Lions of Islam: Symbols of Masculine Power in the Devotional Art of India and Pakistan

Yousuf Saeed

Published on Tasveer Ghar website: 25 Nov. 2019

http://tasveergharindia.net/essay/lions-islam-manly-sufis

Tasveer Ghar (A House of Pictures) is a digital archive of
South Asian popular visual culture
Editors: Christiane Brosius, Sumathi Ramaswami, Yousuf Saeed

http://tasveerghar.net

This essay is part of the project 'Manly Matters: Representation of Maleness in South Asian Popular Visual Practice'.

Lions of Islam: Symbols of Masculine Power in the Devotional Art of India and Pakistan

Yousuf Saeed

Figure 01

While orthodox followers of Islam disapprove of the use of images or icons in religious faith and practice, many believing Muslims continue to revere or rely on devotional images and iconography as part of their daily rituals. Legends about the healing powers and miracles of local saints circulate in the public domain orally as well in popular visual forms, encouraging many devotees to visit their shrines to pray for mitigation of their hardships in life. Pictures of Muslim holy men are published as posters for mass consumption. These feature portraits not only of past saints (such as in Fig. 01) but also of the current hereditary *khadim*s (caretakers) of the Sufi shrines, occasionally depicting them with lions, indicating their masculine power, thus helping them wield spiritual as well as temporal influence over visiting devotees.

Through some examples of religious poster art from India and Pakistan, this essay will explore how the 'masculinity' of holy men and saints is crucial to the power they exercise over their devotees, and how that masculine power is established through the popular visual domain. The 'power' of a dead saint obviously refers to their powerful image as perceived today, having been constructed since their passing on, irrespective of what they may have been in their lifetime.

Portraying Sufi Saints in South Asia

From the perspective of the history of mass-produced art in India, the portraits of Sufi saints did not emerge initially in the same manner as did the figurative depiction of Hindu mythology and folklore produced for instance by artist Ravi Varma or others from the late 19th century onwards. Early popular art related to Islam mostly consisted of pilgrimage maps of Mecca and Medina shrines, images of Indo-Islamic architecture, and decorative Arabic calligraphy.[1] Most producers of poster and calendar art in India, many non-Muslim by name, were mindful of a general abhorrence of figurative art among Muslim viewers, and avoided the inclusion of human figures in their prints. But this was in contrast with the rich traditions of portraiture in the Mughal and other Indo-Islamic traditions of art in pre-modern times that did not shy away from depicting Muslim holy men including prophets, angels, imams, and Sufis. As a matter of fact, the image of six saints in popular prints such as Fig. 01 has a long history going back to the Mughal period, as we shall see below. Sufi saints were revered and respected by most South Asian rulers, and have been portrayed favourably in several Mughal paintings. Later, European commentators and artists were fascinated by these 'fakirs' who performed superhuman acts and bodily feats showing their masculine strength. Many

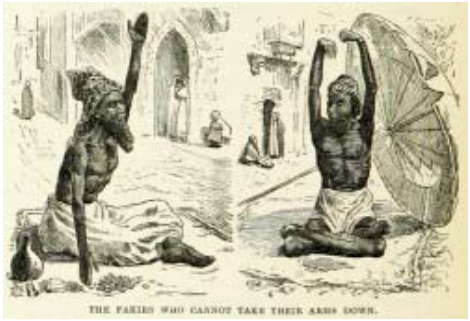


Figure 02

surviving 19th-century illustrations with typical captions such as ‘The fakirs who cannot take their arms down’ reveal such an Orientalist attitude (Fig. 02). The images from the pre-print era and colonial literature were restricted to the elite and may not have circulated among the majority of practising Muslims.

Even in parts of the world such as Iran, Turkey, or Syria, where the majority of the populace profess Islam, many religious pictures printed in our time include human figures such as prophets, *imam*s, and Sufis, and are revered by most believers. In India and Pakistan, portraits of local saints and their attributes began to appear in some printed posters from around the 1950s. Before we explore the sources of these portraits and how they were appropriated by the print industry, it is important to look at aspects of masculinity in Islam, especially in its mystical traditions. Although women Sufi mystics existed all over the Islamic world including South Asia,[2] most of them are neither highlighted in popular oral narratives nor visualized in printed portraits like their male counterparts. According to Valerie Hoffman-Ladd, ‘Sufi ethics came to be known as *futuwwa*, “young manliness,” based on the word *fata*, meaning “young man,” literally a code of chivalry that demanded courage, self-denial, and heroic generosity.’[3] She further points out that even the female mystic Rabia of Basra was listed as a man by hagiographer Fariduddin Attar: ‘...on the path of God, she has become a man and should no longer be called a woman’, suggesting an ‘inferiorization’ of women even among Sufis. Visual portrayal of women mystics would have been further restricted by the *parda* (veil) they may have worn. Thus, male Sufis remain the most visible figures in much of Islamic visual culture.

A large body of research work is available on the history of Sufism or religious-mystical movements in Islam,[4] especially its development in South Asia.[5] There are detailed accounts of how Muslim spiritual practitioners, especially those from Central Asia or the Turko-Persianate world, arrived and interacted with yogis and other mystics in India throughout medieval times,[6] developing advanced theories and practices of body control and asceticism, including self-affliction, celibacy, and yoga.[7] Many orders or *silsila*s (lineages) of Sufism such as Chishtiya, Qadiriya, Suhrawardiya, Naqshbandiya, and Shattariya arrived and thrived in South Asia. The most influential one has been the Chishtiya as its members assimilated the local culture and mingled with the masses, using local dialects and musical forms.[8]

While South Asian Muslims may have imbibed some syncretic tendencies or shamanistic practices from the local Hindu or Indic traditions, some were also brought in from Central Asia where Buddhism and animistic cultures thrived before the coming of Islam. The Chishti Order, prior to its arrival in India and acquiring its name, certainly had its early development in Central Asia, adopting at least some Buddhist practices and iconography.[9] Some Chishti, Qadiri, and Shattari Sufis used practices of

body control and yoga, helping in the formation of their masculine public image. A popular Nath yoga text called *Amritkund* (Pool of Nectar) was extensively translated, at least from the early 13th century onwards, into Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu, and used by Sufis over the centuries.[10] However, a discussion of the theoretical or historical framework of Sufism is of little relevance here as this essay deals exclusively with the popular cult and visual culture of these saints in South Asia.

Figure 03

Male Dominance in Muslim Society

While reading popular Islamic images/portraits, it is important to keep in mind that men's superior position in relation to women is common in Muslim society (as in many other communities). This is exemplified in various masculine tropes. For instance, most believing Muslim men sport a beard following the example of the Prophet, some *ulema* (religious scholars) even wearing long impressive robes and turbans or other types of headgear, though some of this is culturally specific too. Although sporting a beard is not obligatory for Muslim men, shaving or trimming it is often frowned upon. The Prophet is supposed to have stressed trimming the moustache, something which many Muslim men follow.[11] The *imam* or *maulvi* who leads prayers in a mosque or large congregation is definitely expected to have a beard (Fig. 03).[12] The impression of such personality not only serves to identify these male scholars as authorities on all matters religious, but also strengthens the norms of patriarchy at home and outside. Occasionally, the imposing headgear or long robes of the *ulema* also suggest their higher caste status – many well-known *imam*s, *maulvi*s, and *khadim*s or shrine-keepers in South Asia tend to hail from the Sayyed or *ashraf* (noble) castes, despite the belief that Islam does not support a caste system or social hierarchy. In fact, the six praying men shown in Fig. 04 are supposed to represent a wide economic, social, and cultural diversity among South Asian Muslims, visually underscoring and disseminating the egalitarian values of Islam.

Figure 04

In Persian and Urdu, many popular idioms and phrases use the word *mard* (man) and *mardangi* (manliness) to signify the superiority of men, especially the ones following Islam. '*Himmat-e mardan madad-e khuda*' (When men dare, God sends help) is a popular phrase used in daily conversation in many parts of the Indo-Persianate world. Popular literatures related to Islamic history, whether oral or textual, are full of legends of sword-wielding masculine invaders on horseback conquering various lands, an image that has pervaded the popular visual imagination across the world and given rise to stereotypes of Muslims as aggressive and invading (Fig. 05). In recent times, this masculine Muslim image is ultimately identified with Islamic extremism and terrorism too, although this may also be a way of 'othering' a community perpetuated by the mainstream media.[13]

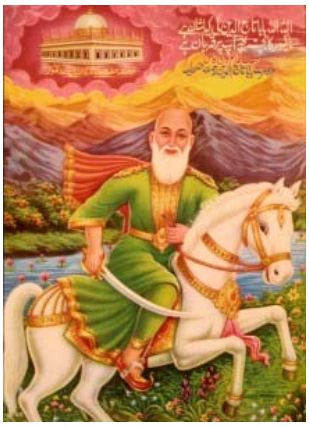


Figure 05

But the poster image of a Muslim-looking man on a horse with a sword and shield does not necessarily mean a violent invader – Fig. 05 in fact shows the saint Tajuddin of Nagpur (Maharashtra) whose valiant posture, like that of many other saints, is supposed to represent his act of spreading the Sufi movement, or Islam, across lands. Baba Tajuddin is depicted as an old man with a flowing white beard and a bald head, but dressed like a king to represent his spiritual power. The Urdu caption across the top of the print refers to his influence on people, such that 'every child of Nagpur is ready to be sacrificed' for him.[14] Such messages not only represent the existing public sentiment about the baba, but also bestow upon him the image of a gallant 'warrior' saint.

The Lion or Tiger as a Symbol of Masculine Power

Among the famous Muslim men with whom the ultra-masculine image has been associated, the earliest is of course Ali ibn Abu Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, considered the first person to have accepted Islam from the Prophet. Ali protected the Prophet from an early age and fought several battles alongside him in the early years of Islam. He was known as a brave and chivalrous warrior who possessed a double-bladed sword known as Zulfiqar, and who attacked his enemies like a lion and hence was given the title of *Hyder-e karrar* (the lion who attacks swiftly) by the Prophet himself. Among South Asian Muslims, Ali is known as *Sher-e Khuda* (Lion of God) and his name is invoked by many while embarking on difficult physical tasks in their daily lives, the symbol of the lion being used for this purpose.

Although Ali is supposed to be revered more by Shias on account of his being a male descendant of the Prophet and part of the *Ahle-bait* (the Prophet's immediate family),[15] many Sunnis too respect him and invoke his name for receiving his powers or blessings. The lyrics of a popular Sufi song or *qawwali* list the phrases describing Ali as *Shah-e-Mardan, Sher-e-Yazdan, Quwwat-e-Parwardigar, La fata illa Ali la saif illa Zulfiqar* (King of men, Lion of Allah, Power of the Lord, No youth like Ali, no sword like Zulfiqar). Ali has been portrayed as a young masculine hero in paintings of the past all over the Islamic world, and also in contemporary printed posters, especially in Iran (Fig. 06, incorporating some of the above texts) and Pakistan (Fig. 07).

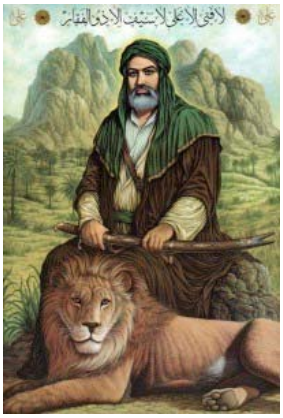


Figure 06

Figure 07

Interestingly, Ali is depicted in these posters with a short, black beard (probably to mark his younger age) rather than a long flowing one, as we shall see in the case of Sufi saints. For those Muslims who do not wish to see or use a portrait, Ali's image is invoked simply by the figure of a lion along with his double-edged sword. Often, calligraphers design sacred Arabic texts in the shape of a lion or tiger, icons that are then taken by many as powerful talismans to ensure victory and good luck.

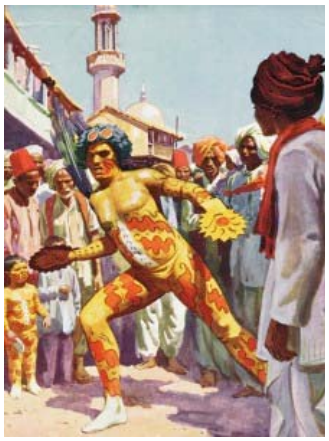


Figure 08

Since Ali's son Hussain and other family members were martyred in the battle of Karbala, its annual memorial involving rituals of mourning by the Shias in South Asia is no less masculine in character. The violent chest-beating, the self-flagellation with knives, the fire-walking, the stick-fighting, and many other rituals are annually carried out in South Asia by men, often as an act of public display, sometimes even visualized in popular art. The tiger or lion plays a role here too. Probably as a symbol of Ali's strength, there often appears a 'Muharram tiger', a man painted in yellow and black stripes, dancing to the rhythm of drumbeats (Fig. 08). The tiger-man can be found in most rural parts of India, from north to south, probably also connected with a tiger dance tradition from Kerala called Pulikali which is performed at the harvest festival of Onam. Tiger-men perform on the streets during Muharram in Pakistan as well.

Tigers or lions have frequently been associated in many parts of the world with power, courage, fear, and leadership. From millennia-old cave paintings, tribal totems, and coins to today's national emblems or heraldic coats of arms, a lion or tiger has often served as a symbol of strength and superiority, largely viewed as masculine attributes. While 13 of the world's countries list the lion as their national animal, around 12 (including India) bestow the same stature upon the tiger or other ferocious cats.[16] Even Bharat Mata or the mother deity representing India is frequently shown with the lion by her side, even with roaring male lions, often driven by as many as four of them, to represent her power (see for example some images from previous Tasveer Ghar essays).[17] Many armed groups or political movements such as Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam and Mumbai's Shiva Sena, among others, have used the emblematic tiger in their logos. Somehow, the use of a lion or tiger motif in a seal, insignia, or logo of an authority or social group is supposed to assert a sense of its power and control in the mind of the viewer. In much of ancient Islamic art and in artifacts such as carpets, utensils, talismans, book illustrations, coins and insignia, etc. one may find lions used as religious as well as secular symbols, even though lion habitats were few in Arabia.[18]

Given India's extensive forest cover in the past, people regularly confronted wild animals in their daily lives. Hindu deities such as Durga, Kali, Sherawali, or Ayyapa that could control tigers or lions are widely venerated to this day. Many Sufis have also been associated with these taming powers. A 16th/17th-century painting from a folio of


Figure 09

the Shah Jahan Album shows a wandering dervish 'leading a remarkably calm and tame lion' (Fig. 09).[19] This image not only depicts an unusual public scene, but also suggests the patronage that dervishes and Sufis received from the Mughal rulers. Another Mughal painting dated c. 1650 shows a lion and a tiger kneeling before a dervish in a submissive posture. Gazi Pir or Barkan Gazi was a Muslim saint in 12th/13th-century Bengal known for his power to control dangerous animals and natural elements. To this day, local people intending to enter the Sundarbans forest infested with tigers invoke Gazi Pir by praying to his clay figurine where he is shown riding a tiger (as does the female deity Bonbibi,[20] also supplicated for protection). In fact, a Bengali *pat* scroll preserved in British Museum depicts Gazi Pir riding a large tiger and holding a serpent (Fig. 10). The tiger here (as well as in other such images) is drawn in a much larger size compared to the saint, probably to project the latter's spiritual powers – although proportions in Bengali scroll paintings are often highly stylistic.


Figure 10

In reference to Hazrat Ali or otherwise, Islam's greatest male heroes are often remembered as lions and tigers. Muslim warriors such as Khalid ibn Waleed (d. 642) and Salahuddin Ayyubi (known to the West as Saladin, 1137–93) were popularly termed Tigers of Islam. Similarly, Hamza ibn Abdul Muttalib, a companion and paternal uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, was given the title *Asadullah* (Lion of Allah), while Omar Mukhtar (d. 1931), a Libyan leader of the native resistance against Italian colonial rule was called the Lion of the Desert. Since many of these heroes were martyred, the symbol of the tiger/lion enhances their image of martyrdom (*shahadat*).

Mysore's Muslim ruler and warrior Tipu Sultan (son of Haidar Ali) used the tiger symbol in much of his material life, not only as he believed it brought the *barakat* (blessing) of Hazrat Ali, his spiritual guide, but also as it was believed to symbolize *shakti* (power) by his Shaivite subjects.[21] Besides the tiger stripes and the calligraphic design of a tiger's mask being used as his emblem, among the most famous of his 'creations' is a mechanical device shaped like a tiger devouring a British soldier, symbolizing his animosity towards, and attacks against, the colonial rulers in India in the late 18th century.[22] Legends of many Islamic heroes like these have been circulated in oral, textual, as well as visual accounts, especially on the covers of popular biographies and historical novels published in Pakistan and India in the 20th century. Recently executed Arab leaders like Iraq's Saddam Hussein, Libya's Muammar Ghaddafi, and even the fugitive Osama bin Laden, besides the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, have been shown with lions in popular images circulating in the Muslim world, making them masculine heroes for many young Muslims, especially in occupied or disputed lands.

Sufis as Protectors of the Faith

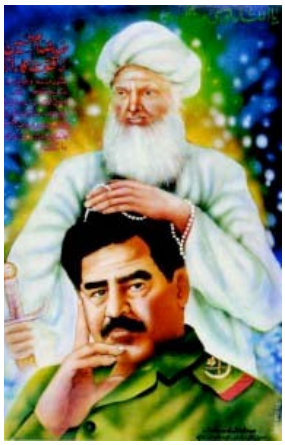


Figure 11

Around the time of the first Gulf War in 1991, numerous hero posters and billboards of Saddam Hussein appeared on the streets of Lahore and Karachi. One such showed Saddam being blessed and protected (from behind/above) by an old and saintly figure with a beard and turban, holding a sword and a rosary (Fig. 11), with the caption '*Sadr Saddam Hussein ki quwwat ka raaz*...' (The secret of the power of President Saddam...is neither his battle skills nor his weapons but the spiritual powers of this *ruhani buzurg* or invisible elder who always accompanies him).[23] While there may have been a legend about the spiritual guide of the leader in Iraq, this image presents a uniquely South Asian or Indo-Muslim style of myth-making about a contemporary war hero.


Figure 12

Among the earliest Islamic portraits printed for a religious niche market in India were those of the saint Abdul Qadir Jeelani at a meeting of six important Chishti saints (Fig. 01). While saint Jeelani (b. 1077) belonged to Baghdad, almost all Chishti Sufis and their followers in South Asia consider him as their spiritual master and *qutb* (axis). A poster depicting the saint, and one of his miracles relating to a woman devotee at his shrine, appeared around the 1970s especially in rural shrines in Punjab (Fig. 12). According to legend, the praying woman, shown in a typically Punjabi dress, had lost her family and guests as their boat sank in a river while returning from a wedding. Apparently, Shaikh Jeelani caused the entire family to emerge alive after 12 years – the image shows a giant male hand lifting the boat from the water. For devotees purchasing and using this image, the rising hand does present a certain masculine power, while symbolizing the spiritual power of the saint to conduct miracles.

The relationship of a Sufi *murid* (disciple) with his *pir* (master), with the lineage of past holy persons, and ultimately with the Prophet Muhammad, is decisive for his spiritual and social status. Most shrines exhibit a *shajra* or lineage tree of the saint, tracing the spiritual ancestry all the way to an *imam* or the Prophet himself. Fig. 01 can be seen as a visual example of this, a widely copied printed poster that shows an imaginary meeting of six saints, namely Shaikh Abul Qadir Jeelani, Moinuddin Chishti, Bu Ali Shah, Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Ka'ki, Baba Farid, and Nizamuddin Aulia, even though many of them were not contemporaries in time or place. Their respective tombs are drawn alongside. Their gathering in one frame denotes their membership of the same *silsila* or spiritual lineage. Jurgen Frembgen has traced the direct antecedents of this poster in a series of Mughal miniatures and other, even older, paintings. Comparing about eight paintings from different periods preserved in museums or libraries from St Petersburg to Berlin and Munich (the earliest of them dating to the 17th century), Frembgen shows how the same assembly of saints has been repeated across all these works with slight variations.[24] In almost all of the versions, while five out of six saints are looking towards the centre, as if engaged in a conversation, Bu Ali Shah (the

middle figure on the right, dressed in blue) is looking away or seems withdrawn. This is probably because he was a *qalandar* (wandering ascetic) who did not like to attach himself to any single institution. He even wears a fakir-like simple dress with no headgear (in some versions) while the others are given more elegant robes and turbans by the artists. Bu Ali's masculinity is kind of antinomian, that is, not invested in any form of power or law.

This deliberate treatment of the Chishti saints and a *qalandar* in different postures and dresses – possibly copied blindly by the later artists from the early paintings – says a lot about how the Sufis of different orders or spiritual tendencies were, and still are, known to their devotees. It also represents a diversity of masculinities present within Sufism. The elegant dresses in this image connote their control of or responsibility for an institution like a *khaneqah* (hospice) where they entertained large numbers of devotees each day, managed the *futuh* (gifts) received, and even maintained synergy with political rulers. In contrast, *qalandar*s and *malang*s chose to shun the public, the ruling elite, and material possessions. In popular terms, this distinction is often made to divide Sufis into the *ba-shara'* (conforming to the Islamic Sharia or jurisprudence) and the *be-shara'* (freed from the Sharia), although some commentators insist that anyone not conforming to the Sharia cannot be a Sufi.[25] So for instance the *ba-shara'* Sufis (mostly Chishtis, Naqshbandis, etc.) can marry and have a family and also be loyal to their hospice and carry out its daily chores, especially of attending to the visitors/ devotees and conducting prayers for them, issuing talismans, etc. The *be-shara'* Sufis (such as *qalandar*s, *madari*s, *malang*s, etc.) are not steadfast in their daily prayers, never stick to one place, and practice mendicancy, celibacy, and extreme forms of asceticism, thus evoking a 'raw' or rustic masculine image among the people.

Inter alia, sporting a beard or facial hair is not a norm for Sufis – some of them, especially the *qalandar*s, are known to shave their head, eyebrows, moustache, and beard – the so-called *char-abru* or *chahar-zarb* (four-hair or four-shaves).[26] A Pakistani poster of Hazrat Syed Lal Badshah (d. 1967) shows an emaciated, clean-shaven, sadhu-like saint with a rosary of *rudraksh* seeds around his neck (normally associated with Hindus), in the midst of the snow-clad mountains of Murree hill station (Fig. 13, left). A ray of *noor* or holy light travels between his fingers and the icons of Mecca-Medina in the sky, while a lion sits next to him, symbolizing his spiritual powers. His naked and bony body clad in a loincloth, unlike that of any 'Muslim' saint seen so far, seems to have been copied from an old and faded photograph of the saint (Fig. 13, right), and suggests his masculine strength, as he did not need clothes to protect him from the cold amid the snowy mountains.

Figure 13

In the biographical accounts or *tazkirah*s of Sufis compiled by their pupils, one finds much stress on practices like *riyazat* (exercise, discipline), *mujahida* (struggle), *faqr* (poverty, austerity), *tark-e duniya* (abandoning the material world), and *faaqa* (starvation), as part of their daily routine.[27] Many of them used to remain secluded in solitary retreats called *chilla* (lit. forty) for many days, weeks, or months, either in the forests or in caves, praying and meditating. Baba Farid Ganj-e Shakar (d. 1266), an important saint of the Chishti Order and spiritual guide to Nizamuddin Aulia, is known for his extreme exercises, at least one of them having been portrayed in a poster (Fig. 14). He practised what is known as the *chilla-e ma'kus* in which he hung upside down by a rope into a well for several days, until, as they say, the flesh of his body was being pecked by crows. Suitably, the bottom of the poster quotes an Urdu/Braj couplet in which the saint requests the crow to 'eat all of my flesh that you can, but spare the two eyes as I still long to see my beloved'.[28]

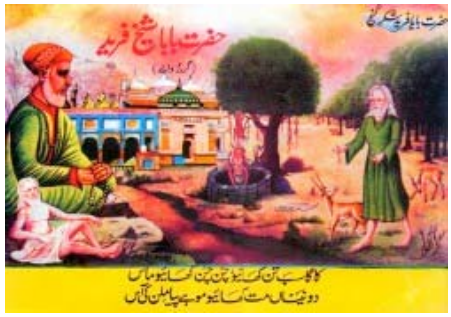


Figure 14

Along with their apparent masculine and hardy attributes, one cannot ignore the virtues of humanism and love, including harmony with nature, for which the Sufis are known, and which probably affirms their manliness. Besides the popular literature associated with them, even visual accounts (such as Fig. 14) depict saints like Baba Farid at one with nature, walking with deer in a garden, etc. Many other Sufis have been shown to be in union with nature. In fact, the idea of coexistence and harmony between two opposites has also been visualized in these images frequently. For example, showing a tiger and a lamb (or deer) drinking water from the same source is an age-old symbol of peace and harmony. Among several images showing Sufis and kings in South Asia communing with wild animals is an old portrait of Haji Bektash Vali, a 13th-century Turkish Sufi, which shows him caressing a deer and a tiger in his lap.[29]

Figure 15

Being masculine for a Muslim saint is not simply about a muscular body and physical strength – it can also refer to the performance of certain religious rituals or austerities an unusually high number of times. A Pakistani poster shows scenes from the life of Syed Abulkhair Naulakh Hazari of Shahkot in Pakistan's Punjab (Fig. 15). The title 'Nau-lakh Hazari' refers to his feat (as inscribed on the poster) of having read the Quran nine lakh and one thousand (901,000) times! This poster also depicts a cheetah and a deer drinking water from the same source, a trope that is commonly used to refer to justice, equality, and tolerance during a certain era. But more interesting is the unique combination of images: within the same frame the saint is shown in a typical Punjabi folk dance posture with *chimta* (tongs) held in his raised hands. Reciting the Quran 901,000 times shows his 'masculine' physical stamina (no Muslim woman seems to have been attributed with having accomplished such a task), while the dance posture – no less masculine in its own way – presents the joyful *bhangra* dance which is an

essential part of Punjabi culture and associated with many popular Sufis like Bulleh Shah.

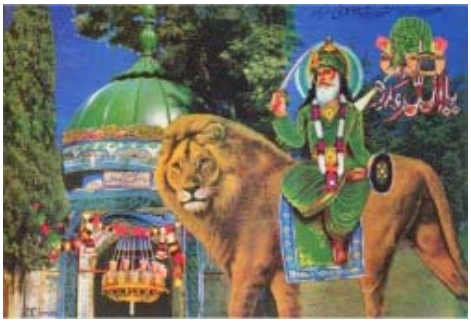


Figure 16

A similarly contrasting personality is seen in another poster from Pakistan, that of Baba Shershah Wali of Lahore who sits in a green dress, facing the viewer, on the back of an over-sized lion (Fig. 16). His head is a cutout from a Sikh guru image while the lion figure comes from a wildlife magazine – almost every element of this picture has been cut out from different sources and pasted together by the artist Sarwar Khan of Lahore. Even if the draped green gives the saint a feminine quality, the large lion confirms his spiritual power. Many other Pakistani posters (collected by the present author in 2005 and later) are created by this cut-and-paste method, probably to reduce the cost of production. But beyond the economy of production, this cut-and-paste could also be seen as a way of syncretizing an image by using materials from different sources. Such a technique, according to Monica Juneja, can be traced back to many Mughal artists who made *muraqqa*s or patchworks by sticking together pieces of older paintings originating from diverse locations.[30] And maybe this would not be too far-fetched in our case, since some of the present-day artists of Lahore do trace their lineage to the Mughal courts.


Figure 17

The most impressive of Pakistan's Sufi-portrait collages is a 20th-century print that brings together almost every possible saint revered in South Asia, all cut out from previous posters and pasted together with an indexed name list (Fig. 17). This pastiche featuring portraits of 57 saints, mostly from Pakistan and some also from India, carries not only a hierarchy in the placement of individuals, but also an amazing diversity of ideologies and sects – from the wandering *malang*s of Sindh to sober scholars of Iraq. The horizontal frame is crammed till every edge with cut-out portraits of all sizes in a form that recalls horror vaccui. If the coming together of so many saints within one frame adds to the *barakat* (blessings) of such posters for the user, as some believe in Pakistan, one could compare these to the high-selling 'catalogue' posters published in India by Brijbasi[31] or J.B. Khanna who put miniature versions of several Muslim posters in one frame.[32]

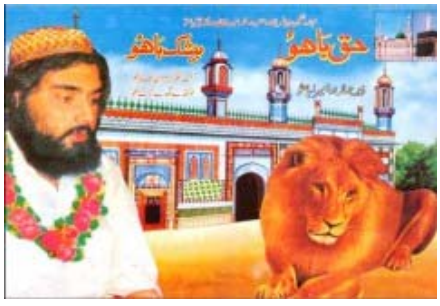


Figure 18

A curious aspect of Pakistani saint collages is the inclusion of photographs of the shrine's current *khadim*s or keepers and their male family members (even children), to keep their image alive in the public memory (Fig. 18). Some current shrine-keepers in rural Pakistan are also large landowners and politically powerful, exercising both spiritual as well as temporal influence over the populace.[33] In Pakistan's Punjab alone, as many as 64 Sufi shrines were

found to have a direct connection with political power – their shrine-keepers participating in elections of various kinds.[34] Needless to say, the Sufi posters almost never depict women of the family or Sufi lineage, though that does not mean practising women Sufis do not exist.

Sufis' Relationship with Nature

Figure 19

Lions or other animals in these images do not only symbolize power – they also represent a saint's relationship with animals and nature. A cut-and-paste montage by Sarwar Khan showing saint Sakhi Abbas Shah of Pattoki (near Lahore) has a peculiar element in it – besides a lion that symbolizes Ali, the poster shows a dog kneeling before the saint in a submissive posture amid the cutouts of several male family members of the saint (Fig. 19). Abbas Shah is also known as Pir Abbas Kutteyan-walan (the one who keeps dogs), and his shrine is a safe haven for stray dogs even today – they are regularly fed with care. Even those that die are often buried within the compound.[35] A reason for this caring for dogs could be that Shias, like Abbas Shah, believe that Hazrat Ali kept a dog as pet. Some Shias even give their children the name *Kalb-e Ali* (the dog of Ali). Dogs and cats are common enough in Sufi shrines in rural South Asia, especially as they find food there, unlike in a mosque where a dog would be totally outlawed for being *najis* (impure).

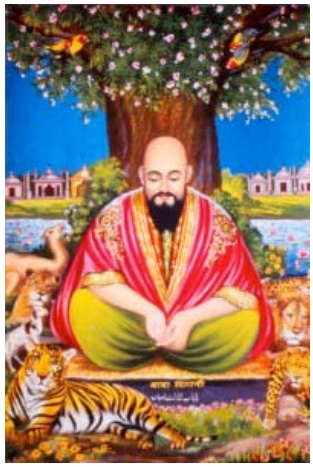


Figure 20

Sufis of many orders such as Chishtiya, Shattariya and Qalandariya, preferred to wander the forests rather than settle in cities or human habitations. The saints' affinity with wild animals is reflected in many printed portraits. Posters of Baba Sailani Shah, buried near Aurangabad in Maharashtra, show him sitting crossed-legged under a tree in a Buddha-like posture, surrounded by animals like lion and lioness, tiger, cheetah, camel, and even a goat (Fig. 20). The animals, cutouts from printed photographs, seem closely attached to the saint, as if part of a family.[36] Many episodes from Baba Sailani's life are depicted in wall frescoes, showing him at ease with a tiger while his disciples and visitors look frightened. The docility of these animals suggests that the saint possesses immense power but it usually remains latent or at rest, and is not something to be afraid of.

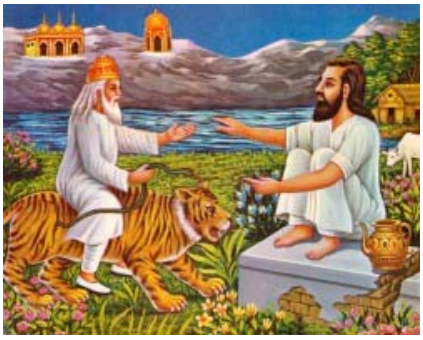


Figure 21

Like many Hindu deities, some Sufis too use a tiger or lion as their vehicle. An Indian poster dating to around the 1970s shows a saint riding a tiger and holding a serpent as his whip, facing another, younger Sufi sitting on a broken platform or wall (Fig. 21). The tiger-rider is Badi'uddin Zinda Shah Madar (14th/15th century) who had come to meet the Chishti saint Shah Mina (d. 1465) of Awadh/Lucknow. Shah Mina, who was sitting on a platform to perform his ablutions, got so excited to know about Shah Madar's

arrival that he ordered the wall to carry him in the saint's direction: hence the detached wall in the picture. However, another version of the story describes this as a contest of their miraculous powers rather than a friendly meeting – while one saint shows he could ride a tiger, the other one orders the wall to fly.[37] Shah Madar, whose tomb is located at Makanpur near Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh), initiated the mendicant Madariya *silsila* (not to be confused with the *madari* or street juggler who performs with animals), and is said to have lived for over 600 years travelling all over the Islamicate world! Such an extraordinarily long life is naturally filled with stories of his miraculous powers that give shape to his masculine image among followers.

Interestingly, the same story of saints riding a tiger and causing a wall to fly is reported in the case of Persian/Turkic Sufi Haji Bektash Vali (d. 1271) and his contemporary, Haji Mahmud Hayrani (apparently a disciple of Mawlana Rumi); and again with one Sultan Sahak and Pir Mika'il in a place called Pirdiwar in southern Kurdistan (mid-15th century). These anecdotes, according to Martin van Bruinessen, connect with India's ancient (Buddhist/Tantric) as well as medieval Sufi lore, probably transmitted through the wandering Sufis.[38] Legends about the miraculous powers of many South Asian saints are prevalent among devotees – while Lal Shahbaz Qalandar of Sehwan, Sindh, could fly in the air, Saint Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer could send his *na'lain* (sandals) flying over the head of a Hindu magician who challenged him by floating in the air on a deerskin. Such stories circulate in oral as well as visual narratives to create powerful images of the buried saints.

The Fearful Healing Powers of a Saint

A saint's masculine and virile power can be manifested in many ways including, for instance, his supposed ability to cure infertility in childless couples, something for which the South Asian dargahs are most sought after. In fact, one of Indian history's most famous acts aided by a saint is the birth of the Mughal prince Salim (Jahangir) after his childless father Emperor Akbar visited Salim Chishti at Fatehpur Sikri to pray for an issue. Since then, people have continued to visit this dargah in the thousands, as well as many other shrines, to pray for offspring. Some local shrines are infamous for incidents of sexual exploitation of women by so-called god-men promising to cure their infertility and other diseases.[39]

Women have a special relationship with Sufi shrines and saints. Since they are not encouraged to pray in regular mosques in South Asia, their desire to visit a public space that could provide them more sanctity than their home, and freedom to pray in their own way, finds release in dargahs. At some shrines, women loosen their hair and swirl their heads crazily to the beat of music as if in a trance. Many women also sing emotional *duhai*, a kind of lament-prayer, for the easing of their troubles.

There is a popular belief that the buried Sufi is still alive, and can help your prayers come true.[40] Many believe that the spirits of saints and djinns reside in the shrines – in

fact, some saints are also called *zinda pir* (living saint). The devotees are told frightening stories by fellow pilgrims of how an upset saint or the spirits can punish you if you act in an irresponsible manner. Stories of people being possessed by such spirits in shrines such as that of Baba Sailani have been reported in local newspapers.[41] One of the most frequent problems for which people visit Sufi shrines is mental illness,[42] although many of them perceive such illness as the effect of a spirit. Many devotees would rather visit a dargah than a psychiatrist to treat ordinary psychological disorders, probably also due to its affordability.[43]

Since they come with specific problems – spirit 'possession', health, family relationships, finances, etc. – women visiting older babas often find comforting father figures in them. Some studies show that Sufi healers tend to ask their devotees intimate questions about their dreams and sexual life etc. to cure their ailments.[44] Psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar who extensively interviewed a spiritual healer at the Patteshah dargah in Delhi found that the devotees, especially women, did not mind disclosing these intimate details since the baba, in this case, was an 87-year-old 'toothless man in shabby clothes but with a reputation of miraculous cures'.[45] His old age and virtual lack of demand for money from devotees create an image of a harmless yet impressive masculinity that leads women to disclose their personal details. While the baba attributes the cause of most ailments to possession by djinns, Kakar interprets them as ordinary cases of anxiety arising out of domestic abuse and finds the baba's dream interpretations and healing methods no less than Freudian.

Figure 22

One can find advertisements of these faith healers pasted on public walls or even inside buses and trains, some of the stickers showing the babas' portraits as well (Fig. 22). Many babas have a fearful masculine appearance with long beard and wild hair, often smoking narcotic drugs in a chillum or clay pipe; some evoke the image of an iconic past saint like Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918), maybe to suggest association with such a known figure. Their treatment of the sick can be overwhelming, involving ashes, burning of incense, animal sacrifice, and various odd rituals reminiscent of tantrics or Aghori sadhus. Patients with mental illnesses are often treated at these shrines by chaining them up and beating them with sticks, the assumption being that the punishment is for the bad spirits who possess them.[46]

Many wandering dervishes also exhibit their physical powers, performing strenuous acts or self-torture publicly on special occasions like the *urs* (death anniversary) of a past saint (see Fig. 02). As they converge around a shrine at the *urs mela* or fete, one can find them conducting fearful body practices like pulling out the eyeballs from their sockets using knives, wearing half a ton of iron chains on the body, etc.[47] Some babas whip themselves mercilessly while many exhibit other types of painful self-affliction. Some young men also present shows of jugglery and martial arts during the *urs*.[48] For

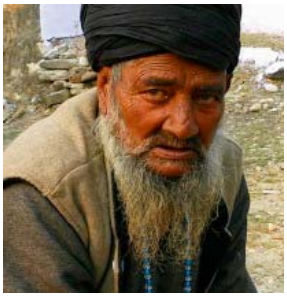


Figure 24

the ordinary devotees, especially distressed women, the dargahs or abodes of babas always evoke frighteningly masculine images and a reason for revering them (Fig. 23).

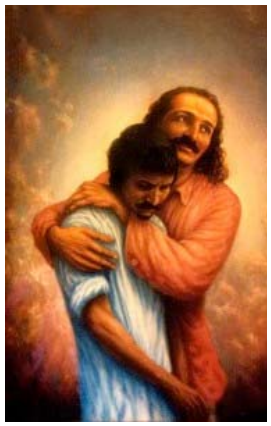


Figure 23

Madness is not only something to be 'cured' in others, but could also be a state in a Sufi's journey. The unusual behaviour or unexpected wrath of a baba makes his followers fearful of him – many babas are considered crazy or *mast* as they don't follow any social norms. A popular mystic-scholar from Maharashtra, Meher Baba (born 1894), called these *mast*s 'the God-intoxicated'. In the 1930s, he travelled all over India to document different types of *mast*s who had reached various stages of their spiritual journey. Most of them hadn't bathed in years and lived in squalid conditions. Many *mast*s were photo-documented and have even been portrayed by artists along with their saviour Meher Baba – himself a very muscular and masculine saint – although these images (like Fig. 24) circulated only among his followers, and show Meher Baba as a very Christ-like figure, giving refuge or solace to the poor, the sick, or the downtrodden, with a heavenly light of hope radiating from behind. According to Meher Baba, *mast*s do show tendencies of 'madness' since we judge them by our 'normal' behaviour, but in reality they exhibit various degrees of spirituality.[49]

Sources of Sufi Portraits

What are the sources of portraiture for Sufi images published in the 20th century? There is a long tradition of writing biographies or hagiographies of the Sufis in the Islamic world, including South Asia, much of it inspired by the biographies or *seerah*s of the Prophet Muhammad. Very often these are *malfuzat* (conversations) of the saints compiled by their disciples or later commentators who heard the accounts from eyewitnesses. These written or oral accounts include descriptions of the saints' *shabeeh* (likeness), forming the basis of their later portraiture, although most of the descriptions tend to be very idealistic.

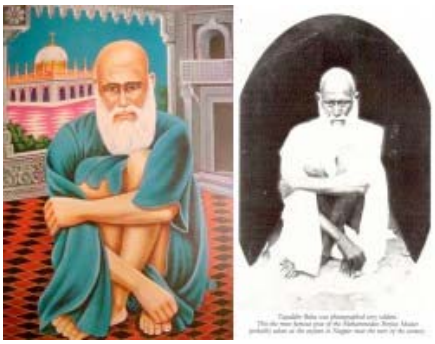


Figure 25

The more recent Sufis, especially those who lived from the mid-19th century onwards, often had their photographs taken. These became the basis of later portraits, the most famous example being that of Sai Baba of Shirdi in Maharashtra whose photograph became probably one of the most widely copied and revered Indian religious images (in painting and sculpture) of the 20th century.[50] Maharashtra has had other babas too who were photographed. A poster of Nagpur's Tajuddin Baba (b. 1861) shows him sitting with his arms wrapped around his legs that are drawn up to his chest (Fig. 25, left). Tajuddin was declared a mad man due to his strange behaviour, which included walking naked in public. A British woman was so horrified to see him in this state just outside her veranda that she got him arrested and sent to a

lunatic asylum near Nagpur. Staying there for 16 years he is said to have performed many miracles and attracted many devotees.[51] A photograph, believed to have been taken in the asylum (Fig. 25, right), was probably used to make the poster which shows him sitting in the same cloistered position – most likely a posture of meditating Sufis.[52] This could be likened to a state known as the *band sama* or a closed posture of listening to music or poetry where the mystic is supposed to completely internalize the poetry/music rather than allowing his body to react externally, as in a dance or by whirling. While *sama*/listening is allowed in the Chishti Order, with even some amount of whirling, many other Sufi orders, such as Naqshbandiya, totally prohibit the Sufi from enjoying music, leave aside dancing. Thus, the posture of a cloistered male body, also seen in examples from Central Asia/Iran, reflects a suppression of outward emotions and self-control that a Sufi is supposed to have on his body in order to reflect within his inner self.

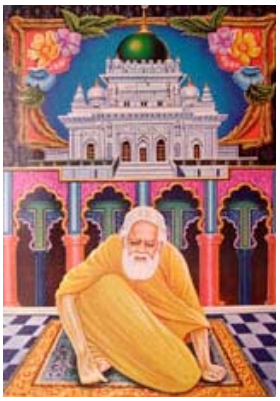


Figure 26

An 18th-century north Indian saint whose shrine is very popular among pilgrims, especially at the time of the annual Kartik Mela held during his *urs* at Deva in Barabanki (Uttar Pradesh), is Haji Waris Ali Shah (Fig. 26). Photographs of Haji Waris were made and printed in large numbers during his lifetime to sell among his devotees, with a popular legend that the saint's eyes have magical properties: whoever looks into them, even in a photograph, gets smitten by them and filled with the desire to visit him or his shrine (those so affected included Hindus and some British men as well).[53] He is supposed to have healed sick people by a simple glance or touch. According to Matt Reeck, the saint's body itself was a living shrine where his devotees gathered:

> ...the saint's power was concentrated in his body and its affective influence. His manner of dress, his itinerant lifestyle, his manner of speaking, and the documented power of his eyes were all subtly capable of reaching devotees of different personal inclinations and religious training.[54]

Thus, mass-produced photographs of saints not only played an important role in spreading their popularity, but also helped poster artists create further portraits. Many of these saints seem to have been photographed in their old age, often sitting in odd and uncomfortable postures on the ground. The later artists religiously copied the original sitting posture, making it the standardized, albeit rather mummified, icon used to identify and revere the saints. Similar iconization is seen in other regions and religions of South Asia as well. Sujithkumar shows the role of the body postures of deceased holy men in Kerala, many of them Christian, through their often-copied photo portraits.[55] In such cases, the image of their morbidity translates into a holy but fearful masculinity.

Conclusion

The 20th-century Sufi posters and their visual syncretism clearly stand beyond the realm of regular devotional prints of Mecca-Medina mosques or Arabic calligraphy as

much as they are different from similar images produced in the pre-modern Islamicate art traditions. Despite allowing their viewers/buyers to situate their religious piety in local contexts away from Arabia, these popular prints continue to assert the exercise of hegemonic masculinity in Muslims' daily lives. Symbols like lions and tigers are used not only to gain spiritual, economic, or political sway over the masses, but also to advocate the superiority of Islam through miracles performed by male saints.

The masculine image of a saint does not necessarily depend on the traits of youth. Most babas, especially the ones visualized and discussed in this essay, are elderly, emaciated, and bony-bodied men with white hair and flowing beards. The artists and the industry that produce their images preserve and depict the ageing bodies in a sort of mummified sacrality which still projects their masculinity among their followers. For the devotee, the saint's image of being withdrawn from the material world and his practices of self-affliction translate into a spiritual maturity, and hence into the potency of his healing powers, talismans, etc.

While Sufism is often portrayed as a peaceful antidote to the extremism and violence caused by the orthodox Salafi Islam globally (and its primary teachings of tolerance, egalitarianism, etc. surely suggest this), many practising male Sufis or shrine-keepers tend to be as exploitative and hegemonic in their day-to-day dealings with the public as any other institutional clergy, and continue to use the visual media to keep their masculine image relevant among their followers.

Acknowledgment
I would like to thank Ruqayya Y. Khan, Zahra Sabri, Christiane Brosius, and Sumathi Ramaswamy for reading and helping improve this essay.

All images featured in the essay are from the collection of the author, unless mentioned otherwise.

Notes

[1] Frembgen, Jurgen Wasim, *The Friends of God, Sufi Saints in Islam: Popular Poster Art from Pakistan*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006; Saeed, Yousuf, *Muslim Devotional Art in India*, 2nd edn., New Delhi: Routledge, 2019.

[2] Pemberton, Kelly, *Women Mystics and Sufi Shrines in India*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010.

[3] Hoffman-Ladd, Valerie J., 'Mysticism and Sexuality in Sufi Thought and Life', *Mystics Quarterly* (Penn State University Press), Vol. 18, No. 3 (September 1992), pp. 82–93.

[4] See for instance, Schimmel, Annemarie, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1975. Also Arberry, A.J., *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, London: Routledge, 2007.

[5] Bennett, Clinton, and Ramsey, Charles M. (eds.), *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny*, London/New York: Continuum, 2012.

[6] Ernst, Carl W., *Refractions of Islam in India: Situating Sufism and Yoga*, New Delhi: Sage/Yoda Press, 2016.
[7] Green, Nile, 'Breathing in India, c. 1890', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2/3, Islam in South Asia (March–May, 2008), pp. 283–315. Also see Kugle, Scott, *Sufis and Saints Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality and Sacred Power in Islam*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2009.
[8] Eaton, Richard M., 'Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam', *History of Religions* (University of Chicago Press), Vol. 14, No. 2 (November 1974), pp. 117–27.
[9] Zarcone, Thierry, 'Central Asian Influence on the Early Development of the Chishtiyya Sufi Order in India', in Muzaffar Alam, Françoise Nalini Delvoye, and Marc Gaborieau (eds.), *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture*, Delhi: Manohar, 2000, pp. 99–116.
[10] Ernst, *Refractions of Islam in India*, pp. 150–53.
[11] De Sondy, Amanullah, 'The relationship between Muslim men and their beards is a tangled one', *The Guardian*, 28 January 2016.
[12] Informal guidelines are laid out on who could be appointed an *imam* to lead prayers. His qualities include high religious scholarship, seniority, and impressive personality, among others.
[13] Saeed, Yousuf, 'This is What They Look Like: Stereotypes of Muslim Piety in Calendar Art and Hindi Cinema', *Tasveer Ghar*, June 2007, http://tasveergharindia.net/essay/what-they-look-like.html
[14] *Allah Allah Baba Tajuddin ki kya shaan hai/Nagpur ka bachcha bachcha aap par qurban hai.*
[15] Shias believe that Ali should have been chosen as the first caliph or successor of the Prophet Muhammad for his being directly related to him, but was denied that role by others who finally gave him a chance only at the fourth turn.
[16] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_national_animals
[17] Rajagopal, Arvind, 'The Commodity Image in the (Post) Colony', *Tasveer Ghar*, http://tasveergharindia.net/essay/commodity-image-postcolony.html#lg=1&slide=5; Brosius, Christiane, 'Celebrating More Than the New Year: The Hindu Nationalist Greeting Cards', *Tasveer Ghar*, http://tasveergharindia.net/essay/celebrating-Hindutva-new-year.html#lg=1&slide=5
[18] Adey, Elizabeth June, 'A Study of the Iconography of the Lion in Islamic Art', PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1993 (incomplete manuscript; contains facsimile of 242 objects).
[19] https://metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/55.121.10.11/
[20] Danial, Shoaib, 'In Bengal's Sundarbans, the fading Bonbibi goddess cult straddles the Hindu-Muslim divide', *Scroll.in*, 7 December 2016, https://scroll.in/roving/819942/bonbibi
[21] Brittlebank, Kate, '*Sakti* and *Barakat*: The Power of Tipu's Tiger, An Examination of the Tiger Emblem of Tipu Sultan of Mysore', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1995, pp. 257–69.
[22] See the image of Tipu's tiger at Victoria & Albert Museum, London, https://vam.ac.uk/articles/tipus-tiger, as well as a video about it https://youtube.com/watch?v=XNJRjV8K1yg
[23] Dadi, Iftikhar, 'Ghostly Sufis and Ornamental Shadows: Spectral Visualities in Karachi's Public Sphere', in Martina Rieker and Kamran Ali (eds.), *Comparing Cities: The Middle East and South Asia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 159–93.

[24] Frembgen, Jurgen Wasim, 'An Imaginary Assembly of Sufi Saints: Notes from Some Devotional Pictures from Indo-Pakistan', in Bernard Heyberger and Silvia Naef (eds.), *La Multiplication des Images en Pays d'Islam*, Würzburg: Ergon, 2003.
[25] Nadvi, M. Obaidullah Koti, *Silsila-e Qalandariya* (Urdu), New Delhi: Farid Book Depot, 2005.
[26] Ridgeon, Lloyd, 'Shaggy or Shaved? The Symbolism of Hair among Persian Qalandar Sufis', *Iran & the Caucasus* (Brill), Vol. 14, No. 2 (2010), pp. 233–63.
[27] Dehlvi, Abdulhaq Muhaddis, *Akhbarul Akhyar* (Urdu), Delhi: Farid Book Depot, n.d., p. 116.
[28] *Kaga sab tan khayyio chun chun khayyio maas/Do naina mat khayyio, mohe piya milan ki aas*.
[29] See the image here: https://thewisemag.com/sufi/articles/anatolian-enlightenment-haji-bektash-veli-and-yunus-emre/
[30] Juneja, Monica, 'Tracking the Routes of Vision in Early Modern Eurasia', in Karin Gludovatz, Juliane Noth, and Joachim Rees (eds.), *The Itineraries of Art: Topographies of Artistic Mobility in Europe and Asia*, Berliner Schriften zur Kunst, 2015, pp. 57–84.
[31] See an example of Brijbasi's catalogue poster: https://kjc-sv033.kjc.uni-heidelberg.de/view-gallery.php?id=14&Eid=13&ImageId=23
[32] Freitag, Sandria B., 'Indian Muslim Niche Market in Posters: South Asian Ways of Seeing, Muslim Ways of Knowing', *Indian Economic Social History Review*, Vol. 44 (2007), p. 29.
[33] Malik, Adeel, and Malik, Tahir, 'Pīrs and Politics in Punjab, 1937–2013', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 51, Special Issue 6 (November 2017), pp. 1818–61.
[34] Malik, Adeel, and Mirza, Rinchan Ali, 'Religion, Land and Politics: Shrines and Literacy in Punjab', draft paper at the University of Oxford, 5 August 2014.
[35] Khalid, Haroon, 'The Holy Pets', *Lahore Nama*, 11 December 2010, https://lahorenama.wordpress.com/2010/12/11/the-holy-pets-by-haroon-khalid/
[36] Madheshiya, Amit, and Abraham, Shirley, 'Syncretic Posters at the Sailani Baba Shrine in Maharashtra: Exploring Portability of Religious Iconography through Networks of Circulation', *Visual Pilgrim*, 2009, https://kjc-sv033.kjc.uni-heidelberg.de/essay-detail.php?eid=16
[37] Digby, Simon, 'To Ride a Tiger or a Wall? Strategies of Prestige in Indian Sufi Legend', in W.N. Callewaert and Rupert Snell (eds.), *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India*, Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 1994.
[38] van Bruinessen, Martin, 'Haji Bektash, Sultan Sahak, Shah Mina Sahib and Various Avatars of a Running Wall', *Turcica* XXI–XXIII (1991), pp. 55–69.
[39] Changoiwala, Pooja, 'Prayed for a child, raped by a godman: India's deadly childbirth superstitions', *SCMP*, 5 October 2018, https://scmp.com/week-asia/society/article/2165680/prayed-child-raped-godman-indias-deadly-childbirth-superstitions
[40] A Quranic quote is used to affirm this belief.
[41] '*Mahilaon ke sharir mein aye Baba Sailani ke sipahi*' [Baba Sailani's soldiers emerge in women's bodies], *Nai Duniya* (Hindi), Baitul, 8 January 2012.
[42] Nizamie, S. Haque, Katshu, M.Z.H., and Uvais, N.A., 'Sufism and Mental Health', *Indian Journal of Psychiatry, Vol.* 55 (January 2013), pp. 215–23.
[43] Eitizaz, Saba, 'Why Pakistan's poor seek mental health cure at shrine', *BBC*, 29 September 2016, https://bbc.com/news/world-asia-37495538

[44] Hoffman-Ladd, 'Mysticism and Sexuality in Sufi Thought and Life', p. 82.
[45] Kakar, Sudhir, *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors: A Psychological Inquiry into India and Its Healing Traditions*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, p.17.
[46] 'Hazrath Sailani Baba Dargah in Buldhana: A part of India where mental-illness is deeply misunderstood', *First Post*, 7 June 2017, https://firstpost.com/india/watch-hazrath-sailani-baba-dargah-in-buldhana-a-part-of-india-where-mental-illness-is-deeply-misunderstood-3504747.html
[47] Gillman, Ollie, 'Sufi Muslim holy men perform bizarre acts of self torture at festival', *Daily Mail*, 27 April 2015, https://dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3057820/Feast-eyes-Sufi-Muslim-holy-men-perform-bizarre-acts-self-torture-religious-festival.html
[48] These acts have been reported even from the early 19th century, such as in de Tassy, Garcin, *Muslim Festivals in India and Other Essays* (translated from French by M. Waseem), Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 42–43.
[49] Donkin, William, *The Wayfarers: An Account of the Work of Meher Baba with the God-intoxicated, and Also with Advanced Souls, Sadhus, and the Poor*, Ahmadnagar: Avatar Meher Baba Trust, 1988.
[50] White, Charles S.J. 'The Sai Baba Movement: Approaches to the Study of Indian Saints', *The Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 31, No. 4 (August 1972), pp. 863–78.
[51] Azeemi, Sohail A., *Sawaneh Hayat Baba Tajuddin Nagpuri* (Urdu), Karachi: Maktaba Ruhani Digest, 1985, p. 30.
[52] Kerkhove, Ray, *Avatar Meher Baba, His Life, His Message and His Followers*, Queensland: Meher Baba Foundation Australia, 2000, p. 15.
[53] Dayal, Subah, and Schulz, Suzanne, 'Outside the Imambara: The Circulation of Devotional Images in Greater Lucknow', *Tasveer Ghar*, 20 June 2009, http://tasveergharindia.net/essay/outside-imambara-devotional-images-lucknow.html
[54] Reeck, Matt, 'The Making of a Saint for All Seasons, The Saintly Body, the Ecumenical Tradition of North India, and the Hagiographical Account of Haji Waris Ali Shah's Life', *Religions of South Asia*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2015), pp. 290–304.
[55] Parayil, Sujithkumar, 'Icons of the Reformist Period and "Re-formed" Icons of the Present', *Tasveer Ghar*, 30 June 2008, http://tasveergharindia.net/essay/icons-reformist-reformed.html

Image Gallery

Lions of Islam: Symbols of Masculine Power in the Devotional Art of India and Pakistan

Fig. 01: Poster showing six Sufis revered in South Asia along with their shrines, clockwise from top right: Abdul Qadir Jeelani (Baghdad, Iraq), Bu Ali Shah (Panipat, India), Nizamuddin Aulia (Delhi, India), Baba Farid (Pakpatan, Pakistan), Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Ka'ki (Delhi, India), and Moinuddin Chishti (Ajmer, India). Publisher: Brijbasi Art Press, Artist unknown, c. 1990.

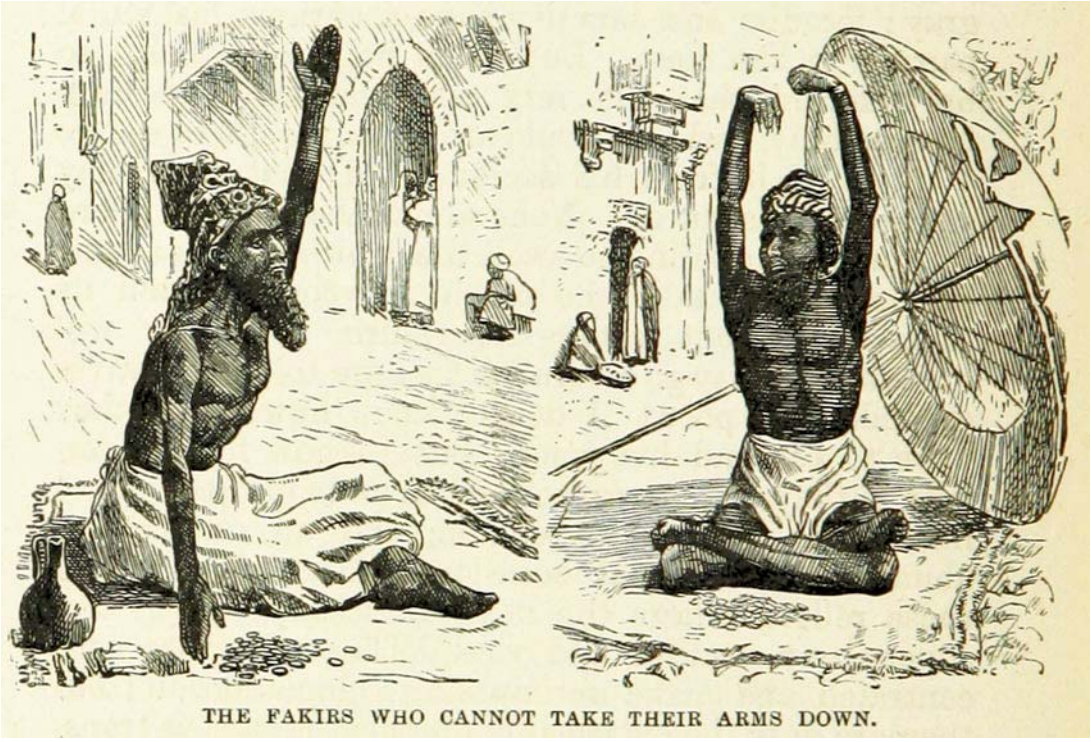


Fig. 02: 'The fakirs who cannot take their arms down', illustration from Rev. J. Ewen, *India: Sketches and Stories of Native Life*, London: Elliot Stock, 1890, p. 128.

Fig. 03: Calendar image of an imam conducting *dua* (supplication) after an Eid prayer, possibly in an *Eidgah* (congregation area). Publisher unknown, Artist: P. Sardar, c. 1970.

Fig. 04: In this poster, Muslim men in different dress styles, rich and poor, stand together in prayer. The Quranic quotation at the top translates as: ‘Say, my prayers and acts of worship, my life and death, are all for the God Almighty, who is one.’ Publisher: Brijbasi Art Press, Delhi/Mumbai, Artist unknown, c. 1980.

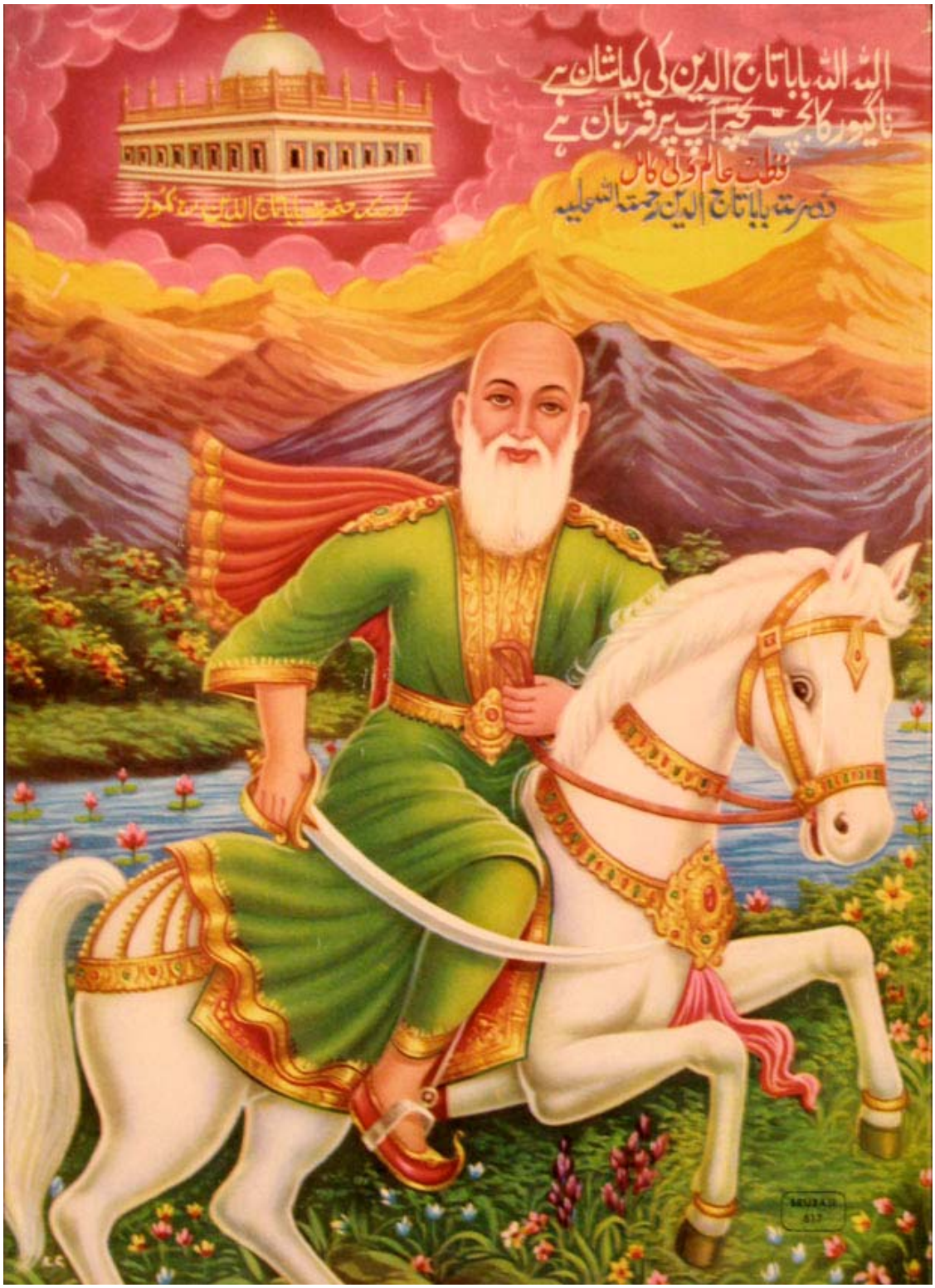


Fig. 05: A poster showing Baba Tajuddin of Nagpur, Maharashtra, on a horse, with his shrine at the top. The Urdu couplet above translates as: 'Allah Allah, what brilliance Tajuddin Baba has/Every child of Nagpur is ready to be sacrificed for you.' Brijbasi, 1990.

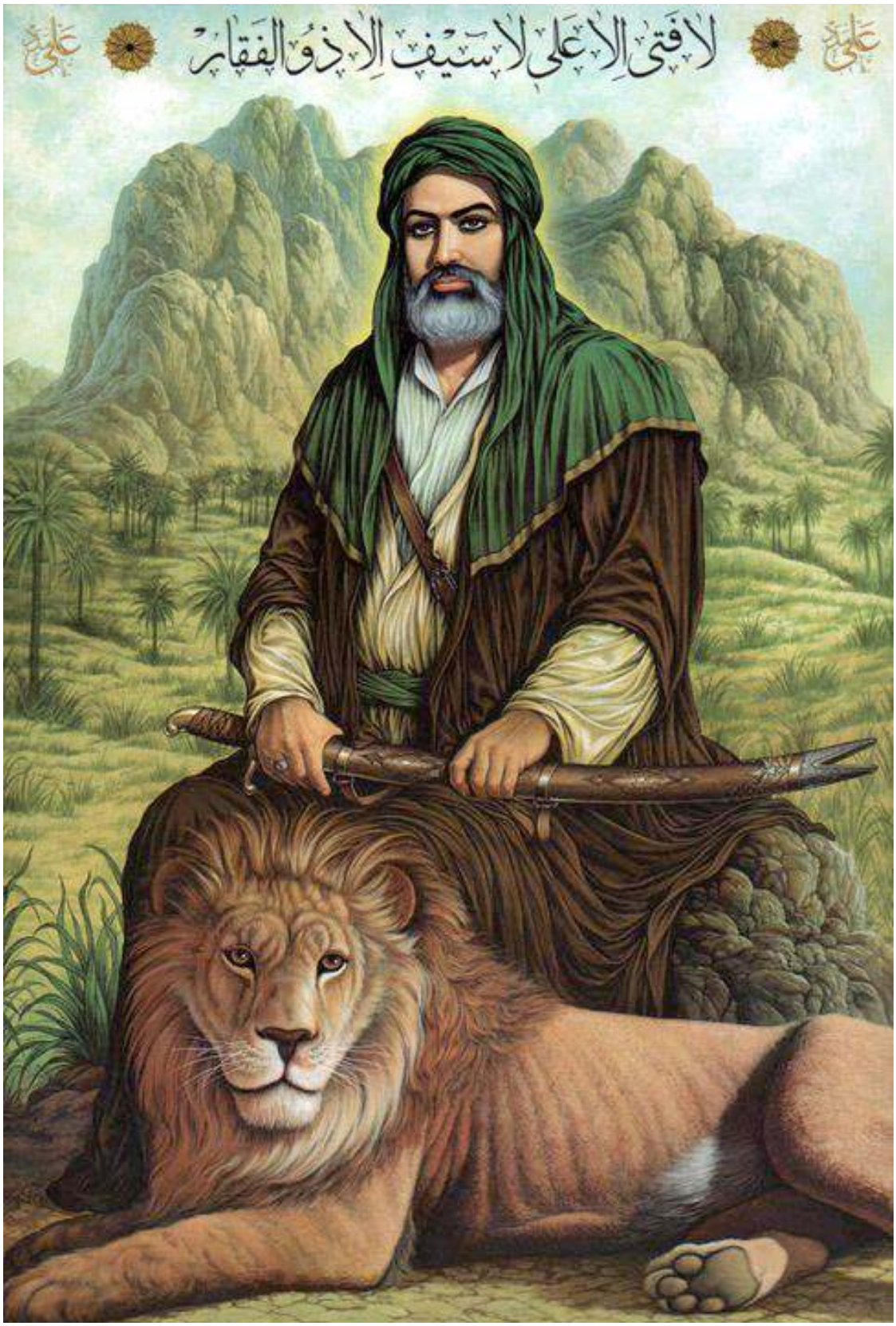


Fig. 06: 'Ali. No youth like Ali, no sword like Zulfiqar. Ali', a poster depicting Hazrat Ali with his sword Zulfiqar and a lion. Printed in Iran and purchased by this author in Pakistan, 2000.

Fig. 07: '*Ya Ali madad*', a poster of Hazrat Ali sitting in a tent holding his twin-blade sword Zulfiqar. Lahore, 2005.

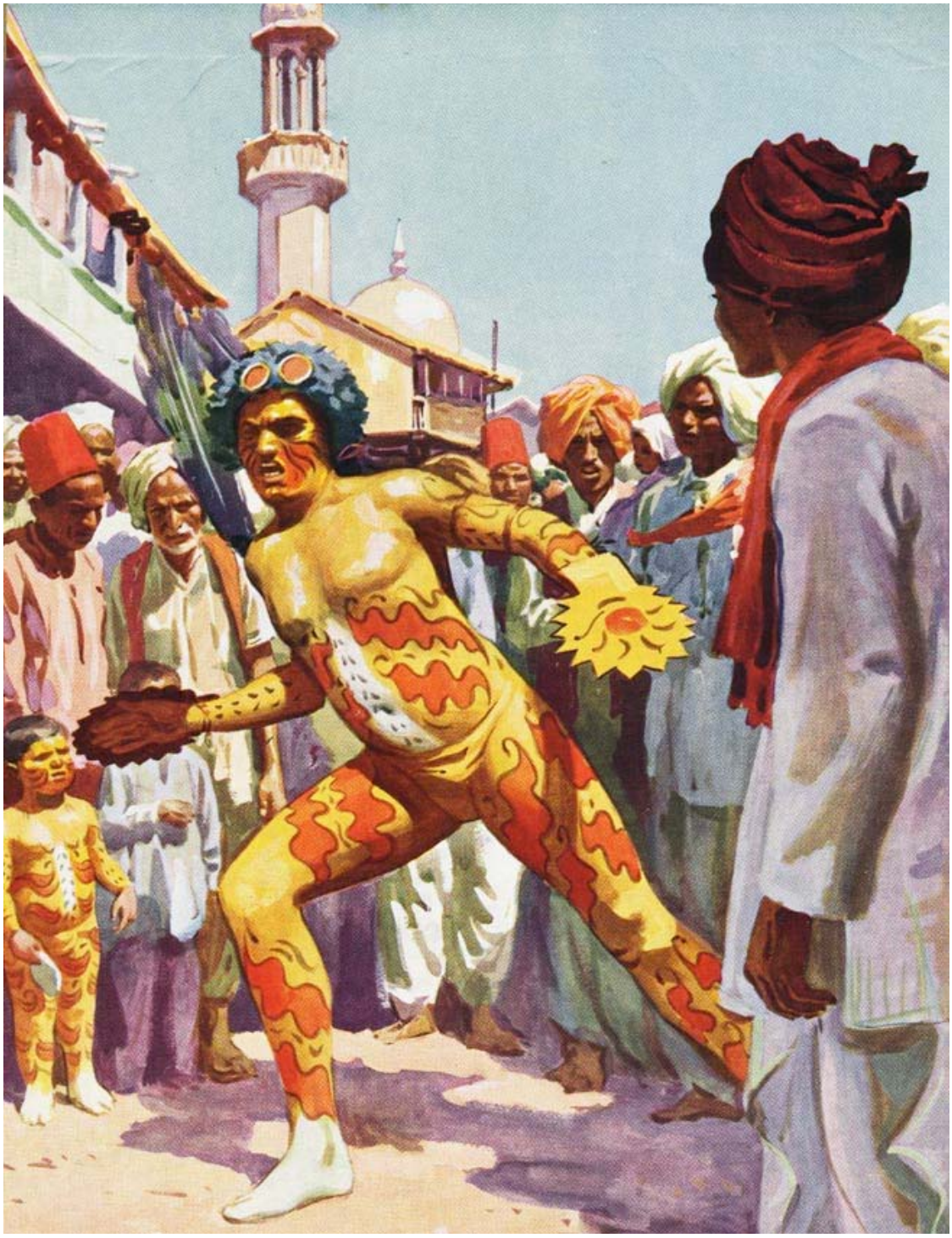


Fig. 08: Painting of a ‘Muharram tiger’ dancing in a crowd. Published in *The Times of India Annual* 1941 with a note that this figure was ‘a more common sight years ago than he is now’. Artist: Walter Langhammer. From the Priya Paul Collection, Delhi.

Fig. 09: ‘Dervish with a Lion’, folio from the Shah Jahan Album. Artist: Padareth, 16th–17th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. https://metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/55.121.10.11/

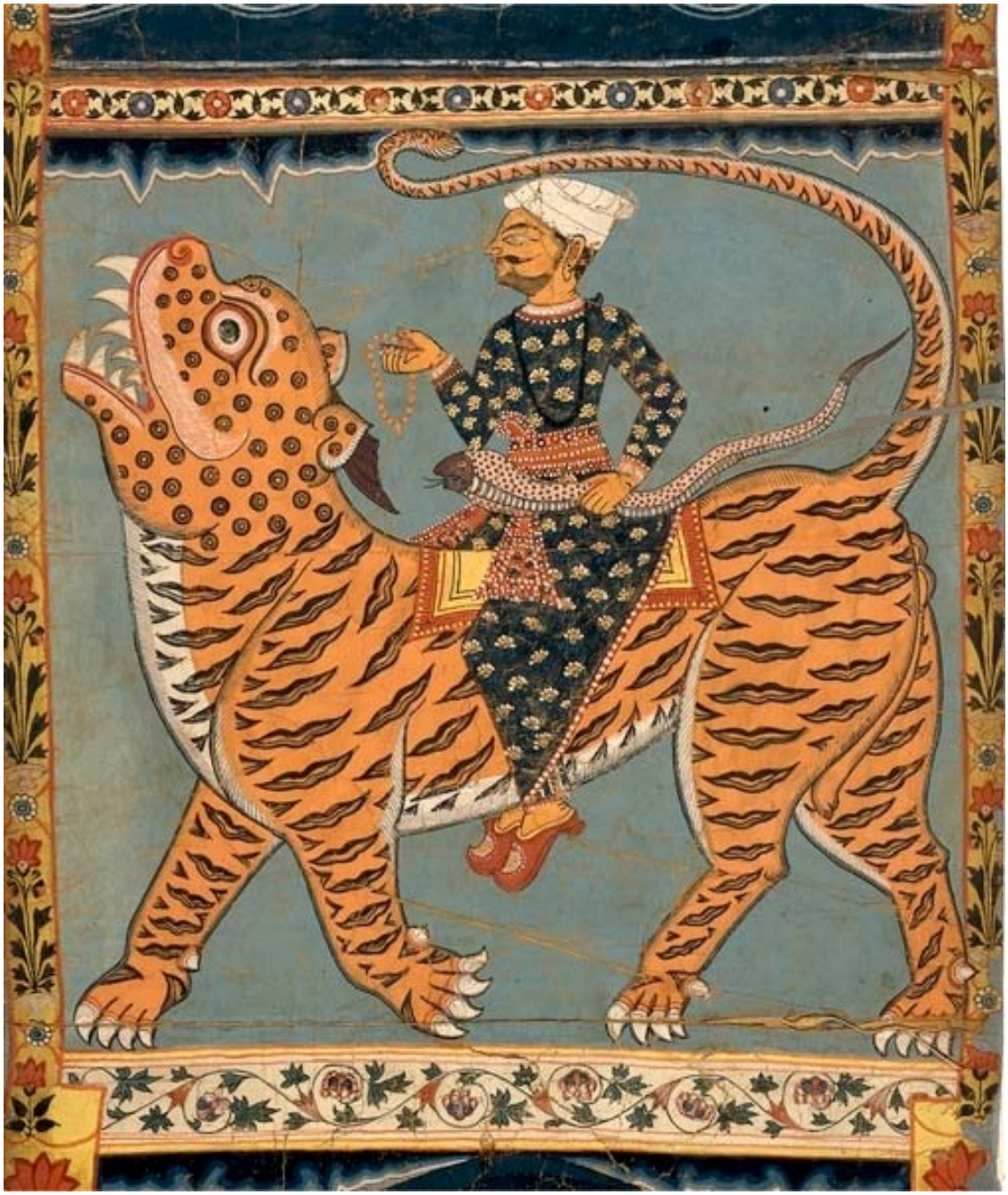


Fig. 10: A *pat* painting of Gazi Pir riding a tiger and carrying a serpent, in a scroll from Bengal, c. 1800. The British Museum, London. https://britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=563861001&objectid=233075

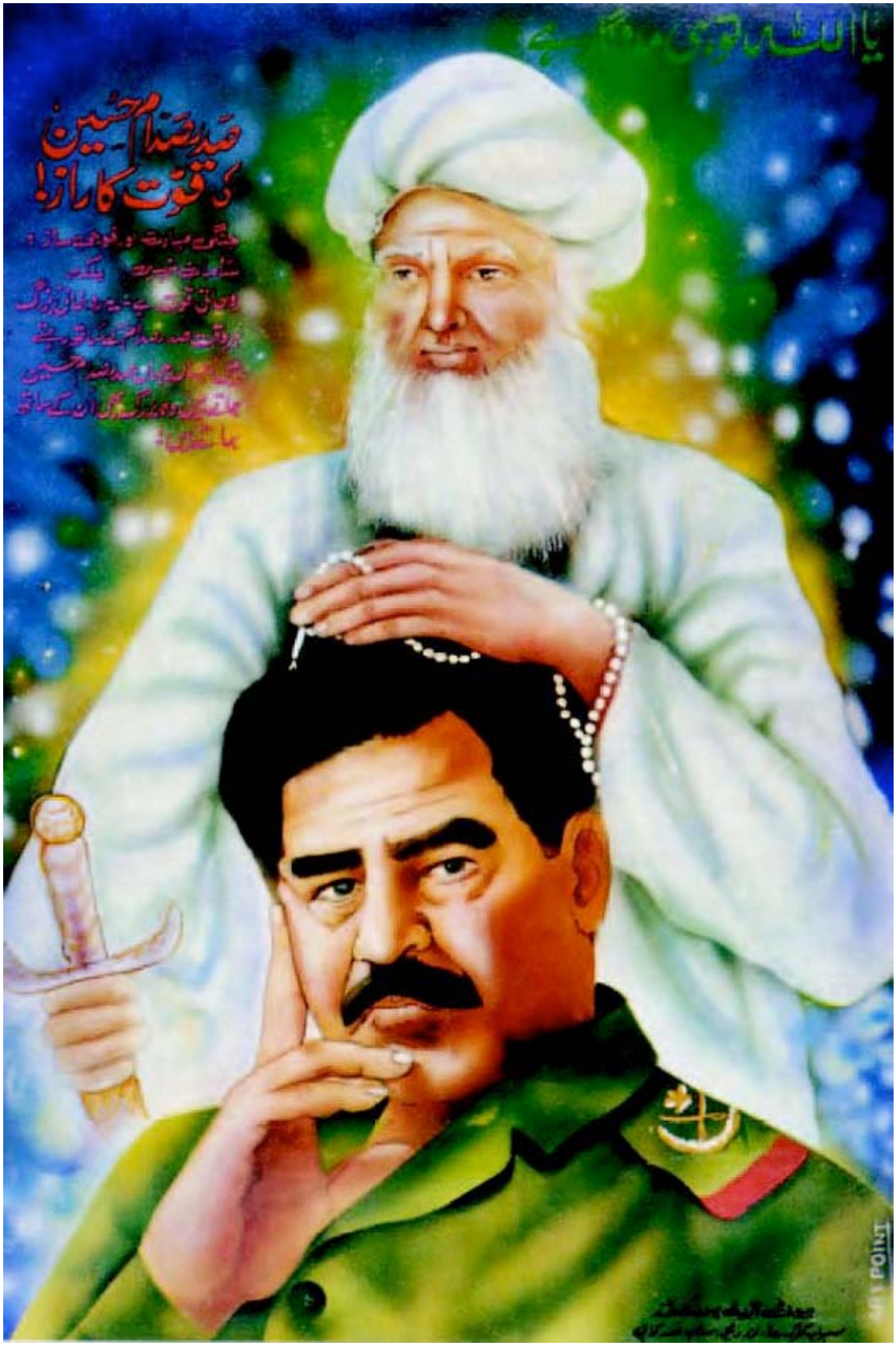


Fig. 11: Poster showing Iraq's then President Saddam Hussein under the protection of an otherwise invisible Sufi saint. Beauty Art Printers, Saddar, Karachi, c. 1990–91. From the collection of Iftikhar Dadi.

Fig. 12: A poster showing Saint Abdul Qadir Jeelani, right, with his Baghdad shrine seen in the backdrop, visited by a female devotee on the left. The woman's family is shown in a boat miraculously resurrected by the saint after having sunk in the river. Publisher: Brijbasi Art Press, Artist unknown, c. 1990.

Fig. 13: (left) '*Hazrat Syed Lal Badshah Koh Murree, Rawalpindi*', a poster of the emaciated sadhu-like saint at his shrine near the Murree hill station in northern Pakistan. Published in Lahore, Publisher and Artist unknown, 2000.
(right) A photograph of the same saint which may have inspired the portrait at left. Sourced from https://facebook.com/Babalalshahqalanadar/

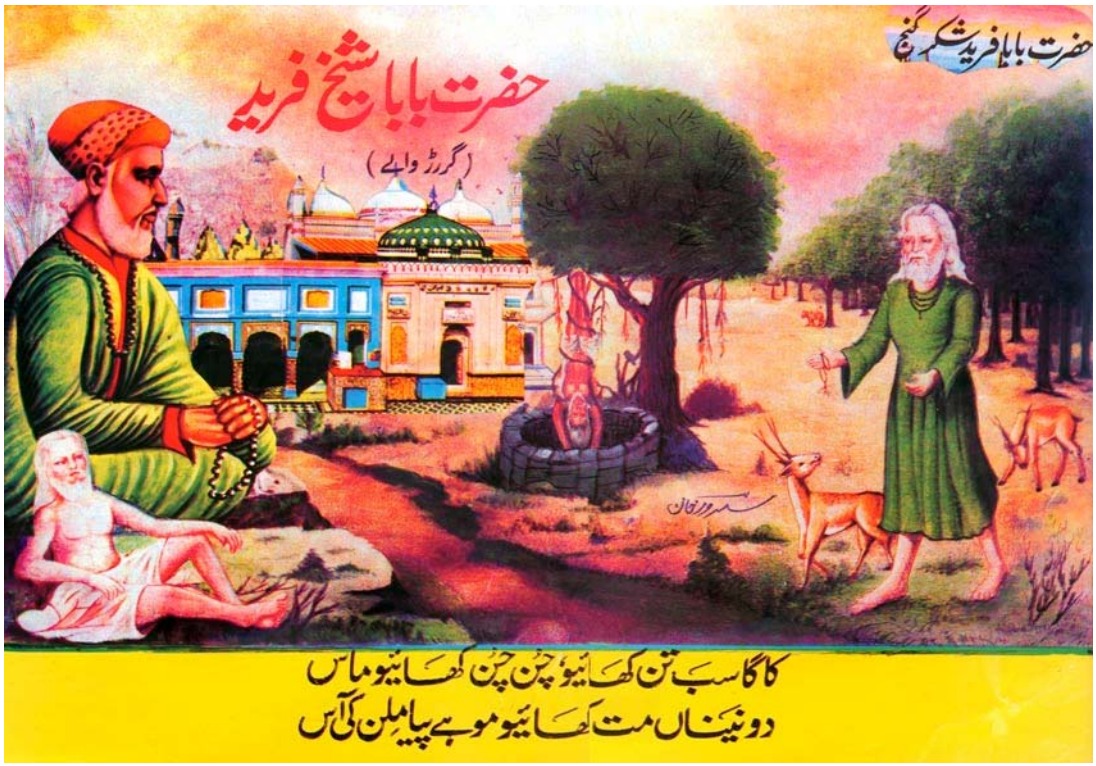


Fig. 14: Poster showing Hazrat Baba Shaikh Farid of Shakar Ganj in various postures, including his *chilla-e ma'kus*, a kind of meditation where he hung upside down from a tree into a well. Published in Lahore, Publisher unknown, Artist: Sarwar Khan, 2005.

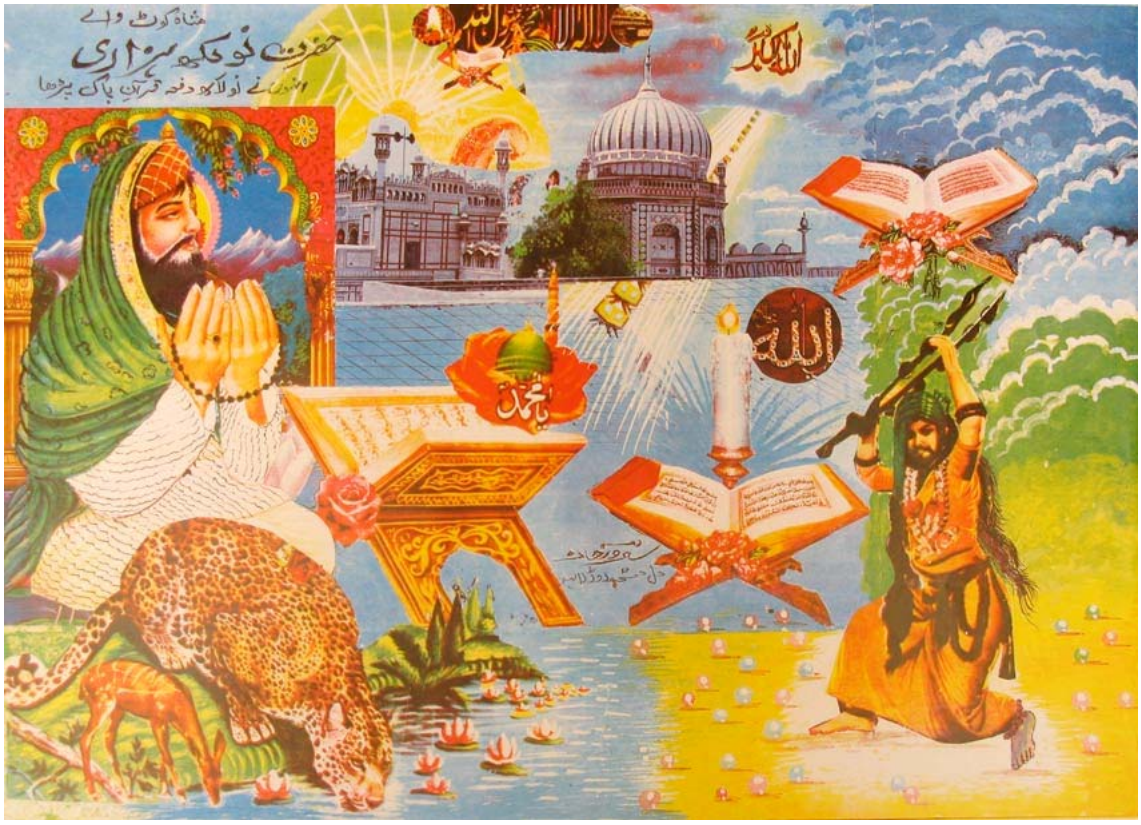


Fig. 15: Poster of Hazrat Naulakh Hazari of Shahkot. Artist: Sarwar Khan, Dil Masjid Road, Lahore, 2005.

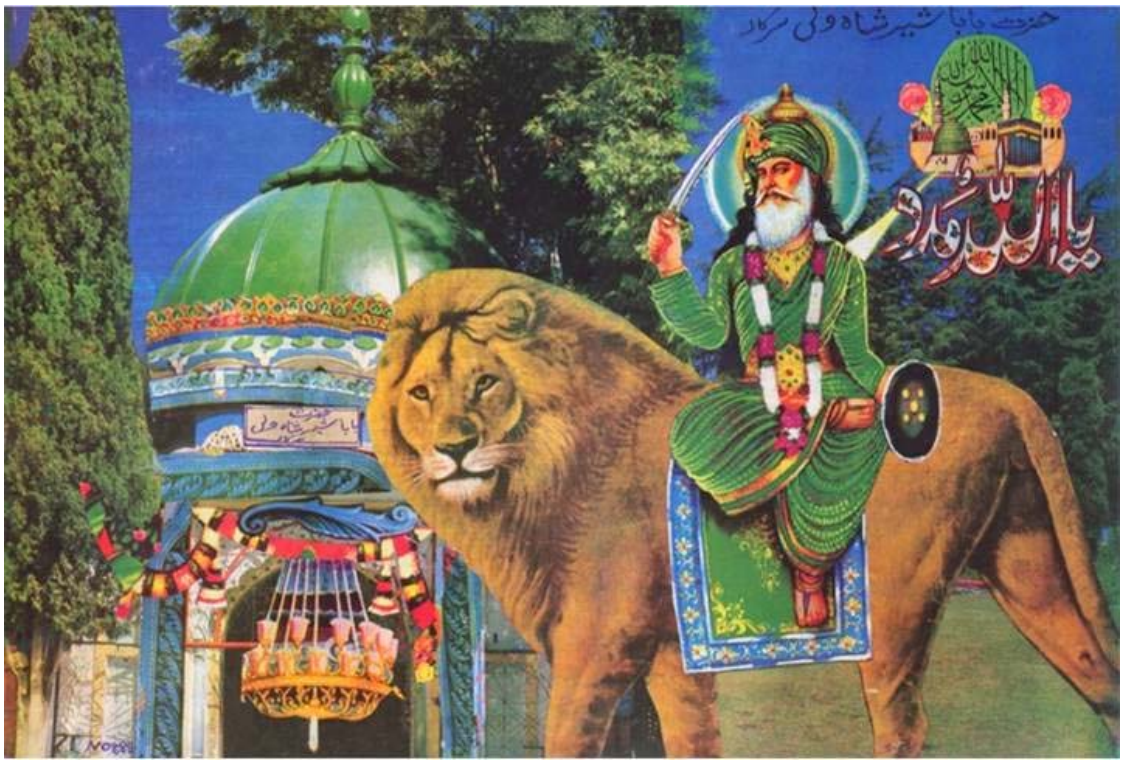


Fig. 16: Poster of Baba Shershah Wali. Published in Lahore, Publisher and Artist unknown, 2005.

Fig. 17: A poster that includes almost all of the Islamic saints of South Asia, or at least those from Pakistan. Numbers are inscribed on each portrait, corresponding to the index of names at the top, centre. Published in Lahore, Publisher and Artist unknown, 2005.

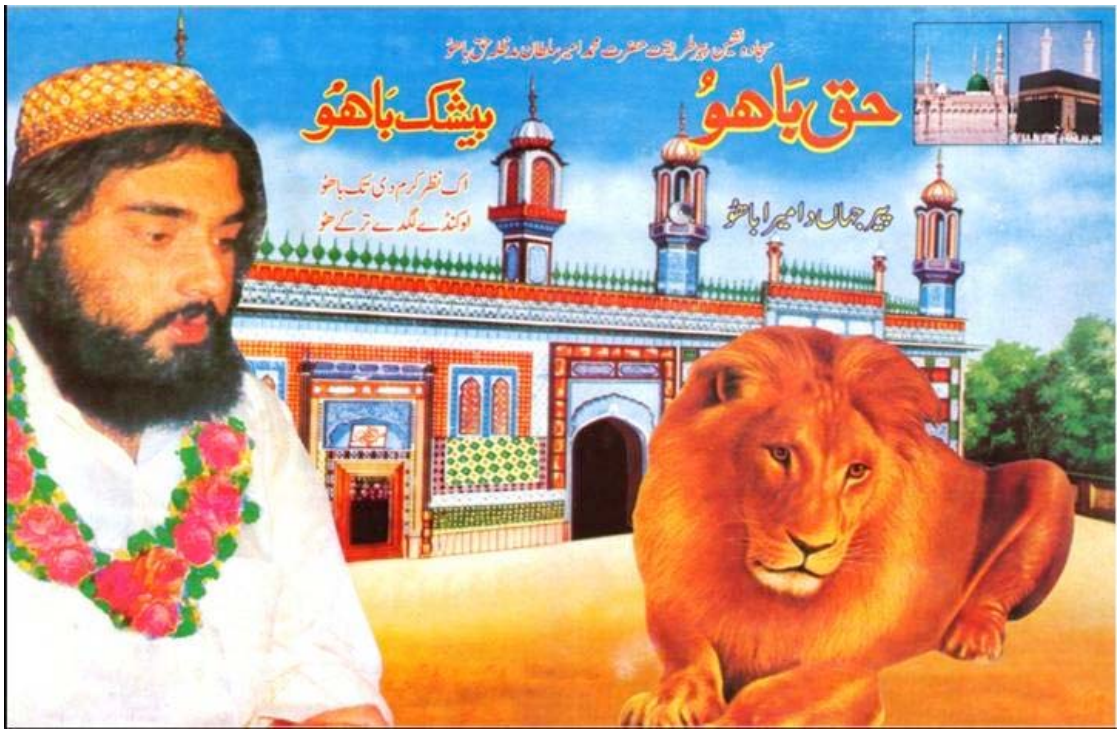


Fig. 18: Poster showing the shrine of Hazrat Sultan Bahu at Shorkot, with pasted-in pictures of the current shrine-keeper and a tame lion. Punjab, Pakistan, 2005.

Fig. 19: Poster of Syed Sakhi Abbas Shah Kutteyanwale. Artist: Sarwar Khan, Lahore, 2005. By courtesy of Haroon Khalid, Lahore.

Fig. 20: Baba Sailani, a saint known for wandering the forests of central India and taming wild animals, is shown here sitting under a tree in a meditative posture as various wildlife peacefully rests around him. Publisher: J.B. Khanna & Co., Chennai, Artist unknown, c. 1990.

Fig. 21: A poster showing the saint Badi'uddin Shah Madar (14th/15th century), riding a tiger and carrying a serpent as his whip, facing the Chishti saint Shah Mina (d. 1465) who sits on a broken wall or platform on the right. Publisher and Artist unknown, 1995.

Fig. 22: Advertisements of faith healers that are usually found stuck inside trains, buses and other public spaces in India. Some sourced from thelallantop.com

Fig. 23: A *qalandar* baba at a roadside shrine outside Saharanpur (Uttar Pradesh). Photo by the author, 2014.

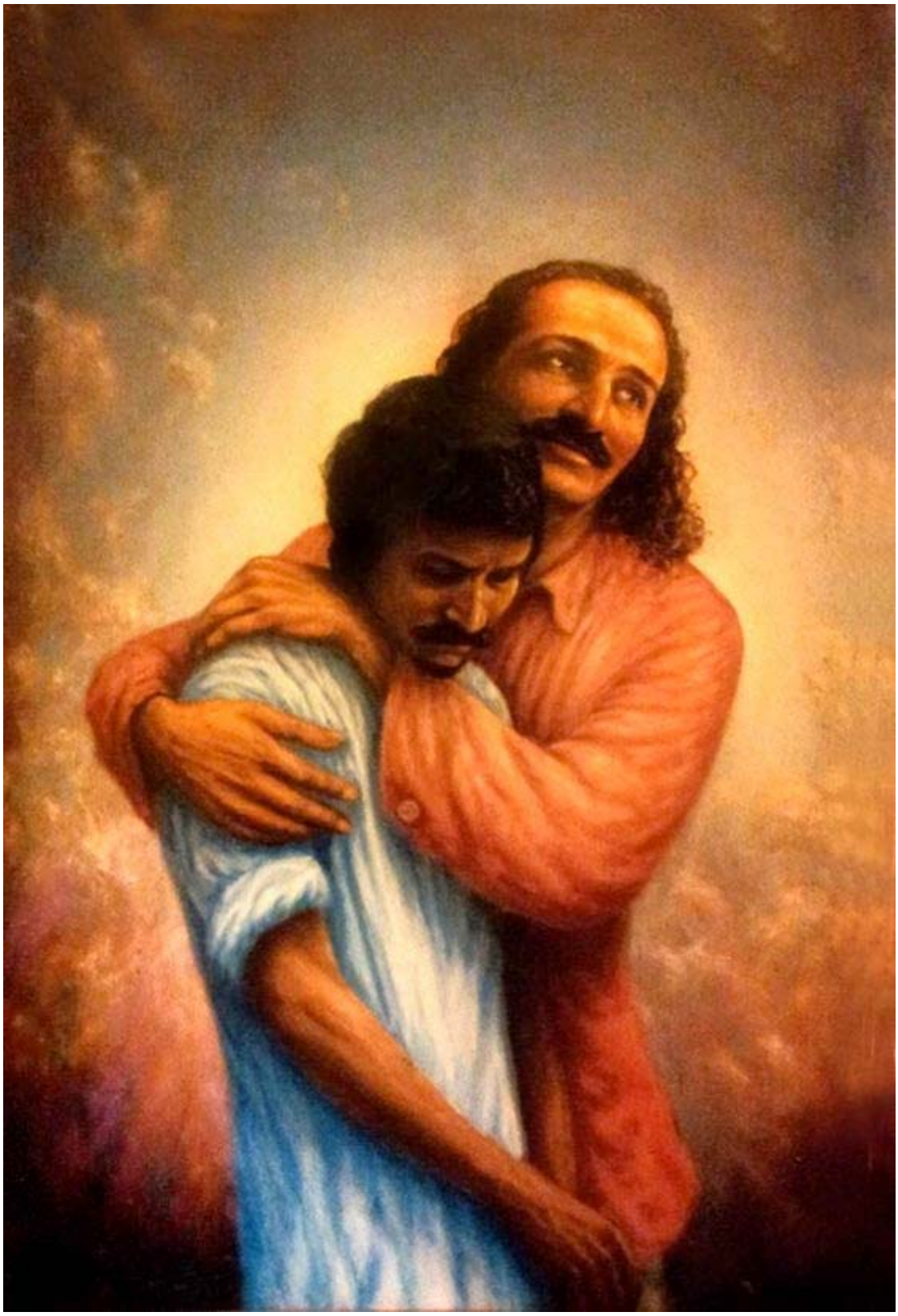
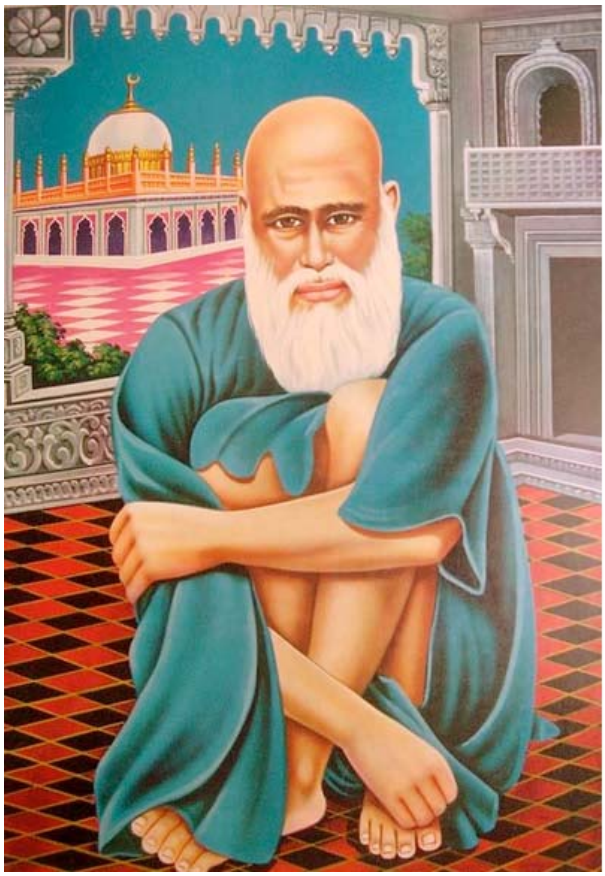


Fig. 24: Meher Baba with Mohammad, the *mast*. A painting by David Berizon. Sourced from pinterest.com



Tajuddin Baba was photographed very seldom.
This the most famous pose of the Mohammedan Perfect Master
probably taken at the asylum in Nagpur near the turn of the century

Fig. 25: (left) A portrait poster of Tajuddin Baba. Publisher: J.B. Khanna, Artist unknown, 1995.
(right) Notice the similarity of the baba's sitting posture in this photograph taken in a mental asylum near Nagpur, c. 1920 (sold outside his shrine).

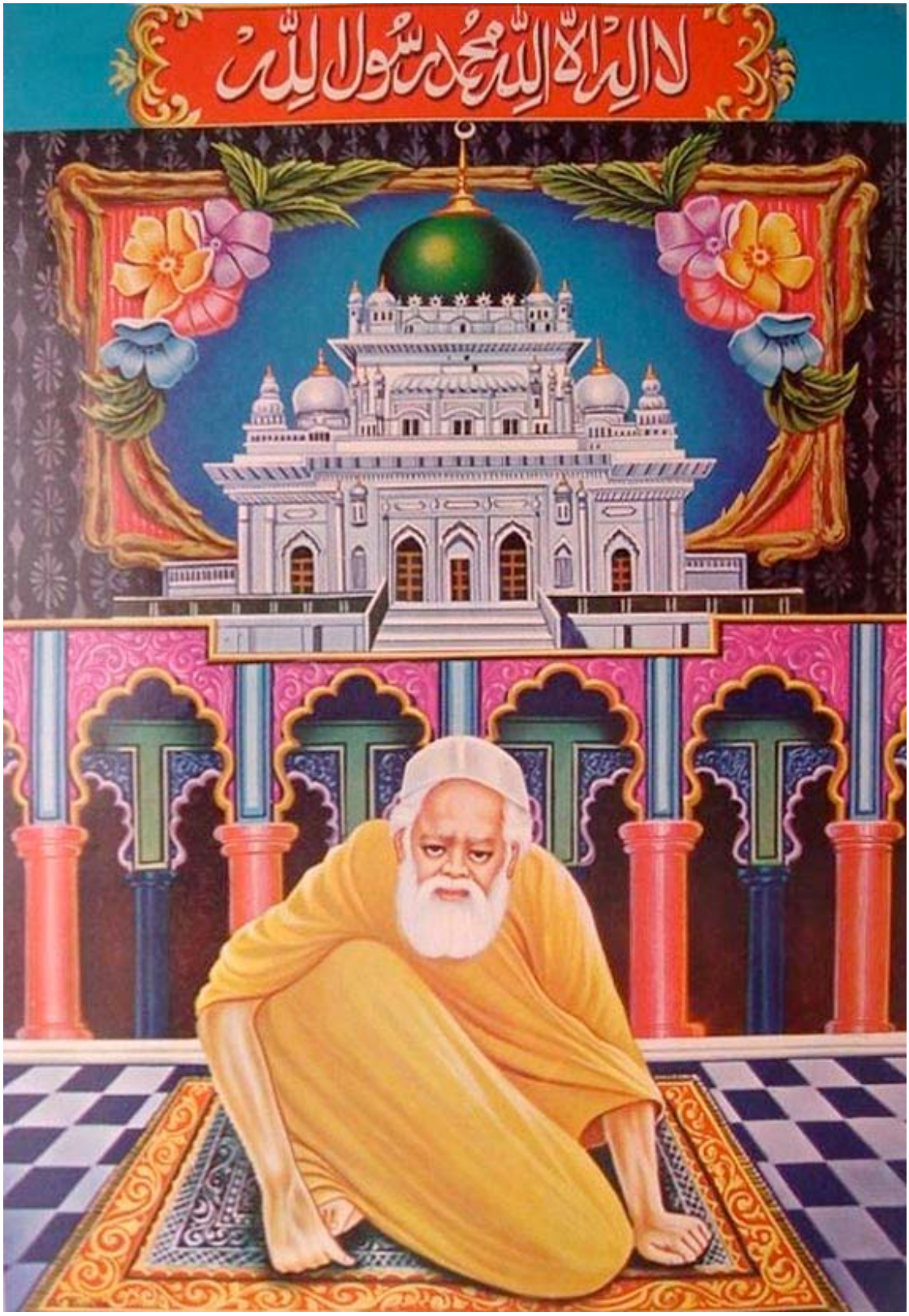


Fig. 26: Haji Waris Ali Shah of Deva, Barabanki (Uttar Pradesh), seated in a posture that may have been copied from a photograph. Publisher: S.S. Brijbasi & Sons, 1995.