THE POLITICS OF CELEBRATION: POWER, AGENCY, AND PLACEMAKING IN A FESTIVAL IN DELHI

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology and Social Anthropology

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Budapest, Hungary

2019

ABSTRACT

Phool Waalon Ki Sair (Procession of the Florists) is one of the most prominent and oldest festive events in the city of Delhi. Originally established in 1812, it flourished and evolved under both the Mughal Empire and the British colonial regime. Since 1962, the festival is being hosted by the civil society organization named *Anjuman Sair-e-Gulfaroshan* in collaboration with the government of Delhi. Hosted annually at the Hindu temple of *Yogmaya Devi* and the Islamic shrine of *Bakhtiar Kaki* in Mehrauli, one of the oldest neighborhoods of the capital, the festival seeks to promote social parity and communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims of the city.

Influenced by the historic turn within anthropology, and based on both archival research as well as ethnographic fieldwork, the analysis presented in the thesis shows that the festival should be viewed as a contentious and dynamic process that constantly shapes, and in turn is impacted by, the agency of its participants and the myriad urban spaces of Delhi where it is staged. Moreover, the thesis explores the manner in which the different polities that have ruled the city (Mughal Empire, British Raj and the postcolonial state in Delhi) have influenced and controlled the festival to serve their specific needs.

In the process, it offers a critique of the existing academic literature on festivals and demonstrates that *Phool Waalon Ki Sair* has less to do with the promotion of inter-religious harmony and more with serving as both the *site* as well as the *medium* of the relations of power through which Delhi has been governed over the course of time. Thus, the thesis seeks to highlight that concepts like power, agency, and placemaking are essential to any anthropological study of festivals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research topic of this thesis would not have been conceived without the help of Sohail Hashmi. In 2013, I had participated in a historical walk organized in Mehrauli by him, and this was the occasion when I first came to know about the existence of *Phool Waalon Ki Sair*. I cannot thank him enough for inspiring me to further explore the history and politics of the festival.

My supervisors, Prof. Prem Kumar Rajaram and Prof. Judit Bodnar, have constantly supported me with their invaluable guidance, supervision, and feedback. Without their help, I would not have been able to conduct the research that has been presented in the following pages.

During my two years in Budapest, I've had the immense fortune of befriending some of the most amazing and loveliest individuals I've met so far in my life. Although I can't mention them all, I'm especially grateful to the following for supporting me during my darkest hours with their companionship, laughter, and kindness - Mariam, Kubilay, Filip, Apratim, Ahmed, Tilahun, Fedya, Jose, Ali, Aniko, Nora, Rasha, Greta, Siddharth, Gamze, Ilkin, and Silvia. I hope all of them continue to prosper in life.

Lastly, I'm indebted to the officials of the National Archives of India and the Delhi State Archives for helping me in my quest to unearth the documents related to the festival's past. An earlier version of the fourth chapter was presented as a working paper in the panel called 'The Institutionalization of Heritage in South Asia: Possibilities of a Transdisciplinary Approach' at the 25th European Conference on South Asian Studies held at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris in July 2018. I'm particularly grateful to Anais de Fonseca and Priyanka Basu,

conveners of the panel, for offering valuable comments regarding my paper. Finally, I'm solely responsible for all the flaws and errors that may be present in the thesis.

Table of contents

ABSTRACT i

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii

Table of contents iv

List of Figures, Tables or Illustrations vii

List of Abbreviations viii

Introduction: The Context of *Phool Waalon Ki Sair* 1

Research Questions and Methodology 7

Chapter 1 - Literature Review: How and why should we study festivals? 9

1.1 Definition and Morphology of Festivals 9

1.2 Festivals as Contentious, Open-ended Processes 12

1.3 Festivals as the Carnivalesque Inversion of Order 14

1.4 Festivals as the Cultural Public Sphere 19

1.5 Conclusion 24

Chapter 2 – A Tale of Processions, Numbers, Disease, and Power: Exploring the History of *Phool Waalon Ki Sair* 25

2.1 Historic Turn within Anthropology 25

2.2 Mughal Origin of the Festival 1803 - 1857 27

2.2.1 Early Modern Context of Delhi 27

2.2.2 Inception of the Festival..... 28

2.2.3 A Glimpse of PWS from 1848..... 30

2.3 Historicizing the Relations of Power 34

2.3.1 Patrimonialism, Tactical, and Structural Power 34

2.3.2 Orientalism and Colonial Governmentality 37

2.4 The Festival during British Colonialism 1857 - 1947 38

2.4.1 Reorganization of Delhi after the Mutiny of 1857..... 38

2.4.2 Revival of the Festival 41

2.4.3 PWS under British Colonial Governmentality 43

2.5 Conclusion 47

Chapter 3 – Performing the Divine, Redefining the Secular: *Ritual Dramas*, (Mass) Mediated Religious Identities, and the Agency of Pavalam 49

3.1 PWS, Secularism, and Communal Harmony..... 49

3.2 Encountering Pavalam 52

3.3 *Ritual Drama at the Shrine of Bakhtiar Kaki* 58

3.4 *Ritual Drama* at the Temple of *Yogmaya Devi*..... 65

3.5 Conclusion 69

Conclusion 71

Bibliography or Reference List..... 73

Appendices 78

List of Figures, Tables or Illustrations

Figure 1: Map of Shahjahanabad before the Mutiny of 1857. (Source: https://imgur.com/gallery/YvVsT)..... 78

Figure 2: A Mughal miniature painting depicting the imperial procession of PWS. (Source: http://www.phoolwaalonkisair.com/gallery_old.htm) 79

Figure 1: The postcolonial state in Delhi played a central role in hosting PWS. (Source: http://www.phoolwaalonkisair.com/gallery_old.htm) 80

Figure 2: Turkish caps as a visual motif in the ritual drama at the shrine of Bakhtiar Kaki. (Source: http://www.phoolwaalonkisair.com/2015_5.htm) 81

Figure 1: Wrestling competition in the DDA park beside Hauz-e-Shamsi. (Source: http://www.phoolwaalonkisair.com/2015_4.htm) 82

Figure 2: Audience of ritual drama at the shrine of Bakhtiar Kaki. (Source: http://www.phoolwaalonkisair.com/2015_5.htm) 83

Figure 1: Krishna kissing Sudama's feet in the ritual drama at the temple of Yogmaya Devi. (Source: Photography by author.) 84

Figure 2: Creation of diagrams was essential to the British Raj's control of urban spaces on the occasion of PWS. (Source: Photograph by author.) 85

List of Abbreviations

IDMC - Imperial Delhi Municipal Committee

LG - Lieutenant Governor of Delhi

PWS - Phool Waalon Ki Sair

Introduction: The Context of *Phool Waalon Ki Sair*

Every year, usually in the month of October or November, the festival of *Phool Waalon Ki Sair* (Procession of the Florists) is organized in Mehrauli, one of the oldest neighborhoods of Delhi. Hosted by the civil society organization named *Anjuman Sair-e-Gulfaroshan*, the festival primarily involves a procession which winds its way through the labyrinthine alleys of Mehrauli and culminates at the Hindu temple of *Yogmaya Devi* and the Islamic shrine of the thirteenth century Sufi saint *Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki*.

Large floral fans that have been skillfully assembled and intricately decorated by local craftsmen are offered both at the temple and the shrine as a ritualistic obeisance toward the divinities, and this ceremony is followed by cultural performances held within the precincts of the two religious sites. Due to its association with both Hindu and Islamic places of worship, *Phool Waalon Ki Sair* (henceforth referred to as PWS) is regarded as a celebration of social parity and communal harmony between all religions among the masses of Mehrauli in particular and the people of the capital in general (Smith 2004; Duttagupta 2015; Jain 2018).

While the festival, in its contemporary form, commenced under the aegis of the Nehruvian state in the early 1960s, its historical origin can actually be traced back to 1812 when Delhi was being ruled by the penultimate Mughal emperor Akbar Shah II. The Battle of Delhi in 1803 had established the British East India Company's political control over the city, and PWS directly grew out of the subsequent power struggle that had ensued between the Mughal crown and the British resident posted at the imperial court (Spear 2002, 41 - 45).

The main bone of contention between the two was the fact that the emperor wished to be succeeded by his youngest son - Mirza Jahangir - while Archibald Seton, the British Resident, was in favor of the eldest prince Sirajuddin Zafar as the heir - apparent (Beg 2012, 4 - 5). This

was one of the first instances of a British Resident beginning to exert indirect control over the polity and rules of succession of a native ruler, and such tactics would later become one of the primary mechanisms of the colonial subjugation of India (Bandyopadhyay 2004, 113 - 118). [1]

Mirza Jahangir, understandably, was strongly opposed to the interventionist policy of Seton and the two had failed to get along with each other from the very beginning (Beg 2012, 4 - 5). The situation came to a head in 1809 when Mirza Jahangir tried to assassinate Seton by firing at him while the latter was about to enter the Red Fort in Delhi (ibid). Although Seton escaped unscathed, he was infuriated by the prince's temerity to challenge a British political agent (ibid). As a result, he exiled Mirza Jahangir to a prison in Allahabad, seven hundred kilometers from Delhi, for a period of three years (ibid).

This incident shocked the Mughal court, and upon the prince's eventual return to the city in 1812, the emperor decided to commemorate the occasion by organizing an elaborate and lavish procession from the Red Fort to the shrine of *Bakhtiar Kaki* and the temple of *Yogmaya Devi* in Mehrauli (ibid). Beautifully designed floral *chadar* (a sheet of cloth) and *masehri* (a canopy) were carried by the processionists all the way from the Red Fort inside the walled city of *Shahjahanabad* (the Mughal name for the city of Delhi) to the village of Mehrauli, almost eighteen kilometers away, where the shrine and the temple are located (ibid). [2] Thus, the festival of *Phool Waalon Ki Sair* (Procession of the Florists) was born and became institutionalized as an annual ritual.

[1] During the first half of the 19th century, British Residents used the 'Doctrine of Lapse' (the policy of taking over a native kingdom if the ruler died without an heir) to annex the kingdoms of Awadh, Jhansi, Nagpur, Satara, etc. (Bandyopadhyay 2004, 115).

[2] I've used *Shahjahanabad* to refer exclusively to the walled city with the Red Fort at its center. On the other hand, I've used Delhi to indicate not only the walled city but also its surrounding regions consisting of numerous villages like Mehrauli, Badarpur, Tughlaqabad, Garbi Mehadipur, Faridabad, etc.

The festival, therefore, had a distinctly anti-colonial connotation from its moment of inception, and it was strategically devised to unite the Hindus and Muslims of the city in support of Mughal rule. After the premature death of Mirza Jahangir in 1821 and the succession of Sirajuddin Zafar (now known as Bahadur Shah Zafar) to the throne in 1837, PWS reached its apogee under the supervision of the Mughal court (Beg 2012, xiv - xviii). Bahadur Shah Zafar "never forgot the central importance of preserving the bond between his Hindu and Muslim subjects, which he always recognized was the central stitching that held his capital city together" (Dalrymple 2009, 483 - 84). Accordingly, he not only ensured that PWS increased in its scope and grandeur with every passing year, but also personally became one of its major patrons (Beg 2012, xiv - xviii).

The centrality of the festival to his reign can be deciphered from the fact that he chose to construct several palaces adjacent to the shrine in Mehrauli like the *Diwan-e-Khas* (Hall of Private Audience), *Diwan-e-Am* (Hall of Public Audience) and the *Bab-e-Zafar* (Zafar Gate) that mirrored the architectural splendor of similarly named palaces within the Red Fort in Delhi (Beg 2012, 18). On the occasion of PWS, Bahadur Shah Zafar would shift his entire court to these newly constructed palaces in the village of Mehrauli, and it would temporarily become the official seat of Mughal power (ibid). He also extensively renovated other public sites in the area like the *Jahaz Mahal* (a caravanserai dating back to the mid-fifteenth century) and *Hauz-e-Shamsi* (an artificial lake built in the thirteenth century), while also incorporating them into the myriad festive events associated with PWS (ibid).

It is interesting to note that even after the Mughal empire had been decisively supplanted by British colonial rule in 1857 - 58, the festival continued to be celebrated by the inhabitants of the city. For instance, one of the earliest colonial documents mentioning the festival is the 'Final Report on Settlement of Land Revenue in the Delhi District', which was based on a

cadastral survey that had been carried out between 1872 and 1877 by the colonial bureaucrat Oswald Wood. In this report, one can catch a brief glimpse of the cultural activities that were associated with the festival -

> The fair at Mehrauli especially is a favourite resort for the Delhi people. It is called the 'Pankha Mela', because 'Pankhas' are carried in procession on Wednesday to the Hindu temple, 'Jog Maya', and on Thursday to the shrine of 'Kutbudin' [sic] (Wood 1882, 59). [3]

Hence, it is fair to assume that PWS had been incorporated into the processes of British colonial governmentality, even though the polity which had originally organized the festival had itself ceased to exist. Over the years, the festival would even prove resilient to the monumental changes that the British Raj brought about in the spatial layout of Delhi by destroying several parts of the old city and initiating the construction of a new imperial capital called New Delhi in 1911.

PWS kept on being celebrated all throughout this tumultuous era and was finally brought to an end in the late 1930s, when almost every major festival in Delhi was severely curtailed or banned outright by the colonial authorities due to the increasing momentum of the nationalist movement for Independence, coupled with the subsequent communal violence related to the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent (Legg 2007, 142 - 148; Beg 2012, 41 - 42).

However, despite the widespread communal violence precipitated by the Partition, the association of the shrine and the temple in Mehrauli with a festival that had celebrated the cultural bonhomie between Hindus and Muslims was not forgotten. For instance, just three days before his assassination on 30 January 1948, Mahatma Gandhi had visited the shrine of *Bakhtiar Kaki*, where, "he addressed the gathering, emphasizing communal harmony and

[3] Pankha' - Floral Fan; 'Mela' - Fair

religious tolerance. He assured the Muslims of India of non-discriminating treatment by the Indian Government" (The Times of India, 1948).

Moreover, just a few years later in August 1953, the Notified Area Committee - a municipal body working under the Delhi State Government - was contributing a sum of three hundred rupees to the 'Sair-i-Gulfaroshan Fair Committee' for organizing the festival (M. L. Dave, Secretary, 'Contribution towards the expenditure on the Sair-i-Gulfaroshan Mela during the year 1953 - 54', Letter (Delhi, 1953), Local Self Government Files No. 5(47)/53, Delhi State Archives). [4] Thus, soon after Independence, PWS was again being actively hosted and supervised, but this time by the postcolonial state in Delhi.

In 1962, the civil society organization called *Anjuman Sair-e-Gulfaroshan* was officially established specifically for the task of hosting the festival on an annual basis (PWS Brochure 2016, 14). In 1963, on the occasion of the festival, Jawaharlal Nehru, then Prime Minister of India, wrote a letter to the organization in which he endorsed the celebration of PWS in the following manner -

> Phool Waalon Ki Sair, the old traditional mela which used to be celebrated in Delhi by all communities alike, was revived last year after many years. I am glad that it is being held again this year at Mehrauli. Being a symbol of our unity, it deserves all encouragement. I send my good wishes to its organizers in the firm hope that the spirit behind this mela will guide our countrymen in establishing cordial relations among themselves, regardless of caste, community, or creed (ibid, 6).

Thus, by the early 1960s, PWS had become a part of the cultural project of promoting the ideal of secularism by the postcolonial state in Delhi. Consequently, the *Anjuman* also began

[4] Adjusted for inflation, it amounts to a sum of twenty-six thousand rupees in 2019.

receiving monetary grants from the Delhi State Government for supervising the festival, and it has been doing so each year from 1962 till the present day.

Meanwhile, Mehrauli too has undergone a drastic transformation over the course of time. It's no longer a rural settlement in the outskirts of *Shahjahanabad*; instead, it's now a densely urbanized area falling within the larger National Capital Region (NCR) comprising Delhi and a few districts from the neighboring states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan like Faridabad, Meerut, Ghaziabad, Alwar, etc. The temple of *Yogmaya Devi* is now located along Kalka Das Marg, one of the major and busiest thoroughfares of Mehrauli, and is flanked by upscale restaurants and boutiques. On the other hand, the shrine of *Bakhtiar Kaki* is located close to Islam Colony, a working-class neighborhood inhabited primarily by the Muslim urban poor. Thus, both spatially and socially, the two religious sites have become drastically different from one another.

Similarly, PWS has also experienced a profound transformation. The original procession, which used to span across vast areas of *Shahjahanabad* and its surrounding villages, has now become localized and attenuated, and primarily involves two smaller ones which begin at the *Hauz-e-Shamsi* and end at the temple and the shrine respectively. They are followed by cultural performances held at both the sites, and all of these festive events are organized by members of the *Anjuman*. Often, important government officials like the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi or the Minister of State for Culture and Tourism are invited as chief guests to formally preside over these ceremonies.

Furthermore, the space opposite *Hauz-e-Shamsi* has been turned into a public park owned by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). It acts as the venue of a competitive event based on *Kushti* (a form of wrestling popular in South Asia) and a week-long popular fair consisting of

myriad entertainment and commercial activities. All of these elements together comprise the contemporary manifestation of PWS.

Research Questions and Methodology

The intriguing history and social context of the festival have rendered it uniquely amenable to multiple pathways of scholarly inquiry. The primary research question that arises in relation to PWS is how have the different polities (Mughal Empire, British Raj and the postcolonial state in the capital) that have ruled Delhi interpreted, represented and utilized the festival to exercise power over the city and its inhabitants?

Moreover, since the goal of PWS is to promote communal harmony and the ideal of secularism, what kind of religious identities are constructed by its cultural performances for both Hindus and Muslims? In addition, due to the drastic transformation of Mehrauli since the inception of PWS, it is imperative to investigate the relationship between the festival and the various urban spaces where it is staged, as well as the historical evolution of such a relationship. Lastly, there is a need to focus on how the masses participate in the festival, and the way this influences the overall nature of PWS.

In this thesis, I've tried to answer these questions by investigating and analyzing the festival through two distinct methodological approaches. Firstly, with the help of ethnographic research methods like direct observation, participant observation, and an in-depth qualitative interview, I have sought to situate myself, in my role as an anthropologist, *within* the festive events and offer experiential forms of analysis. Such a mode of inquiry with respect to festivals has been a long-standing tradition within anthropology, primarily because festivals involve a complex amalgamation of essentially subjective, lived, and embodied, practices and experiences (Frost 2016, 570 - 571).

Secondly, I have relied on primary sources (archival documents and contemporaneous newspaper articles) and a secondary source (a book based on narratives of oral history and Mughal court documents) directly pertaining to the festival's past in order to provide a historical account of its transformation over a period lasting almost two centuries. This diachronic approach has complemented my ethnographic investigation of PWS by revealing the processes that have led to temporal continuities and fissures between the contemporary form of the festival and the guise in which it had originally emerged. The following chapter situates my analysis of PWS within the context of the existing academic literature on festivals, before the discussion moves on to the qualitative data obtained and interpreted through the methods mentioned above.

Chapter 1 - Literature Review: How and why should we study festivals?

Festivals have been extensively studied and theorized within both sociology and anthropology. This chapter explores the existing academic literature on this issue by focusing on the theoretical frameworks that have been utilized to interpret festivals. By discussing how they have been analyzed as a carnivalesque inversion of the social order, a part of the cultural public sphere, or, contentious, fluid, and transient processes that are constituted by myriad rites, I will demonstrate how these conceptual frameworks relate to my analysis of PWS. While doing so, I will also offer a critique of such concepts along with a brief summary of the larger arguments presented in the thesis.

1.1 Definition and Morphology of Festivals

Festivals have long been recognized as occasions of 'collective effervescence' that lead to the development and dissemination of a strong sense of community among their participants (Durkheim [1912] 1995). Building upon such a notion, Alessandro Falassi has offered what has arguably become one of the most well-known definitions of festivals -

> Festival commonly means a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview (Falassi 1987, 2).

Moreover, as observed by Falassi and others, festivals represent a temporality that is distinct from that of daily life, since communities do not celebrate festivals everyday but view them as specific events, or, "a unique moment in time celebrated with ceremony and ritual to satisfy specific needs" (Goldblatt 1990, quoted in Cudny 2016, 14). Thus, a general morphology of

festivals should focus on the unique temporal sequences they pass through, which can be described as ritual acts or 'rites' (Falassi 1987, 3 - 4). Such rites serve as the constituent elements of festivals by offering particular symbolic meanings that are culturally relevant to the communities participating in them, while also undertaking various social functions.

Thus, festivals may involve *rites of conspicuous display* which bring communities into contact with, thereby also allowing them to venerate, elements, sites, and objects laden with special symbolic significance like relics, sacred shrines, magical items, etc. (ibid, 4). Access to such cultural icons, which also act as signifiers of both the identity and ideology of communities, is often mediated and supervised by the social elites within those communities. This enables the elites to establish themselves as the rightful guardians of the icons, which in turn, manifests and legitimizes their power over the community as a whole (ibid). For instance, the procession that lies at the heart of PWS can be construed as an elaborate *rite of conspicuous display* which has allowed representatives of the various polities that have ruled Delhi to establish their control over the temple and the shrine in Mehrauli.

Another significant type of such rites is the *ritual dramas* that are often staged to depict a creation myth, a legend, or a symbolic belief that offers cultural coordinates for mooring the historical memory of the community, thereby both reifying and explaining the unique cultural identity of the community to itself and others within the larger ambit of festivals (ibid). The cultural performances staged at the temple and the shrine can be interpreted as *ritual dramas* created specifically for PWS.

Other interesting temporal sequences found in numerous festivals are *rites of exchange* and *rites of competition*. The first is especially relevant to those festivals which include fairs where there is an exchange of money, goods, information, and ritual gifts or visits (ibid, 5). Such an exchange serves two main purposes - first, it facilitates a temporary redistribution of wealth

and/or social status within the community, and second, it creates the abstract notion of a community of equals bound together by certain shared relations of reciprocity (ibid). The popular fair associated with PWS can be identified as the site of different forms of *rites of exchange.*

Rites of competition, on the other hand, achieve the exact opposite - through games and contests, they celebrate the emergence of hierarchy and the notion of the 'winner' exerting power over the rest (ibid, 5 - 6). The competitive events held as a part of PWS can be easily recognized as such *rites of competition*. Furthermore, since all of these rites create social conditions that differ from the norms of everyday life, it has led Falassi to conclude that they are the fundamental components which distinguish the festive temporality from that of daily, mundane existence, thereby justifying his oft-quoted epithet for festivals - "time out of time" (ibid).

Scholars have reasoned that a morphology of festivals must also include an emphasis on their spatial aspect because along with their temporal uniqueness, all festivals transfigure ordinary spaces into the special arena where their exceptional rites can be organized. Thus, Waterman has observed that "festivals transform landscape and place from being everyday settings into temporary environments - albeit with permanent identities - created by and for specific groups of people" (Waterman 1998, 55). Corollary to this, the social, economic, political and environmental nature of such spaces has a profound impact on the quality, content and relevance of the festivals themselves. For instance, a festival held in a rural, agrarian area will be strikingly different from the one that is hosted in a working-class neighborhood within a city. In this regard, PWS certainly transforms the religious sites and urban spaces of Mehrauli from their everyday environment into temporary arenas for staging its myriad constituent rites.

Finally, Gibson and Stewart have noted that festive spaces also act as "a point of convergence" where the different groups associated with the festival - the organizers, volunteers, participants, sponsors, audience, journalists, casual onlookers, etc. - can forge tangible, material and social networks among themselves (Gibson and Stewart 2009). This is a crucial outcome of festivals in general because such networks "enable their participants to maintain personal and virtual contacts, to exchange information and ideas, or to cooperate creatively on specific projects" (Faust and Wasserman 1994, quoted in Cudny 2016, 21). Several scholars have utilized this insight to argue that festivals promote the formation of social capital by increasing social cohesion and enabling the development of community resources (Misener and Mason 2006; Arcodia and Whitford 2007; Finkel 2010; Wilks 2011; Quinn and Wilks 2013).

1.2 Festivals as Contentious, Open-ended Processes

While the aforementioned theoretical framework does prove relevant to the analysis of PWS, the empirical reality of the festival also contradicts these concepts in significant ways. First, Falassi's definition assumes that festivals cater to the needs of the "whole community", which is envisioned as a single, uniform, and homogeneous entity. In the case of PWS, this does not hold true since the inhabitants of Mehrauli participating in it are stratified along the lines of class, caste, gender, and religion. Even if the various social groups based on such divisions unitedly participate in the festival, one still needs to explain if and how PWS specifically addresses each of these sections within the larger community of Mehrauli, how these diverse groups relate to the festival in their own ways, and ultimately, how these myriad interactions and processes shape the final nature of the festival itself.

Second, the elites in charge of organizing festivals do not always act in unison, nor do festivals construct and transmit cultural values and meanings that are necessarily internally consistent.

As noted by Frost, festivals often become the site of an intense struggle for dominance as different kinds of authorizing institutions and groups compete against one another to pursue their own agenda (Frost 2016, 573 - 575). As a result, instead of promoting a stable set of cultural beliefs, such festivals are often rendered internally fractured and contentious with multiple voices and ideologies vying for control (ibid).

For instance, Lokesh Ohri has explored the conflicts and negotiations that occurred between the state government of Uttarakhand, local elites acting as the organizers, and regional artists performing in the festival as they all sought to gain control of the form and content of the *Virasat* Arts and Heritage festival in the Indian town of Dehra Dun (Ohri 2016, 667 - 682).

Third, although festivals possess a distinct spatial and temporal logic, it is not possible to entirely divorce them from the larger social context they inhabit. To illustrate, if the *rite of conspicuous display* allows elites to exhibit and reinforce their power over the masses, it must be explained how the festival fits into the mechanisms through which such a hierarchy is maintained and perpetuated even after the festival itself has ended. Similarly, the transformation of ordinary spaces within the ambit of PWS necessarily raises the issue of why certain spaces are deemed especially conducive for hosting festivities in the first place, what are the social processes that determine their organization and control, and to what extent they affect larger relations of power in society.

Hence, one cannot blithely and unproblematically assume that festivals promote social capital without first considering the relations of power that intimately shape the festive events and spaces. The communities, temporal sequences, and spaces comprising festivals, therefore, should not be viewed as closed entities that are neatly bounded and demarcated. Or, in other words, instead of conceiving festivals as particular *events* rigidly demarcated in terms of time

and space, it is far more fruitful to conceive them as fluid, contested, open-ended *processes* that are prone to changes brought forth by the incessant ebb and flow of myriad cultural forces-

> Many studies of festivals, in both theoretical and empirical terms, are marked by tightly defined boundaries of their immediate social context, with an emphasis upon closed spaces, fixed times, indigenous social actors, internal regimes and symbolic contexts, and bounded rituals. Fewer studies have sought to position festivals in a context that is fluid, open to different scopes of society and cultural vectors, and that resonates with the realities of ongoing change (Picard and Robinson 2006, 4 - 5).

Accordingly, I've later demonstrated that the procession of PWS and its cultural meaning have changed over the course of time due to the intervention of different groups of elites. Meanwhile, while analyzing the cultural performances as *ritual dramas*, I've highlighted the implicit contradictions within the religious identities constructed through these performances, along with their specific impact on Hindus and Muslims of Mehrauli. In the process, I've also discussed the festival's changing relationship with the various urban spaces of the city. Finally, under the influence of the historic turn within anthropology, I've tried to situate PWS within the larger, oft-changing, relations of power through which the city of Delhi has been governed.[5]

1.3 Festivals as the Carnivalesque Inversion of Order

The distinct spatial and temporal logic of festivals has given rise to another major strand of theoretical analysis which has perceived them as the site of a temporary inversion of the social order. Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, identified the medieval carnival as a leisurely event whose primary purpose was to allow its participants to release their emotions that would usually

[5] Concepts like the 'historic turn' and 'power' have been defined in the following chapter.

remain suppressed within the everyday routine imposed by the feudal social order (Bakhtin 1984).

The carnivalesque celebrations would enable the masses to criticize, mock or lampoon the elites through myths, rituals, or plays in which the subordinated could, albeit temporarily, invert the relations of power (ibid). The carnival, therefore, not only represented a popular resistance against the elites of the time, but also symbolized a reaction against the strictures of 'high' culture (ibid). Bakhtin thus viewed festivals as the carnivalesque sites of denial, transgression and inversion of the existing social order (Rojek 1993).

Mirroring Bakhtin's conceptual stance, Victor Turner has analyzed festivals as zones of liminality that are caught in the 'betwixt and between', wherein specific rites of passage or play lead to a de-familiarization of everyday social norms (Turner 1982, 121). This creates the opportunity to subvert the quotidian social structures and hierarchies, thereby engendering a sense of 'communitas', or, an intense feeling of equality and inclusion shared by all the members of the community participating in the festival (ibid, 50).

Influenced by the work of Van Gennep (Gennep 1960), both Turner and Falassi have sought to identify the ritualistic elements within festivals which lead to a playful and exuberant sense of escape from daily routine, which in turn offers a momentary inversion of the relations of power (Quinn and Wilks 2017, 37 - 39). For instance, *rites of passage* signifying the transition from one stage of life to another can act as forms of initiation into age groups (childhood to adulthood) or occupational groups (incorporation into the military or a particular religion) during festivals by dismantling the distinction between an 'insider' and the 'outsider' (Falassi 1987, 4).

On the other hand, *rites of reversal* can underscore the fluidity of cultural categories by explicitly conducting a symbolic inversion of social roles that customarily exist within a binary

opposition - men impersonating women and vice versa within a festive masquerade, the master becoming the servant and the servant morphing into the master through the enactment of a festive myth, or, the desecration of the sacred and the sacralization of the profane through particular festive symbols and works of art (ibid).

To illustrate, the ancient Roman Saturnalia celebrations involved festivities that lasted a week and were dedicated to Saturn, the god of sowing and husbandry (Frazer [1919] 1995, 306 - 411). These celebrations were used to reverse traditional social roles - for seven days, masters had to wait upon their slaves and serve them food, while the slaves could admonish the masters for the cruel treatment meted out to them throughout the rest of the year (ibid).

Henri Lefebvre, the Marxist urban theorist, has also analyzed festivals in a similar manner. In his *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre conceptualized the festive temporality as a special occasion which allowed participants to break free of the disciplinary practices underpinning everyday life and work (Lefebvre 2008, 202 - 207). During festivals, individuals could subvert everyday authority by giving in to an excess of emotions and desires (ibid). Therefore, although festivals are characterized by a significant release from the social constraints of everyday life, they cannot be completely separated from the latter since, according to Lefebvre, festivals are mainly born out of the need to transcend the restrictions that delimit individual agency on a daily basis (ibid, 202 - 207). [6]

While the theoretical approaches mentioned above mainly engage with the distinction between the festive temporality and that of everyday life, the Foucauldian concept of 'heterotopia' has been employed to understand the unique spatial dimension of festivals. The notion of

[6] For example, the medieval French festival of *Fête des Fous* (Feast of Fools) allowed its participants to mock and ridicule the ecclesiastical authority of the church (Lefebvre 2008, 57). Usually celebrated on New Year's Day, individuals could perform parodies of the dogmatic, Christian ideology through intentionally subversive masquerades, appalling re-enactments of religious rituals, and unrestrained bouts of gluttony, together with drunken orgies (ibid).

'heterotopia' was defined by Foucault as a kind of 'counter site' - "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 24).

Therefore, heterotopias act as spaces where "an alternative social ordering is performed", as opposed to the spaces wherein the usual hierarchies which comprise our mundane, everyday social existence operate unchallenged (Hetherington 1997, 40). Festivals can thus be easily identified as heterotopic spaces in which contrasting, if not incompatible, beliefs are often reconciled with one another through the celebration of a common ideal; participants from myriad social backgrounds are brought together on an equal footing under a uniform cultural identity, and spaces that were originally intended for other purposes are imparted newer meanings and functionality (Quinn and Wilks 2017, 41 - 43).

While such conceptualizations of festivals may seem compelling, they are ultimately based on certain flawed assumptions. First, the notion of inversion of the social order within a festival presupposes the existence of an un-inverted hierarchy external to the festival (Swiderski 1986, 17 - 20). Or, in other words, instead of examining how festivals fit into everyday relations of power, the notion of inversion seeks to identify the hierarchies being inverted within the special occasion of the festival, and then superficially extrapolates them onto the wider world (ibid).

As a result, the idea of inversion fails to grasp the crucial fact that the temporary emancipation enjoyed by the participants of a festival is often deliberately designed to reinforce the domination of the elites hosting the festivities in the first place. To put it differently, festivals should be viewed as both the *site* as well as the *medium* of power - the former allows us to perceive the hierarchies that operate within the specific temporal and spatial boundaries of festivals, while the latter enables us to understand how festivals themselves can be utilized by

various social groups to either exert, or resist, power and authority in the realm of everyday life.

I've illustrated this argument by discussing how PWS was used by the Mughal court to contest the power of the British East India Company, as well as the manner in which the colonial state in Delhi later administered the festival to enforce its control over the city. At the same time, I've also offered a glimpse of the myriad ways in which organizers and participants working within the temporal and spatial confines of PWS were deeply embedded within the relations of power internal to the festival. Meanwhile, by analyzing the *ritual dramas* within the contemporary manifestation of PWS, I've argued that it is precisely when participants are offered a temporary inversion of the social order that they are most firmly incorporated into the hierarchies operating on a daily basis in society.

Second, the concept of inversion also assumes that all the participants in a festival necessarily perceive and partake in the celebrations in the same manner. This is patently not true since participants can use their agency to focus on, and react to, different aspects of a festival in unanticipated ways (Wah 2004). Moreover, even when their agency is influenced by the temporary sense of emancipation offered by the carnivalesque inversion of the social order, participants may still end up reinforcing existing cultural norms that underpin the larger relations of power in society.

One also cannot overlook the fact that the agency of the participants has the potential to impact the nature of the festival itself. Therefore, if festivals indeed should be viewed as fluid, contested, and open-ended processes, then their relationship with their participants needs to be conceived of as a dialectic, with the myriad festive rites and spaces structuring the agency of the participants, while also being shaped by it in turn. I've explored these issues by analyzing

the way Pavalam - a working-class, Christian woman - had participated in PWS, and the impact of the cultural performances on their audience.

1.4 Festivals as the Cultural Public Sphere

There is a third major stream of theoretical analysis that employs the concept of the 'cultural public sphere' to investigate the social role of festivals. The concept itself has been derived from the ideas of Jurgen Habermas in relation to the historical evolution of the 'public sphere' in the West. Habermas has argued that the origins of the modern, political public sphere can be traced back to the coffee houses, salons, and public academies that had emerged in different parts of Europe during the eighteenth century (Habermas 1989, 31 - 43). Such spaces were utilized by members of the nascent European bourgeoisie of that era primarily for discussions, debates, and deliberations centered around the various political issues of the time (ibid).

Initially, such dialogic interactions and communication were undertaken either as an opposition to, or in support of, literary works that had delved into contemporaneous political and social events (ibid). This led Habermas to conclude that such practices, along with the spaces associated with them, proved essential in giving rise to the first literary public sphere (ibid). Over the course of time, it evolved into the modern, political public sphere in which rational, self-aware, and autonomous individuals could interact with each other as equals and freely discuss the topics of common concern (for instance, the print media, public discussion forums, etc.). Moreover, the European bourgeoisie gradually began to use their influence in this public sphere to criticize, and subsequently delimit, the power of the state in order to establish the principle of public accountability (ibid).

However, with the rise of the modern 'culture industry' during the twentieth century and the consequent commodification of most artistic and creative endeavors, later scholars have argued

that the contemporary production and reception of cultural artefacts constitute a distinctive 'cultural public sphere' within the larger domain of the political public sphere (McGuigan 2005, 433 - 438; Sassatelli 2011, 12 - 26). While the former is characterized by its own form of politics that privileges aesthetic modes of expression and affective communication, the latter has become the exclusive arena of the calculative, formal, and rational discourse originally examined by Habermas (McGuigan 2005, 435 - 436).

Festivals, therefore, can be firmly situated within the cultural public sphere due to their strong association with the formulation of cultural identities and practices, as well as their affective and ritualistic elements which often emphasize aesthetic forms of expression, creativity, play, and entertainment (ibid). Furthermore, festivals can be categorized into any one of the three ways in which the cultural public sphere manifests itself: uncritical populism, radical subversion, and critical intervention (ibid, 436 - 438).

The first refers to any festival that upholds conventional wisdom and prevailing cultural norms. The second involves those which seek to invert existing social hierarchies or supplant them with more equitable alternatives (the Woodstock Festival of 1969, or the carnivalesque protests at the meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999 are some of the relevant examples).

The third is situated midway between the previous two, and "combines the best of uncritical populism - an appreciation of the actually existing cultural field - with the best of radical subversion, producing a genuinely critical and potentially popular stance" (ibid, 438). For instance, the Avignon Theatre Festival in France allows its participants to affirm their personal love for the art form and critically engage with what it means to partake in an enlightened, cultural citizenship, while also offering a cultural representation of the nation to them (Fabiani 2011).

Although the aesthetic and affective elements of festivals indeed possess significant political connotations, the concept of the cultural public sphere cannot be applied to the context of PWS due to its Eurocentric assumptions. For example, Habermas' understanding of the modern public sphere, together with the notion of the cultural public sphere derived from it, assumes the pre-existence of a self-aware, rational, and autonomous individual on whom different cultural and political roles are inscribed once they enter the public realm.

While this may be historically true in the context of the West, it does not hold true in the case of India. Individuals participating in the Indian public sphere are always perceived to be already endowed with collective social identities based on one's caste, class, gender, or religion -

> In non-Western societies this notion of the individual, separate from all other individuals, as the unit of society, is still not an uncontested one. At every level in non-Western societies then, there remains a sense of self that is produced at the *intersection* of individuated bodies and collectivities of different sorts (Menon 2015, 43). [7]

Or, in other words, in non-Western countries like India, collective and intersectional social identities supersede the individualistic and atomized conception of the self, especially when it comes to participation in the public sphere (ibid, 42 - 44). For instance, since the 1990s, efforts aimed at reserving 33% of the seats in the Indian Parliament for women have been vehemently opposed on the grounds that it will allow mainly upper caste, elite women (who already possess considerable cultural capital due to their socio-economic privileges) to be a part of the legislative process, at the expense of individuals, both male and female, from the lower castes and economically backward sections of society (ibid, 38).

Thus, intersectional identities are an intrinsic element of the discourses and practices constituting the Indian public sphere (ibid). However, this does not mean that Indians lack a

[7] Emphasis in original.

sense of the self or agency built around the notion of the individual. Rather, it simply indicates that such a self or agency is always mediated by and expressed through collective, intersectional identities. I've illustrated this argument by showcasing how the *ritual dramas* of PWS construct identities in which religion is intimately intertwined with gender and class. Meanwhile, I've also explored the way in which intersectional identities influenced the individual agency of Pavalam.

Lastly, Habermas interpreted the public sphere as it arose in the West as independent of, and conceptually distinct from, intervention by the state (Fraser 1990, 57). This was essential for conducting a rational discourse that could hope to criticize the policies of the state without the fear of retribution or censorship (ibid). However, as shown by Srirupa Roy in her comparative analysis of the Indian and Turkish public spheres, the construction of the public sphere in India was undertaken by the state itself as the central component of a historically specific political and cultural project (Roy 2006, 200). Rather than being an unintended consequence of the social, economic, and political, structural transformations brought about by the ascendance of the bourgeoisie, the Indian public sphere developed due to concerted efforts directed towards nation-building implemented by the state (ibid, 201 - 202).

In India, therefore, the institutions, discourses and practices mediated and supervised by the state have proved crucial in the formation of the abstract public that functions as the bedrock of any public sphere (ibid). Moreover, Roy has also emphasized the need to focus on the visual practices and performances within the Indian public sphere through which the state has formed notions of what it means to be the 'public', what the state hopes to represent, and how the 'public' can relate itself to the state and the nation in general (ibid, 204).

Moving away from the overwhelming emphasis on rational-critical discourses that characterizes Habermas' conceptual outlook, Roy has argued that non-Western forms of the

public sphere, such as the one in India, are often marked by public spectacles, visual practices, and performances which offer particular images of the state, the nation, and the citizen to the population at large (ibid). Ultimately, these processes are representative of the unique 'exhibitionary complex' of postcolonial modernity, and the ways in which it manufactures the public as viewing subjects or spectators (ibid, 205). [8]

> If the public is the 'orchestrated realm of the permissible', then the attempt to 'bound' the permissible in and through the nation-statist imaginary is, regardless of its ultimate success or failure, an integral component of public formation …. Images of the state and of the state-citizen and state-nation relation are central to the visual practices and performative displays that constitute publicness …. We know we are 'the public' when we either see the state, or when we are asked to see in a particular way: as self-conscious spectators of a staged display of and about ourselves (ibid 202 - 204).

Building upon the arguments of Roy, I've shown how the cultural performances at the temple and the shrine in Mehrauli function as visual displays and practices of staging the state's authority in front of the masses, while also acting as a means of establishing what it means to be a Hindu or a Muslim inhabiting a secular polity based on notions of tolerance and communal harmony. Since PWS is hosted by a civil society organization that is directly dependent on state patronage for its existence, it is imperative to view the festival as a part of the postcolonial state's cultural and political project of nation-building, as well as the construction of the Indian public sphere related to it.

[8] In her essay, Roy has focused on the Republic Day Parade held in New Delhi every year on 26 Janaury, which involves both cultural tableaus representing the various states of the country as well as proud displays of the latest weapons of mass destruction procured or developed by the Indian state and is broadcast on national television, as one of the relevant examples of the exhibitionary complex of postcolonial modernity. It has allowed the state to promote notions of India's cultural diversity as a natural, timeless entity - regional states with unique religious festivals often represent them in their tableaus during the parade. At the same time, the military aspects of the parade have disseminated notions of the citizen - soldier, virtues like gallantry and self - sacrifice for the nation, and aspirational visions of India's increasing prowess in military technology. The entire event is not only watched by spectators assembled along the Rajpath (earlier known as King's Way during the British Raj), the ceremonial boulevard in New Delhi connecting the *Rashtrapati Bhavan* (President's Residence) and the India Gate, but is also viewed by spectators scattered across the length and breadth of the country, thereby creating a mass mediated public sphere for such an exhibitionary complex as well (Roy 2006, 210 - 216).

I've also offered a bottom-up perspective to this discussion by exploring the manner in which Pavalam acted as a member of the abstract public participating in the public sphere constituted by the organization of the festival. Or, in other words, I've analyzed how she used her individual agency to not only interpret the festival and the state's role in hosting it, but also to voice her grievances and demands as a politically conscious citizen comprising the public sphere in India.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that while focusing on the myriad constituent rites of festivals, it is also important to conceive them as fluid and transient processes intimately shaped by relations of power. In the following chapters, I've built upon this argument in order to establish that PWS itself should be viewed as both the *site* as well as the *medium* of power. Moreover, as Delhi has come to be ruled first by the Mughal Empire, next by the British Raj, and now by the postcolonial state in the capital, the relations of power through which these polities have respectively controlled and dominated the city have historically evolved, and so has the festival's role in them. Ultimately, the larger argument offered in the thesis is that PWS needs to be interpreted as a contentious and dynamic process constantly shaping, and in turn being influenced by, the agency of its participants and organizers, the urban spaces of Delhi, and the ever-changing relations of power that bind them all. Consequently, the concepts of power, agency, and placemaking become integral to any anthropological study of festivals.

Chapter 2 – A Tale of Processions, Numbers, Disease, and Power: Exploring the History of *Phool Waalon Ki Sair*

The analysis offered in this chapter focuses on the origin of PWS during the early nineteenth century and provides a historical account of its manifestation during the rule of the last two Mughal emperors. It then proceeds to critically engage with the ways in which the festival was incorporated into the processes of British colonial governmentality once the Mughal empire had been decisively supplanted by the colonial regime. Meanwhile, it also demonstrates how the festival has acted as both the site and the medium of the relations of power through which Delhi has been governed over the course of time. The analysis has been fundamentally influenced by the historic turn within anthropology, and it is to this issue that the discussion will first turn.

2.1 Historic Turn within Anthropology

The historic turn within anthropology has led to the realization that cultures cannot be perceived as ahistorical, timeless entities, and cannot be accurately analyzed through an ethnographic inquiry which only focuses on the present, or, a particular moment in time (Ortner 2006, 8 - 11). As a result, there is a renewed emphasis on the proper contextualization of the past, together with a tendency to view social events and actors as both the product of as well as constituting a long-standing temporal process which is always determined by the confluence of local relations of power, and external forces like colonialism and/or capitalism (ibid). In epistemological terms, the historic turn involves offering critiques of existing theoretical paradigms like structuralism and functionalism (ibid, 1 - 3).

Structuralists interpreted most aspects of society (from institutional mechanisms like kinship to seemingly irrational cultural artefacts like myths) as based on an underlying set of rules, or logic, or "structure" (Ortner 2006, 1 - 3). It was this abstract "structure" which was deemed to be the sole determinant of how society operated, and the way individuals interacted with one another (ibid). On the other hand, functionalists analyzed society as the product or outcome of a series of interconnected and interdependent parts, each of which served a distinct purpose and contributed to the stability of society as a whole (ibid). Therefore, it was either "structure" or "function" that constrained and determined how social actors would behave at a given point of time (ibid).

The historic turn has allowed scholars to move away from theorizing such an oppositional relationship between the structural constraints of society and the practices of social actors (Ortner 2006, 1 - 3). Instead, the two are now conceived as caught within a dialectical relationship (ibid). Structures and functions certainly enable particular social practices and inhibit others. However, they are themselves reproduced and perpetuated by the practices of real social actors "on the ground" (ibid).

Moreover, such practices can vary considerably over the course of time and can even lead to conflicts due to their internal contradictions or inconsistencies (ibid). Therefore, the focus on a dialectical relationship between structural and functional constraints on one hand, and the agency and practices of social actors on the other, has led to one of the most important realizations of the historic turn that "history makes people, but people make history" (ibid, 2).

Furthermore, this realization has also influenced scholars to focus on the agency of individuals and communities (people of color, women, colonized groups, etc.) who have typically been misrepresented or ignored within much of existing academic scholarship (McDonald 1996, 6). However, the notion of their agency needs to be reconstructed from the bottom up by exploring

the specific historical conditions and possibilities enabling it to exist (ibid). This is a better approach than merely superimposing the concept of agency upon a pre-existing, putative map of social structures and the subjectivities associated with them (ibid).

Methodologically, the historic turn has involved an interdisciplinary exchange through which historical sources are utilized by anthropologists, while anthropological concepts are employed to analyze historical sources (Dirks 1996, 37 - 47). Hence, I've used archival documents, a secondary historical source and contemporaneous newspaper articles to reconstruct and decipher the agency and practices of the social actors who have been involved with the festival.

At the same time, I've also been aware of the fact that such sources and the narratives contained within them are themselves the product of historically specific, local, and contingent relations of power (ibid). This leads us to the second methodological implication of the historic turn which suggests that the analytical concepts applied by anthropologists need to be historicized as well (ibid). Thus, within my historical account of PWS, the concept of power changes according to the specific time period being discussed, as can be observed in the following sections.

2.2 Mughal Origin of the Festival 1803 - 1857

2.2.1 Early Modern Context of Delhi

The early nineteenth century was a politically tumultuous period in the history of the Indian subcontinent. The Mughal empire had declined, and the authority of the imperial court was restricted only to Delhi and its surrounding regions (Bandyopadhyay 2004, 29 - 37). Several smaller kingdoms had emerged across the subcontinent to fill the political vacuum left by the collapse of the centralized rule of the Mughals, and there was constant, internecine warfare among them (ibid). Taking advantage of the general state of disunity and fragmentation, the

British East India Company had already acquired political and economic control of regions like Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa in the eastern part of the subcontinent and was now beginning to set its sight on conquering areas to the north like the kingdom of Awadh, and especially Delhi (ibid, 37 - 62).

During the Battle of Delhi in 1803, which was part of the larger Second Anglo - Maratha War (1803 - 05), the Company's armies led by the British general Lord Lake decisively defeated the forces of the Maratha *sardar* Sindhia, who represented the interests of the Central Indian kingdom of Gwalior (ibid, 54). Since the Mughals would not have been able to defend Delhi without the military assistance of the British, the Company received the privilege of posting a British resident - Archibald Seton - in the imperial court, while Shah Alam II, the emperor, effectively became a pensioner of the Company (Spear 2002, 37 - 41).

Between 1803 and 1806, the Mughal emperor was receiving a personal allowance of Rs. 60,000 per month, and the total grant sanctioned for the imperial court by Lord Wellesley, then Governor General of the Company based in Calcutta, amounted to eleven and a half *lakh* rupees every year (ibid, 38). [9] In 1806, after Shah Alam's demise, his eldest son was crowned emperor and came to be known as Akbar Shah II (ibid, 41). [10]

2.2.2 Inception of the Festival

Between 1806 and 1809, the year when Mirza Jahangir was exiled to Allahabad, Akbar Shah II began using cultural means to contest British authority, since a military confrontation with

[9] 'Lakh' - One hundred thousand.

[10] In 1809, the pension of the emperor was increased to twelve *lakhs* per annum (Spear 2002, 39). The collapse of centralized Mughal rule across the subcontinent had allowed the Company to acquire *diwani* (right to collect the revenue) on behalf of the Mughals, especially in the eastern regions of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, which also happened to be some of the most fertile parts of the subcontinent with the potential to generate vast amounts of revenue from agricultural practices, land tenure, and related commercial activities (Bandyopadhyay 2004, 42 - 62). Disagreement over the disbursal of the revenue was yet another reason for the constant competition, negotiation, and diplomatic conflict between the Mughal court in Delhi and the Company based in Calcutta (ibid).

the Company was prohibitively expensive. [11] Soon after ascending to the throne in 1806, the emperor sent his emissary to Calcutta to publicly present Lord Minto, successor of Wellesley, with a *khillat* or a dress of honor (ibid, 42).

The formal acceptance of the *khillat* by provincial rulers had been a long-established custom through which they had officially recognized Mughal legal sovereignty and power over themselves (ibid). But Minto bluntly refused to accept it and also called off all forms of direct communication with the emperor (ibid, 43). PWS grew directly out of the historical context of this contentious relationship between the imperial court and the Company and was yet another cultural means through which the former sought to resist the power of the latter.

In 1806, during a meeting of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India in London, a member named Mr. Mulker made the following astute observation -

> Friends, for fifty years I have been in India. I know the conditions there. I know the importance of the Fort of Delhi …. If the Fort is touched, such an earthquake will come that the whole of India will be shaken. Let this kingship, which is only in name, continue as it is (ibid, 2).

Thus, although the Company was perfectly capable of militarily subjugating the Mughal court, it chose not to do so in order to prevent the remaining native kingdoms from forming an all-encompassing alliance with the Mughals against the British.

Akbar Shah II implicitly realized the importance of retaining control over Delhi as well, and as a result, the festival of PWS became institutionalized as an annual ritual steadfastly observed by the imperial court to specifically serve this purpose. Moreover, the procession of PWS from the Red Fort in *Shahjahanabad* to the temple and the shrine in Mehrauli was strategically

[11] This was the Mughal prince who has been earlier mentioned in Chapter 1.

devised to unite the Hindus and Muslims of the city in support of Mughal rule. The Mughals themselves were followers of the *Chishti* order of Sufism, and since *Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki* is the most senior saint of this order buried in Delhi, his shrine automatically became a site of immense social and political significance. [12]

On the other hand, upon the instructions of the emperor, an upper caste, elite, Hindu businessman of Delhi named Lala Sedo Mal refurbished the older temple of *Yogmaya Devi* in Mehrauli when PWS first commenced in 1812 (ibid, 38). After the death of Akbar Shah II in 1837, his eldest son Sirajuddin Zafar was crowned emperor and came to be known as Bahadur Shah Zafar (ibid, xiv - xviii). During his reign, the grandeur and splendor of PWS reached new heights, as illustrated by the following account of the festival from 1848 (ibid, xiv - xviii).

2.2.3 A Glimpse of PWS from 1848

PWS was organized toward the middle of the month of *Bhadon* once the monsoon had arrived in Delhi (ibid, 9). [13] On the morning of the first day of the festival, the entire Mughal court travelled from the Red Fort in *Shahjahanabad* to the palaces constructed by Bahadur Shah Zafar near the shrine of *Bakhtiar Kaki* in Mehrauli (ibid, 11 - 18). Within this elaborate and lavishly decorated regal procession, an elephant bearing the royal standard was at the very front, and several platoons and regiments of armed infantry and cavalry respectively were serving as the guardians of the imperial family (ibid, 14). The entire procession slowly made its way through different neighborhoods of the city like *Khas Bazar* and *Faiz Bazar* until it left the precincts of the city through the Delhi Gate (ibid, 15). [14]

[12] For a detailed discussion of the relationship between Sufism and Mughal state formation, see Alam 1997, and Nair 2014.

[13] 'Bhadon' - The fifth month of the Saka era corresponding roughly with August - September of the contemporary Gregorian calendar.

[14] This was the southern entrance of *Shahjahanabad*.

Since midnight, thousands had been waiting along the route of the procession to catch a glimpse of the imperial family (ibid). While passing through the streets of *Shahjahanabad*, the emperor constantly showered coins among the crowd, and this was one of the most eagerly anticipated moments of the procession (ibid). Thus, it not only acted as an elaborate *rite of conspicuous display*, but also served as a rudimentary, early modern form of redistribution of wealth through which the Mughal court literally purchased the loyalty of its subjects. However, the procession also created an opportunity for the masses to cleverly subvert and mock their Mughal overlords. People of the city were fond of ridiculing the overt display of power by the Mughals by singing the following tongue-in-cheek song about the penultimate emperor as the procession passed by them (ibid, 7) -

Qutab ko chala mera Akbar hatila

Naa raste mein jungle naa milta hain tila

(To Qutab goes my dear Akbar, the stubborn fellow;

To him it matters little,

Whether there's a jungle or a hillock on the way!)

It was already evening by the time the procession reached Mehrauli because on the way, the Mughals visited sites important to the dynasty that were located beyond the walls of *Shahjahanabad.* [15] Hence, the procession was a means of not only spatially inscribing Mughal power over Delhi and its surrounding areas, but also associating Bahadur Shah Zafar's rule

[15] For instance, the Mughals visited the grave of Muhammad Shah (1702 - 1748), the twelfth emperor. They also visited the Alai Darwaza that was built in Delhi by Sultan Alauddin Khalji (1267 - 1316) in 1311. He was the second ruler of the Khalji dynasty which was one of the several regimes comprising the Delhi Sultanate that had preceded the Mughal Empire.

with sites that were important to previous Mughal emperors as well as older Islamic dynasties that had governed the city.

Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Delhi also made their way to Mehrauli by organizing processions that consciously tried to emulate the one conducted by the Mughals (ibid, 32). To illustrate, just as the women of the court (who were ranked lower than their male counterparts) had to travel at the head of the procession with the men following behind, so did the poorer masses of the city venture out first with only earthen pitchers on their heads that contained their food and clothes (ibid). They were followed by the elites of Delhi who rode on horses that had saddles decorated with silver and gold laces (ibid). The rich put up in their own country houses in the village of Mehrauli (ibid, 33). The poor, on the other hand, were mainly accommodated in tents provided by the Mughal court that were set up inside the Qutab complex and along the main road to the village (ibid).

Curiously, the women of the city were not allowed to join these secondary processions, nor could they venture out of *Shahjahanabad* (ibid). On the occasion of PWS, they could temporarily move out of the confines of the domestic sphere but had to stay contended with enjoying themselves in the vast Mughal gardens and orchards near *Sabzi Mandi*, all of which still remained heavily guarded by soldiers from the Red Fort (ibid). Thus, for the women of *Shahjahanabad*, this brief exposure to the world beyond their homes acted as a *rite of reversal* - they momentarily broke free of the patriarchal control of their families only to be subjected to the patriarchal control of the imperial court.

For the men of the city who travelled to Mehrauli on the occasion of PWS, the three days of the festival were mainly spent in collective bathing at the *Hauz-e-Shamsi* and enjoying themselves in a nearby mango grove that had originally been planted by Bahadur Shah Zafar (ibid, 21 - 22). Another major attraction of the festival during its last two days was the bustling

fair that was held in Mehrauli (ibid, 31). On this occasion, the *karkhandars* (owners of petty cottage industries) of the city were in the habit of pooling together their resources to collectively set up shops in the temporary *bazar* (market) that would stretch all the way from the Ajmeri Gate of *Shahjahanabad* to the Qutab complex in the village of Mehrauli (ibid, 31 - 32). [16] The wares sold by them mainly included items of daily necessity like lanterns, glasses, *diwar-giri* (wall - lamps), toys, fabrics of satin, cloth made out of gold and silver threads, metal ornaments and utensils, etc. (ibid, 30 - 38).

Interestingly, this fair was attended by both the commoners of Delhi as well as the sons of important nobles, together with the lower ranked princes of the court known as the *salatin* (ibid, 35 - 37). Hence, the fair acted as the site of *rites of exchange* which not only enabled the merchants and craftsmen of Delhi to conduct brisk business on the occasion of the festival, but also temporarily erased the differences in social status between the Mughal nobility and the masses by allowing the two groups to freely intermingle within the same public space.

PWS ended on the third day with the organization of certain *rites of competition.* Professional wrestlers of the city participated in bouts against one another which were held in makeshift *akhara* (traditional wrestling pits) that had been set up along the road to the village of Mehrauli and in the mango grove adjacent to the *Hauz-e-Shamsi* (ibid, 36 - 41). The winners of the competitions were handsomely rewarded by the imperial court - while some received expensive silk cloths and gold threads for their turbans, others were gifted shawls and *karas* (massive gold rings to be worn on the wrists) (ibid, 38).

On the last night of the festival, an elaborate, competitive display of fireworks took place on boats that had been anchored in the middle of *Hauz-e-Shamsi* (ibid, 40). While one group of boats belonged to the people of the city, the remaining were manned by Mughal officials from

[16] This was the south-western entrance of *Shahjahanabad*.

the Red Fort (ibid). As the different fireworks were set off, the two groups pretended to be in a naval battle against each other (ibid). The entire spectacle lasted well past midnight and was ended by Bahadur Shah Zafar himself after he declared the people of the city to be the winners (ibid, 41). He also personally distributed prizes like shawls and *mundil* (turbans made of silk and gold threads) among the victorious contestants (ibid).

The various *rites of competition*, therefore, were yet another elaborate means of momentarily abolishing the hierarchy between the imperial court and the masses of the city, while also acting as a crude form of redistribution of wealth through which the emperor could win over the allegiance of the commoners. On the morning of the fourth day, PWS officially ended with both the Mughals and the masses returning to the walled city of *Shahjahanabad* (ibid, 41). Before proceeding further with the history of PWS, it is imperative to define the concept of power and understand how it can be used to theoretically analyze the role of the festival within the exercise of Mughal authority over Delhi.

2.3 Historicizing the Relations of Power

2.3.1 Patrimonialism, Tactical, and Structural Power

Power, in its most basic form, has been defined as "the probability that an actor will be able to realize his own objectives even against opposition from others with whom he is in a social relationship" (Giddens 1973, 156). For instance, in pre-modern epochs, patrimonialism was one of the most pervasive forms of power (ibid, 157). Its most essential feature was the fusion of the courtly life of the ruler on one hand, and the functions of the state on the other, while the overwhelming majority of state officials were recruited by the ruler himself from the vast retinue of his own personal advisers, family members, and servants (ibid).

In this sense, the Mughal Empire can be regarded as a significant example of patrimonial power. The majority of Mughal officials were directly related to the emperor through kinship ties and shared the same Timurid ancestry with him (Koch 2001). Moreover, the emperor was the embodiment of sovereignty and the supreme figure of authority - the imperial court convened wherever the emperor resided, thereby literally making him the center of power (ibid). This is the reason why military campaigns, processions, etc. that allowed the emperor to personally visit the different regions of his empire were crucial to establishing his authority over the realm. Hence, PWS can be construed as one of the chief components of the patrimonial power exercised by the Mughal emperor over Delhi and its surrounding areas during the first half of the 19th century.

However, the exercise of power always creates individual or collective opposition to it. Thus, power can be interpreted better by situating it within the fluctuating relations between social actors wherein successive gains can allow one to dominate others, while at the same time, creating possibilities for the subordinated to challenge, resist, and dismantle their conditions of domination (Wolf 1999, 4 - 5). When considered in its institutional and systemic contexts, power and its resistance mainly operate through two distinct modalities - tactical/organizational and structural (ibid, 5).

The first indicates the means through which definite social settings are created in which individuals can express their capabilities, as well as interact with one another (ibid). On the other hand, the latter denotes the relationships which not only operate within the aforementioned social settings but also determine the fundamental organization of these settings themselves (ibid). For instance, the material forces engendered by capitalism influencing the allocation and deployment of social labor (ibid).

In the context of PWS, the patrimonial authority of the emperor could be exerted over Delhi through the exercise of tactical power that influenced the organization of the procession and the other festive rites by the officials of the court. However, it also allowed the masses to lampoon the emperor when the procession brought them into direct contact with the ruler within the same public space. But, such an exercise of patrimonial and tactical power was itself determined by the larger structural power exerted by British colonialism over the Mughal Empire, which was further influenced by the material forces resulting from the creation of a global capitalist order in which Britain acted as the powerful, metropolitan core, while India was reduced to the subordinated position of the colonized periphery. [17]

It was precisely because of this material supremacy of the British in the global arena that they were able to relegate the Mughal emperor to a mere pensioner of the Company in the first place, which further negated the possibility of a direct military conflict between the two and resulted in the creation of PWS, a means of *culturally* resisting British political ascendance in north India by the Mughals.

Therefore, while PWS was utilized by the Mughals to resist the structural power exerted by British colonial enterprise, which in itself was born out of capitalist restructuring of the relations between different parts of the globe, the festival also represented the Mughal court's own cultural machinations to dominate Delhi, which again gave birth to myriad forms of resistance employed by the masses of the city. As a result, it is imperative to theoretically understand PWS as simultaneously being both the *site* as well as the *medium* of power, and as a contentious process which allowed both power and its resistance, albeit on different scales of society, to coexist and intimately intertwine.

[17] For a detailed discussion of the world-systems theory, see Wallerstein 1976 and Skocpol 1977.

2.3.2 Orientalism and Colonial Governmentality

The Mughal Empire officially ended when the British successfully repressed the Mutiny of 1857, and in 1858, the Government of India Act dissolved the East India Company and brought the subcontinent under the direct rule of the British Crown (Bandyopadhyay 2004, 73). From this period onwards, Delhi began to be ruled by the rational, legal domination of the colonial bureaucracy that underpinned the power of the British Raj (Giddens 1973, 157 - 159). Within such an exercise of power, the colonial bureaucrats functioned on the basis of impersonal, institutionalized rules, as opposed to ties of personal allegiance to a ruler (ibid, 158). Moreover, their abstract sense of duty was informed by the ideology of Orientalism.

Under the influence of Orientalism, colonial bureaucrats began perceiving India as an unknown, primitive, and exotic landscape that could be easily conquered by the superior technology and civilizational values of the British (Said 1978, 72). However, before establishing a viable colonial rule for themselves in India, the British first had to know over *what* they were going to rule (ibid). [18]

Numbers and enumeration techniques became indispensable to solving this problem because they reduced the vast socio-cultural complexity of India to abstract, manageable parts; the social processes of the colony could be divided into separate individual components that were easier to govern, thereby rendering the colony more readily susceptible to the inquiring gaze of the colonizer (ibid, 43 - 79). The numerical mode of imagination, and its consequent empirical practices, also created the semblance of bureaucratic control over India's social realities (Appadurai 1993, 317).

[18] Emphasis mine.

The larger objective of such an orientalist exercise of power was the establishment of a stable regime of colonial governmentality (ibid). With the help of its techniques of quantification, the British Raj constructed the colonized population of India as the locus of direct intervention and control, rendered commensurable disparate social processes as per the same abstract standard, and paved the way for a 'scientific' and 'rational' supervision of the masses. Moreover, the production of texts like censuses, gazettes, revenue records, etc. by the colonial state directly contributed to the formulation of discourses that legitimized its system of governmentality.

Lastly, the colonial practices of enumeration, classification, and measurement created the 'economy' as a separate and distinct entity, and enabled the British Raj to decipher Indian society in terms of modern economic categories like income, wealth, levels of production and consumption, etc. (Kalpagam 2015, 139). The Raj mainly acted as a rentier state in conjunction with indigenous collaborators and exclusively focused on extracting resources, taxes, profits, and revenue from the land and the colonial economy, in order to finance its imperialist projects (Guha 1994).

2.4 The Festival during British Colonialism 1857 - 1947

2.4.1 Reorganization of Delhi after the Mutiny of 1857

During the suppression of the Mutiny of 1857, Delhi witnessed heavy fighting, and once the dust had settled, much of the city lied in ruins (Gupta 2002, 1 - 7). The overwhelming majority of the inhabitants had fled from the city (ibid). The victorious British, suspicious of Muslims because the Mughals themselves had been followers of Islam, allowed Hindus to return to the city in January 1858, but Muslims could not come back till 1859 (ibid, 24). This marked the

beginning of the politics of Divide and Rule, which ultimately resulted in the rise of communal violence and sectarian conflicts (ibid).

Moreover, the need to promote British capitalism also came to be linked with the communal politics of favoring Hindus over Muslims (ibid). For instance, several Hindu bankers and moneylenders, who had remained loyal to the Raj during the Mutiny, were now allowed to purchase the empty, vacated properties of Muslims (ibid, 23). Such upper caste, elite, Hindu businessmen almost overnight became some of the largest property owners of Delhi, while the neighborhood of Katra Nil, where most of these Hindu merchants had their private residences, became the richest area of the city (ibid).

Delhi also began to be incorporated into the material forces and economic logic of British capitalism. The 'Report of the Parliamentary Committee on Colonization and Settlement of India', prepared between December 1857 and August 1858 in London, laid out the following doctrine -

> Colonization cannot proceed in India as it does in Australia and Canada: it must spring from the upper, rather than the lower ranks of society, by the settlement of capitalists; i.e. from the capitalist, rather than from the laborer (King 2007, 38).

As a result, several palaces of the Mughal nobility were demolished to create space for the living quarters of the increasing number of British bureaucrats, merchants, and commercial agents who now began to reside in the city (Gupta 2002, 39 - 44). All of the settlements in the north-western part of the city, including the city wall, were demolished to construct residential quarters for British bureaucrats, and it came to be known as the Civil Lines (ibid). The offices of the Deputy Commissioner, the Magistrate, the judges of the District Court, and senior police officers were established here (ibid).

Later, additional land was used to provide accommodation for British police officers, and this area came to be known as the Police Lines (ibid). Obviously, Indians were not allowed to reside in these areas, nor could they freely move in the streets in this part of the city (ibid). This rampant, violent, spatial and social reorganization of the city ended much of its previous cultural traditions, including the festival of PWS (ibid, 25). In 1858, Ghalib, the most famous Urdu poet of Delhi, lamented in his memoirs that property worth 30 *lakh* rupees had been destroyed, and he composed a *shair - ashoob* in which he mourned that -

> The life of Delhi depends on the Fort, Chandni Chowk, the daily gatherings at the Jamuna Bridge and the annual *Gulfaroshan*. When all these four things are no longer there, how can Delhi live? Yes, there was once a city of this name in the dominions of India (ibid, 25). [19]

In 1862, the first railway line connecting Delhi with Calcutta, the capital of the British Empire in the subcontinent, was established (ibid, 53 - 66). The town hall was built near the railway station, and soon the area became a bustling commercial center (ibid). Moreover, to serve the interests of British capital, cotton textile and flour manufacturing industries began to be set up in Delhi, due to the proximity of the city to the cotton and wheat producing areas of Punjab (ibid).

By 1905, Delhi became the major railway junction and commercial center in north India (ibid). Its earlier trade links with Central Asia and Gujarat during the times of the Mughal Empire were severed, and newer commercial routes were established to link Delhi with the rural hinterland in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Rajasthan, as well as the two port cities of

[19] *Sair-e-Gulfaroshan* in Urdu literally means Procession of the Florists. Thus, Ghalib was referring to PWS as one of the four main features of Delhi. This further underscores the immense significance of the festival within the history of the city. *Shair - ashoob* is a genre of Urdu verse that primarily functions as an elegy.

Calcutta and Bombay (ibid). Gold and silver bullion, European cotton and woolen goods were imported into the city, while flour, cotton, wheat, and oilseeds were exported (ibid).

2.4.2 Revival of the Festival

As mentioned earlier, the collapse of the Mughal Empire in 1857 had ended the festival of PWS as well. However, by the late 1860s, as Delhi began to be spatially and socially reorganized to serve the interests of colonial rule and British capitalism, the festival and its fair were also revived (ibid, 40). The previously mentioned cadastral survey by Oswald Wood called 'Final Report on Settlement of Land Revenue in the Delhi District' offers an important clue regarding how PWS came to be organized anew, although the polity that had first created it no longer existed -

> The fair at Mehrauli especially is a favourite resort for the Delhi people. It is called the 'Pankha Mela', because 'Pankhas' are carried in procession on Wednesday to the Hindu temple, 'Jog Maya', and on Thursday to the shrine of 'Kutbudin' *for the maintenance of which a tolerant Government allows a jagir of Rs. 2000/- a year to the khadim* [sic] (Wood 1882, 59). [20]

The term *khadim* refers to the family or a group of individuals who take care of an Islamic tomb or shrine (Beg 2012, 55). It is usually a hereditary occupation and the *khadim* of a shrine or mausoleum is held in high esteem by the local populace (ibid). In this context, it must have referred to the Muslim elites who had been serving as the *khadim* of the shrine of *Bakhtiar*

[20] Emphasis mine.

'Jagir' - A type of feudal land grant that was institutionalized in India during the early 13th century with the establishment of some of the first Islamic dynasties in Delhi. This system continued and evolved during Mughal rule as well. It is interesting to note that although colonial modernity did not materially function on the basis of feudalism, officials of the British Raj were still using this term to refer to the money provided by the colonial state for the upkeep of its indigenous collaborators.

Kaki, and the *jagir* offered by the colonial state for the maintenance of the shrine was, in all probability, received by them.

Thus, in the post - 1857 era, PWS had been revived to serve the interests of the local Muslim elites of Delhi who were also acting as indigenous collaborators of the British Raj, and who were literally on the payroll of the colonial state. Later in this chapter, colonial archival records will further reveal that there were other groups of local elites, apart from the *khadim*, who were also involved in the organization of the festival, as well as the particular material interests that motivated all of them to host PWS once again even after the demise of the Mughal Empire.

The cadastral data originally provided in Wood's report was reproduced in its entirety in the Delhi District Gazetteer of 1883 - 84 (Revenueharyana.gov.in, n.d.). However, it also added a new part in the section on taxation records in which the various festivals of Delhi were classified based on their number of attendees, the number of villages involved, and the duration of their ceremonies (ibid). At this point of time, PWS still took place over three days, was attended by almost 20,000 individuals, and involved people from 15 odd villages around the city, although their names were conspicuously absent from the record (ibid).

But, more importantly, due to the numerical orientation of the survey, the diverse social histories and practices associated with disparate cultural processes like PWS in Mehrauli, the collective bathing ritual in the river Yamuna at the village of Garbi Mehadipur, or the ritualized interpretation of the weather by Brahmins at Banskaull, were completely excised from the colonial record (ibid). Their entries in the gazetteer rigidly defined all of them as "religious fairs" and their complex socio - cultural relevance was reduced to purely functional categories like "for pleasure", "for worship", "to make offerings", etc. (ibid). Hence, under the influence of Orientalist rationality, the unique social processes of Delhi had been transformed into a

monolithic, homogenized, cultural 'Other' that could be easily interpreted for administrative purposes.

The larger objective of both Wood's report and the later gazetteer was the accurate determination of the revenue that could be acquired from Delhi and its surrounding areas (ibid). Accordingly, the data about the general populace in both of these records was purely quantitative and served the extractive economic policies of the Raj (for example, number of licenses in every village, amount of annual revenue owed by each of them, etc.) (ibid). By the 1880s, therefore, PWS had been firmly incorporated into the processes of British colonial governmentality through which the Raj had been established as a rentier state that primarily focused on extracting economic resources from India and treating it as the colonized periphery serving the interests of the capitalist, metropolitan core in Britain.

2.4.3 PWS under British Colonial Governmentality

The centrality of PWS within the processes of colonial governmentality, however, did not become evident until 1914, when the secretary of the Imperial Delhi Municipal Committee (IDMC) instructed the Deputy Commissioner of the city to gauge the festival's potential to be turned into a lucrative fiscal resource for funding the construction of a new imperial capital called New Delhi (P. V. Chance, Secretary, 'Management of Fair to be held on the side of the new city', Letter (Delhi, 1914), Local Self Government Files No. 9 / 1914, Delhi State Archives). However, the Deputy Commissioner informed the IDMC that this could not be done (ibid). The primary reason was that the local elites of the city had already been given the right to collect tolls levied at the fairs of PWS, in return of Rs. 100 paid to the colonial state (ibid). For the year 1916, it was the *khadim* of the shrine of *Bakhtiar Kaki* who was given the right to collect such taxes (ibid).

As shown by Fanon and Abu-Lughod, the creation of a 'dual city' was a fundamental aspect of spatially and socially differentiating the native town and that of white, European settlers (Fanon 1961, 38 - 40; Abu-Lughod 1965, 432 - 451). The construction of New Delhi can be regarded as an important example of creating such a 'dual city'. [21] While this was essentially based on the racial hierarchy between British and Indians, the aforementioned archival record clearly shows that indigenous elites who were wealthy, and possessed considerable social status due to their religion, caste, class, and/or gender, actively collaborated with the colonial state to create the 'dual city'.

But, more importantly, the case of PWS further reveals the fact that along with the demolition of several of the native parts of Delhi to make way for New Delhi, the material exploitation of the former was also integral to the colonial imagination and its associated processes of governmentality that led to the construction and maintenance of the latter. Moreover, such an exploitative relationship was fundamentally shaped by the local, contingent relations of power within which the British Raj and its indigenous collaborators were embedded.

Speaking of the relationship between the British Raj and its indigenous collaborators, the latter would often test the limits of their power by evoking the festival of PWS as an excuse to establish and consolidate their control over scarce economic resources like land. For instance, between 1921 and 1931, the head of the trust managing the temple of *Yogmaya Devi*, who also happened to be an upper caste, elite, Hindu businessman and banker to the Raj, was allowed to illegally encroach upon the *nazul* land adjacent to the temple, in the name of erecting temporary shelters for the pilgrims attending PWS (G. M. Young, Deputy Commissioner, 'Leasing of Nazul Land near the Jogmaya Temple, Mehrauli to Rai Sahib Lala Madho Pershad', Letter

[21] This is especially true because New Delhi was built as an imperial capital to exclusively serve the interests of British colonizers. On the other hand, Delhi was turned into the town of the natives.

(Delhi, 1921), Local Self Government Files No. 264 / 1921, Delhi State Archives). [22] Colonial bureaucrats gave him a free rein, as long as he was willing to pay an annual rent of Rs. 25. Hence, PWS acted as the site of establishing the power of the local elites of the city over its urban spaces and cultural processes, while also serving as the medium through which colonial governmentality envisioned and regulated the construction of the 'dual city'.

In 1867, after an outbreak of cholera at the popular fair in Haridwar claimed more than 100,000 lives, the British Raj began to view Indian fairs and festivals as the breeding ground of contagious diseases (Kalpagam 2015, 238). PWS did not escape this prejudice, and in 1917, upon the instructions of the Deputy Commissioner, the Plague Medical Officer of Delhi sanctioned Rs. 262 before the festival for the disinfection of public wells, construction of temporary latrines and inoculation centers, and the appointment of sweepers from the *Kahar* caste to clean the fairgrounds near the temple and the shrine (D. R. Verma, Plague Medical Officer, 'Sanitary Scheme for the Annual Pankha Fair at Mehrauli', Letter (Delhi, 1917), Local Self Government Files No. 185/1917, Delhi State Archives). Moreover, people were forbidden to wash themselves in public water bodies like the *Hauz-e-Shamsi*, and shopkeepers were prevented from selling food that had been left out in the open for long (ibid).

However, even within the realm of regulation of public health, the British Raj had to contend against its indigenous collaborators. In 1916, the Deputy Commissioner received a complaint from the *khadim* of the shrine that he was not being allowed to issue passes for establishing shops during the fair of PWS by the Deputy Sanitary Commissioner, a certain Dhanpat Rai (H. C. Beadon, Deputy Commissioner, 'Management of Fair to be held on the side of the new city', Letter (Delhi, 1916), Local Self Government Files No. 9 / 1914, Delhi State Archives).

[22] Nazul' - This was land originally owned by the Mughal emperor. After 1857, all nazul land in and around Delhi was taken over by the British Raj and was intended for public use. For more on this, see Gupta 2002.

Eventually, the dispute was resolved when the Deputy Commissioner warned Dhanpat Rai that the control of the festival lied within the former's civil administration, and that the latter had no right to interfere with the contract offered to the *khadim* through which the colonial state also materially benefitted from the festival (ibid).

Hence, the control of public health, like every other imperialist project of the colonial state, was based on a fluid edifice of power within which the British had to continuously compete with their Indian collaborators over establishing their respective spheres of influence and domination. Furthermore, such an exercise of power significantly overlapped with the extractive economic policies of the Raj, and its indigenous collaborators were also competing against one another in terms of influencing the organization of PWS.

By the late 1930s, most festivals in Delhi were banned by the British Raj because of the increasing communal conflicts between and within the various religious communities of the city (Legg 2007, 142 - 144). PWS was similarly outlawed during this era of widespread social unrest (Beg 2012, 41 - 42). However, this was also the period when the book called *Bahadur Shah aur Phool Waalon Ki Sair* (Bahadur Shah and the Festival of Flower Sellers) was published (ibid, xi). The history of the festival during the Mughal Empire offered earlier in this chapter has been largely derived from this secondary source. It is based on official documents of the Mughal court along with oral history interviews of the inhabitants of Delhi that were conducted toward the beginning of the 20th century (ibid, xviii - xix).

Mirza Farhatullah Beg, the author of this work, was himself of Mughal origin and was born in Delhi in 1883 (ibid, xviii). He studied at St. Stephen's College and later served as the Director of Education as well as the Inspector General of Courts in the Nizam's Government in the princely state of Hyderabad (ibid, xviii). Thus, he was a member of the indigenous, urban, well-educated, bureaucratic elites who worked for the native princely states of India that were

subservient to the British Raj and actively collaborated with its colonial rule. Despite this fact, Beg deliberately wrote his book to remind the people of Delhi about the Hindu - Muslim amity that had once existed during the Mughal Empire, and which was abruptly ended by the British colonizers to serve their own policy of Divide and Rule (ibid, 43 - 44).

Beg's scholarly reconstruction of the festival's Mughal past, therefore, focused on using PWS yet again as a medium of resisting British colonialism and its communal politics, although the festival itself had ceased to exist. However, Beg himself was also a willing collaborator of the British Raj and deeply embedded within the relations of power through which the colonial state had governed India. Hence, his work is yet another instance of the fact that PWS has always functioned as both the site and the medium of relations of power, and the resistance that automatically grows out of them.

2.5 Conclusion

Influenced by the historic turn within anthropology, this chapter has critically engaged with the Mughal and colonial past of PWS by exploring the narratives and practices of the social actors who had been directly involved with the festival. On the basis of both primary and secondary sources, it has shown that PWS acted as a site of the patrimonial authority of the Mughal emperor and was intimately shaped by the organizational power of the officials of Red Fort. The organization of PWS by the Mughals was in itself a cultural means of resisting the structural power exerted by British capitalism and its consequent colonization of India. Meanwhile, such a formulation of the festival also allowed the inhabitants of Delhi to resist Mughal domination in myriad ways.

Furthermore, with the end of the empire and the beginning of British rule, PWS was incorporated into the discourses and practices of colonial governmentality, which in itself was

based on an orientalist rationality legally enforced by a bureaucratic state. However, such an exercise of power also created possibilities for the indigenous collaborators of the British Raj to use the festival for their own material gains, and through their activities, they often challenged and resisted the authority of the colonial state. This goes on to prove that PWS, from its moment of inception, had been a contentious social process within which both power and its resistance were intimately intertwined. More importantly, the festival was functioning as both the site and the medium of those fluid, transient relations of power through which Delhi was governed by the Mughal Empire and the British Raj.

Chapter 3 – Performing the Divine, Redefining the Secular: *Ritual Dramas*, (Mass) Mediated Religious Identities, and the Agency of Pavalam

In this chapter, the evolution of PWS after Independence is explored, along with the ways in which the festival has been used by the postcolonial state in Delhi to promote the ideal of secularism and the notion of communal harmony associated with it. Treating the cultural performances at the temple and the shrine as elaborate *ritual dramas*, the chapter shows that they create insular, divisive, and stereotypical religious identities for both Hindus and Muslims of Mehrauli. As a result, such identities become directly antithetical to the notions of communal harmony and secularism that PWS claims to uphold. The agency of Pavalam, together with that of the audience of the *ritual dramas*, is also analyzed to offer a bottom-up perspective to this discussion, as well as establish that the promotion of secularism by the festival cannot be adequately understood without making a distinction between the *form* and *content* of PWS. [23]

3.1 PWS, Secularism, and Communal Harmony

As I've mentioned earlier, although PWS was no longer being celebrated by the 1940s, the festival was revived soon after the Independence of India in 1947. By 1962, a separate civil society organization called the *Anjuman Sair-e-Gulfaroshan* had been set up specifically for the task of hosting the festival on an annual basis. It was founded by Yogeshwar Dayal, an upper caste, elite, Hindu businessman of Delhi who was known to be an inveterate patron of the arts (PWS Brochure 2016, 13). Since 2006, after the demise of Dayal, the organization is being run by his daughter - Usha Kumar Dayal - who also happens to be a member of the trust

[23] Agency has been defined as the capability of "exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree" (Sewell 1992, 20). Agency is inherent in all human beings, can be both collective and individual, and it differs on the basis of gender, wealth, class, social prestige, ethnicity, occupation, etc. (ibid, 20 - 21).

managing the temple of *Yogmaya Devi*. Similarly, other Hindu and Muslim businessmen of the locality who serve in the temple trust and act as the *khadim* of the shrine of *Bakhtiar Kaki* respectively, also hold important positions within the *Anjuman*.

The postcolonial polity in India is built upon a coalitional exercise of power by the state, the indigenous bourgeoisie, civil society organizations, and the bureaucracy, including the urban, elite professionals (Chatterjee 1986; Kaviraj 2010). Thus, the members of the *Anjuman* exercise coalitional power by acting as representatives of the indigenous bourgeoisie operating a civil society organization that collaborates with the postcolonial state in Delhi to supervise PWS as a means of directly intervening in the cultural life of the masses.

Such an intervention is primarily directed toward the creation of a secular polity based on notions of tolerance and communal harmony. For instance, in 1980, the Lieutenant Governor (LG) of Delhi, the constitutional head of the National Capital Region (NCR), was invited for the first time to preside over the festival (The Times of India, 1980). After offering the floral tribute at the shrine, Mr. Jagmohan, then LG of the city, used the occasion of PWS to criticize the communal riots that had occurred in parts of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi earlier that year, and he further emphasized the need to uphold the secular traditions of the country (ibid). [24]

Therefore, after Independence, PWS was actively being used as a platform for offering official, political condemnation of communal violence that had erupted both in the capital and elsewhere in India. This further affirms the centrality of the festival within the cultural project of establishing a secular polity. Moreover, the festive events held that year also included, for the very first time, a sound and light program organized at the *Jahaz Mahal* on the Bollywood film *Mughal-e-Azam*, along with a *qawwali* competition and other cultural performances

[24] As observed by Bhargava, Indian secularism is the only one of its kind that publicly emphasizes notions of tolerance and communal harmony to address problems like inter-religious conflicts, sectarian violence, etc. (Bhargava 2006, 26 - 27).

(ibid).[25] Thus, the organization of the festival in 1980 marked the beginning of utilizing popular Bollywood music and commercially recorded devotional songs within the cultural performances of PWS, thereby also relating the festival to larger cultural discourses, practices, and artefacts circulating within the sphere of the national mass media.

During the celebration of PWS in 1982, Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, further praised the potential of the festival to mitigate the problem of communal violence -

> Asking the people to develop their mental, intellectual, and spiritual faculties, the Prime Minister said no community was ever going to benefit from violence as the common people wanted peace. She said a lesson could be learnt from the festival which symbolized communal amity and national integration (The Times of India, 1982).

It is then safe to conclude that in the decades after Independence, the postcolonial state in Delhi and the *Anjuman* had decisively turned PWS into a cultural means of combating the recurrent problem of communal conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, as well as promoting the notion of tolerance and its consequent construction of a secular polity.

Secularism in India has been shaped by an approach of neutrality adopted by the state in relation to communities following different faiths (Sen 2005, 19 - 21). The postcolonial state in India, therefore, consciously tries to remain equidistant from different religions and treat members of different faiths symmetrically and equally (ibid). PWS can be regarded as a significant manifestation of this secular principle of neutral equidistance - instead of favoring one religion

[25] 'Qawwali' - It is a form of Sufi Islamic devotional music that originated in South Asia during the early 13th century. In modern India, it is one of the most popular genres of commercially recorded devotional songs.

Mughal-e-Azam is a film that was made in 1960 by Karim Asif and Feroz Abbas Khan, renowned theatre personalities, screenwriters and film directors. The film is a typical Bollywood musical based on the 16th century love story between an ordinary Mughal courtesan, Anarkali, and prince Salim, the heir-apparent who later became the fourth Mughal emperor Jahangir. The screenplay of the film was derived from the famous play in Urdu called *Anarkali*, written by the acclaimed dramatist Imtiaz Ali Taj in Lahore in 1922. *Mughal-e-Azam* is not only one of the most grandiose and memorable films created within Bollywood after Independence, but it is also treated as a cinematic eulogy to the syncretic culture of Hindus and Muslims in India, as well as the power and splendor of the Mughal Empire.

over another, the festival involves both Hindu and Islamic sites, while also allowing, at least in theory, both the communities equal access to the public sphere.

However, as mentioned earlier, the cultural performances of PWS, due to their dependence on visual displays and practices, need to be considered as an integral part of the 'exhibitionary complex' of postcolonial modernity. By utilizing them as spectacles disseminating particular types of visual symbols, the organizers of PWS are able to effectively establish not only the authority of the state in front of the masses, but also construct notions of *what* it means to be a Hindu or a Muslim. Therefore, if the *form* of PWS upholds the secular notion of neutral equidistance, then the *content* of its cultural performances should also be investigated to determine if, and how, they allow the festival to affirm such an understanding of secularism.

The following ethnographic sections explore these issues by analyzing the cultural performances at the temple and the shrine as elaborate *ritual dramas*. Moreover, by offering an account of the agency of Pavalam and that of the spectators participating in the performances, they try to highlight the distinction between the *form* of PWS and its *content*, as well as demonstrate the fundamental impact of making such a distinction upon the overall nature of the festival itself.

3.2 Encountering Pavalam

On 19 October 2016, the third day of PWS, I decided to visit the *Hauz-e-Shamsi* and *Jahaz Mahal* in Mehrauli primarily to see how these spaces, which have been as important to the festival as the temple and the shrine, have transformed over the course of time. The previous two days of the festival had witnessed the members of the *Anjuman* offering floral tributes to various government officials of Delhi like the divisional commissioner, lieutenant governor, chief minister, etc. in order to officially thank them for their endorsement of the festival. Thus,

along with establishing their control over the two religious sites, PWS also allows the members of the indigenous bourgeoisie comprising the *Anjuman* to create ties of cooperation and collaboration with the urban, elite bureaucrats constituting the postcolonial state in Delhi.

Moreover, the offering of these floral tributes to the government officials took place in the elite, urban spaces of New Delhi like Raj Niwas Marg, Delhi Sachivalaya, etc. But, on a sunny autumn afternoon, as I reached the road beside the *Hauz-e-Shamsi* after a brisk walk of 20 minutes from the nearest metro station of Chhatarpur, an entirely different face of the city, and that of the festival, appeared before me. The first thing that I noticed was the overbearing stench of offal. As I later discovered, some parts of the artificial lake have now become the dumping ground of sewage from the neighborhood. While I slowly walked down the narrow road that encircles the reservoir, I saw an Islamic cemetery on my right and immediately on my left, the entrance to a DDA park where a massive crowd of hundreds had assembled.

As I entered the park, I realized that people had mainly gathered around a large *akhara* (traditional wrestling pit) that had been set up a few meters away from the entrance. Inside it, two well-oiled men were busy grappling with one another, as the crowd cheered them on. Soon, one of them was able to throw the other on the ground, and a triumphant cry rippled through a section of the masses - "The *pehelwan* (wrestler) from Ghaziabad has won!" It was instantly followed by loud, disgruntled murmurs from a different section of the spectators - "So what? Our lad from Kishangarh has won more money since the beginning of the matches!" In the middle of this heated exchange, I saw a man with a membership badge of the *Anjuman* proudly pinned on his chest step into the *akhara* and hand over a note of Rs. 100 to the winner.

Amidst the raucous cries of applause and excitement that welcomed the start of the next wrestling bout, I had a moment to examine the faces in the crowd. To my surprise, everyone was male, from different age groups like early teens to the old, and from their demeanor, the

overwhelming majority looked like they were members of the urban poor. [26] Interestingly, a few feet away from the crowd and the *akhara*, some adolescent boys were engaging in their own mock fights against each other. Playfully imitating the moves of the wrestlers, they tried to topple their opponents, all the while breaking into peals of laughter and mischievous giggles.

The wrestling tournament was thus operating as a *rite of competition* through which rivalries between different neighborhoods of the city could be *culturally* resolved. Moreover, instead of the Mughal court, it was now the *Anjuman* which was handing out prizes (mainly in the form of cash) to the winners, thereby reproducing the *rite's* earlier function as a rudimentary form of redistribution of wealth among the masses. And finally, within the festive occasion of PWS, this *rite of competition* held at the park beside the *Hauz-e-Shamsi* was also the site of constructing and displaying a dominant form of masculinity for the urban poor, spatially inscribing such a masculinity through ties of loyalty to one's immediate neighborhood and socializing young boys into such gender roles.

All this while, I had been sitting on a bench slightly away from the crowd and had been furiously scribbling down my observations in my notebook. That's why I was startled when I looked up and saw a woman had approached me with a timid, hesitant smile on her face. She appeared to be in her late 40s, was shabbily dressed in a faded *salwar kameez*, and had an old shawl firmly wrapped around her torso that also covered her head. A few strands of her hair had slipped out from underneath the folds of her shawl on her forehead, and I could easily make

[26] During my fieldwork, I got to know through informal conversations with the participants of the festival that most of them are employed as local vegetable vendors, mechanics, domestic help, rickshaw drivers, security guards, artisans, shop assistants, etc. in Mehrauli. As observed by Gooptu, such members of the working-class within the informal labor market of Indian cities can also be regarded as comprising the urban poor (Gooptu 2001, 1 - 3).

out that her hair had been dyed with *henna*, and so I naturally presumed that she was Muslim.[27] She politely asked me if she could sit beside me on the bench for a while, and I said yes.

A few awkward minutes of silence passed between us before she nervously enquired when the LG was supposed to arrive at the park. I informed her that Najeeb Jung, then LG of Delhi, was scheduled to inaugurate the cultural performance to be held at the shrine of *Bakhtiar Kaki* the next day and was not going to attend the wrestling competition. Feeling dejected, the woman made a move to leave, but after pausing for a moment, she again sat down beside me, gave me a surreptitious look, and asked, "Do you work for a newspaper? Because earlier I saw you writing something in your notebook." When I told her that I was merely a student interested in studying the history of the festival, she visibly looked relieved.

Mustering up her courage, the woman then asked in an urgent voice - "In that case, can you please help me? You seem to be an honest, well-educated guy, and that's why I'm making this request. I have to submit a highly important petition to the LG, and I was told by others that he'll be attending this festival, but I don't know when he'll be present, nor do I know how to identify him. Till a few days back, I wasn't even aware of the fact that there's someone called the LG who rules over Delhi." A shy grin momentarily appeared on her face, but it quickly vanished, and she added with an imploring look, "If you're going to attend the performance tomorrow, can you please help me with submitting my petition to the LG? I need to personally deliver it to him."

Intrigued by this unexpected turn of our interaction, I assured her of my help, and struck up a conversation with her. Over the course of the next hour or so, she revealed that her name was

[27] Muslim women who are members of the urban poor and the working-class in Delhi often dye their hair like this. Since I was in a Muslim locality during this segment of the fieldwork, I assumed that Pavalam must be Muslim as well.

Pavalam, and that she had been living in Delhi since 1996. She had originally migrated to the capital with her husband from their native village in Tiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu.

Her husband used to work as an electrician, while she was employed as a nurse in a government sponsored creche for children from low income families. Unfortunately, due to a work-related accident, her husband prematurely passed away in the early 2000s, and ever since, Pavalam has been financially struggling to sustain herself, along with her two daughters. The three of them lived in a small apartment in Aya Nagar, a working-class neighborhood close to the Mehrauli-Gurgaon road.

Since the past one year, her immediate neighbor had been trying to turn his basement into a storage space for his new grocery business. However, during the renovation, he had accidentally damaged the foundations of her apartment, and as a result, one of the walls of her house had collapsed, injuring her elder daughter as well. Pavalam had been trying to get monetary compensation from her neighbor, but because of his apparent clout with the local political leaders affiliated to the BJP, all her efforts had proved futile. [28]

The officials of the local police station had refused to accept her formal complaint and had actually demanded a hefty bribe as a precondition for investigating the case. She didn't have enough money to hire a lawyer and was rebuffed by the people at the local party office of the INC as well when she had tried to approach them with her grievance. [29] A clerk at the office had finally taken pity on her and had instructed her to submit her petition directly to the LG

[28] 'BJP' - Bharatiya Janata Party. It is currently the political party which has control over the central government of India.

[29] 'INC' - Indian National Congress. It is the second most prominent national political party in India after the BJP, and has always been an ideological and electoral opponent of the latter.

when he would visit Mehrauli on the occasion of PWS. This was the reason why Pavalam was so eager to personally meet the LG.

Her story had moved me, but I was also curious to know why she had initially inquired about me being a journalist. When I raised this issue, Pavalam looked embarrassed for a moment, but then she drew close to me and said in a low, conspiratorial tone, "I don't want someone to write about me in a newspaper. I'm actually Christian; the part of Tiruvallur where I come from is mainly inhabited by Christians. But to meet the LG, I knew that I had to go to a neighborhood dominated by Muslims and being alone as a woman in a strange locality is not safe, so I decided to dye my hair with *henna* as it would make me look like any other ordinary Muslim woman. I can travel more freely this way!"

With a childish grin on her face, Pavalam partially removed the shawl around her head to show that the dye only extended halfway up her scalp. But she quickly drew it back and imploringly added, "Please don't tell this to anyone. I really need to meet the LG, and this is the only way I can do so without drawing the wrong kind of attention to myself. I've dyed just half of my hair because I didn't have enough money to buy more of it. You appear to be a kind, well-educated person, and that's why I've asked for your help."

I was astounded by the ingenious manner in which Pavalam had chosen to utilize her individual agency. By adopting the identity of a Muslim woman, she had enabled herself to access the public sphere constituted by the organization of PWS. Thus, she had managed to resist the quotidian social hierarchies which remain operational within the ambit of the festival as well, and that actively exclude her because of her gender, class and religion. The adoption of such a novel intersectional identity was akin to wearing a mask that had granted her the freedom to participate in the public sphere created by PWS.

More importantly, she had specifically approached me for help because she had perceived me as a member of the well-educated, urban elites with enough social authority to command serious attention from others within the public sphere, and Pavalam had hoped to use it to her advantage. I was reminded of Geertz's observation that "the culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" (Geertz 1973, 452). But, after my encounter with Pavalam, I realized that while I was trying to interpret the festival and her agency over her shoulders, she was observing and analyzing me as well, in order to determine to what extent I might be of use to her.

By the end of our conversation, evening had already set in. The wrestling competition had ended, and the joyous crowd had begun to disperse. After assuring Pavalam once again that I'll be at the shrine the next day, I left the park and decided to visit the *Jahaz Mahal* before returning home. The dilapidated, medieval caravanserai was located on the far side of the lake and was adjacent to the local market. It had been beautifully decorated with rows of flowers for a *qawwali* competition to be held on the last night of the festival. After a quick glance at the venue, I decided that it was more important to see how Pavalam would act during the performance at the shrine, and so I called it a day and returned to my apartment.

3.3 *Ritual Drama at the Shrine of Bakhtiar Kaki*

On 20 October, the fourth day of PWS, I got off my cab at the Mehrauli Bus Terminal in the late afternoon and decided to walk till the shrine. It was a struggle to find my way through the labyrinthine alleys of the locality, and I had to ask for directions twice. As I got nearer to the shrine, the urban landscape around me began to drastically change. Upscale residential and commercial buildings slowly gave way to series of old, almost ramshackle houses that were jostling for space and seemed to have been built almost on top of each other.

There were several small shops lining both sides of the street. Their owners, who were predominantly Muslim men, were competing against one another to attract customers by describing their respective wares - flowers, sweets, sheets of cloth, etc. - in the loudest possible voice. Several Muslim families, presumably from the nearby Islam Colony and dressed in festive attires, were busy purchasing the various merchandise. The narrow street that led to the main entrance of the shrine was thronged with eager men and women, and I almost had to wrestle my way through the crowd to enter the shrine.

A large courtyard adjacent to the mausoleum of *Bakhtiar Kaki* had been temporarily converted into the venue for the cultural performance. A makeshift stage had been erected against one of its walls with a board proudly displaying the name of the *Anjuman* and the festival. I saw a few members of the organization self-importantly instructing some men to properly arrange the chairs in front of the stage. Wreaths of flowers had been strung on all the walls of the courtyard, and I could see Muslim women with their children sitting on the rooftops of nearby houses to catch a glimpse of the event. On one side of the courtyard, a half-broken wall separated the precincts of the shrine from what seemed like the remnants of the palaces constructed by Bahadur Shah Zafar. Later, I discovered that the mausoleum also contains the tombs of Mughal emperors like Akbar Shah II, Shah Alam II, and Bahadur Shah I.

Immediately after entering the courtyard, I saw Pavalam sitting together with a few other Muslim women. She greeted me with a polite smile when I sat beside her, and I had to assure her yet again that the LG would certainly be present for the cultural performance. I also overheard some parts of the animated conversation that was going on among the Muslim women. All of them were residents of the locality and their spouses had been employed by the *khadim* as sweepers and cleaners of the shrine's premises. They were particularly proud of this

fact because it had allowed them to get special passes for the cultural performance, a privilege that had not been extended to the hundreds who had gathered outside.

Suddenly, there was an excited shout near the gate - "The LG has arrived!" Soon afterwards, we saw Najeeb Jung entering the premises accompanied by several policemen and members of the *Anjuman*. A person walking in front of them was carrying the enormous *pankha* that was to be offered at the tomb of *Bakhtiar Kaki*. The procession was also accompanied by musicians playing traditional instruments like the *shehnai* and the *dholak*. The moment the procession had crossed the courtyard, the crowd that had gathered outside began pouring into the space in front of the stage. People began jostling with one another to grab as many of the seats as quickly as possible. During the commotion that ensued, I saw Pavalam agitatedly get out of her seat, and after confirming with me which one of the officials was the LG, she tried to proceed toward the tomb. However, because of the large crowd, she couldn't venture too far and came back with a look of sore disappointment on her face.

Suddenly, she asked me if I was willing to present the petition to the LG on her behalf. She pleaded with me by saying, "Son, please help me out! You can see that I can't find my way through the crowd!" However, I was stuck in a dilemma - will it be appropriate for me, in my role as an 'objective' ethnographer, to help her? Will I be tampering with my 'data' by doing so? But, before I could reply, Pavalam noticed the hesitant look on my face and turned to the Muslim women for assistance. She briefly mentioned what she intended to do with her petition and asked them if one of them was willing to guide her to the tomb. However, the eldest among them assured her - "Sister, it's not a problem. You're one of us. No one will stop you from approaching the LG. If someone does, you can just tell them that you're Salima's friend."

Feeling confident, Pavalam replied that she would at once enter the tomb and hand over her petition while the LG was on his way out. But Salima, who had spoken earlier, looked horrified

and said, "You're the wife of a Muslim man, and you still don't know that women can't enter the tomb?!" [30] A look of mortification appeared on Pavalam's face, but she quickly composed herself and replied that she had actually meant that she would be waiting for the LG at the tomb's entrance. Before the Muslim women could ask her anything further, she hurriedly left to fulfill her task.

Just a few minutes later, Pavalam returned with a triumphant smile on her face. Clearly, she had been successful in submitting her petition to the LG. I noticed that she now chose to sit on my other side away from the curious glances of the Muslim women. I realized that the way she had used her individual agency to adopt an intersectional identity had created its own uncertainties - the Muslim women had almost caught her deception, but she was able to prevent her mask from slipping away.

As I was beginning to feel impressed by her achievement, Najeeb Jung returned to the stage and officially inaugurated the cultural performance. He further mentioned that the shrine of *Bakhtiar Kaki* was very dear to him since his father used to visit it frequently in the past. Afterwards, Usha Kumar also underscored the long association between the *Anjuman* and the shrine and thanked the *Sahitya Kala Parishad* for hiring members of the local community for the afternoon's performance. [31] I realized that the procession and the offering of the floral tribute were an elaborate *rite of conspicuous display* through which the *Anjuman* and officials of the postcolonial state in Delhi were able to establish their authority over the shrine.

The performance commenced with five, young Muslim men, dressed in the traditional attire of Sufi saints, dancing to the *qawwali* called *Piya Haji Ali* (My Beloved Haji Ali) from the 2000

[30] Women in general are not allowed to enter the mausoleum. Salima was scandalized by the fact that Pavalam, despite appearing to be a Muslim woman, was not aware of this.

[31] 'Sahitya Kala Parishad' - This is the cultural wing of the Delhi State Government.

Bollywood film called *Fiza*. The song was used in the film in praise of the 14th century Sufi saint *Haji Ali Shah Bukhari* whose burial site in Mumbai has been turned into an Islamic shrine. However, he had little to do with the Chishti order of Sufism to which *Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki* had originally belonged. Moreover, within the film, the song was utilized to underscore the hero's identity as a devout Muslim, who later turns into a terrorist - a stereotype about Islam that has been reproduced time and again within Bollywood (Mujtaba 2006; Islam 2007, 408 - 409).

Thus, the cultural performance began with a deliberate reinforcement of a stereotypical depiction of Muslims borrowed from the larger realm of the national mass media. Furthermore, by playing a song dedicated to a Sufi saint who was completely unrelated to *Bakhtiar Kaki*, it also consciously ignored the significant cultural differences *within* Indian Muslims. It began to dawn on me that the performance, in its role as a *ritual drama*, was constructing a highly problematic and clichéd religious identity for its Muslim spectators.

However, to my surprise, I found the Muslim women, who had earlier interacted with Pavalam, interpreting the cultural performance in a vastly different manner. I overheard one of them congratulating Salima because her eldest son was one of the five dancers on the stage. In response, Salima nodded wisely and said, "I intentionally asked him to work as a dancer for them [*Sahitya Kala Parishad*]. Otherwise he would have fallen into bad company. You know how the ruins beside the shrine become a den of gamblers and drug addicts every evening. I don't want him to mix with them. By working as a dancer, he can at least have the chance to lead a better life". The other women accompanying her enthusiastically supported her view.

Hence, for at least these women within the audience, the cultural performance represented an opportunity for upward social mobility, despite the fact that the Muslim identity disseminated by it was highly problematic. In addition, the transformation brought about in the urban spaces

surrounding the shrine on the occasion of PWS gave them hope of transcending, albeit temporarily, their usual state of exclusion and marginalization. I finally began to realize that it was important to make a distinction between the *form* and *content* of the contemporary manifestation of PWS. While the former, through its focus on organizing the cultural performance at the shrine, does allow at least some of the Muslim residents of the locality to strive for a better life, the latter, due to its emphasis on reproducing problematic stereotypes about Islam, ends up reinforcing the cultural hierarchies that discriminate against Indian Muslims in the realm of everyday life.

The performance ended with the five men dancing to yet another Bollywood song called *Khwaja Mere Khwaja* (My Master) from the 2008 historical romance film called *Jodhaa Akbar*. The song was used to depict the third Mughal emperor Akbar's devotion to the 13th century Sufi saint called *Moinuddin Chishti*, whose tomb in Ajmer is also a renowned Islamic shrine. Since *Bakhtiar Kaki* was the disciple and successor of *Moinuddin Chishti*, this song was at least directly relevant to the social context of the former's shrine in Mehrauli. But, it was interesting to note that the dancers were all wearing the typical red, Turkish caps worn primarily by West Asian dervishes - a cultural feature entirely alien to the South Asian variant of Islam (Amin 2005).

Within mainstream Indian cinema, the visual motif of such Turkish caps has been used as a cultural stereotype to depict Muslims as the 'Other' who do not truly belong to the social milieu of South Asia (Amin 2005; Islam 2007, 405). Moreover, the use of only *qawwali* within the cultural performances reinforced yet another stereotypical representation of Muslims as essentially mystical, medieval, and non-modern that has also been frequently upheld within Bollywood (Islam 2007, 408). Therefore, in the form of a *ritual drama* based on symbols and ideas derived from the larger national mass media, the performance organized at the shrine

reproduced a stereotypical understanding of Muslims as backward, feudal, and foreigners who do not fit into Indian society.

As people began to leave after the end of the cultural performance, Pavalam bid me farewell after thanking me for informing her about the LG's visit to the shrine. Her novel way of utilizing intersectional identities had not only allowed her to blend in with the Muslim spectators but had also enabled her to treat PWS as an alternative site within the Indian public sphere for expressing her needs and grievances to an official of the postcolonial state, especially when other public institutions had deliberately excluded her. Moreover, her innovative use of her individual agency had helped her to access both male dominated spaces within the festival as well as a site that does not belong to her own religion.

However, this had created its own form of uncertainties, as exemplified by the moment when her deception was almost caught by the Muslim women. Furthermore, their recognition of her as primarily the "wife of a Muslim man" meant that she still remained embedded within the everyday gender hierarchies that continue to operate within PWS. Pavalam's experience further demonstrates that within the 'exhibitionary complex' of postcolonial modernity, it is not just the state that uses visual displays to establish its authority, but an individual like her can contrive a particular kind of public self to present before the state. If PWS is the site where the postcolonial state visually stages its power, then it is also the site in which an individual like Pavalam can manufacture herself as a specific type of spectator and participant in the public sphere.

In this sense, the form of PWS certainly affirms the principle of secularism by allowing a working-class, Christian woman to directly interact with an official of the postcolonial state, and that too within an Islamic site. However, the procession and the *ritual drama* were mainly used to establish the authority of the *Anjuman* and the postcolonial state over the shrine, as well

as construct a highly problematic identity for the Muslim masses. Thus, in terms of its content, PWS fails to promote the ideal of secularism. Such an interesting duality within the overall nature of the festival is yet another proof of the fact that it needs to be viewed as both the *site* and the *medium* of power, together with the myriad forms of resistance that automatically arise out of it.

3.4 *Ritual Drama* at the Temple of *Yogmaya Devi*

On the last day of PWS, during my visit to the temple to witness the procession and *ritual drama* staged there, I could easily notice the marked difference between the urban space where it is located and that of the shrine. Unlike the *dargah* of *Bakhtiar Kaki*, the temple is situated along Kalka Das Marg, one of the major thoroughfares of Mehrauli. Sitting atop a hill with a magnificent view of the adjacent Qutab complex, the temple is flanked by upscale commercial establishments like boutiques and restaurants. The gleaming, white marble façade of the temple further underscores the fact that it occupies one of the most expensive and exclusive real estate areas of the neighborhood.

On the evening of 21 October, as the procession slowly wound its way up the hill, access to the inner *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple was denied to the hundreds of devotees who had gathered in its outer courtyard. The overwhelming majority of them were Hindu and belonged to the urban poor. While they waited outside in front of a temporary stage erected for the cultural performance, the members of the *Anjuman* and the temple trust offered a floral fan to the deity. Clearly, this was yet another *rite of conspicuous display* through which the *Anjuman* and the temple trust could establish themselves as the rightful guardians of the temple.

After being inaugurated by Usha Kumar, the cultural performance eventually commenced with three female dancers presenting the song *Deva Shree Ganesha* (The God Ganesh) from the

2012 Bollywood film *Agneepath* (The Path of Fire). This was followed by a male dancer, dressed as the Hindu god Shiva, performing to yet another Bollywood track named *Shivji Satya Hain* (Shiva is the Truth) from the 2004 movie *Ab Tumhare Hawale Watan Saathiyo* (We Entrust This Nation to You, O Countrymen!). Both the songs were utilized in the respective films to emphasize the staunchly Hindu identity of their protagonists.

In *Agneepath*, for instance, the song established the religion of the hero, who was later shown to be fighting against the illicit human trafficking undertaken by a Muslim gangster. *Shivji Satya Hain*, on the other hand, was performed by Amitabh Bachchan in the film to portray the character of a Hindu soldier trying to protect the temple of Amarnath from an attack by Muslim terrorists from Pakistan. Therefore, in the form of a *ritual drama*, the cultural performance created a Hindu identity that was unequivocally opposed to Islam and intrinsically intertwined with the notion of safeguarding the Hindu community of the nation from real or imagined external threats. I also realized that such a problematic amalgamation of religion and mass media could never truly promote communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims.

The subsequent segments of the performance were entirely based on commercially recorded devotional songs. As the loudspeakers began blaring *Mera Shankar Bhola Bhala* (My Innocent, Beloved Shiva), the man who had earlier portrayed Shiva took to the stage once again and was now joined by one of the previous female dancers. While Shiva stood in the center of the stage with a domineering stance, the woman began venerating him through coy and conspicuously subservient gestures to the following refrain - "The innocent Shiva with his *Damru* is my Lord and Beloved!" [32] Hence, the female devotee, by acting as a representative of the worshippers of the god, became a symbol of the audience as well. The performance, through a gendered envisioning of the relationship between the deity and the masses, undertook a feminization of

[32] 'Damru' - A traditional musical instrument.

the audience; the spectators could revere the male deity solely through the perspective of a servile woman who was in awe of an impassive, male divinity.

Till this point, the devotees in the audience had primarily functioned as passive spectators. However, to my great surprise, the next part drew them more actively into the performance. This time, Shive was joined by a man in the attire of the goddess Kali, and together they performed to the song *Ghanana Ghanana Ghanta Baaje Chamunda ke Dwar Par* (The Bells Ring at the Door of Chamunda). The recital represented the Hindu myth of Kali subduing Shiva through her mad, violent, and untamable dance. At the climactic moment, as Shiva meekly lied down at his feet, the man impersonating Kali dramatically lit a fire in his left hand and broke the fourth wall by stepping off the stage. The organizers fervently exclaimed - "All Hail the Mother Goddess!" - and several women in the audience rushed forward to seek the blessings of Kali.

Thus, the goddess had given her *darshan*, and the devotees, through the limited agency imparted to them, were actively encouraged to collectively participate in the performance, thereby heightening the overall religious appeal and frenzy of the entire act. [33] But, more importantly, it was a *man* who had depicted Kali, a goddess known for her unbridled feminine vigor and sexuality (Kripal and McDermott 2005, 23 - 28). It was ironic that the *ritual drama* held at the *Yogmaya* temple, a seat of the Mother Goddess, did not allow women to embody a female divinity who is particularly known for vanquishing her male counterparts.

[33] Unlike the usual sociological interpretation of the act of looking, wherein the observer exerts power over an image (a person, scenery, thing, etc.) by reducing it to an 'object' of the look, the ritual of *darshan* unfolds by inverting this relation of power. It is the observer who is allowed, or given a privileged opportunity, to look at the image, thereby attaining salvation, or acquiring emotional joy and sustenance, or reinforcing her social status. Thus, the image is placed in a position of power over the observer, determining the latter's subservient subjectivity. Within the historical occurrences of *darshan*, the image has been typically been that of a divinity, or a figure of socio-political authority (king, head priest, etc.). See Vasudevan 2010 for more on this.

The performance finally ended with two male dancers enacting the relationship between Krishna and Sudama to the song *Sudama Garib Aa Gaya* (Sudama the Poor has Arrived). Sudama's steadfast loyalty toward the Hindu god Krishna is one of the most widely celebrated components of the *Bhagavata Purana*. Among Hindus, Krishna's generosity toward the impoverished Sudama has traditionally been used as an allegory of how personal devotion to the divine can lead to the deliverance and redemption of the devotee. However, the same mythical tale, reinterpreted, repackaged, and commodified through a commercially recorded devotional song, became a means of offering symbolic concessions to the urban poor. To illustrate, the refrain of the song emphasized Sudama's poverty more than his love for Krishna -

See how poor I am! My Faith on Krishna has brought me to his door,
O Watchmen! Please Tell Krishna that poor Sudama has arrived.
Neither a turban on my head, nor a shirt on my torso,
Tell Krishna that my name is Sudama!

While the male dancer representing Sudama emerged from the midst of the audience, Krishna, illustrated as the king of Dwarka, remained seated on a throne upon the stage. The denouement of the act was marked by a reversal of this relation of power - Sudama was placed on the throne, while Krishna assumed an inferior postion at his feet, and interestingly, this was met with a cheerful approval from the audience. The *ritual drama*, therefore, had symbolically resolved the destitution of the masses. By arising from their midst, Sudama became an equal of the working-class spectators, and through his submission to divine authority, he also managed to overcome his penury.

Moreover, the *apparent* dissolution of the economic inequality between Krishna and Sudama acted as a visual motif of the urban poor transgressing, and eventually upending, the hierarchies of class. Thus, the *ritual drama* had offered the working-class devotees a symbolic, but ultimately ephemeral, sense of triumph, and a metaphorical means of coming to terms with their inferior position within the larger socio-economic order. In this sense, it also acted as an elaborate *rite of reversal* which firmly incorporated the spectators into quotidian social hierarchies precisely when they were allowed to temporarily invert them within the festive occasion of PWS.

Finally, the aforementioned ethnography also shows that the content of the festival remains inimical to the promotion of secularism, even though its form can allow an individual like Pavalam to express herself within the public sphere constructed by PWS. By creating insular, divisive, and highly problematic religious identities for both Muslims and Hindus, the festival clearly proves that the exhibitionary complex of postcolonial modernity involves both visually staging the authority of the state and establishing what it means to belong to these two religious groups within the ambit of a secular polity. Unfortunately, the content of PWS contradicts the notions of tolerance and communal harmony, even though in its form it seemingly upholds the secular principle of neutral equidistance.

3.5 Conclusion

On the basis of a detailed ethnography of the contemporary manifestation of PWS, this chapter has decisively shown that the form of the festival should be clearly distinguished from its content. While the former does allow the festival to be truly secular to a limited extent, the latter primarily involves establishing the authority of the *Anjuman* and the postcolonial state in Delhi over the temple and the shrine. The content of PWS also creates parochial, stereotypical, and highly problematic identities for both Hindus and Muslims that skillfully combine religion

with gender and class, thereby further negating the possibility of the festival to promote tolerance and communal harmony.

Lastly, the agency of Pavalam indicates that the construction of the 'exhibitionary complex' of postcolonial modernity can also witness an individual utilizing intersectional identities in a novel manner to project herself as a specific type of spectator, citizen, and participant in the public sphere conceived by the festival. Moreover, the creation of such an 'exhibitionary complex' also involves delimiting the agency of the audience in such a way that they either look upon the cultural performances as an opportunity for upward social mobility, or unquestioningly imbibe the religious identities constructed through them. The influence of PWS, therefore, can be properly interpreted only when it is regarded as both the *site* and the *medium* of relations of power, along with the resistance born out of them.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in the thesis has tried to establish that the festival of *Phool Waalon Ki Sair* needs to be interpreted as both the *site* and the *medium* of the relations of power through which the city of Delhi has been governed over the course of time.

Influenced by the historic turn within anthropology, I've used archival documents, contemporaneous newspaper articles, and a secondary source (the book by Mirza Farhatullah Beg) to reconstruct the past of the festival. Thus, PWS was utilized by the Mughal court to resist the structural power exerted by British colonialism on India as the country was reduced to the colonized periphery exploited for the material benefits of Britain, which acted as the capitalist, metropolitan core.

However, the festival was also a cultural means of spatially inscribing the power of the Mughal court over Delhi and its surrounding areas. The procession associated with PWS played a crucial role in this, and it further created opportunities for the inhabitants of the city to mock and subvert their Mughal overlords.

With the end of the empire and beginning of British colonial rule in Delhi, the festival was gradually incorporated into the myriad processes of colonial governmentality, that was itself guided by the ideology of Orientalism. But, this also enabled the indigenous elites of the city who were collaborating with the Raj to utilize the festival to acquire greater control over the urban spaces of Delhi and their social processes.

After the Independence of India in 1947, PWS began to be used by the postcolonial state in Delhi to construct a secular polity by promoting notions of tolerance and communal harmony. However, a conceptual distinction between the form and content of the festival sheds light on

the fact that it does not truly promote inter - religious harmony between Hindus and Muslims of the city, and only superficially reinforces the ideal of secularism.

Furthermore, the agency of Pavalam and that of the spectators of the cultural performances intimately shape the overall nature of PWS itself. This also problematizes the conceptualization of festivals as an integral component of the 'exhibitionary complex' of postcolonial modernity; the postcolonial state's authoritative visual displays and practices are countered by novel ways in which individual and collective agency operate from the bottom-up.

Therefore, any anthropological study of festivals has to necessarily focus on concepts like power, agency, and placemaking in order to understand how they function as contentious, dynamic processes that are caught in a dialectical relationship with the agency of their participants and the spaces where they are staged.

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Appendices

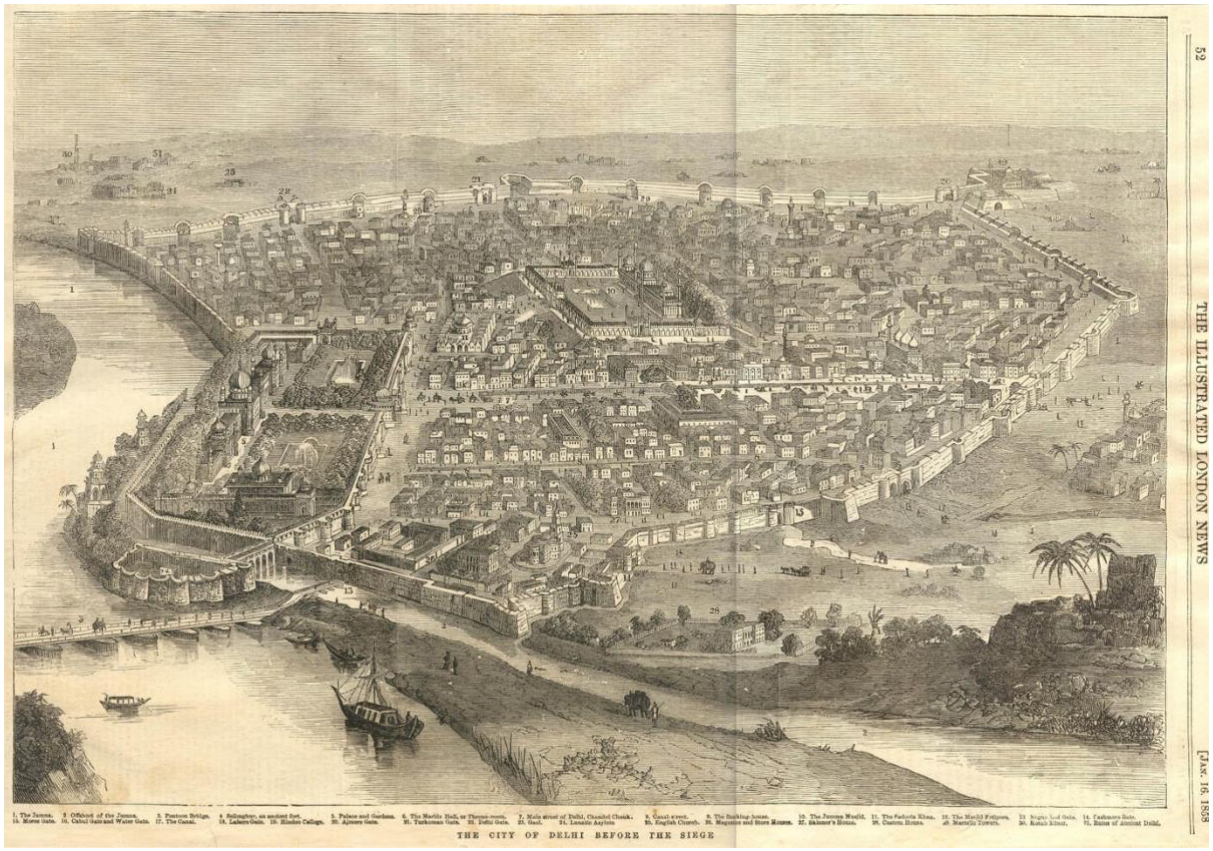

Figure 1: Map of Shahjahanabad before the Mutiny of 1857. (Source: https://imgur.com/gallery/YvVsT)

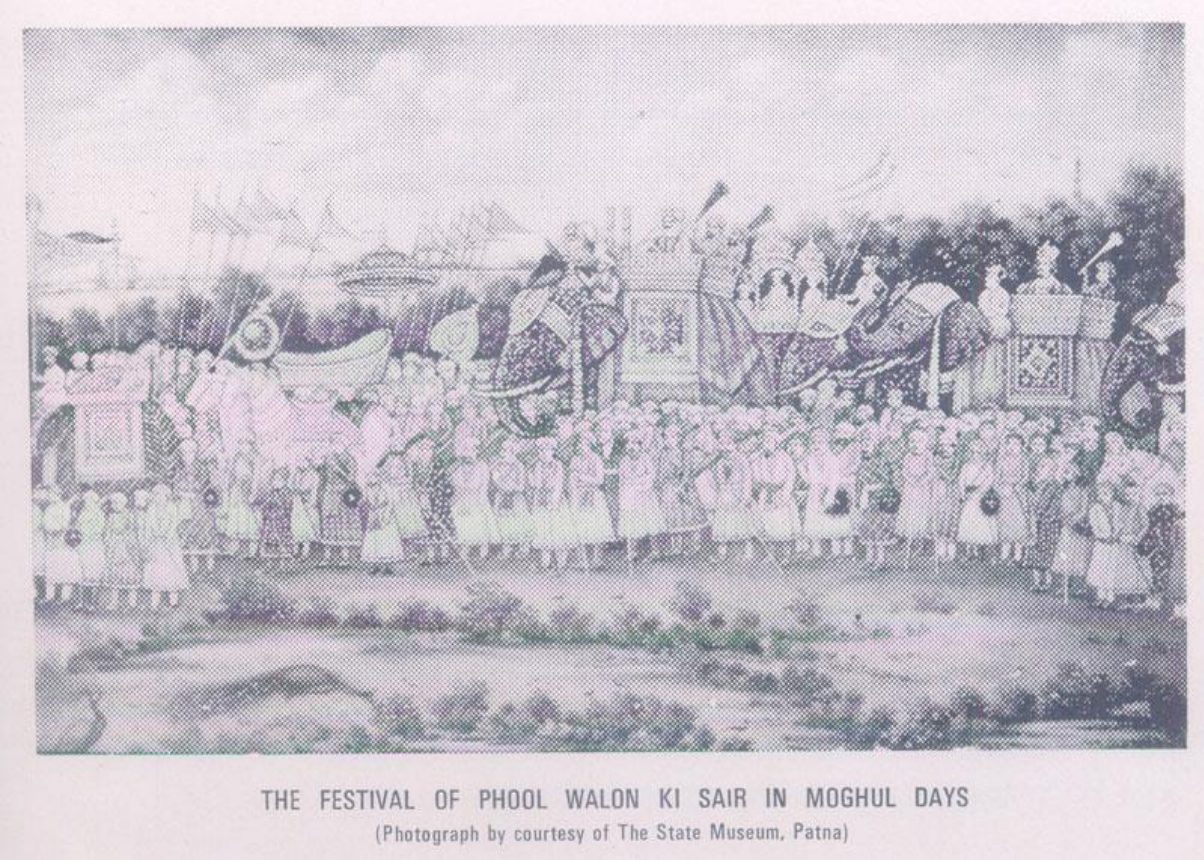

Figure 2: A Mughal miniature painting depicting the imperial procession of PWS. (Source: http://www.phoolwaalonkisair.com/gallery_old.htm)

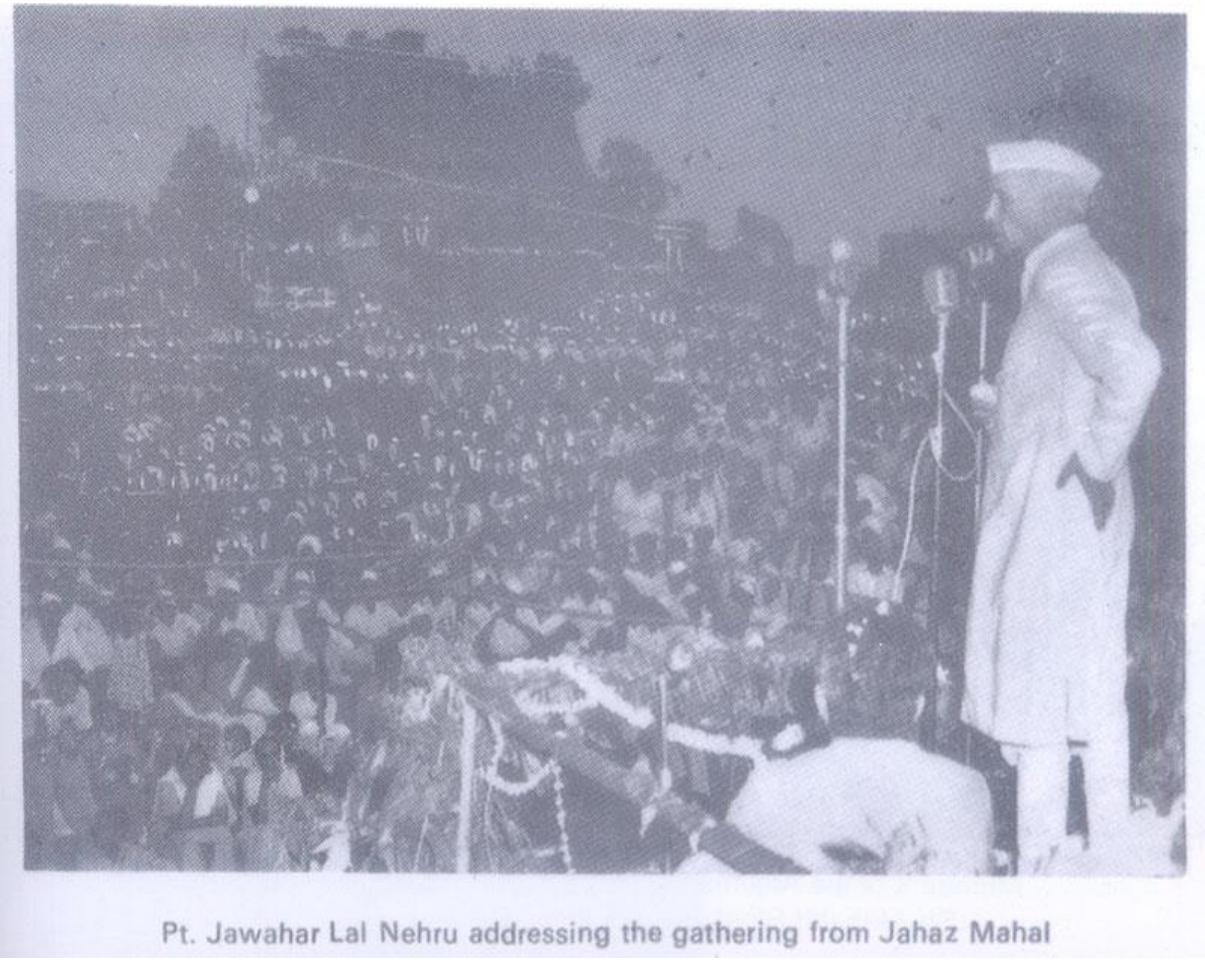

Figure 3: The postcolonial state in Delhi played a central role in hosting PWS. (Source: http://www.phoolwaalonkisair.com/gallery_old.htm)

Figure 4: Turkish caps as a visual motif in the ritual drama at the shrine of Bakhtiar Kaki. (Source: http://www.phoolwaalonkisair.com/2015_5.htm)

Figure 5: Wrestling competition in the DDA park beside Hauz-e-Shamsi. (Source: http://www.phoolwaalonkisair.com/2015_4.htm)

Figure 6: Audience of ritual drama at the shrine of Bakhtiar Kaki. (Source: http://www.phoolwaalonkisair.com/2015_5.htm)

Figure 7: Krishna kissing Sudama's feet in the ritual drama at the temple of Yogmaya Devi. (Source: Photograph by author.)

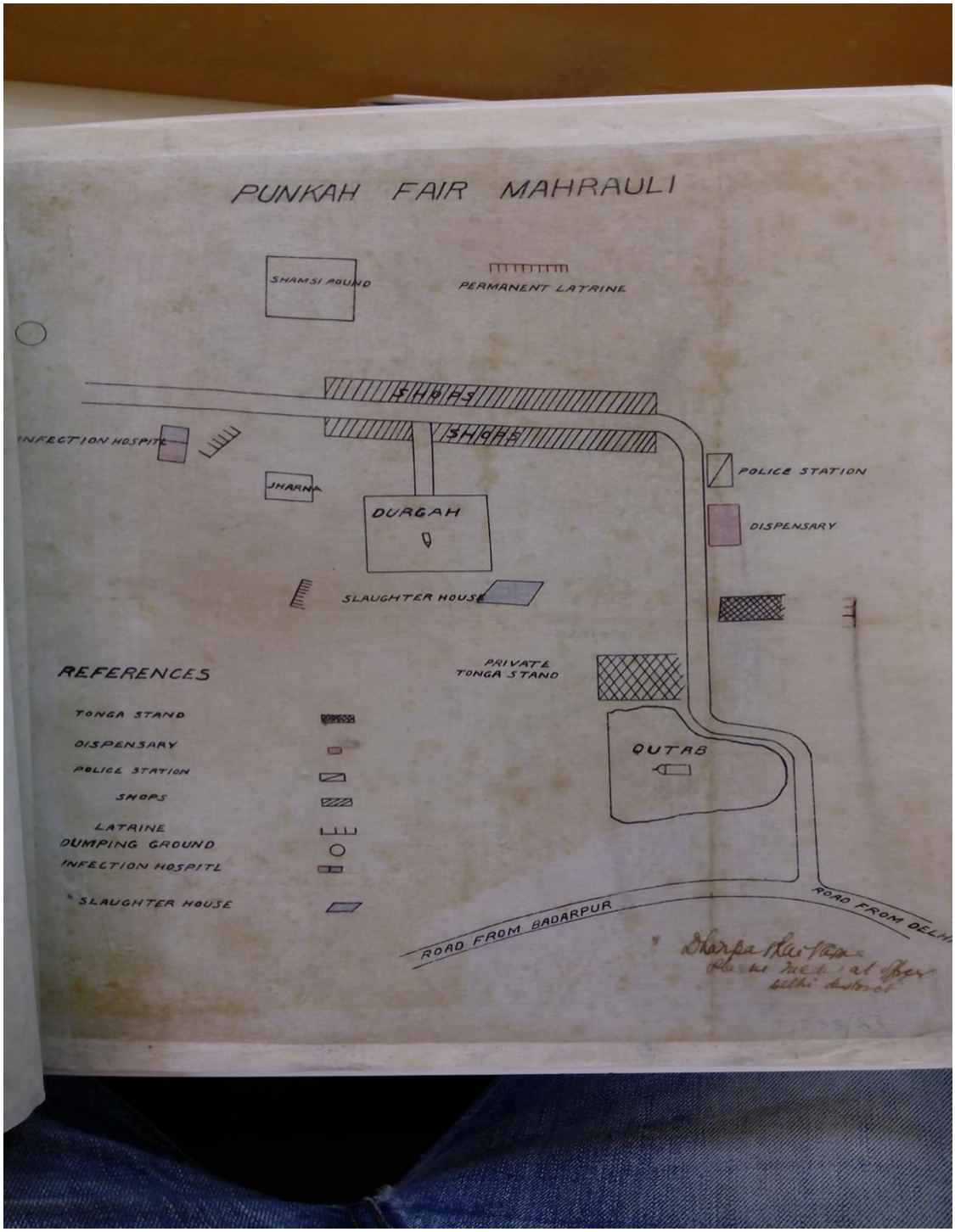

Figure 8: Creation of diagrams was essential to the British Raj's control of urban spaces on the occasion of PWS. (Source: Photograph by author.)