढ़ाया, द्वेष-क्लेश का किया सफाया ।२४।
नाना-थल से कर प्रस्थाना, सन्त-रूप का साधा बाना ।२५।
पहुँचे चढ़ दृढ़ करी तपस्या, सिंह-सर्प की भुला समस्या ।२७।
बाद तपस्या यज्ञ रचायो, वृद्ध-बाल सब जीमण आयो ।२८।
रुच-रुच सब को भात छकाया, बचा भात खैरात लुटाया ।२९।
बरियाणी-सुत प्राण उबारे, कीरति के बज उठे नगारे ।३०।
जीव-सृष्टि-सेवक विख्याता, सत्य-दया-करुणा संत्राता ।३१।
चोरी-जारी-भीख निषेधी, श्रम कर उदर-भरण संवेदी ।३२।
बाँझ नारी की गोद विकासी, हरिदास की दृष्टि प्रकाशी ।३३।
दुखिया जन के काज संवारे, सफल किये अनगिन भंडारे ।३४।
दुर्व्यसनों से सतत अलत्का भेद-भाव के पूर्ण त्यक्ता ।३५।
गुरू महिमा के पूर्ण प्रचारक, अलख-अगोचर भक्ति विचारक ।३६।
हरजश-राम भक्ति-अनुरागी, राम-नाम रटना लौ लागी ।३७।
सिर चोटी मन-पूजा-पाठा, साधक बने तीन सौ साठा ।३८।
सहस्त्र-नाम तुमको अतिभाये, निराकार-निर्गुण पद गाये ।३९।
मन से भजो लाल की वाणी, भुक्ति-मुक्ति-दाता कल्याणी ।४०।

दोहा : सुमरण कर हरिनाम नित, दलि से दुई निकाल ।
मेल-मिलन ही ब्रह्म है, कहते प्यारे लाल ।।
प्यारे लाल के कथन को, मन में निश्चय धार ।
कलयुग के भगवान हैं, लाल 'रूप' अवतार ।।
'बोलो लालदास बाबा की जय'

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साखी (संध्याकाल)-1

लाल जी पाप कटे हरि नाम सू जो जन जपे शरीर ।
नाम बिना बह जांवेगे जैसे नदी भादवे नीर ॥
भाव भजन भादू नदी सभी उठी गरनाय ।
सरिता वे ह जानियें जो जेठ मास ठहराय ।
ज्ञान ध्यान दत्तब दया । हरि दर्शन सू ख्याल ॥
दस्त कुशादा पाक दिल तू साहिब को लाल ।
गौरी गोविन्द गाइये सामे आई रात ॥
साझं पड़ै जो सोइये अपने धर कू जाये ।
गोरी गोविन्द गाइय नातर रहिये सोय
निश वाशर हर कू रटो लाल कैर सो होय ॥

राम नाम मतवारे सत गुरू - 2

राम नाम मतवारे सतगुरू..२..सत अरू शील दया निर्लोभी मोहरू ममता मारे ॥

भर भर प्याला हर रस पावे आठ पहर सर सारे ॥
पैंडा में गज हसती मिलियो मयमंता गज भारे
हाथीवान दूर भू टेरे आगा सू हठ जारे ॥
ये मयमंता बहुत है खूनी तीन सलाम करारे ।
हाथीवान उतर कर धायो चरणन शीश नवारे
तुम सतगुरू साहिब के प्यारे मोकू राखो चरण सहारे
सतगुरू वचन सांच कर बोला कुमार्ग छोड दे प्यारे ॥
सीख सुणी गुरू लाल की खुल गये भाग हमारे
हाथीवान साध बुद्ध पाई शरण लाल की रहोरे ॥

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राम नाम है ऐसा सतगुरू - 3

राम नाम है ऐसा सतगुरू - २

सुआ पढ़ावत गाणिका तारी खूबा सदना कैसा
भिलनी का बेर प्रीत सू पाये अन्तर नाही अंदेशा
अजामील घर साधू आये नाम की साख हमेशा
दुर्योधन की मेवा त्यागी साग विदुर घर रूखा
नामा ध्रुव के कारज सारे सैन भगत का सांसा
जन प्रहलाद अग्न ते उबारे भक्त की भीड मिटाता
जन रैदास कबीर कमाला लाल भगत हर पासा
जन भीखन कू मिले लाल सतगुरू सुमरो लाल हमेशा ॥

आयो शरण तुम्हारी सतगुरू - 4

आयो शरण तुम्हारी सतगुरू-२
मैं आधीन तम्हारो सतगुरू अब की बार हमारी ।
हमसे पतित अनेक उबारे ऐसी साख तुम्हारी
महानन्द कू काया दीनी आँख हठीले दाढी ।
बूढत जहाज समुन्दर सू तारी जा दिन पड़ी शहा पे भारी ॥
बोहत की प्रतिज्ञा राखी प्रण कियो तैने भारी
मेटो ग्रहण हुई अमावस्या साध वचन नहीं टारी
जहाँ जहाँ भीड पडी तेरा जन पे तहाँ करै सहाई
लाल प्रभू मोहे सतगुरू मिलो है लाल चरण बली जाई ॥

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भजन

हरजी तैने लाल पठायो आप.....2

लिख चेहरी परवानो भेजो । दई रे दरशन की छाप ।।

हरदम हरजी के रहत हजूरी पाया सूधा जाप। हरजी तैने लाल पठायो आप...

ऐसा सतगुरू हमे है मिलो है जैसो कोई भाई ना बाप ।

उत्तर दखन लाल पूरब पश्चिम जस जाहिर मेवात ।

हरजी तैने लाल...........

कल मे आन गजा गज गाजो दियो है देवन कू जवाब

गाओ रे लाल निरंजन प्यारो हरकू जपे सो हरि कू प्याारो ।

भजन

मै बिनजारो मेरा रामजी मैं तुम्हारो ।

मेरो दुबलो सो बैल गुण नही लादे दीजो पंथ बुहार ।।

लादा सत्य शील सुकृत धन, यही बिनज उर धारो ।

ऐसो बिनज मोपे बिनजो ना जावें, कठिन बिनज उर हारो ।

कोटि चन्दन क्रोड धन उबरे जबर महा पतिहारो ।

मारग चलत फूंक पग धरियो जब पावे हरि द्वारो ।।

गाओ रे लाल निरंजन प्यारो, सब साधुन पार उतारो प्रभूजी ।।..2

भजन

मै तो गुरू चरणन पर वारी ।

महर करो गुरू दर्शन दीजो, आतम तत करारी ।।

अजपा का मोही सुमरन दीना, उर अंतर हम धारी ।।

गुरू समान और ना कोई, देखा सकल निहारी ।।

भज हरिदास लाल गुरू चरनन कू बारम्बार उचारी ।।

गाओ रे लाल निरंजन प्यारो, हर कु जपे सो हर कू प्यारो ।।

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श्री प्रभू लाल दास जी - प्रातः काल के भजन साखी

पौ फटो तडको भयो । जागी जिया जौन ।
सब मिल माँगों राम सू अपनी अपनी चौन ॥
हरि दाता जग मांगता रिजक सबन कू देय ।
जल थल जिया जौन की खबर सबन की लेय ॥
पैदा किया की शरम है पाले दे दे चौन ॥
पाले पोखे गत करे साहिब बहुत भलो
साँची शरण लाल की पकड़ी । सतगुरू लाल मिलो ॥
ऐसा सतगुरू लाल हैं भीड पडे तो सहाय ॥
अगन जलत प्रहलाद की वर्षा कीनी आय
आधो दरशन पयो लाल को जासू भयो निहाल
शरण गहाई राम की तुम सब के प्रतिपाल
पापज दिन विडार के बैठो देवन दाल
रैन दिनाः तुम कू जपो हिरदै को माल
लाल प्रभु मोहे सतगुरू मिले है जाकी निर्मल चाल ॥
दरश पहाड़ा जी को कीजे मुख बरसै है नूर
परमारथ कू औतरे हरि के रहत हजूर
इन्द्र अखाड़ो नित रहे बाजे अनहद तूर
साधू जन आँवे दरश कू मनसा हो भरपूर
सहस नाम हरि का जपो बैठो शील स्वरूप
लाल प्रभु मोहे सतगुरू मिले है राखो हाल हजूर ॥
दरश कुवर को कीजे । शुभ काम सरेगें ।
सैमिली में बैठ के आछो राज करे ।
जिन के केडे आप है वे काहे कू डरे ।
आ रवा सब छोड के हरि को ध्यान धरे ॥
लाल प्रभु मोहे सतगुरू मिले है जासू नाव तिरै

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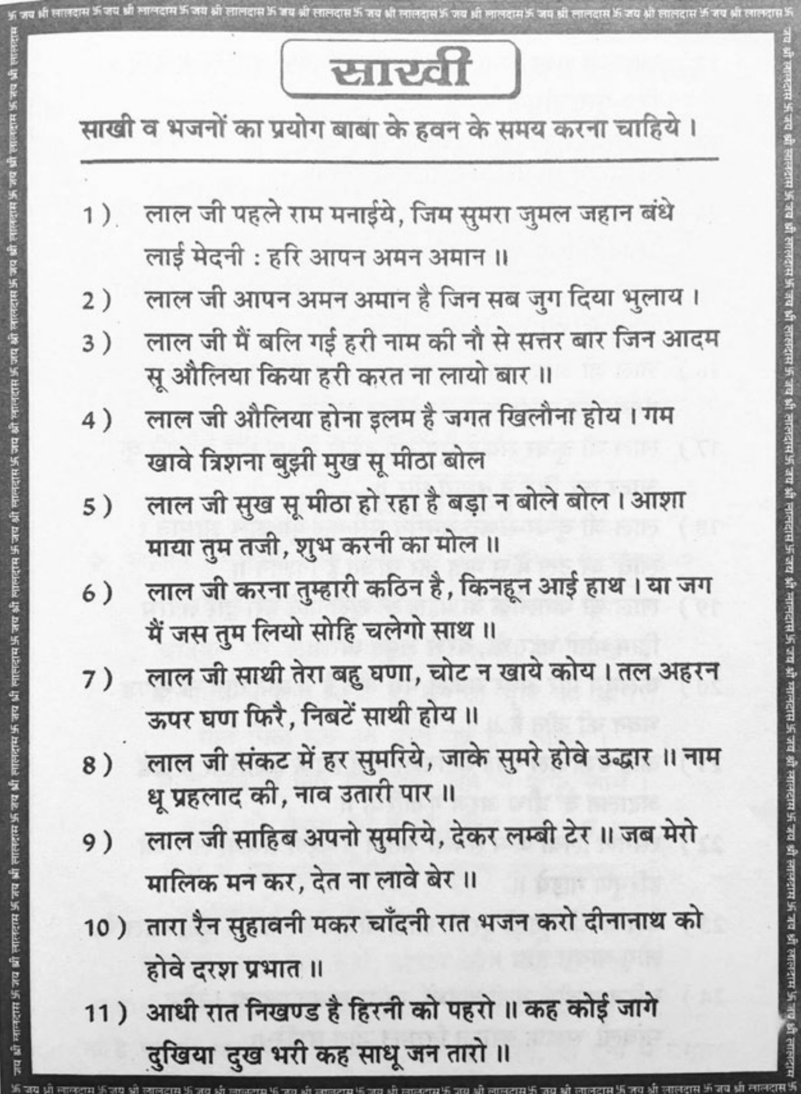

साखी

साखी व भजनों का प्रयोग बाबा के हवन के समय करना चाहिये ।

1) लाल जी पहले राम मनाईये, जिम सुमरा जुमल जहान बंधे लाई मेदनी : हरि आपन अमन अमान ॥

2) लाल जी आपन अमन अमान है जिन सब जुग दिया भुलाय ।

3) लाल जी मैं बलि गई हरी नाम की नौ से सत्तर बार जिन आदम सू औलिया किया हरी करत ना लायो बार ॥

4) लाल जी औलिया होना इलम है जगत खिलौना होय । गम खावे त्रिशना बुझी मुख सू मीठा बोल

5) लाल जी सुख सू मीठा हो रहा है बड़ा न बोले बोल । आशा माया तुम तजी, शुभ करनी का मोल ॥

6) लाल जी करना तुम्हारी कठिन है, किनहून आई हाथ । या जग मैं जस तुम लियो सोहि चलेगो साथ ॥

7) लाल जी साथी तेरा बहु घणा, चोट न खाये कोय । तल अहरन ऊपर घण फिरै, निबटें साथी होय ॥

8) लाल जी संकट में हर सुमरिये, जाके सुमरे होवे उद्धार ॥ नाम धू प्रहलाद की, नाव उतारी पार ॥

9) लाल जी साहिब अपनो सुमरिये, देकर लम्बी टेर ॥ जब मेरो मालिक मन कर, देत ना लावे बेर ॥

10) तारा रैन सुहावनी मकर चाँदनी रात भजन करो दीनानाथ को होवे दरश प्रभात ॥

11) आधी रात निखण्ड है हिरनी को पहरो ॥ कह कोई जागे दुखिया दुख भरी कह साधू जन तारो ॥

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12) लाल जी राजा राणा छत्रपती सावधान क्यों ना होय ॥ एक दिन ऐसा होयगा सबकू चले बिछोय ॥

13) लाल जी राजा राणा छत्रपती, सुनो खान सुल्तान ॥ जिया चाहो तो हरि भजो, नहीं चन्द रोज मेहमान ॥

14) लाल जी शुभ बोलण जग शीतला, सत्य ले और सांच ॥ सब अंधयारी छिप गई उगे पूरण मासी चांद ॥

15) लाल जी पूनम जग पूरी हुई कभी ना ओछी होय ॥ दसू दिशा की मंडी, म्हारो सतगुरू लीनी सोध ॥

16) लाल जी अटल ओलिया शेरपुर, जाके कंचन बरसे नूर ॥ दरश देख पापज कटै, भागे दुख दलीद्दर दूर ॥

17) लाल जी कुंवर संकटे सुमरियो ओडी में धन धीर ॥ आये कू आदर करे डिगे ने बधाये धीर ॥

18) लाल जी कुंवर संकट समरीये मेरी कर मुश्किल आसान । लावै पर दल में सू मोड़ कर बाजत है निशान ॥

19) लाल जी मातलौक के महल के खुले पावें हरी द्वार ॥ रिम झिम मोती महर के, बरशै अमृत धार ॥

20) कलयुग घोर अंधेर सकल भय भीत है ॥ सप्त दीप नौ खण्ड भक्त की जीत है ॥

21) कोई पंजीवाल कोई सदीवाल कोई हदफ हजारिया ॥ खडे अदालत के बीच अरज गुजारिया ॥

22) रसगण लियो जन्म सैमली आइये ॥ बहण सरूपा लार की हरिगुण गाइये ॥

23) वेश बनयो गूदड़ी दुरमत लारी धोय ॥ हरजी की बुद्ध लाल पै, लोग बावरा होय ॥

24) सहित कबीले बली कहावें, कुंवर कुतब पहाडा । सोज सांवली सरूपा बरकत निरमल जोग सवाँरे ॥

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25) सामग्री सब टोट है साखी सीखे नाहीं, नैनन सू चहूँ घट फिरे कपट हिय के माँही ॥

26) दुनिया लावे लूट के तू दियो भी मत लेव, इन बातन मेरो हरि खुशी और बात सब खेह ॥

27) शब्द रसायन शब्द गुरू, शब्द ब्रह्मा का रूप ॥ ईतने गुण या शब्द में, देख शब्द का रूप ॥

28) राम जगत में है बड़ा या पटतर ना कोय । चार वेद वाकूँ रटें निरख परख लो लाय ॥

29) अलख लखा जिन सब लखा, लखा अलख नहीं होय । वह तो साहिब अलख है, वाकू लखेगा कोय ॥

भोग का भजन

❖ लालन हेलोदीनो आन साधन के काज दुनिया के कारने-२

इतवारी अपनो कर पठियो, हरि सू बाँधो सूत ।
चांदमल घर लाल चन्द्रमा, धन समदा तेरी कूंख ॥
धोलीदूब में जन्म लियो है, धन वा भूमि को भाग ।
मात पिता सब उठ बोले पुत्र हुए औतार ।
सूखी लकड़ी नित उठ बेची, अंत ना पायो कोय ।
आधी तो खैरात करे है दिन दिन दूनी होय ॥
पैडा में गज हस्ती मिलियो, कुंजर करी सलाम ।
हाथीवान निरख कर देखे तेरा बड़ा कलाम ॥
हाथीवान उतर कर बूझे, आपन कौन कहावो भाई ॥
सतुगरू वचन साँच कर बोले, जब पीलवान बुध पाई ॥ ....
खोड पहाडी आन विराजे, भजन करे दिन रात, दी दूनी में प्रगट

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भयो है शक्कर बाँटे हाथ सिहं शिला में आसन माँढो, भजन करें दिन रात, सिंह सर्प की शंक न मानी, सब जुग आयो हाथ ॥
बांधोली में यज्ञ रची है, ख्वावे बूरा भात, जो आवे जाही कू पावे, धन्य लाल तेरी साख ॥
दाना पानी अब बना है, लाल टोडी को धाये । कुल का लोग सिद्ध जब कहिये, तब रसगण कू आयो ॥
रसगण में एक झुपडी छाई कुँवर औतारी आये । एक म्यान दो खाँडा कहिये, बाँधोली पहुँचाओ ॥

सखी सरूपा रिध सिध बीबी, वीर पहाडा गाजी । बाँधोली मे कुँवर बिराजे, जश की नौबत बाजी ॥ मक्का मन्दिर अजब बना है लाल त्रिवेणी न्हाये । गांठ उमर की आय लगी है नगंला माही समाये ॥ छः महीना नगंला में बैठो हुकम राम को लावे । पाक गुसल साधन कू दीनी, जब शेरपुर पहुँचाये ॥ कलयुग मैं आछी भक्ति करी है साँचो हर को दास । अजमत साध तेरा जश गावे, लाल मिलन की आश ॥ लाल कू हेलो दीनो आज...

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दास भजन निस्तारो सतगुरू - 5

दास भजन निस्तारो-२

या जन्म हमारो सुधारो सतगुरू जन्म हमारो सुधारो
माटी की भीत पवन को गारो कोल कियो है करारो ।
पानी सू नर पैदा कियो अन्न को कियो सहारो
सहित कबीले बली कहावें कुँवर कुतब पहाडों ।
सोज सावँली सरूपा बरकत । अविचल राज तिहारो ।
दास भजन निस्तारो....

अंगना में खेलत सातू भाई - 6

अंगना में खेलत सातू भाई लाल भक्त ।
सतगुरू सतवादी हर जी सू प्रीत लगाई ॥

पिता चांदमल समदा माता । जिनकी कूख औतरे आई ॥
माय भौगरी साँची बंदी कस्सन कर कर खाई । .....
आसल दे गोकलं दे माता लाल भक्त बरपाई ।
चाँदो लाडो मानो माता सुमरो एक ही साँई ।
राजकौर जिन राज कमायो । सखी साँवली माई ॥
कुँवर पहाडा शेरदास गोसदास हरी दर्शन नित जाई ।
सखी सरूपा रिध सिध बीबी संग ही संग पठाई ।
नोरंगदेय संतोशरी चिमनी मुक्त नवल दे बाई ।
काले दास और कुँवर फतेदास संतन के सुख दाई ।
सोज सांवली कंवर कोरानी सुफल कूख की जाई ॥
सुमरण भजन करो साहिब को सकल पाप मुचजाई ।
सीख सुणे सोई फल पावे हरजी के होवे बडाई ।
प्रेमदास जन शरण लालकी रामचरण बली जाई ।
अंगना में खेलै सातो भाई

भजन

लाज सरूपा जी ने राखी भक्तन की।
दीन कमायो बीबी दुनिया त्यागी अपनो राम कियो है राजी।।
कलयुग केडो दीन कमायो दिल की दुरमत भागी।।
सतशील हिरदा में जाके । चन्द सूरज तेरो साकी।।
आठ पहर हरजी के आगे। यह बुद्ध है बाबा की।।
लाल प्रभू मोहे सतगुरू मिले है बिनती सुनो मलखाँ की।।

भजन

लाल मेरो धनमाल लाल दातार है
लाल ही को पूँजी पल्लो। लाल साहुकार है।।
या दुनिया को लाल साधु। मोकु सिद्ध मुरार है।।
लाल ही को दीयो खाऊँ, लाल ही के दरश आऊँ।।
लाल के दरबार साधो, दूनी जय जय कार है।।
लाल के ही हाथ बात, राम ही के रहे साथ।।
लाल ही उतारे साधे, खेवा पहली पार है।।
आन देवन सू अनबन, साहिब सेती पार ही।।
हरीदास साध तेरो यश गावे। लाल के दरबार है।।

भजन

लाल को चिराग बाबा, देखो जी धर्मात्मा।।
राम के खंदाये आये, साधुन में सुख चैन लाये।।
सो कबीले बली कहाये, दुहलौत का गौत में।।
दादा तेरो चांदमल, पिता तेरो ओलियो।।
माता तेरी भौगरी। बैठी खिलावे गोद में ।।
सतजुग राज कियो, सरबस दान दियो ।।
आछी आछी जग्य दीनी। बाँदोली का खेत में।।
हरिदास साध, कुंबर तेरो जस गाये।।
मोज तो तुम्हारी पावे, ज्ञान ध्यान पावे साधुन का साथ में।
गाओ रे लाल जिरंजन प्यारो हर कू जपे सो हर कू प्यारो।।

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भजन

जन का बन्धन काट मुरारी...2

मोहे विषम ज्वर आन सतावे होवे अनत दुख: भारी ।।

ये बन्धन कटबे को नाँही ओषद बिना तुम्हारी ।।

तुम ही वैध धन्वन्तर मेरे तुम ही मूल पंसारी ।।

तुम्हे छोड कहां जाऊ मेरे सतगुरू कौन है दिखाऊ नाडी

मंकारी के सुत राखन कू प्रण कियौ तैने भारी ।

द्रोपदी को तैने चीर बढायो । जासू सकल सभा पचहारी ।।

नाम लेत गोविन्द को गाणिका। बैठ विमान सिधारी।।

लाल प्रभू मोहे सतगुरू मिले है लीजो खबर हमारी ।।

गाओ रे लाल निरन्जन प्यारो हर कू जपे सो हर कू प्यारो।।

भजन

मेरा मुझमे कुछ नाही जी। जो कुछ है सो सांई।।

शीश साहिब को बाशा कहिये। श्री नारायण नैनन माही।।

नाशा माही निरंजन कहिये। सिरोमणी श्रवण माही।।

कंठ माही श्री कृष्ण विराजै। तन मे तीरथ भाई।।

इन्द्रिन में दीनानाथ बसत है। मन में मालक भाई।।

चित माही चितानन्द विराजे। रोम रोम रघूराई।।

छगन मे दर्शन की आशा। पग परिक्रम्मा धाई ।।

कर जोड हरिदास बिनती करेजी। प्रभू लाल के चरणन मांही।।

गावो रे लाल निरंजन प्यारो हरकू जपे सो हर कू प्यारो।।

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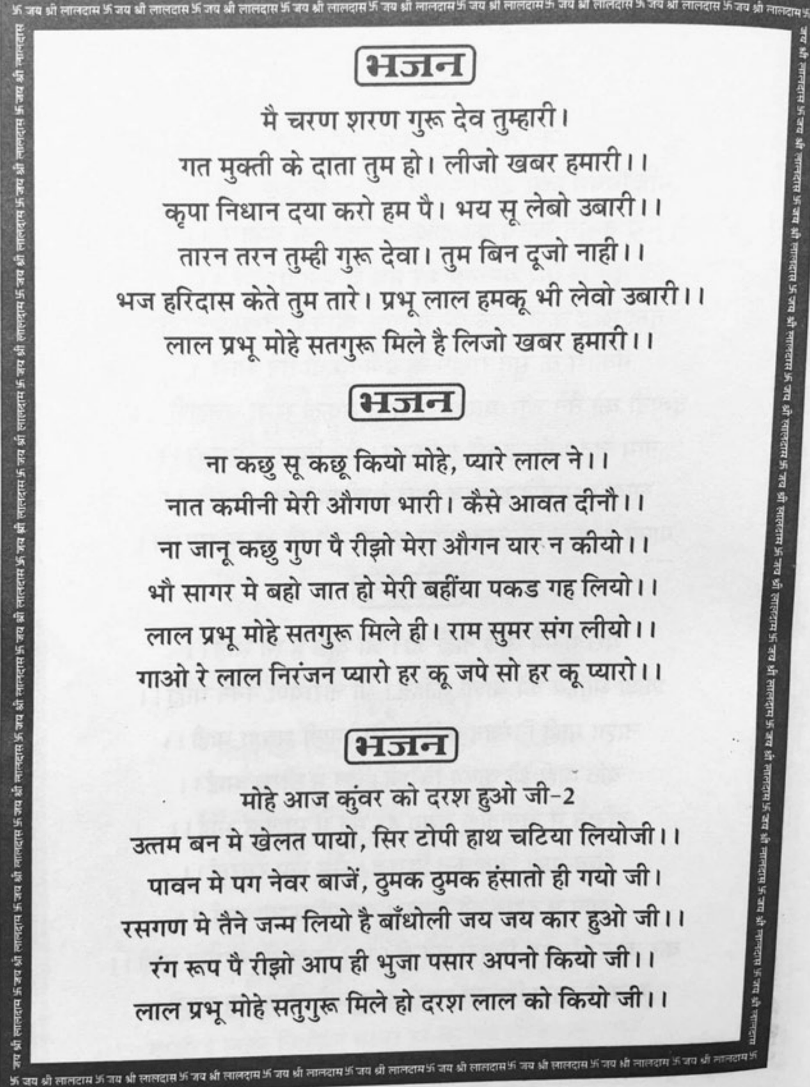

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हम सब मिलकर बाबा

हम सब मिलकर आए बाबा तेरे दरबार

भरदो झोली सबकी तेरे पूरण भण्डार

होवे जब संध्याकाल, निर्मल होके तत्काल

अपना मस्तक झुकाएं, करके तेरा ख्याल

तेरे दर पर आके बैठे, सारा परिवार ... हम सब... ॥१॥

लेके दिल में फरियाद, करते हम तुमको याद

जब हो मुश्किल की घड़ियां, मांगे तुमसे इमदाद

सब से बढ़कर ऊँचा जग में तेरा आधार ... हम सब... ॥२॥

चाहे दिन हो विपरित, होवे तुमसे ही प्रीत

सच्ची श्रद्धा से गाये तेरी, भक्ति के गीत

होवे सबका बाबा जी तेरे चरणों में प्यार ... हम सब... ॥३॥

तू है सब जग का वाली, करता सबकी रखवाली

हम है रंग-रंग के पौधे, तू है हम सबका माली

'पाथिक' बगीचा है ये तेरा सुन्दर संसार ... हम सब... ॥४॥

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।। श्री लालदास की वन्दना ।।

जगती रहे लालदास, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥ टेक ॥
जगती रहे बाबा लाल, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ।
किसने बाबा तेरा भवन बनाया-२
किसने हरिगुण गाया, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥१॥
भक्तों ने बाबा तेरा भवन बनाया-२
साधन हरिगुण गाया, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥२॥
किसने बाबा तेरे चादर चढ़ाई-२
किसने ज्योति जगाई, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥३॥
भक्तों ने बाबा तेरी चादर चढ़ाई-२
संतन ज्योति जगाई, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥४॥
लाल ध्वजा और सवा रूपैया-२
भक्तों ने भेंट चढ़ाया, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥५॥
बूरा भात का थाल सजाया-२
प्रेभ से भोग लगाया, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥६॥
दूर-दूर से यात्री आवें-२
हर्ष-हर्ष यश गाया, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥७॥
बाबा की महिमा है भारी-२
सबने दर्शन पाया, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥८॥
सब की करी कामना पूरी-२
मन बांछित फल पाया, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥९॥
हरिभक्तन जब ध्यान लगालैं-२
अनहद सबद सुनाया, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥१०॥
भक्त मण्डल बाबा तेरे दर आया,
चरणनन शीश नवाया, ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥६॥ ॥११॥
जगती रहे लालदास ज्योति तेरी जगती रहे ॥

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।। भजन श्री लालदास जी ।।

जय श्री लाल दास गुरूदेव, अनोखी थारी झाँकी ।
जनम-थल धौली दूब सुहानो, बाँधोली ज्ञान बखानो ।
कुण्ड की महिमा अपरम्पार, अनोखी थारी झाँकी ॥१॥ जय श्री...

बैठक, नंगला, रसगण में, तप कीनो हर पल क्षण में ।
तप को यश बड़ों अपार, अनोखी थारी झाँकी ॥२॥ जय श्री...

तन सोहे चादर धौली, शेरपुर हो या बांधोली ।
बाबा टोडी आप विराट, अनोखी थारी झाँकी ॥३॥ जय श्री...

गल रूद्राक्ष बिराजै, नित मठ में नौबत बाजे ।
ऊपर ध्वजा लहर लहराय, अनोखी थारी झाँकी ॥४॥ जय श्री...

माला हृदय में फेरै, भगतन कू जप धुन टेरे ।
बाबा सेमली कीनो जाप, अनोखी थारी झाँकी ॥५॥ जय श्री...

कोई घी का दीपक लावे, कोई स्नेह की जोत जगावे ।
तेरी जोत जगे दिनरात, अनोखी थारी झाँकी ॥६॥ जय श्री...

तेरी महिमा जग में भारी, तू चार जुगी अवतारी ।
बाबा सारो सब के काज, अनोखी थारी झाँकी ॥७॥ जय श्री...

जब पूर्णमासी आवे, परकम्मा सभी लगावें ।
बाबा सबकी रखना लाज, अनोखी थारी झाँकी ॥८॥ जय श्री...

सुन कीर्ति अमर तुम्हारी, यात्री गण सब बलिहारी ।
बाबा तुम सबके सरताज, अनोखी थारी झाँकी ॥९॥ जय श्री...

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श्री बाबा लालदास आरती

ॐ जय बाबा लालदास, ॐ जय बाबा लालदास ।
सब दुख हारी संकट टारी, आया तेरे पास ॥ ॐ जय...
बाल्यावस्था में वन जा कर, तुमने तपकीना । बाबा...
देवन करी परीक्षा, वहां पै बजाके मृदुवीना ॥ ॐ जय...
लकड़ी बेचन अलवर जाकर, करत पेट उद्धार । बाबा...
चले भरोटा ऊंचा सरसे, देव करत जयकार ॥ ॐ जय...
हाथी मस्त सामने आया, मच रहा हाहाकार । बाबा...
चरण छुवे हाथी ने तेरे, झुका शीश हर बार ॥ ॐ जय...
हाथी वान विनय कर, जोरत कहता बारम्बार । जय...
शिष्य बनाओ बाबा, मुझको तुम मेरे करतार ॥ ॐ जय...
हाथीवान को शिष्य बनाया, सदू उपदेश सुनाया । बाबा...
वाणी श्रवण करी चित देकर, तेरे ही गुण गाय ॥ ॐ जय...
अन्धे को आंखे तुम दीनी, मन में अतिहर्षाय । बाबा...
ध्रुव दर्शन करवाये बाबा, चरणन शीश नवाय ॥ ॐ जय...
कुष्टी का तुम कुष्ट मिटाया, जय जय करता ज़ाय । बाबा...
कुष्टी द्रव्य लुटाया सगरा, कंचन काया पाय ॥ ॐ जय...
शाह जहान भवंर में अटकी, तुम को याद किया । बाबा...
पहुंचे जहाज उबारी तुमने, बेडा पार किया ॥ ॐ जय...
भक्त अनेक तुम्हारे, कहां तक करूं बखान । बाबा...
दास नहीं कछु भक्ति जानत, शरण पड़ा है आन ॥ ॐ जय...
बाबा लालदास जी की आरती जो मन से गावे । बाबा...
सर्व विकार नशावै, मन वाँछित फल पावै ॥ ॐ जय...

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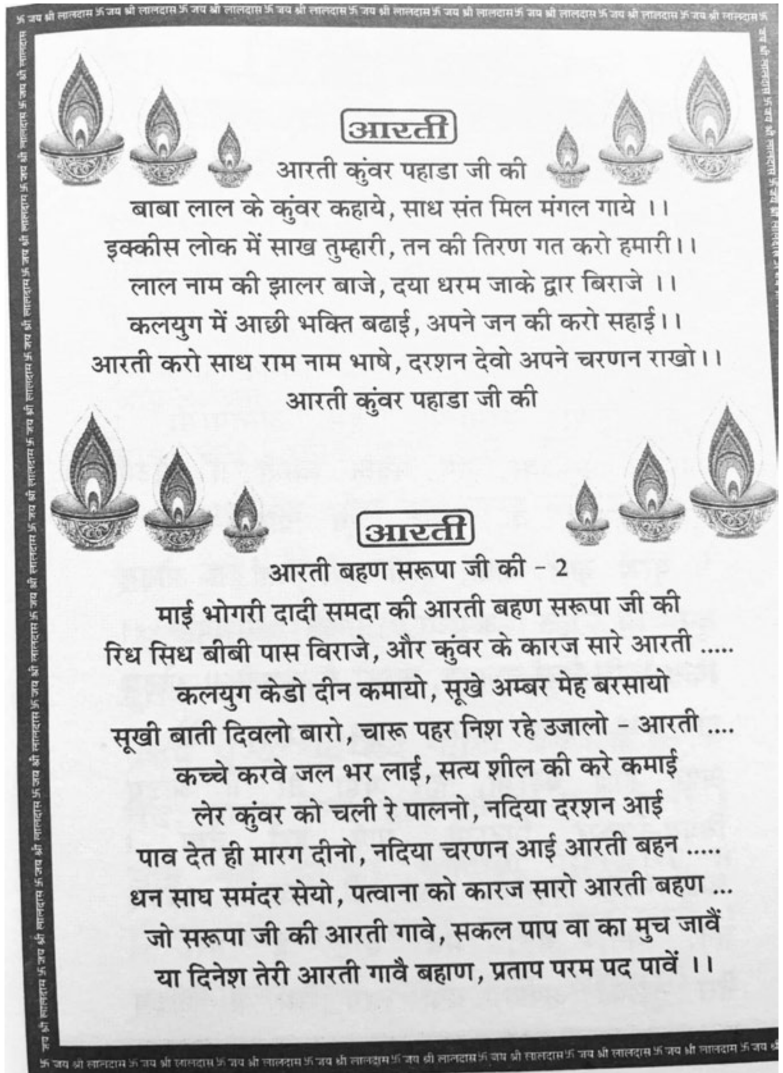

आरती

आरती कुंवर पहाडा जी की

बाबा लाल के कुंवर कहाये, साध संत मिल मंगल गाये ।।
इक्कीस लोक में साख तुम्हारी, तन की तिरण गत करो हमारी।।
लाल नाम की झालर बाजे, दया धरम जाके द्वार बिराजे ।।
कलयुग में आछी भक्ति बढाई, अपने जन की करो सहाई।।
आरती करो साध राम नाम भाषे, दरशन देवो अपने चरणन राखो।।
आरती कुंवर पहाडा जी की

आरती

आरती बहण सरूपा जी की - 2

माई भोगरी दादी समदा की आरती बहण सरूपा जी की
रिध सिध बीबी पास विराजे, और कुंवर के कारज सारे आरती .....
कलयुग केडो दीन कमायो, सूखे अम्बर मेह बरसायो
सूखी बाती दिवलो बारो, चारू पहर निश रहे उजालो - आरती ....
कच्चे करवे जल भर लाई, सत्य शील की करे कमाई
लेर कुंवर को चली रे पालनो, नदिया दरशन आई
पाव देत ही मारग दीनो, नदिया चरणन आई आरती बहन .....
धन साघ समंदर सेयो, पत्वाना को कारज सारो आरती बहण ...
जो सरूपा जी की आरती गावे, सकल पाप वा का मुच जावैं
या दिनेश तेरी आरती गावै बहाण, प्रताप परम पद पावें ।।

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ॐ जय जगदीश हरे

ओ३म् जय जगदीश हरे, स्वामी जय जगदीश हरे ।
भक्त जनों के संकट, क्षण में दूर करे ॥ ओ३म्
जो ध्यावे फल पावै, दुःख बिनसे मनका ।
सुख सम्पति घर आवै, कष्ट मिटे तनका ॥ ओ३म्
मात-पिता तुम मेरे, शरण गहूँ किसकी ।
तुम बिन और न दूजा, आस करूँ जिसकी ॥ ओ३म्
तुम पूरण परमात्मा, तुम अन्तर्यामी ।
पारब्रह्म परमेश्वर, तुम सबके स्वामी ॥ ओ३म्
तुम करुणा के सागर, तुम पालन-कर्ता ।
मैं मूरख खल कामी, कृपा करो भर्ता ॥ ओ३म्
तुम हो एक अगोचर, सबके प्राणपति ।
किस विधि मिलूँ दयामय, तुमको मैं कुमती ॥ ओ३म्
दीन-बन्धु दुःख हरता, तुम रक्षक मेरे ।
अपने हाथ बढ़ाओ, द्वार पड़ा तेरे ॥ ओ३म्
विषय-विकार मिटाओ, पाप हरो देवा ।
श्रद्धा-भक्ति बढ़ाओ, संतन की सेवा ॥ ओ३म्
तन, मन, धन, सब कुछ है तेरा ।
तेरा तुझको अर्पण, क्या लागे मेरा ॥ ओ३म्

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श्री गणेश जी की आरती

जय गणेश, जय गणेश, जय गणेश देवा ।
माता जाकी पार्वती, पिता महादेवा ॥
एकदन्त, दयावन्त, चार भुजा धारी ।
मस्तक सिन्दूर सोहे, मूसे की सवारी ॥
अन्धन को आँख देत, कोढ़िन को काया ।
बांझन को पुत्र देत, निर्धन को माया ॥
पान चढ़े, फूल चढ़े और चढ़े मेवा ।
लड्डुअन का भोग लगे सन्त करें सेवा ॥
हार चढ़े, फूल चढ़े, और चढ़े मेवा ।
'सूरदास' शरण आयो, सुफल कीजै सेवा ॥
देवन के देव और पुत्र महादेव के ।
प्रथम पूज्य सर्वसेव्य, दाता जनसेव्य के ॥
वेद, पाश, लिए हाथ अभय मुद्रा धारी ।
ज्ञान को भण्डार धनदाता सुखकारी ॥
दीनन की लाज राखो शम्भु पुत्र वारी ।
मनोकामना पूर्ण करो जाऊँ बलिहारी ॥

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श्री बाँके बिहारी जी की आरती

श्री बाँके बिहारी तेरी आरती गाऊँ
हे गिरधर तेरी आरती गाऊँ
श्याम सुन्दर तेरी आरती गाऊँ

मोर मुकुट प्रभु शीश पे सोहे
प्यारी बंशी मेरो मन मोहे
देखि छवि बलिहारी जाऊँ
श्री बाँके बिहारी तेरी आरती गाऊँ

चरणों से निकली गंगा प्यारी
जिसने सारी दुनिया तारी
मैं उन चरणों के दर्शन पाऊँ
श्री बाँके बिहारी तेरी आरती गाऊँ

दास अनाथ के नाथ आप हो
दुख सुख जीवन प्यारे आप हो
हरि चरणों में शीश झुकाऊँ
श्री बाँके बिहारी तेरी आरती गाऊँ

श्री हरि दास के प्यारे तुम हो
मेरे मोहन जीवन धन हो
देख युगल छवि बलि-बलि जाऊँ
श्री बाँके बिहारी तेरी आरती गाऊँ

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श्री लक्ष्मी जी की आरती

ओ३म् जय लक्ष्मी माता, मैया जय लक्ष्मी माता
तुमको निशदिन सेवत, हर विष्णु धाता । ओ३म्
उमा, रमा, ब्रह्माणी, तुम ही जग माता ।
सूर्य चन्द्रमा ध्यावत, नारद ऋषि गाता । ओ३म्
दुर्गा रूप निरंजनि, सुख सम्पति-दाता ।
जो कोई नर तुमको ध्यावत, ऋद्धि सिद्धि पाता । ओ३म्
तुम पाताल निवासिनी, तुम ही शुभदाता ।
कर्म प्रभाव प्रकाशिनिं, भवनिधि की त्राता । ओ३म्
जिस घर में वास तुम्हारा, तहं सदगुण आता ।
सब सम्भव हो जाता, मन नहीं घबराता । ओ३म्
तुम बिन यज्ञ न होते, वस्त्र न कोई पाता ।
खान-पान को वैभव, सब तुमसे आता । ओ३म्
शुभ गुण मन्दिर सुन्दर क्षीरोदधि जाता,
रतन चतुर्दश तुम बिन, कोई नहीं पाता । ओ३म्
यह लक्ष्मीजी की आरती, जो कोई नर गाता ।
उर आनन्द समाता, पाप उतर जाता । ओ३म्

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श्री पित्तरों जी की आरती

पितरों की नित आरती कीजै,

तन मन धन चरणों में लीजै ।

अपने कुल की रक्षा करते-2,

पुत्र पौत्रों के दुःख को हरते ।

पितरों की नित आरती कीजै ॥

स्वर्ग लोक में वास तुम्हारा,

सेवा करते देवता सारे ।

पितरों की नित आरती कीजै ॥

जिन पर आप खुशी हो जाओ,

उनके कारज सिद्ध बनाओ ।

पितरों की नित आरती कीजै ।

जो कोई शरण में आवे तुम्हारो,

जग में सुख पाता भारो ।

पितरों को नित आरती कीजै ॥

जो कोई नित पितरों की आरती गावे,

नर जीवन में सुख सम्पत्ति पावे ।

आरती पितरों की कीजै ।

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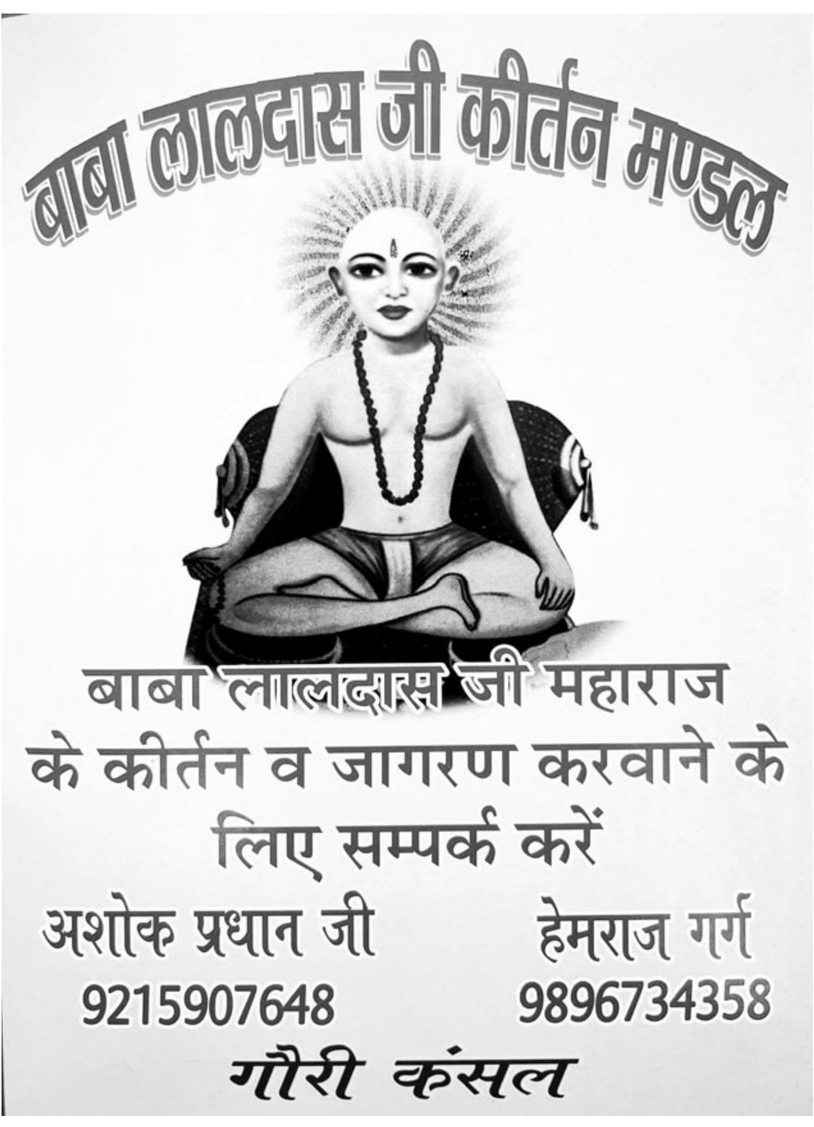

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पुन्हाना से शेरपुर धाम

दिनांक 1 फरवरी 2015

रास्ते में खाने पीने की व्यवस्था मन्दिर कमेटी की तरफ से होगी पद यात्रियों को वापस आने की व्यवस्था गाडियों द्वारा कमेटी की तरफ से होगी

निवेदक

बाबा लालदास मन्दिर कमेटी पुन्हाना

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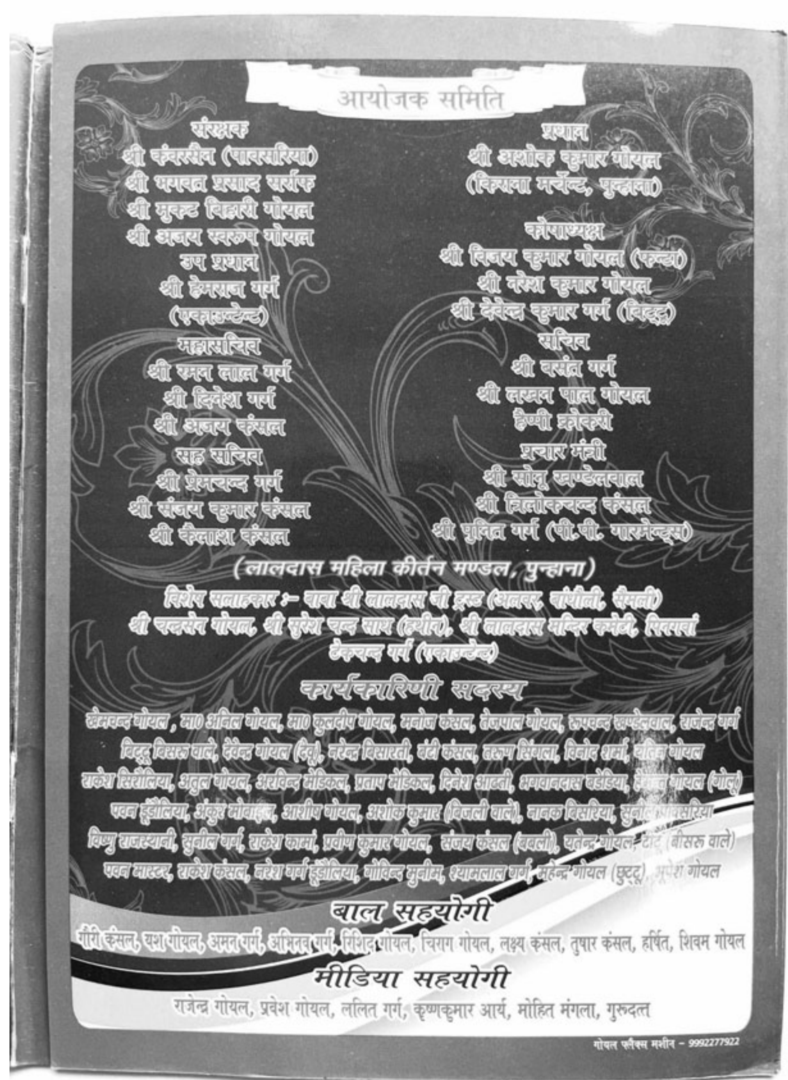

आयोजक समिति

संरक्षक
श्री कंवरसैन (पावसरिया)
श्री भगवत प्रसाद सर्राफ
श्री मुकट बिहारी गोयल
श्री अजय स्वरूप गोयल

उप प्रधान
श्री हेमराज गर्ग
(एकाउन्टेन्ट)

महासचिव
श्री रमन लाल गर्ग
श्री दिनेश गर्ग
श्री अजय कंसल

सह सचिव
श्री प्रेमचन्द गर्ग
श्री संजय कुमार कंसल
श्री कैलाश कंसल

प्रधान
श्री अशोक कुमार गोयल
(किसना मर्चेन्ट, पुन्हाना)

कोषाध्यक्ष
श्री विजय कुमार गोयल (फन्दा)
श्री नरेश कुमार गोयल
श्री देवेन्द्र कुमार गर्ग (बिट्टू)

सचिव
श्री वसंत गर्ग
श्री लखन पाल गोयल
हैप्पी क्रोकरी

प्रचार मंत्री
श्री सोनू खण्डेलवाल
श्री त्रिलोकचन्द कंसल
श्री पुनित गर्ग (पी.पी. गारमेन्ट्स)

(लालदास महिला कीर्तन मण्डल, पुन्हाना)

विशेष सलाहकार :– बाबा श्री लालदास जी ट्रस्ट (अलवर, बांधौली, शैमली)
श्री चन्द्रसेन गोयल, श्री सुरेश चन्द साव (हथीन), श्री लालदास मन्दिर कमेटी, सिरसवां
टेकचन्द गर्ग (एकाउन्टेन्ट)

कार्यकारिणी सदस्य
खेमचन्द गोयल, मा0 अनिल गोयल, मा0 कुलदीप गोयल, मनोज कंसल, तेजपाल गोयल, रूपचन्द खण्डेलवाल, राजेन्द्र गर्ग
बिट्टू बिसरू वाले, देवेन्द्र गोयल (दिवू), नरेन्द्र बिसारती, बंटी कंसल, तरूण सिंगला, विनोद शर्मा, यतिन गोयल
राकेश सिरौलिया, अतुल गोयल, अरविन्द मेडिकल, प्रताप मेडिकल, दिनेश आढती, भगवानदास बडोडिया, हेमन्त गोयल (गोलू)
पवन डूडौलिया, अंकुर मोबाइल, आशीष गोयल, अशोक कुमार (बिजली वाले), नानक बिसरिया, सुनील पावसरिया
विष्णु राजस्थानी, सुनील गर्ग, राकेश कामां, प्रवीण कुमार गोयल, संजय कंसल (बबली), यतेन्द्र गोयल, टीटू (बीसरू वाले)
पवन मास्टर, राकेश कंसल, नरेश गर्ग डूडौलिया, गोविन्द मुनीम, श्यामलाल गर्ग, महेन्द्र गोयल (छुट्टू), भूपेश गोयल

बाल सहयोगी
गौरी कंसल, यश गोयल, अमन गर्ग, अभिनव गर्ग, रिशिद गोयल, चिराग गोयल, लक्ष्य कंसल, तुषार कंसल, हर्षित, शिवम गोयल

मीडिया सहयोगी
राजेन्द्र गोयल, प्रवेश गोयल, ललित गर्ग, कृष्णकुमार आर्य, मोहित मंगला, गुरुदत्त

गोयल फ्लैक्स मशीन – 9992277922

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GLOSSARY

addā	gathering place
alām	disturbed, insane, angry
āmīr	head or commander of army (organisation)
Anjuman-i-Khadim-ul-Islam	literally, 'the servants of Islam', a Muslim political outfit formed in the 1930s
Arya Samaj	a Hindu reform organisation
asur	demon
auliyā	Muslim saint
azān	call for *namāz*
bābā	literally grandfather, older man, religious and spiritual personalities
Bajrang Dal	a Hindu right-wing militant organisation
Baniya	a Hindu caste of merchants
bārā	courtyard, fence
barkat	blessing
bāt	conversation, dialogues, a poetic style in Mewat
bhaicārā	brotherhood
*bhajan*s	religious songs
Bhapang	a music instrument of the Muslim Jogis in Mewat

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bhandārā	religious feast
BJP	Bhartiya Janta Party, a right-wing Hindu political organisation
bhagā-bhagī	Partition event in Mewat
bhakti	devotion
bidat/bidāh	innovation/addition in Islamic teaching of the Quran and the Hadith
Brajbhāṣā	a dialect spoken in the parts of Mathura, Bharatpur, Hathras and Aligarh and Bulandsahar popularly known as the Braj area
bujurg	elder
Brahmin	a Hindu caste of priests
caste *pancāyat*	a council of caste not recognised by the government
caddar/galeb	a piece of cloth designated for graves
caḍhaāvā	offerings
cālīsā	mantras consisting of 40 hymns
carpāī	cot
chhe bātein	the six principles of the Hadith and the Quran
Chishti	a well-known lineage of Sufi saints
cillā	a 40-day Tablighi retreat in a mosque
dādā	grandfather, saint, respected elder
dādī	grandmother
dāk-meorās	the Meo postmen during the Mughal Period
Damrot	a Meo *pāl*/lineage
dān	gift, presentation
dargāh	a tomb of a Sufi saint
darśan	seeing a holy person or the image of a deity in Hinduism
dāvāh	invitation for discussion and debates in Islam
dāvat	feast
dharma	religion/religious doctrines or moral duty

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dhikr/zikr/dhyān	remembrance of Allah
dīn	religion
dīnī	religious life
dohā	couplets
dohā-dhānī	a form of classical music (see *rāg*)
damru	a small hand drum and a symbol of the god Shiva
duhlot	a Meo *pāl*
Durood-ul-Sharif	verses of the Quran recited at a grave
Īd	an Islamic festival
ektārā	a musical instrument made of one string
fanā	annihilation
fakir	Muslim vagabond ascetics; a Muslim caste of beggars
*fatvā*s	legal rulings sanctioned by Islamic scholars (muftis)
faujdār	a Mughal garrison officer or police officer
fitnā	chaos
*gvāl*s	stockmen/shepherds
gotra	lineage
guru	teacher
Hadith	the collection of the teachings and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad
harām	prohibitions in Islam
harem	domestic spaces meant for women only
hujrā	drawing rooms
ijtemā	Islamic congregation
insān	human
itihās	history
irtīdād	apostasy
Jagga	a community of genealogists
*jāgran*s	all night-awake

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jajmānī	a rural system of patron and client relationship; peasant castes always performed the role of patrons for service castes
jalsā	a congregation
jamaat	a group
jamaatī	members of the Tablighi Jamaat
jātī	caste
jhālar	furbelow
Kabīrpanthī	belonging to the sect of Kabir
kabrā	mausoleum
kaccī sadak	unmetalled road
kākā	uncle
kalmā	the lines of the Quran
kalyug	the last Hindu epoch of fours marked by disorder
*kamin*s	services castes
kāmiyā	labourer or servant
khidmattiyā	bodyguards of royal emperors
khudkāsht	personal cultivation
kirtan	Hindu musical praying
kṣatriya	Hindu warrior caste-class
madrasa	an Islamic school primarily for imparting religious teachings
*mahāsabhā*s	major associations
makbarā	tomb
mālik	master
mandalī	group
markaj	centre
*maulavi*s	Islamic preachers
melā	festival
mohallā	parts of a town
Muharram	an occasion of mourning among Shia Muslims

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*murids/khalifā/pīrjādgān*s	disciples
mustaqīm	a straight path; also interpreted as 'the right path' in Islam
Naga	Shaivite ascetics
namāz	Islamic prayer
Nath	Shaivite ascetic sect
nizāmat	district
nirguṇ	formless or without attributes
niyat	intention
nuktāvalī	collection of couplets
pakkā	solid; metallic
pāl	a Meo territorial unit
pancāyat	a local political body, meeting of elders
panth	a guru cult
paramparā	tradition/custom
*parivār pramukh*s	family heads
pīr	a term for Islamic (Sufi) saints
pratīk	symbol
Purān	a Hindu religious text written in Sanskrit
qavvālī	a form of music associated with Sufi saints and sung at their *dargāh*s
rājā	a ruler
rāg	style of Indian classical music
Ramzān	an Islamic month of fasting
ras	sentiment
rasiyā	a vernacular form of music
rojā	fasting during the holy month of the Ramzān
RSS	Rasthriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (National Self-Help Group), a right-wing Hindu organisation
*sabadi*s	sayings
sādh	Muslim priests and followers of Laldas

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sādhu	sage
safāyā	clearing up
saguṇ	with attributes or physical qualities
sajrā	ancestry in Mewat
samādhī	a state of intense concentration achieved through meditation. In yoga, the final stage, at which union with the divine is reached (before or at death)
samprādāy	religious order/religious path/sect/cult
sant	saint
sarpanc	village headman
sāmpradāyik sadbhāv	communal harmony
Shivkathā	the tale of Shiva
silsilās	Sufi saintly lineages
śāyar	poet
shirk	association/polytheism
shobhā yātrā	pageantries/ritual procession
śuddhī	purification, conversion, a purified community
shudra	low caste-class Hindus
srāddha	a Hindu ritual performed to pay homage to one's deceased parents and ancestors
Sufi	Islamic mystic saints, a Muslim individual who practises *tasavvuf* or mysticism
surā	the section/verses of the Quran
svadeshi	homemade
svāstikā	the Hindu symbol of auspiciousness
Tabligh	Mission for Islamic preaching
tāntric	related to Hindu esoteric traditions
tapas	heat
tapasyā	meditation
taqqiyā	concealing the true identity
taqreer	religious discourses and reasoning

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tawhid	oneness of God
tehsil	a Division of a district for administrative purposes in India
tyāg	abandoning
ulemā	an Islamic scholar
ummāh	concept of community in Islam
ustād	an Urdu term for teacher or master
vāt	epic or tale
vrat	vow, fasting tales
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council), a right-wing Hindu organisation
Vyās	a Brahmin priest skilled in narrating religious tales
waḥdat al-wujūd	unity of being/god
yagna	Hindu sacrificial rituals around a fire altar
yātrās	pilgrimage/processions
yogi	a meditator, religious person or mendicant
zannat	heaven
zuhr	midday Islamic prayer

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INDEX

Ahirs, 8, 10, 20, 22, 24, 58
Ahirvati (the Ahirs' habitation), 8
Ain-i-Akbari, 11
Akbar, Emperor, 11–12, 44
Allah, Shah Wali, 160n18
Alwar, 3, 8, 35n35, 41, 43, 120
  communal relations in, 86–93

controversial *śuddhī* campaign, 88–91
  democratic reforms, 87–88
  disputes related to Laldas temples, 79–86
  electoral processes, 88
  issue of religious processions during Holi and Muharram, 89
  under Jai Singh, 86–87
  Meo population in, 17
  Ramgarh *tehsil* of, 25
  riot, 1932, 89
  total population in, 15, 35n36
Alwar Muslim League, 83
Anjmun Hidayatul Islam, 91
antagonistic tolerance, 103n6, 228, 230
anti-syncretism, 30n8
appropriated space, 110
appropriation of space, 110, 131n1
ārtī song, 124–25
Arya *dharm* (doctrines), 139
Arya Samaj, 2, 88–89, 135–37, 140, 216n41
  adherence to ritual texts, 141
  ideology of a non-idol, non-human worshiper, 181, 186n36
  participation in political matters, 136–37
  religious conversion, 137, 141
  revival of Hindu culture and traditions, 137
  social issues and practices, 136
  śuddhī (purification/conversion) campaign, 88–91
asceticism, 93
Auliya, saint Nizamuddin, 91
Babri mosque, 78, 102n4
  demolition of, 207
Bahar, Dada, 11–14
Bajrang Dal, 84, 101, 136
Balban, ruler, 17
Baniya Laldasis, 67, 80, 84

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009423991 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Baniyas, 1, 4–5, 7, 28, 29n1, 31n12, 38n62, 59, 79, 84, 89, 98–101, 116, 126–28, 140, 229–31
commercial activities, 96–97
construction of new temples, 101
importance of family and community, 98–99
Jain, 108n50
middle-class, 96
religious orientation of, 4–5, 113
role in developing political power of Hindutva, 101, 111, 123–24, 129–30, 135–36
saguṇ mode of worship, 99, 112
social and economic relations between Meos and, 99, 107n48, 108n48, 108n56
Barani, 18
bards, 187–98
art and livelihood, 205
critique of religious purity, 206
Jogi and Mirasi, 193, 196, 208
Mewati, 192, 195, 197–98, 204, 207
Muslim, 192–96
self-identification, 210
Bauls of Bengal, 192, 213n15
songs, 213n16
begging, 95
Bengali Muslims, 73n36
Bhagirath of Saharanpur, 45
bhaicārā (brotherhood) settlements, 189
Bhakta Prahalad, 118
Bhakti movement, 2, 18–19, 36n40–41, 54, 69n13, 218
bhakti (devotion) path, 2
Bhapang, 199–200
Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), 101, 207
Bhogari, 56, 58
bidāh/*bidat*, 148–50
Bisarani, Dadi, 12
Brahminical, 22, 31n11
Brahminical forms of worship, 99
Brahminical hierarchies of society, 69n15
Brahminical Hinduism, 53, 72n30, 96–97, 107n45, 112–14, 140, 231
murti/idol worship, 112–15
Vaishnavite form of, 112, 131n4
Brahminical style of life, 99
Brahmins, 22, 29n1, 38n58, 59, 72n30, 73n35, 76, 88, 105n24, 112–14, 118, 131n4, 231
Braj language and culture, 197–98
Braj region, 20, 23, 198, 215n32, 221
Buddhism, 226

caste, 41–43, 58–59, 66, 81, 88, 92–93, 96, 99, 101, 104n22, 105n27
chaddar offering practice, 65–66
Chiraklot clan, 12–13
cillā, 151
collective Muslim self, 142
communalism in India, 37n29
communal relations in Alwar, 86–93
competitive sharing, 79, 103n6, 230
concealment and secrecy, ethnographic narratives of
of Abid, 175–77
of Ahmad, 164–71
of Haruni, 177–79
of Hazra, 179–80
Rabiya and Fatima, religious dilemma of, 171–75
of Shiv Shankar Singla, 180–83
as a social phenomenon, 174–75, 182, 183n2, 184n9
Constantinople conquest, 102n2
cow veneration, 14–15, 55–61
cultural-religious sharing of saintly figures and religious orders, 226–28

Dada Bahar, 11–14
Dadu, 66, 96
Damrot Meos, 13

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009423991 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dargāh, 63–64, 83, 91, 106n37, 121, 135, 154–56, 161n26, 167–69, 229
darśan of a deity, 97, 100, 140
devotional desires, 4, 7
devotional differences, 93–101, 114, 158, 227–28, 230, 232
  act of *darśan*, 97
  asceticism, 94
  in Baniya and Meo religious cultures, 99–101
  *bhajan*s (religious songs), 97
  'Bhakti' and 'Sufi' modes of piety, 93
  God's service, 95
  between Hindu and Muslim, 142
  Kabir and Ravidas, 93–94, 96
  sectarian (*panth*) differences, 93–94
  transition from *nirguṇ* to a *saguṇ*, 99
  Vaishnava and Shaiva traditions, 94
devotional ethos of north Indian peasantry, 25
devotional Hinduism, 2, 18, 70n24, 76
devotional practices of Sufism, 224
devotional sensibility, 18, 219
devotional songs, 73n35, 127, 139
dhikr/*dhyān*, 147, 231
Dholidoob shrine of Laldas, Alwar, 43, 80
Dhyanpur temple, 45–46
dohā-dhānī śāīli (*dohā dhānī* style), 197, 215n31
dominated space, 110
domination of space, 110, 131n1
dual religious identity, 1
Duhlot clan, 120
Dungarisi Sadh, 39–40, 49, 67n1–2, 70n16, 125, 227
Durga Mata temple, 137–38

ethnic cleansing, 90

false consciousness, 207
Farookh, Umar, 205
faujdār, 41–42, 50
female sexuality, 210
folk poetry and folk musical styles, 196–202
folk tales, 47, 196, 210

Gadan of Tijara, Chishti, 51
Ganga, the goddess and Ganges River, 44–45
Gazi Miyan, 58
genealogies
  of *itihās-purān*, 22
  Jaduvansi *pāl*s, 20
  kinship conceptions, 23
  Meo community, 19–24
  Meo *pāl*, 96
  myth, memory and history, 37n54
  patterns of social interrelations and socio-economic status, 23
God concept, 41–42
  in *nirguṇ* form, 42
Gujarvati, 8
Gurgaon's Muslim population, 15

Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 78
Hajj pilgrimage, 52
Hegelian treatment of power, 191–92
Hegel's philosophy, 186n30
hidden transcripts, 190–91
Hindi language, 48–49, 68n7, 70n18–19, 70n21, 86, 199, 204
Hindu ascetics, 65
Hindu caste, 1–3, 7–11, 14–17, 19–21, 29n3, 33n28, 36n49, 46, 51–52, 54–55, 58, 63
Hindu *dharm sabhā*s (Hindu religious organisations), 87
Hindu fundamentalism, 203
Hinduisation, 85
'Hinduised' religious behaviour, 87
Hinduism, 18, 23, 29n3, 53, 55, 67, 85, 87, 91–93, 104n22–23, 137, 162, 166, 200, 219, 231

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009423991 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Hindu Laldasis, 1, 76, 80–81, 83–85
Hindu lineage (*gotra*) system, 36n49
Hindu–Muslim composite heritage, 202–11
  Nath, Sufi and Bhakti religious streams, 204, 207
  notion of religious synthesis, 204
  songs for local consumption, 205
Hindu–Muslim relations/dispute, 82, 89, 92, 101, 107n48, 130, 139, 141, 147, 166, 207–08, 210, 223
  riots in Tijara, 90
Hindu nationalism, 86, 101
Hindu Rashtra (nation), 137
Hindu religioscape, 7
Hindu Sabha of Alwar, 81–82
Hindutva, 29n3
Hodal, 26

idol installation and vivification processes
  Laldas temples, 116, 231
  Punahana temple, 132n8
Ilyas, Maulana, 91, 146
Indianisation of services and posts, 88
Indic eclecticism, 166
Indic form of life, 55, 58–59, 63, 73n34, 74n38, 88, 225
  religiosities, 58
Intekhab-e-Tehreek, 91
inter-caste relations, 27
inter-community alliances and conflicts, 13
interreligious disputes at shared spaces, 78–86
inter-religious relations, 10–11
Islam, 29n3, 54–55, 67, 93, 219
  in India, 104n21
  prohibited practices in, 195, 214n22
Islamic Deobandi school, 91
Islamic reformism, 192–96
Islamic Sufism, 147
Islamuddin, 146
itihās-purān, 22, 37n52

Jadu (Yadu) clan of Mathura, 20
Jaduvansi Meos, 20
Jaduvansi *pāl*s, 20
Jaggas, 46, 69n11, 118
Jaharpir, 137–139, 159n7
Jaharpir saint, 139
Jaharpir temple, 137–38
Jainism, 166
jajmānī (patron–client) system, 187–92, 195, 212n4
  caste and labour relations under, 192
  dissolution of, 189
  Jogis and Mirasis under, 190
  patronage towards folk artists, 190
jalsā, 152–54, 166, 168
Jats, 8, 12–13, 18, 22, 24, 32n19, 58, 105n25, 115–16, 227
  migratory histories, 18
  peasants, 8
Jattiyaat, 8
jāgran, 126, 195
Jinnah, Muhammed Ali, 82
jivdayā, 42, 56
Jogi/Yogi, 24, 27, 37n50, 69n15, 88, 105n28, 158, 159n2, 183, 187–93, 196, 198–202, 208, 210–11, 211n2, 213n15, 215n33–35, 216n41–42, 221
jātī, 33n28, 34

Kabir, 66, 96
  kabīrpanth, 29n4, 93
Kabir, Guru, 1
kaccā houses, 122
Kacchvaha Meos, 21
Kamaal, Haji Shah, 68n10
Kamakhya Devi, 201–02
Kayath, 98
Khan, Ghaus, 43
Khan, Maqbul, 152, 154, 166–68

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009423991 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Khan, Rammal, 194–95
Khan, Sahab, 39–40, 43, 47
Khan, Ustad, 193
Khare, Narayan Bhaskar, 90
kinship relations, 220
Krishna, Lord, 19–20, 23–24, 31n11, 58, 69n13, 74n39, 120, 164–65, 170, 197–98, 211, 217n49, 227
Krishnaite song of divine love, human feelings and universal values, 192–93
kṣatriya (warriors), 19–24, 201
Kshatriya (caste), 29n1, 38n58, 118
Kurmi peasants, 22, 58
Kurmis, 24
Kutub, 120

Laldas, 1, 29n4, 39–40
  adherence to strict vegetarianism, 40
  anecdotes of, 14
  ārtī song of, 124–25
  as Bhagirath of Saharanpur, 45, 68n9
  booklets and pamphlets about, 117
  confrontation between Naths and, 94
  conversation between Gadan and, 51
  Dungarisi Sadh, 39–40, 49, 67n1–2, 70n16, 125, 227
  early years, 43
  encounters between state officials and, 40–42
  equal proximity, 54
  family, 43, 120
  five rules, 1
  followers of, 1, 63, 66
  genealogy of, 116–23, 132n11
  God concept, 41–42
  graves of, 121
  hagiographical narratives, 47–55
  identity of, 46, 54, 68n6
  incarnation story, 117–18
  interactions with Mughal rulers and Mughal officials, 44, 50
  Meo genealogy of, 118–19
  message of religious indifference, 52
  miraculous events, 40–43, 49, 68n5, 139–40
  names of, 43
  new form, 111
  path of *nirguṇ bhakti*, 50–51
  religiosity of, 2
  religious behaviour, 39–40
  religious diversity of, 225
  religious order of, 44
  sajrā (family lineage) of, 119–20
  sādh of, 62
  teachings and his *samprādāya*'s, 5
  traditional shrines of, 3–5
Laldasi *panth* (religious path), 1–2, 30n5
'Laldas Kirtan Mandali' (Laldas Music Society), 127
Laldas Mandir Avam Vikas Samiti, 103n17
Laldas religious order, 218–19
Laldas temples, 112–16
  advertising processes, 126–28
  annual fairs and festivals, 123
  *baithak*s (resting place) of, 126, 133n22
  devotional styles, 93–101
  disputes related to, 79–86
  idol installation and vivification processes, 116, 231
  Laldas's *samādhī* status, 116, 132n7
  Meo *sādh*'s relationship with, 121–23, 132n6
  money and resources, 128–31
  murti/idol worship, 112–15
  practice of *bhandārā* (ritual feast), 127–28
  prayers and bhajans, 124–25
  role of Brahmin priest, 116
  *shobhā yātrā*s (pageants), 124
  temple committees, 125–26, 132n9
  transformation by Baniya community, 112–15, 123, 128–31
  *yātrā*s (pilgrimages), 123–24

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009423991 Published online by Cambridge University Press

liminality, 30n8, 53–54, 71n28, 72n29, 72n31–33, 86, 111, 131n3
lāldāsī samprādāy, 43

Machhendranath, Guru, 201
madrasa, 91, 143, 155–56, 166, 169
Mahabharata, 20, 23, 37n55, 70n21, 116, 118, 196–97, 216n40
*mahāsabhā*s (major associations), 24
*maktab*s, 86
markaj, 144, 171
*maulavi*s, 35n31, 144, 153–54, 160n18, 168–69, 171, 178–79, 184n6
Mecca mosque, abandoned, 53
Meenavati, 8
Meo, Lal Khan, 1. *See also* Laldas
Meo Laldasis, 80
Meo Muslim *sādh*s, 62–63
Meo *pāl*s, 20–21
  marriage, 21
  material and symbolic practices, 21
Meos, 1, 8–9, 88
  description of, 9–10
  devotion of Bhakti and Sufi saints, 46
  genealogies of, 19–24
  Islamisation of, 14
  kinship conceptions, 23–24
  kṣatriya (warrior) status, 20–22
  land-ownership, 188
  marriage ceremonies, 189
  Meo's self-perception, emotions and sensibilities, 24
  migratory histories, 18
  number of sacrifices by, 37n57
  origins, 18
  parallel marriage, 21
  population estimate, 15–17
  practice of endogamy, 21
  relationships between kinship, 19
  religious experiences, 147
  resistance to Mughal and British imperial rulers, 14
  social, religious and economic profile of, 15–25
  version of popular Islam, 54
  worship of 'Hindu' deities and goddesses, 16–17
Meo villagers, 84–85
Mewat, 27
Mewat Development Agency, 177
mewāti bāt, 196–97, 214n28, 215n33
Mewati Development Society (MDS), Punahana, 26
Mewati dialect, 8, 49, 70n19
Mewati, Hasan Khan, 14, 24, 35n32
Mewati Muslim mythology, 211
Mewati Muslims, 14, 46, 90–91, 150, 188, 211
  portrayal of, 17
Mewat region, 8–15
  anti-national activities in, 9
  Aravalli mountains, 9
  binary of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim,' 9–11
  religious and social identities in, 11
Mirasis, 24, 27, 37n50, 158, 187, 199, 202, 211n2
murti/idol worship, 112–15, 131n5
Muslim ascetics, 159n2
Muslim eclecticism, 166
Muslim Laldasis, 1, 83, 96, 101
Muslim League, 82, 91
Muslimness, 47
Muslim religioscape, 7
mustaqīm, 50–51, 70n22, 224

Naga/Nath Sadhu, 94
namāz, 40, 53, 77, 79–81, 91, 144, 151, 165, 179, 194–95
Nath cult, 201
Nath Yoga, 94
Nath *yogi*, 201
Nirban Chauhans, 20
nirguṇ bhakti (formless devotion), 1, 50–51, 53, 70n23–24, 93, 96–97, 147
  Islamic concept of Allah, 96

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009423991 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nuktāvalī, 47–48, 50, 67n2, 70n16–17, 70n19, 94, 124, 224

oral histories, 47

Pahara, 43
*pāl*s, 12, 20–21, 34n30, 36n45, 39n49, 43, 62, 96, 120, 165
*pancāyat*s, 12, 60, 66, 81, 169
Partition violence, 83–84, 89, 92, 102n5
passive resistance, 28, 159, 164, 183, 183n4, 184n6, 188, 191–92, 197, 202, 205, 208, 212n3, 215n38, 233
patrons. See *jajmānī* (patron–client) system
pilgrimages, 123–24
pīr, 1, 29n1, 39, 42, 46, 50, 54, 63, 74n38, 101, 140, 157, 159n7, 180, 185n12, 222
polytropy, 140, 165
Powlett, William Percy, 17, 35n37, 40, 43, 63, 68n5, 95, 97–98, 112, 120–21, 123, 125, 133n19
Prajamandal, 87–88
public transcript, 190–91, 213n12
Punahana temple, 11, 38n62, 135–37, 140
  idol vivification at, 132n8
  religious beliefs and practices, 140–41

Qasim, Maulana Muhammad, 91
Quran, 50, 61, 66, 83–84, 91, 142, 144–45, 152–54, 156, 166–68, 206, 210, 223

Raghuvansis, 21
Rajni, legend of, 11–12
Rajput martial tradition, 22
Ram, Lord, 1, 14, 19–21, 24, 29n2, 29n4, 31n11, 43, 51, 53–54, 56, 60, 69n13, 87, 94, 99, 102n4, 114, 120, 211, 217n48–49, 224, 227, 230–31
Ramayana, 21, 23
Ramgarh, 26
Rashtriya Sawayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), 84, 101, 104n19, 136, 142, 180, 216n41
rasiyā, 198
Ravidas, 66, 96
Rawat clan, 12–13
Rawat Jats, 13
reformist pressure, 2, 158, 179, 183
religions and religious views in India, 30n6, 226
religioscapes, 7, 83
religious affiliations, 47
religious ancestry, 20
religious antagonism, 219
religious consciousness, 11, 92–93
religious conversion, 89
religious identities, 1–2, 4, 10–12, 18, 28, 31n10, 33n28, 34n30, 47, 66–67, 81, 84–86, 92–93, 158, 166, 169, 195, 202, 207–08, 211, 218–20
religious mixing and sharing, 221, 226–28
religious notions and symbols, uses of, 180
religious other, 49
religious pluralism, 166
religious purity, 2, 84
religious self-identification, 210
religious symbolism and practices in *panth*, 65
religious syncretism, 221–26
religious transformations, 4, 18, 83
rojā, 40, 53, 61

sādh, 39–40, 49, 61–67, 62, 74n14, 76, 84–85, 95, 114, 116, 120–23, 129–30, 132n6, 132n111, 133n20, 231
saguṇ, 96, 99, 229
Saharanpur temple, 45–46
Saiket, 166–68
saint hagiographies, 47
sajrā, 119–20
samprādāy or *panth* (order/path/sect), 5, 31n11, 122, 219
Sanatan Dharma Sabha, 87
Sanga, Rana, 14
Sanskrit *vrat kāthā*s (fasting tales), 197

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Saraswati, Dayanand, 140
Sarupa, 43
*sayyed*s, 64–65, 74n43, 75
secrecy. *See* concealment and secrecy, ethnographic narratives of
Shah, Kanifnath/Rahman, 18
Shah, Modi, 97–98
Shah Chokha tomb, 11–12, 27, 151, 154–56, 159n1, 163–64, 168–70, 173, 175, 179, 229
Shaivite philosophy, 36n41, 69n15
Shakti cult, 201
shared/mixed shrines, 2, 8, 78, 86, 92, 101, 102n3, 102n5, 111, 130, 145, 157–58, 228, 230, 232
shared religiosity, 2–3, 6
shared sacred spaces, 78, 92, 101, 102n3, 111, 218
  disputes at, 228–33
  'mixing' of diverse values and boundaries, 226–28
  opposing and appropriating, 228–33
  shared devotion of Laldas, 101
Sherpur shrine of Laldas, 3–4, 27, 38n61, 163
  anthropomorphic form for *darśan*, 100
  civil suit, 80–81
  clashes, 81–83
  control of, 84
  devotional differences, 93–101
  dispute, 2012, 84
  Hinduisation of, 75–76, 85–86
  Hindu Laldasis' ownership of, 78
  Hindu symbols at, 75–76, 85
  interreligious disputes at, 78–86
  kabra, 6
  matter of offering *namāz*, 80
  Muslim *sādh* performing *ārtī* at, 64
  non-operational mosques inside, 76–77
  srāddh ceremony, 81
  structure, 75–76
shirk, 148–50
shiv katha (the story of Shiva), 198
Shiv Sena, 84
Shukoh, Dara, 44
Sikand, 78
Singh, Jai, 86–87
Singh, Ram, 135, 139
Singh, Shyam, 139
Singh, Tej, 86
social construction of space, 110–11, 131n2
social production of space, 110–11, 131n2
spiritual leadership, 73n35
śuddhī (purification/conversion) campaign, 88–89
Sufi *dargāh*, 135
Sufism, 18–19, 36n40–41, 54, 69n13, 93–94, 146, 219
Sufi spiritualism, 50
Sunni Islam/Sunni Muslims, 14, 28, 33n20, 63, 78, 84, 101, 130, 146, 148, 152, 170–71, 195, 228–29
syncretism, 30n8, 72n32, 85, 214n17, 221–26, 233n3–233n5

Tablighi Jamaat, 2, 62, 91–92, 130, 141–42, 182–83, 187–88, 206–07, 211
  activities in Punahana, 144
  acts of *bidāh* (religious innovations), 150
  adoption of Sufi doctrines, 232
  cillā, 151
  concept of *dāvāh*, 145
  connection between Sufism and, 146–47
  dhikr (remembrance of God), 231
  doctrine of *shirk*, 149, 151
  form of religious piety, 231
  idea of 'Muslimness', 148, 158
  idea of 'proper' religious conduct, 154
  ideology, 164, 189
  ijtemā, 153
  influence in aspects of life, 143
  influence on Meos, 156–57
  main spheres of Tablighi life, 144, 152, 156

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markaj, 171
mission of, 144
mode of functioning of organisation, 145
perspectives on saints and shrines, 154–55
philosophy, 147–48
principles (*chhe bātein*) of, 144–45
prophetic mimesis, 150
'radical' religious politics of, 154
reform movement, 142–43, 158
religious congregations, or *jalsā*, 152–54
religious duties of Tablighi Muslim, 171
style of functioning, 144
tawhid (the unity of God), 149
valid and invalid religious practices sanctioned by, 170–71
view of Islam and Sufism, 148–49, 151–52, 163, 168–69, 231
view of worship of Laldas and Shah Chokha saints, 168
Tablighis, 84–85
tawhid, 144, 149, 160n16, 224
Tijara, saint Gadan, 93
tolerance, idea of, 102n5
Turks, 41–42, 51, 185n10

ummāh, 12, 154, 158, 194
Urdu, 49–50, 70n19, 70n21, 86, 143, 204, 214n19

Vaishnava/Vaishnavite tradition, 4, 31n11
form of worship, 112–15, 131n4–5
Vaishnava sect in Dhyanpur, 45
Vishwa Hindu Parishad, 101, 216n41

waḥdat al-wujūd, 51–52, 71n25–26, 224
Wahhabism, 149

Yadav community, 10, 20, 22, 58

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