

The Cult of Islamic Holy Relics as a Contact Zone — A Case Study of a Muslim Shrine in North India —

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要 旨

南アジアのムスリム多住国家、すなわちインド、パキスタン、バングラデシュでは、英領期に組織された改革主義的なイスラーム思想・運動が、修正と再編を重ねつつもなお活発に展開されている。その一方で、これらの国にはムスリム聖者の墓廟が数多く存在しており、改革主義者によって「非イスラーム的」あるいは「土着的」と非難されがちな聖者信仰もまた根強く保持されつづけている。本稿では、この聖者信仰と密接に結びついているにもかかわらず、これまでほとんど注目されることのなかった聖遺物への信仰を取り上げる。その際、異なる文化が出会い、衝突し、格闘する社会空間としての「コンタクト・ゾーン」[Pratt 2008 (1992)] という観点を導入することで、聖遺物信仰に関するこれまでの議論を批判的に検討し、現地調査に基づいた精緻な事例分析を通じて、信仰の具体相を明らかにしたい。

Introduction

In Muslim dominated societies of South Asia, that is, some parts of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Islamic reformist groups have built up energetic campaigns. At the same time, there are many Muslim shrines in these countries where Islamic saint cults, criticized by reformists as non-Islamic or indigenous, still remain strongly rooted. This paper focuses on the cult of holy relics, a subject that hitherto has gone almost unnoticed even though it is intimately entwined with these saint cults in the formation of the holy places of South Asia.

In South Asia, the relics of the Prophet Muhammad, some of his hair or beard, footprint, sandals, cloak or staff, are carefully preserved in Muslim shrines and other religious institutions and have become the object of fervent pilgrimages and veneration [Komaki 2004]. This form of veneration, along with the saint cults, has been repeatedly criticized by reformists and to such an extent that there has even been research reporting its decline^{*1}. However, at least in the area in North India where the author carries out her fieldwork, there are as yet no signs of such a

decline. On the contrary, colourful and compact religious goods, such as stickers and wall-hangings that take the relics as their motif, are now purchased by pilgrims and devotees, and are in circulation as charms and amulets or souvenirs from holy places.

This paper considers the holy places of South Asia through a case study of such a cult of holy relics. In doing so it draws upon the analytical perspective of the contact zone, that is, social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other [Pratt 2008(1992): 7]. The paper is thus organized as follows. It first offers a brief explanation of basic terminology and concepts regarding Islamic holy relics. It then focuses on specific aspects of faith based on a case study in North India and introduces the criticisms of the cult of holy relics made by reformists. This is followed by a critical examination of the discussions of the cult of holy relics so far, which the author hopes to throw into relief from the perspective of the contact zone.

Islamic holy relics

What are called here Islamic holy relics refer to visible and tangible objects, known in Arabic as “relics of the Prophet (*āsār nabawīyya*)” and in Turkey as “the sacred relics (*mukaddes emānetler*)”, which have been objects of faith in Muslim societies throughout the ages. Holy relics have been treated with reverence by the ruling classes too, not just by the so-called masses. For example, the Abbasid caliphs wore the cloak of the Prophet on ceremonial occasions, a mosque and shrine were built in Cairo under the Mamluk sultanate to house the relics of the Prophet purchased by the *wazīr* (minister) and successive sultans visited there, and in the Ottoman Empire too the sultan and other influential people paid their respects to relics of the Prophet.

In the Muslim societies of South Asia these Islamic holy relics go under such names as *tabarrkāt*, *āsār-e mubāarak*, and *āsār-e sharīf*. The first two, *tabarrukāt* and *mubāarak*, share the same root of “b-r-k” with the Arabic word *baraka*, and they all mean a phenomenon or object that has been blessed.

According to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, *baraka* is a power of blessing that has its source in God. It is said to bring overflowing material prosperity as well as psychological or spiritual affluence and happiness to people who have been endowed with it. The Quran, as the words of God, naturally has *baraka* and God has also infused people such as the Prophet and saints with *baraka*. In particular, the Prophet Muhammad and his family (his daughter Hazrat Fatima, his cousin on his father’s side as well as his son-in-law Hazrat Ali and his two grandsons Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain) and their descendants are innately endowed with *baraka*. These sainted people awarded *baraka* from God then grant this to ordinary people through a very

diverse and sometimes even curious transmission process, both during their lifetime and posthumously [Colin 1960: 1032].

The word “*āsār*” that appears in the second and third expressions is the plural form of *asar*, which means relic in Arabic. A search for *asar* in the *EI* leads to the entry *al-asar al-sharīf* (the sacred relic), such as some hair or part of a beard, teeth or a tooth, writing and household belongings, as well as a footprint, are given as examples [Goldziher 1960: 736].

A large proportion of Islamic holy relics which are referred to by the above terms are articles which are believed to have belonged to the Prophet Muhammad^{*2}. However personal effects of people included in the category of holy person who were granted *baraka* by God, namely the family of the Prophet (Hazrat Fatima, Hazrat Ali, Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain), his companions and later renowned Muslim saints, are also revered as Islamic holy relics. Let us then look in more detail at what the cult of Islamic holy relics actually is.

The veneration of holy relics at the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin

The *dargāh* or Sufi shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, a famous Sufi saint of the Chishti Order, located in the south-east of New Delhi. This saint is said to be a Sayyid, in other words to possess a pedigree and genealogy stretching back to the Prophet. The holy relics enshrined here are as follow.

1) Several hairs from the beard of the Prophet. I saw these twice, at the festival of the Prophet’s birth anniversary (Hijri calendar the 12th Rabi ‘ul Awwal) in 1991 and 1996. On the second occasion I noticed that the number of hairs had increased, and so asked one of the shrine staff, i.e. *pīrāda* (custodian of the shrine) about this. I received the reply that some of the hairs had grown and split in two just as if they were alive, and so had been divided and preserved in separate containers. He added that the very fact that such a miracle had occurred was a guarantee of the authenticity of the relics. 2) A small piece of leather said to be the final remnant of a book written by Hazrat Ali. 3) A small brick of baked Karbala mud said to have been soaked with the blood of Hazrat Husain; its colour is said to change from brown to red on the anniversary of his death (Hijri calendar the 10th Muharram). This is also said to be genuine due to this annual change in hue. 4) A footprint of the Prophet embedded in rock. This is proof of a miracle performed when the Prophet left his footprint on a rock after a non-Muslim had challenged him to prove that he really was a messenger from God.

These relics are said to have been given into the safe-keeping of the shrine by Bahadur Shah Zafar (r. 1837-58), the last Mughal emperor, shortly before he was arrested near Humayun’s

tomb. The relics are open to the public once a year on the Prophet's birth anniversary and it went as follows at this shrine in 1996.

After noon of the eve of the 12th Rabi 'ul Awwal (in the Hijri calendar a day begins at sunset) many buildings in the Nizamuddin Dargah were decorated with festive illuminations, and an awning, from which were hung gold and silver cords, was stretched over the courtyard to the south of the saint's tomb chamber. Soon a performance of *qawwālī* (the devotional music of the Sufis) commenced there. Around that time pilgrims gradually gathered and spread mats in the courtyard to the north of the tomb chamber to reserve their space as their numbers steadily increased.

Soon after four in the afternoon the *pīrāde* assembled in the courtyard to the south of the tomb chamber. The *qawwālī* performance ceased and a preacher (a senior *pīrāda*) seated himself where the musicians had been. At 4:20 a religious gathering known as *milād sharīf* began. In this gathering the preacher sat facing the entrance to the tomb chamber and a few *pīrāde* seated themselves opposite one another at intervals of one or two metres to form a path. The pilgrims seated themselves to encircle this, as a rule with the men on the right, when facing the tomb chamber, and the women on the left.

The preacher at the centre of it all chanted the *fātiha* and recounted the Prophet's life while reciting at intervals "*Lā Ilāha Illa Allāh*" and then went on to give a sermon on the way a Muslim should be according to the *sunnah* (the way of the Prophet). During this, large cloth-covered platters and baskets were brought one after another onto the path; these contained food such as *nān* (leavened bread) and *dāl* (lentil soup). These had been given as offerings by pilgrims and became *tabarruk* (a medium for *baraka*) during the gathering. These offerings are distributed among all the pilgrims in the evening.

After a while another person took over as the preacher. He also first chanted the *fātiha* and then *na'at sharīf* (exalted poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad) and then began to recount the life of the Prophet. When he came to the scenes of the Prophet's sickness and death, everyone in the congregation, including the preacher, stood up and chorused "*Yā Nabī Assalām-Alaikum*". After this the two preachers intoned *du'ā* in alternation and the congregation repeated the choruses of *āmin*. This roughly hour-long religious gathering concluded with the *azān* (call to prayer) of the *asr* prayer and the congregation began to perform *wuzū* (ritual ablution), the men to join together in a service in the mosque to the west of the tomb chamber, the women to pray separately in the space on both sides of the mosque. Unlike the usual *asr* prayer, *qu'rān khānī* (recitation of the Quran) was also performed.

At 5:50, when the *asr* prayer finished, a male ascetic facing east from inside the mosque

began to sonorously chant *na'at sharīf*. At the same time, in the courtyard to the south of the tomb chamber the congregation began to form separate lines of men and women under the instructions of the *pīrzāde*. The time was finally approaching for the relics of the Prophet and his family to be displayed. The relics were to be displayed to the west of the tomb chamber, in other words between the tomb chamber and the mosque. The ascetic faced towards the relics and chanted *na'at sharīf*.

Of this shrine's relics, the hairs, the small piece of leather and the small brick of Karbala mud were enshrined in a showcase that was placed on a pedestal of chest height and covered with a velvet cloth. The footprint of the Prophet was placed at the base of the pedestal holding the showcase and bucket and jug brimming with rose water were readied at its side.

When a *pīrzāda* removed the velvet cloth covering the showcase, the devotees surged forward. The *pīrzāda* did all they could to hold them back and to order them into lines so that the men and women could alternately approach the relics. When their turn came, the pilgrims intoned *du'ā* as they viewed each of the showcased relics and then gratefully received rose water wrung by the *pīrzāda* from a cloth with which they had soaked up rose water poured from the jug onto the Prophet's footprint. Some people cupped the *baraka*-filled rose water in both hands and drank it there and then, while some people put it in small bottles to take home. Some young couples dripped it into the mouths of the infants they were holding. After doing these things, they carefully rubbed the few remaining drops in their palms onto their foreheads, cheeks and the clothes on their chests. This revealed a mentality whereby not even a single drop of sacred rose water was overlooked.

The viewing of the relics was temporarily halted by the *azān* to the *maghrib* prayer, and everyone in the shrine turned toward the tomb chamber and intoned *du'ā*. With this it became the 12th Rabi 'ul Awwal, namely the day of the Prophet's birth anniversary according to the Hijri calendar. After the *maghrib* prayer a *qawwālī* gathering was held in the courtyard to the south of the tomb chamber and the relics were displayed to the pilgrims until late into the night. The event continued for two more days, but from the next day onwards only the stone slab with the Prophet's footprint was displayed.

The Prophet's birth anniversary at the Nizamuddin Dargah thus centres on a religious gathering and the viewing of the relics. The popularity of the Prophet's birth anniversary even rivals that of the 'urs (saint's death anniversary) at this shrine, and it is not hard to imagine that the objective of the visitors to the shrine is the once-a-year veneration of the relics. They gather to acquire knowledge of the Prophet's life and miracles, as well the *baraka* emitted by the relics, at the shrine of a saint who is a descendant of the Prophet's family. In this sense, one may say

that the relics possess the power to periodically transform the shrine into a meeting spot where pilgrims can mingle with the Prophet and his family.

Incidentally, people who have completed their veneration may take a look inside the shops by the approach to the shrine before they make their way home and look for souvenirs of holy place for their family, neighbours and acquaintances. They are well aware that various kinds of charms and amulets are there alongside the offerings, books, *qawwālī* cassettes, caps for prayers and prayer mats. On display are plastic plates engraved with verses from the Quran, a Quran-shaped locket (in which to place a charm with a verse from the Quran on it) and also charms and amulets connected with the above-mentioned holy relics. These include photographs of the holy relics, for example, or plaques that include those photographs, and colourful wall scrolls and stickers depicting the Prophet's sandal, and cover a wide range of assurances, guaranteeing things like peace and prosperity in the household, academic success and traffic safety. According to the shopkeeper, "The sticker may be stuck on a wall, but if you want to ensure the continual protection of *baraka* you should carry it around with you in your wallet or bag".

Reformist criticism of the cult of holy relics

As was mentioned earlier, in recent years Islamic reformist groups have built up energetic campaigns in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The South Asian Islamic reformist groups originally launched during the latter half of the 19th century are all organized in North India and belong to the Sunni ulama tradition, whose campaign is now being actively expanded on a global scale. Deoband, Barelvi and Ahl-e Hadīs are the three most influential groups but the most powerful is the Deoband movement. The Deobandi ulama, Ashraf Ali Thanawi (1863-1943) wrote *Heavenly Ornament (bihishti zewar)*, and published in 1905, for the religious education of young Muslim women. This preached to the women who would become wives and mothers about the abolishment of the wicked customs that were widespread amongst the North Indian Muslims at that time, and about how to live as a proper Muslim based on the words and deeds of the Prophet and on Islamic law. The following extract is a criticism of various actions at festivities for the birth anniversary of the Prophet.

In many places, women observe the noble *maulid*, the birthday of the Prophets. As practiced today, the observance entails these sins:

1. When a woman serves as reader, her voice can often carry beyond the door. It is wrong for her voice to be heard by an unrelated person; it is even more likely to cause evil because she

is reading poetry.

2. When a man serves as reader, he will obviously not be related to all the women but in fact will be unrelated to many. The current custom is to read verses of poetry expressively; the women thus hear the singing of a man, which is forbidden.

3. The books and pamphlets discussing *maulid* are often filled with false traditions. To read them or hear them is a sin.

4. Many people believe that the Apostle^s honors the gathering with his presence; for this reason, they stand up in the middle of the ceremony, when his birth is mentioned. There is no argument for this in the *shari'at*, and to consider as certain whatever is not proven in the *shari'at* is a sin. Some do not believe that he is present, but they nevertheless consider standing so necessary that they reproach anyone who fails to do so. If you tell them that standing is not required in the *shari'at* and that in fact they should not stand when there is a *maulid*, they cannot bear it. They imagine that without standing the observance is simply not a *maulid*. To consider something necessary that is not necessary in the *shari'at* is a sin.

5. The distribution of sweets or food of some kind is compulsory. The participants consider its omission a disgrace and a cause of displeasure to Hazrat^s. It is evil to consider something required that is not so specified in the *shari'at*.

6. It grows late while the ceremony is being held or the sweets are being distributed. Often, the time is short for the canonical prayer. This too is a sin.

7. Even if one is free of erroneous beliefs and avoids sinful practices in the observance, one should still avoid this custom, because it may encourage the ignorant to carry it out. Whatever is legally optional and may cause the ignorant to stray must be given up. Therefore, do not carry out *maulid* in accordance with current custom. When you want to recite the events of the life of Hazrat Apostle^s, take a reliable book and read it to yourself or to a few people of the house or to people who have come to visit and happen to be there. And if you intend to transfer the credit of some good deed to the soul of Hazrat Apostle^s, do so by giving to the poor on some occasion other than the birth observance. No one is forbidding you to do good works--only avoid impropriety [Metcalf 1992(1990): 157-158].

These are criticisms of customs that were then widespread in North India. From this we can know that the large-scale celebrations of the birth anniversary of the Prophet continued to be held, even in the early 20th century when reformist Islam was extending its influence. An admonishment concerning the veneration of holy relics can also be found in another passage of the book. This is as follows.

People, women among them, gather at places where some relic (*tabarruk*) is known to be --the revered robe or perhaps a hair of the Apostle^s or of some other elder, for example. Sometimes the relics are brought to someone's house. The first objection to this is that the relics are not always authentic. That aside, even if the relics are authentic, the gatherings themselves are wrong. Many of the evils of gatherings were described above in the discussion of the gatherings of women at weddings. Noise, lack of seclusion, and sometimes the singing that all the women hear (in this case, singing by those viewing the relics)--everyone knows these to be bad. It is correct to go to see relics only if you go alone and do nothing against the *shari'at* [Metcalf 1992(1990): 160].

The veneration of holy relics has been introduced above, based on fieldwork done at the end of the 20th century and on the religious educational book from the early 20th century. Although the cases are few in number, they well convey the fervent nature of the veneration of the holy relics. They may also indicate that even after almost one hundred years, there has been no great change in the actual practice of paying veneration to the relics.

By the way, a number of events held to do with the Prophet can be seen as contrary to the doctrine of Islam, as in Thanawi's criticisms. Of the five pillars based on the sunnah of the Prophet, Islamic Law only recognises the two *'id* directly connected with Ramadan and Hajj. Not only does Islamic Law not recognise any other festivals as legitimate, it also forbids ceremonies or religious festivals held for a human being, even if he is the Prophet. Hence, particularly from the point of view of a reformist, the festival of the Prophet's birth anniversary as described above could be said to be shameful behaviour that deserves censure.

However, despite such opinions and criticisms, many people still take part in the festival to mark the Prophet's birth anniversary. They gather before the relics, seeking some form of contact with the Prophet. In this sense the veneration of the holy relics offers an opportunity for people to come into contact with the Prophet (and his family) through the relics, and they could be said to enter thus into a real personal experience of Islam. This is also demonstrated by the fact that the reformist Thanawi, while criticizing the festival of the Prophet's birth anniversary and a number of actions to do with the veneration of the holy relics, did not totally repudiate the veneration of the holy relics itself.

The decline of the cult of holy relics?

It can be seen from the instances mentioned above that the cult of holy relics itself has not been completely repudiated by the reformists. In fact, the same opinion was demonstrated by a leading member of Jamaat-i-Islami, a non-ulama reformist Islamic group in modern-day Pakistan (in 2003, during the author's stay in Pakistan)*³. It is also still fresh in our memory that Mullah Omar, the supreme leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan, appeared before the citizens of Kabul robed in the Prophet's mantle when the Taliban established their administration [Ahmed 2002(2000): 42]. Holy relics are extremely precious objects that offer important clues for our understanding of the political situation in today's Muslim societies.

However, it has been reported that the cult of relics has declined due to the continued harsh criticism from reformist Islam forces. The cultural-historical discussion by Parveen [1993] epitomizes this. She seeks the origins of the South Asian cult of footprints in ancient Buddhism and Hinduism, and begins by explaining the syncretic connection between those and the cult of the Prophet Muhammad's footprints. The Prophet's footprints were brought to the Indian sub-continent with the establishment of Muslim rule where, since the cult of footprints was already well-established, the cult of the Prophet's footprints syncretized with local customs and ceremonies and took hold as a part of Islamic practices [Parveen 1993: 335-337].

Drawing upon a number of examples, she also tries to prove that, in the Bengal region since there are many similarities between Islamic holy relic shrine construction, cults and ceremonies and local Hindu temple construction, cults and ceremonies, there was a very amicable relationship between the Muslim ruling class, the patrons of the cult of holy relics, and their Muslim and non-Muslim subjects, and that the ruling class used the holy relics of the Prophet to stamp their authority, demonstrate their piety and pray for good fortune [Parveen 1993: 337-341].

Finally she argues that from the 18th century onwards, the end of Muslim rule and the influence of reformist Islam meant that mosques were built in the Bengal region instead of holy relic shrines, and that, since the emphasis in modern-day Bangladesh is on maintaining a close relationship with Saudi Arabia rather than on maintaining local customs, the cult of holy relics is in overall decline [Parveen 1993: 342-343].

Certainly, as Parveen points out, ever since the dawning of the modern age in the 18th century, the cult of holy relics in South Asian Muslim societies has lost one important patron of its ceremonies after another in its Muslim rulers. It is also partly true that reformist groups have

shown a tendency to try to eliminate local, syncretic Islamic practices. Nevertheless, as was mentioned earlier, even the Deoband movement, the most influential reformist Islamic group, does not repudiate the cult of holy relics itself. What is more, there are reformist movements such as the Barelvi who deify the Prophet and positively support faith in saints and holy relics, and attempts are being made to provide a new interpretation of the public celebration of the Prophet's birth anniversary and the veneration of holy relics and give them ideological backing*⁴.

However, that does not mean that the Deobandi unconditionally approve the veneration of holy relics. As was mentioned earlier, one point of contention is whether or not the holy relics are genuine. Let us then consider the question of how the authenticity of the holy relics is endorsed. In fact it is not just that there is a dearth of legitimate and scholarly traditions to support the authenticity of the relics, but there are no writings that encourage their reverence in either the Quran or the six major Hadith collections and Islam has no canonization mechanism to begin with. Hence an attempt to trace the authenticity of relics was an extremely individualistic task. Thus it may be considered that a local approval process is performed in which the authenticity of relics is endorsed by such things as a storied history in which dynastic rulers and renowned saints make an appearance, numerous miracles, the number of pilgrims and the manner of their faith. It would seem that one important element in this kind of local approval process was the existence of kingship.

Thus the decline of the cult of holy relics argued by Parveen [1993] would seem to be nothing more than the abolition of lavish ceremonies, or their scaling down, due to the loss of the rulers who were their patrons as a result of colonialisation and modernisation, rather than to the influence of modern reformist Islam. This scaling down of the ceremonies, however, certainly does not signify the decline of the cult of holy relics. This is because, as was described earlier, the holy relics are being mass-produced and consumed as goods such as charms and amulets or souvenirs from holy places, and faith in them is flourishing on a more personal level and further within the private domain.

The cult of holy relics as a contact zone

The author considers that a kind of contact zone can be found in the present state of this cult of holy relics. According to Pratt, within the extremely asymmetrical relationship produced by dominance and subordination such as colonial rule, bidirectional borrowing and appropriation frequently occurs between completely different cultures that meet, clash and grapple in the social space of the contact zone, and the dualism between "us" and "them" is destroyed from its

very foundations by the interactions, negotiations and choices of the bearers of both cultures [Pratt 2008(1992): 7].

Then, in the case we are considering here, what are the different cultures that engage in borrowing, appropriation, negotiation and selection? Firstly, it is possible to posit an analytical framework that locates on one hand the universality of Islam and on the other the individuality of Islam in South Asia; in other words, the analytical framework of the great tradition and the little tradition. However, taking universality as an a priori, inevitably signifies that a pure, great tradition Islam exists in an unshakeable form. With this way of thinking, it could be said that the stance of reformist Islam is of the same type as that of researchers who perceive the cult of relics as syncretism [Stewart and Shaw (eds.) 2005(1994)]. Moreover, the two different cultures can be posited, secondly, as a reformist Islam that has been impacted by westernisation = protestant values and their influence and an Islam that has not been so impacted.

Nevertheless, even the latter Islam has not completely avoided the influence of westernization. Hence the bearers of the cult of holy relics too encounter modern western thinking and are also contriving to meet the demands of the age of consumer societies and popular culture. Here we should first of all note the Barelvi technique of preparing modern ideological arguments to defend pre-modern customs. It is often actively asserted at the shrines, the actual scene of the cult of holy relics, that the custodian of the shrine and people who play a leading role there are supporters of the Barelvi movement.

The next point that must not be overlooked is the effective use of the mobility, ubiquity and universality of the holy relics. In many cases the saints in saint cults have a markedly local quality, but the holy relics are held to be relics of the Prophet and his family or descendants. They can be considered to possess a more universal quality that evokes a temporal and spatial centrality, wherever they are located in the Islamic world. In a manner of speaking, by displaying holy relics with a global significance and value in local shrines, and by selling reproductions of them to individuals - in other words, further boosting their mobility and ubiquity - this kind of local Islam is being diffused without diluting the centrality of global Islam.

Thus, in the contact zone of the cult of holy relics, different layers of Islamic practices are influencing one another and creating a hybrid world. In previous research on Islamic saint cults, the aspect of syncretism was negated and only similarities with local religious practices were stressed, with the anti-syncretic reformists perceived as being strongly opposed to them^{*5}.

However, since they are syncretic, the saint cults and the cult of holy relics whose decline due to the workings of anti-syncretism was reported or predicted in fact did not wane. They simply changed their form when the Muslim dynasties that had been the patrons of the

ceremonies vanished, or in response to the needs of the times or the people, and are vigorously expanding by means of new strategies. In this sense the cult of holy relics is a visible form of contact zone where the individualistic Islam centred upon local saints mixed with the global and universal Islam that has a sense of reverence for the Prophet at its core. It can be said to be not entirely inconsistent with the ideology and actions of reformist Islam, and even to thrive on criticism, and to be transforming itself dynamically.

Conclusion

This paper focused on specific aspects of Islamic holy relics based on a case study in North India. It has long been argued that the cult of holy relics is in decline as a result of such factors as the revitalization of reformist Islam and the forces of modernisation and secularisation. However, the case study introduced in this paper demonstrates strongly that it is rather overflowing with vigour and enthusiasm. The veneration of holy relics and the thriving festival of the Prophet's birth anniversary are proof of this, but another point that the author would like to emphasize is the circulation of kitsch and pop charms and amulets modelled on the holy relics.

The existence of charms and amulets that take the holy relics as their motif indicates that, even after the solemn and substantial relics have been reproduced in a compact and colourful form, people still have faith in them as vehicles for *baraka*. What is more, most of such charms and amulets can be purchased inexpensively at the shrines of saints. Thus holy relics are not only venerated in pilgrimages to the places where they are kept, in other words holy places, but are also venerated in a more individual and everyday space through the purchase of charms and amulets modelled upon them. In a sense, the transformation of holy relics into goods might be seen as the contact zone of holy places and the sphere of everyday life.

Thus, the cult of holy relics is by no means a pre-modern and dying faith that can be expected to decline, but rather a faith that constantly reinvents and transforms itself in a shape that conforms to the times and is overflowing with the energy to live in the present (cf. Genep [1943: 96-98]). And, because it is a multilayered contact zone, it continues its existence while undergoing abundant transformations, not only in its colours and forms but even in its significance and values.

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*1 For example, immediately after the partition the dominant view was as follows. Non-Islamic and heretical elements had already been eliminated in East and West Pakistan[Nasr 1966: 96], or there were some parts that would probably soon be eliminated by Islamic movements [Ahmad, A. 1969: 51]. On the other hand, since there were no powerful Muslim leaders in India, the Islam of most of the populace living in the provinces, in other words the Islam that had absorbed folk beliefs and Hinduism, remained unreformed [Ahmad, A. 1969: 51], or that the Islam of such people was being purified too [Faruqi 1979: 34].

*2 It seems that what lies behind this cult of the Prophet's relics is a faith in the miracles (*muajiza*) performed by him. For example, the Prophet did not cast a shadow, his hair did not burn even when it was cast into the flames, flies would never land on his clothes, and his sandals never left a trace on sand but he always left footprints when he walked barefoot on rock [Arnold 1978: 367-368].

*3 He said that he too would fervently venerate the holy relics if they were genuine, but did not do so because most of them were fakes [Komaki 2004].

*4 See [Sanyal 1996], for example.

*5 Grunebaum uses the framework of the great tradition (universalism) and the little tradition (local culture) to explain the situation whereby Islam as a universal culture, in the process of spreading around the world, was placed in antagonistic / complementary relationships with the traditional culture of each region. He argues that it is the little tradition that is officially criticized [von Grunebaum 1955: 17-37]. According to the Indian Muslim anthropologist Ahmad, the anthropologists and sociologists who surveyed Muslim societies in India during the 1950s and 60s attempted to analyze diverse forms of Islam using the framework of the great tradition / little tradition, but it was the theological and philosophical principles of Islam that were seen as legitimate and the great tradition, while local and indigenous Islamic phenomena were designated as heresy or the little tradition[Ahmad 1984(1981): 10]. This division into orthodoxy and heresy can also be seen in the arguments of the modern anthropologists and sociologists Gellner and Turner.They too regard the Islam of the ulumas as orthodox Islam and consider that its opposite is the heretical Islam involving saints [Gellner 1981, Turner 1974].