

Shrine Photo Ethnography

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Part I:

Introduction:

For my very first shrine visit, I picked Shah Jamal's shrine, located opposite Forman Christian College, near Muslim Town. I decided to visit this shrine because I had not heard of this shrine before and I am interested in how Sufi saints get shrines made for them. I was accompanied by my mother who had visited Data Darbar years ago but it was too far and slightly inconvenient for her to take me there. It was also during a time of political unrest in Lahore so it was also unsafe for us to travel to other shrines of Sufi saints. Thus, we agreed to visit a shrine that is in closer proximity and since we both have never been to this shrine before, we considered it an adventure for ourselves.

I visited the Shah Jamal shrine on the 15th of May at 10am. The shrine was located in a neighborhood with residential homes and schools. There were small shops meant for selling the shrine rituals. These shops were selling *chaddars* (a cloth for covering the shrine) and *diyas* (oil lamps made of clay) along with oil bottles for lighting the diyas. There is also a store that looks after the shoes of the visitors of the shrine. The shrine building was very tall as the shrine's entrance was above three flights of stairs. Upon climbing the marble stairs, my feet had become acquainted with the scorching floor of inferno heat.

The shrine was not crowded, with only a few followers who were busy praying or reading Quranic verses. The shrine was in the middle of the mosque and there was a wall that separated the women's and men's areas. The women could get a view of Shah Jamal's shrine but they were not allowed to enter the shrine.

Methodology:

Participant observation was used for this project which is best for understanding the atmosphere of the shrine and how people interact or behave in this religious and spiritual space. I followed the appropriate dress code for the shrine which is shalwar kameez and a dupatta covering my head as the worshippers believe it is a way of showing respect to the Sufi saint. I observed the women's area of the shrine at first and took pictures with my phone's camera of written texts and sacred items that were located in the shrine. I was later allowed access to other parts such as the men's section of the shrine and a sacred room where the Saint prays which is also a school for the local children.

I interviewed a caretaker who is known as *Khadim Baba* or Little Baba because he looked after the shrine. He approached us first because we did not look like regular visitors, judging based on our confused expressions. I informed him that we were here for educational purposes and he gave us permission to take photos and record the interview. I had to ask him only one question which was: "What is the nature of the kalaam of this shrine?". My expectations for the interview were that I would let the caretaker talk as much as he wanted about the kalaam so that the interview would take up to three to five minutes. My expectations were completely shattered when it turned out that the caretaker's answer to my question was only about 20 seconds long. I found the interview with the caretaker too short so I had to improvise by asking about the rituals that take place at the shrine and I also included a brief discussion with a female practitioner at the women's section of the shrine on what she reads and recites at the shrine.

Part II:

Account of Scripts:

Item No.	Location	Language	Verse, Pir's saying etc
1.	Corners of women's entrance	Arabic	"O Allah" on the right "O Muhammad" on the left
2.	Front wall of shrine at women's section	Arabic with Urdu translation	Verily it has come to you as light and a book from Allah.
3.	Wall of the shrine at women's section	Urdu	Women are not allowed inside (the shrine).
4.	Ceiling of the shrine	Arabic	99 names of Allah
5.	Back wall of shrine at women's section	Urdu	"I am so weak, so drop me at the footsteps of my beloved's shrine so that when the gatekeeper tells me to get up, I will say I can not."
6.	Back wall of shrine at women's section	Arabic	There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger
7.	Back wall of shrine at women's section	Arabic	Dua e Qunoot: O, Allah! We implore You for help and beg forgiveness of You and believe in You and rely on You and extol You and we are thankful to You and are not ungrateful to You and we alienate and forsake those who disobey You. O, Allah! You alone do we worship and for You do we pray and prostrate and we betake to please You and present ourselves for the service in Your cause and we hope for Your mercy and fear Your chastisement. Undoubtedly, Your torment is going to overtake infidels O Allah!
8.	Courtside wall of women's section	Arabic	"Mashallah (Allah willed it)" on the right "Subhanallah" (Praise Allah) on the left
9.	Wuzu area of men's section	Urdu	Instructions on what to do at the shrine.

10.	Entrance to women's section from men's section	Urdu	Men are strictly not allowed in the women's section
11.	Small book used by female practitioners	Arabic and Urdu	Consists of Surah Al Fatiha, Ayat ul Kursi, a few verses of Surah Al Imran and a few verses of Surah Al Taubah. Includes miracles that occurred upon reading these Quranic verses
12.	Wall outside of shrine at women's section	Urdu	History of Saint Shah Jamal and the shrine along with the miracles by Shah Jamal
13.	Bookshelf at women's section	Urdu	Book titled "Life After Death"
14.	Bookshelf at women's section	Urdu	Book titled "Religion of Islam"

On the shrine's wall, there are documents that discuss the history of the shrine and its saint. It begins by discussing the life of Baba Shah Jamal who was born in 1588. He was not interested in his studies and preferred playing until a dervish came and told him that he was straying from his destiny. It was that point in his time that he started focusing on his studies and eventually becoming a well known mystic at that time.

When Baba Shah Jamal lived near Ichra, he asked for some masons and workers to construct a type of fort known as Damdama. The workers refused because they were already constructing a palace for the Shehzadi Begum Bint-e-Jalaluddin Akhbar in which they are already getting paid well for their labor. The Sufi mystic told them that they would earn twice as much if they constructed his fort along with the palace. The workers agreed and started working on the seven *manzils* (floors/stories) fort at night. One night, the candles (*diyas*) ran out of oil which made it difficult to work in the night so Baba Shah Jamal told them to fill the candles with

water from his well. A miracle occurred as the water was able to light up the candles. This led to the workers worshipping Baba Shah Jamal as a servant of Allah.

Another story that was mentioned in the history about the shrine. The Shehzadi, who had her palace built (where the Punjab Institute of Mental Health is now located), felt her privacy was invaded because of Shah Jamal's seven-story fort. She knew he was Sufi mystic so she did not want to punish him and she told him to reduce the size of his fort because his fort could overlook into her palace's garden. Shah Jamal conducted a dhamal (a sort of spinning dance) after meditating and with the tap of his heel on the ground, five stories of the fort fell down and only two stories remain standing to this day. The miracles of Baba Shah Jamal led to the development of his shrine and mosque at his fort. After seeing the fort in real life with just two stories which already looks massive, I can not begin to imagine what it looked like with seven stories.

Part III:

Transcription of the interview:

Interviewer: Shanzeh Ahmad

Interviewee: Muhammad Yaseen/ Khadim Baba Jee (caretaker of shrine)

Date and time: May 15th, 2023 13:30

Location: Shah Jamal Shrine located opposite of Forman Christian College, near Muslim Town.

SA: Can you please tell us about the kalaam used in this shrine?

KB: This frame here is of the history of the shrine and Baba [Shah Jamal]. It has been here for 400 years. You can take a picture of it on your mobile and read it at your comfort.

SA: [clarifying my question again] Do you need to read some specific kalaam for this shrine?

KB: Look just as you came here, you can pray, perform namaz and read the Quran and make your *mannat* (wish) to Baba Jee. There is no problem in whatever you want to read while making you *mannat*.

SA: So you can read whatever is in the Quran?

KB: Yes. You can read the Quran or perform namaz. The diyas are also used for asking for your *mannat*.

SA: If my *mannat* is fulfilled, do I need to come back?

KB: You know what you need to do? You need to bring a lock. We will attach it [to the shrine] and you will take the key home. Your *mannat* will be fulfilled after two or three days. You come back after your *mannat* is fulfilled and take the lock and its key and throw it in flowing water.

After that you contribute financially *langar* (community kitchen that serves meals free of charge). Owing to your finances, you can pay around Rs.50, Rs.100 or Rs.200.

SA: What are those? [I pointed at other parts of the shrine]

KB: These are...These were graves before. The otherside was a graveyard. These three graves were left. They are with the *Sarkar* (Baba Shah Jamal). The 5 stories are buried down, 2 stories are up. There were 7 stories. The shrine is standing on these 2 stories.

[Silence for 5 seconds]

KB: Let me give a *pathar* (rock) to cleanse your body of diseases and cleansing of the soul.

[The caretaker displays a marble rock that is in the shape of a mosque due to the similarity of the dome shape. He also places it on my head to cleanse my soul and body.]

SA: What do you do with this tree?

KB: You take some leaves. Dry them. Grind them, mix it in water and drink it. It is going to increase your lifespan.

SA: Have they been planted by him (Baba) or did you plant them?

KB: He (Baba) planted them.

SA: You said women were not allowed in the shrine but I saw women there who were reciting Surah Fatiha for Baba?

KB: You can pray Surah Fatiha. You can pray whatever you like.

[The caretaker speaks very slowly and when it comes to talking about Baba Shah Jamal, he uses a lot of hand gestures to imply how incredible he is. He sometimes did not answer the questions due to misinterpretation or he did not hear them correctly.

I would like to mention that I forgot to record where the caretaker explained to us about the shrine at the women's section and when he took us to see Baba Shah Jamal's praying site that was under the shrine. I will mention them in the conclusion section.

We went to the book shelf and checked if there was anything to document. A woman started telling me about a book she uses to fulfill her wishes. I decided to interview her as well as she was a practitioner at the shrine. Another female practitioner also entered the conversation.]

Interviewer: Shanzeh Ahmad

Interviewee: Anonymous Woman

Bystander: Female practitioner

AW: Whatever is their heart desire, they have been granted (by reading the verses in this book). There are mentions of when people have their wishes fulfilled.

SA: What do you need to read?

AW: These are the surahs you have to read. There is Surah Fatiha, Ayat ul Kursi, some verses of Surah Al Imran and some verses of Surah Al Tauba. Whatever kind of *hajat* (wish) you have, you can read these. [Flips through the pages] Or you can recite *Ya Latifo* or *Ya Kabiro*. Or you

could read these names or you could combine both of them. If you combine these words it is much better as it will bring you more blessings. Any wish with good intentions is fulfilled by this. I'm distributing them so if you want to take it, you can.

SA: Do people come gather on Thursday night?

KB: On Thursday...

FP: Do I need to read it everyday? [The female practitioner interjects into the recording.]

AW: You can read it everyday. No matter how many times you read it. 11 times or as much as you like. Read it from your heart, for whatever you wish or read it for Allah's love.

[This part was inaudible because everyone was speaking all at once and Khadim Baba was speaking very quietly too.]

SA: As such does everyone read or recite something together?

KB: No.

SA: So you read everything on your own.

KB: [Nods his head]

SA: Ok thank you.

[End of interview]

Part IV:

Conclusion

Learning the history of ancient buildings has always intrigued me and made the shrine trip much more interesting for me. Next to the frame was a wooden bowl of salt that came from the local salt mines. It is part of the ritual to take or consume some of the salt after you make your *mannat* (wish). In addition, the believers tie strings on a tree known for growing since the life of Shah Jamal. Near the tree, there is also a shelf for lighting the diyas (clay oil lamps). Since

it was my first time visiting a shrine, I noticed that people do a lot of rituals to guarantee the fulfillment of their *mannat*. The annual Urs takes place on 3-5th Rabi-ul Sani (based on the Islamic Calendar) which is a ceremony for Shah Jamal that is accompanied by *qawwalis* (singing religious songs) and *dhamals* (spinning dance).

Along with learning a lot about Sufi saints and shrines, there were noticeable differences between the men's and women's section of the shrine. The first thing I noticed was the entrance to the shrine. There were two separate entrances for men and women but the stairs were open from the men section only. Hence, women had to enter from the stairs to the men's section then pass through the women's entrance. The stairs to the men's entrance was sheltered completely from the sun while the women's section did not have any shelter so it was excruciatingly hot to walk towards the women's section in a weather of 45 degrees Celsius.

The other features of the shrine were different in the women's and men's section because the features in the men's section were upgraded or renovated. Just for the sake of clarity, I did not sneak into the men's section and entered in a perfectly legal manner with the caretaker. The pages that had the history of the shrine and Shah Jamal were lamented and engraved in marble in the men's section while the women's section one was framed but the pages are old and close to breaking down. The women's section also had an old shelf for lighting the *diyas* (oil candles) while the *diyas* shelf at the men's section had been renovated with tiles. I had watched a video about this shrine that was uploaded 4 years ago and the *diyas* shelf at the men's section was in similar condition as the women's section but now it looks brand new. This made me wonder if there is a difference in budget from both sections or if the caretakers of the shrine had prioritized the renovation of the men's section more due to the frequency of events held at that side of the shrine.

One other feature I noticed was the difference in praying space for men and women at the shrine. When I entered the women's section there was a courtyard and shade was only around the main shrine and Wudu area. There was a single fan at the corner for the women who were praying at the shrine. I assumed the same was for the men's section but there was an air conditioned indoor praying space where the Imam leads the prayers. In addition, there were some poles at the men's outdoor praying space which are used to hold a cloth over the area as shade from the sun. It was evident to me that women had to pray outside without much shade from the scorching heat while men were allowed to sit inside with shade.

Besides that, I was stunned by the burial of Sheikh Fakhar-u-din's wife. Sheikh Fakhar-u-din had a small proper shrine at the women's section but no one knew about his wife's grave until the caretaker removed the prayer mat. I felt somewhat bad for the wife as her grave is constantly being stepped on because her grave is under the prayer mat. I would consider it disrespectful to the deceased because I was taught that you should not step on the deceased's grave.

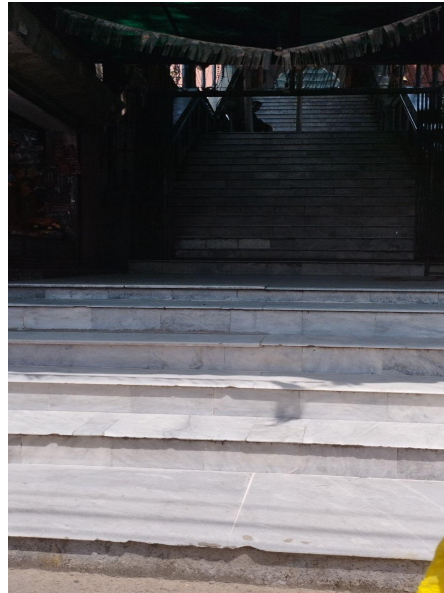
The caretaker took me to the Saint's praying site which is also adorned with flowers and lights. This praying site was underneath the men's section of the shrine. There was also a school next to the praying site for the local children.

In conclusion, my expectations of a shrine of a Sufi saint was not fully met. I was expecting to see a lot of mentions of "Shah Jamal" or some of his popular quotes. I mostly just saw mentions of "Allah" and "Muhammad" at the shrine which makes this more similar to my beliefs. After reading the story of Shah Jamal, I felt that he was only trying to teach and spread Islam as I knew that Sufis would preach that one's connection to God should be direct rather than through any other means. The miracles that occurred during Shah Jamal's life may only be God's

way of helping his believers. I am not a believer of shrines albeit I do like the spiritual messages conveyed by the Sufis. I noticed that the worshippers are still following what Shah Jamal was preaching but they have added their own sort of twist to his teachings by conveying their prayers to Baba Shah Jamal so that he can help in fulfilling their wishes and prayers.

Part V:

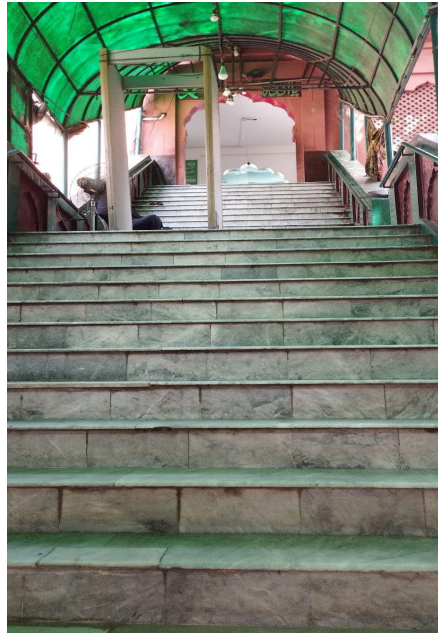
Img.1: Main Entrance to shrine (used by everyone)



Img.2: Shops at the main entrance selling items for the shrine



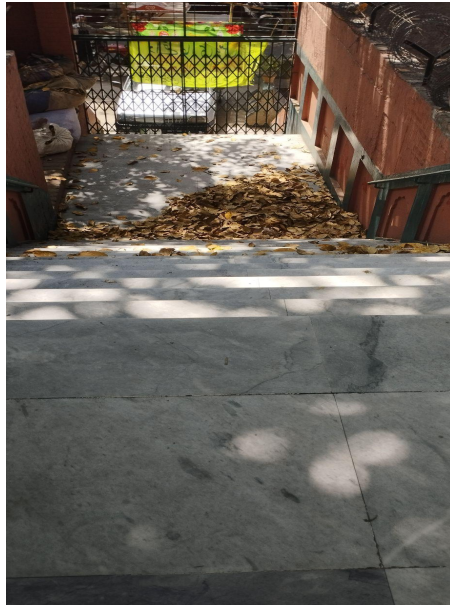
Img.3: Entrance to the men's section of the shrine



Img.4: Entrance to women's section of the shrine



Img.5: Closed off main entrance to women's section to the shrine



Img.6: Main view of the shrine at women's section



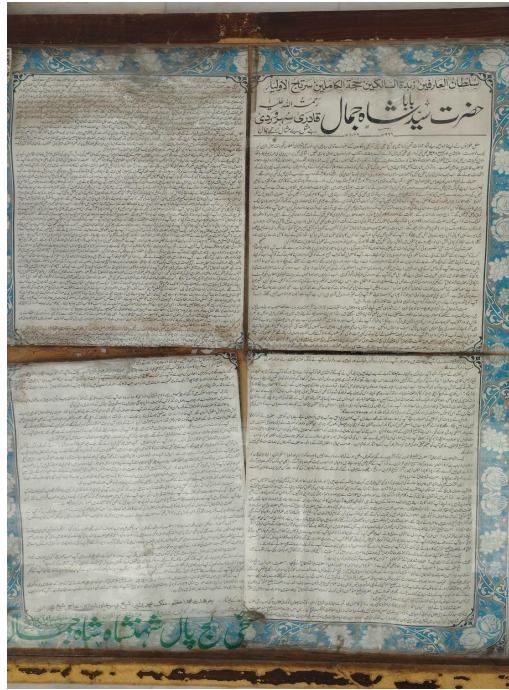
Img.7: Women's section courtyard



Img.8: Salt for the worshippers to purify themselves



Img.9: History of Baba Shah Jamal and the shrine at women's section



Img.10: Sign that says women are not allowed in the shrine



Img.11: Shrine of Baba Shah Jamal view from women's section



Img.12: Window of shrine at women's section



Img.13: Locks on the window of the shrine



Img.14: The *Pathar* (a marble rock meant to cure diseases)



Img.15: “*Ya Allah*” inscribed on the right side of the wall



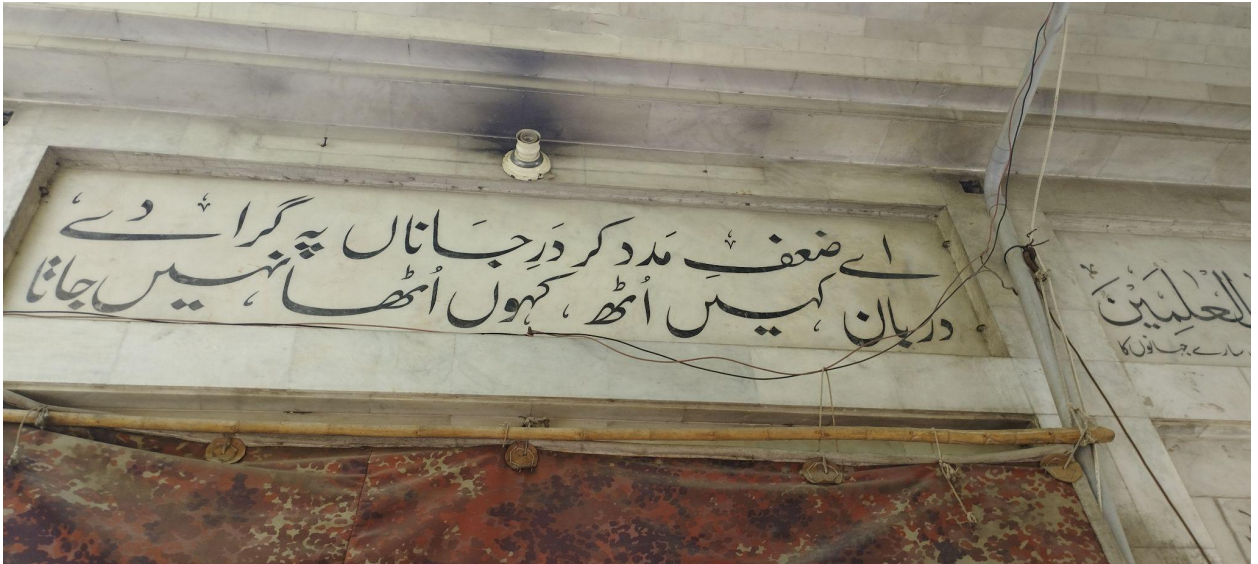
Img.16: “*Ya Rasool*” inscribed on the left side of the wall



Img.17: Inscription of the first *kalma*



Img. 18: Inscription that expresses devotion towards the shrine



Img.19: Sheikh Fakhar-ud-din's shrine at women's section



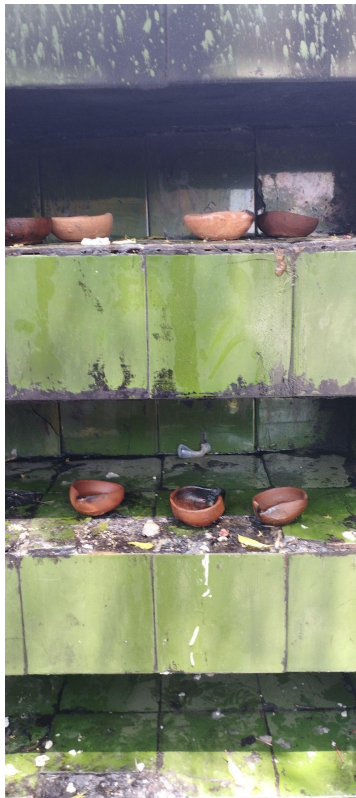
Img.20: Sheikh Fakhar-u-din wife's grave



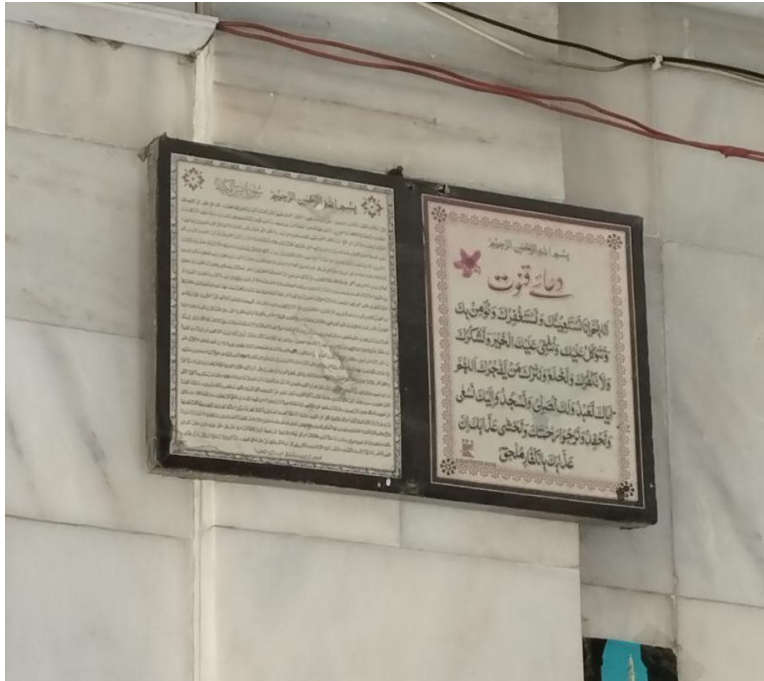
Img.21: The *Wan* tree



Img.22: Shelf for the *diyas*



Img.23: *Dua-e-Qunoot* and *Surah Yaseen* on the wall



Img.24: A copy of the Quran covered in hand made clot



Img.25: Women sharing a book she uses for fulfilling her wishes



Img.26: Inscription of *Mashallah*



Img. 27: Inscription of Subhanallah



Img.28: History of Saint Shah Jamal and the shrine at men's section



Img. 29: *Diyas* shelf at men's section



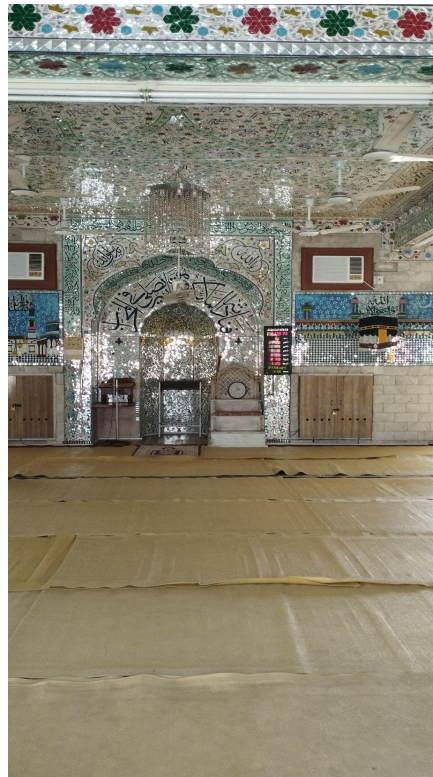
Img. 30: Baba Shah Jamal's praying area



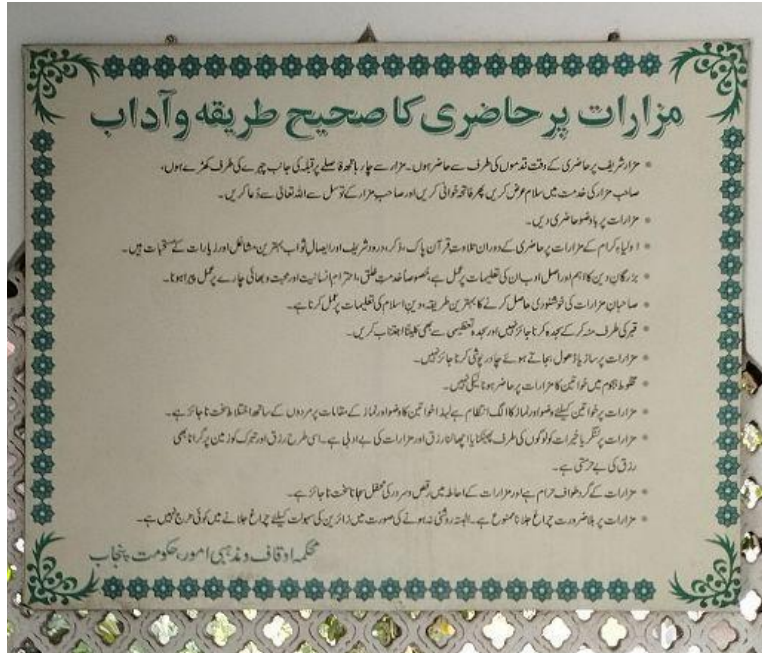
Img.31: School next to Shah Jamal's praying site



Img. 32: Praying area of men's section



Img. 33: Poster stating the correct way to worship or pray at the shrine



Img. 34: Sign saying that men are not allowed at the women's section



Img. 35: Inscriptions on the walls of the men's section

