

SHRINE ETHNOGRAPHY

Linguistic Anthropology 363

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Introduction

For our linguistic anthropology class, we were assigned to visit a shrine and interview the caretaker to learn about the "kalaam," the language associated with the shrine. The goal was to establish a connection between the language used by the shrine, its saints, disciples, and the devotees who continue to visit it today. I chose the Baba Shah Jamal's shrine for its convenient location, just six minutes away from my university. I wanted to study it on my own without interference from my family or any biases that would come along. However, upon reaching the shrine alone, in the morning of 22nd May, Monday, I realized some flaws in my planning.

Firstly, the shrine was not prominently located and proved difficult to find despite following Google Maps. Situated in a largely unplanned residential area resembling a muhalla neighborhood, it lacked a distinctive landmark. Secondly, the entrance to the shrine was inconspicuous, nestled between two shops mostly crowded by men during the day time. It was only on my second visit, on 22nd May, Monday night, accompanied by my mother and grandmother, that I discovered the entrance through a stairway. Furthermore, the absence of parking forced me, as a woman, to navigate through a crowd of men, shop owners, customers, and sometimes intoxicated individuals who often gathered near the shrine's walls.

During my initial visit, I couldn't enter the shrine as I failed to locate the entrance. On my second visit, I experienced the shrine's casual atmosphere with a few people coming and going. As I entered, well-lit shops greeted me at the shrine's entrance. On the left side, there was a shop selling toys, rings, and threads, while the right side housed a shop selling flowers for the graves and a small room for shoe storage. We had to ascend barefoot up the stairs to reach the shrine located on the first floor, specifically the men's section. Across a courtyard from the entrance stood Baba Shah Jamal's shrine, while another open courtyard lay on the left side. This secondary courtyard featured a foldable shed/roof to provide shelter during rain or scorching sun. Both courtyards served as spaces for congregational prayers. Additionally, there was a small mosque to the left of the entrance, where the Azan was called and Friday and Eid sermons were delivered.

From the entrance, a small door on the right led from the men's section to the women's section. In the women's area, there was another courtyard with part of Baba Shah Jamal's tomb across it. The door to the tomb was covered with a grill, restricting women from entering. However, they could observe the interior through marble-grilled windows and the door. Adjacent to the exterior of the tomb, on the back side of the women's section, was the less ornate grave of Baba Shah Jamal's adopted son, Shah Fareed. The tomb of Baba Shah Jamal has a roofed passage around the tomb. On the back of Shah Fareed's grave an open cupboard is displayed with numerous books, mainly consisting of the 30 sections of the Quran (sparas), the complete Quran itself, and other Islamic books containing prayers and writings about the saint by various authors. The women's courtyard also contained other anonymous graves, distinguished by a couple of black marble markings. These markings

indicated the burial sites of unknown individuals. Adjacent to the main entrance for women, there was a wudu area on the right-hand side. Towards the front of the courtyard, there were neglected shelves for lighting oil lamps, flanked by two trees. The tree on the far left was considered more sacred due to the abundance of materials tied to it. People tied strings, plastic bags, and even bangles to the tree to make wishes or manat in the hope of their desires being fulfilled.

During my second visit, I encountered a middle-aged woman, draped in a black chaddar, who seemed to be in charge of the women's section. When I approached her for an interview, she initially greeted me brusquely and discouraged my inquiries, claiming that the shrine's devotees were not open to interviews. She asserted that I was the only one who had come to interview them, as even people from America had visited with grants and witnessed the dance of the malangs, yet none of the malangs had agreed to an interview. Her response startled me, as I had read about the saint's teachings centered around truth and drawing people closer to God. It seemed incongruous that someone would refuse to discuss their beliefs and have them documented, potentially strengthening others' faith in God.

On my third visit to the shrine on May 26th, a Friday, I made a point to seek official permission for my interview. I contacted the phone number displayed on a notice board at the entrance, which connected me to the office of the darbar committee. I discovered that the shrine is regulated by the "Auqaf and Religious Affairs Department" under the government of Punjab. The committee advised me to visit on a Friday after the Jumma prayer, assuring me that an official would grant me permission to conduct the interview.

I was allowed to interview the guide after the Jumma(Friday prayer). Having reached there on time, I saw a huge number of people leaving the shrine. Most of them I assume were only there for the congregation prayer and not to pay visit to the shrine itself. Usually shrines have a masjid/mosque area which is built with the intention of sadqa-e-jaria, Islamic concept that refers to ongoing or continuous acts of charity or deeds that bring benefits and blessings even after the giver has passed away. After waiting for the crowd of worshipers to leave I waited for the guide to show up on women's side. The men section by that time was completely empty however the women side still had a bunch of women praying. In addition to the women ranging from middle aged to elderly there were young children of primary school both girls and boys playing in the courtyard of the women's side.

Soon after, I was greeted by a middle-aged man of brown complexion, dressed in a light blue shalwar kameez. While speaking with him, he mentioned that although he had some connection with the shrine's custodians throughout the ages, he was appointed by the Auqaf department and did not have a strong spiritual association with the shrine. He sported a mustache but no beard and avoided making direct eye contact with me during the interview. In Pakistan, it is common for men to refrain from making eye contact with women during conversations as a sign of respect, so as not to make them feel uncomfortable or intimidated. One notable trait about him was that throughout the interview he kept smiling and talked in a low tone.

Although low the tone of his conversation seemed cautious, as if he was careful not to reveal anything that might be judged unfavorably. For instance, when discussing the practices of women who tied strings and locks to the fence and trees, he mentioned that according to them, their wishes are granted, but he quickly added that he believed everything happens by

the will of Allah. He made several similar comments, often stating that certain practices or beliefs were held by others, not himself or the shrine, and that he was not knowledgeable about them.

The main focus of our conversation was on the folklore surrounding the saint, most of which had not been officially documented and relied mostly on hearsay. He repeated the same story that was displayed on the board on women's side of the shrine. According to the tale, the saint had initially ordered the construction of a seven-story shrine, but at the request of a princess at the time, it was reduced to just two stories. The first floor housed the tomb, while the ground floor was used for Thursday night festivals, Urs (death anniversary), and other events. He repeatedly directed me to read the stories and folklore displayed on the boards around the shrine, providing only minimal additional details in response to my inquiries.

During our conversation he revealed to me about some practices and rituals that take place in the shrine. One of the rituals was "saib ka sehra" or garland of apples that women tie on a particular day of each year. The ritual is based on the story of Baba Shah Jamal when a hindu couple came to him for help. The hindu couple were unable to conceive a child and wanted a son. The saint ordered them to bring with them two melons. While the saint was meditating the man peeled both the melons to serve the saint. When Baba shah Jamal opened his eyes and saw the peeled melons, he got upset and told the couple that they will have two sons now but one of them will be a Muslim. The muslim child should be brought to the saint and he will raise him as his own son who he named "Fakher-ud-deen". Based on this story a lot of women come to the shrine and tie a garland of apples on 2nd Rabi al Thani, fourth month of the Islamic calender, with an intention that they can conceive a child. When their wish is granted they come here next year again to perform the ritual again and through this the chain continues.

When the interviewee shared the story with me he stated that he obviously does not believe that the saint grants the wishes but it is through his wasilah(refers to a means or intermediary that is used to seek closeness to Allah or to seek His blessings and favors). It's worth mentioning that the concept of wasilah can vary among different Islamic schools of thought and interpretations. Majority of scholars emphasize the direct relationship between an individual and Allah, while others who do recognize the permissibility of seeking intercession through righteous individuals focusing that the individual is virtuous and alive. A cultural practice mostly common in the sub-continent also allow evoking the dead as a wasilah to grant their wishes.

Another ritual that takes place every Thursday is "Langar" the term itself is derived from Sikhism where it means community kitchen commonly practiced in there gurgwaras. In Pakistan or Punjab langar is a concept of distributing food to however wishes to receive. Langar distribution is not specific to the people visiting the shrine, or people of a specific socio-economic background, the food is considered blessed and so everyone is welcomed and encouraged to eat from it. Thursdays its self has great significance in Islam. A hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him)indicates the significance of Thursdays. The hadith is found in Sahih Muslim, a collection of authenticated hadiths:

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Deeds are presented on every Thursday night and Friday. So I like that my deeds be presented while I am fasting." (Sahih Muslim)

Because of this Hadith many Muslims fast on Thursday and try to do as many good deeds as possible. However in the subcontinent the tradition has been condensed many to langar distribution and not many people are aware of the actual reasoning behind the importance of Thursdays.

As my interview progressed, I asked the key question about the Kalaam of the Shrine. I was told there is none. When inquiring further about what kind of zikr is done in the shrine by people who visit it, I was told about the mehfil that use Sufiana kalaam to praise the saint and God. With the Sufi influences, Thursdays nights are picked for holding these mehfil for these shrines.

From discussions with other classmates who had also visited the same shrine, it became apparent that many of us had similar experiences during our conversations with the custodian. We all felt somewhat like outsiders. I believe this may be attributed to the regular visitors of the shrine who have formed close relationships with one another. When someone unfamiliar visits the shrine, they are perceived as different and treated accordingly. People tend to avoid engaging with them, possibly due to unfamiliarity and different mannerisms.

Transcription:

(there are kids playing in the background.)

Mahnoor: Kis tarhan ka zikr hota hai?

What is the nature of the zikr?

Guide: mehfil hoti hai her Jummeeraat ko. Aur yahan jo ye khaas mansoob hai na, net pe bhi search ker lena, ye dhool dhamaal se jo hamara sufiana kalaam jese chalta hai na dhool(he paused for a second and then continues) kahien samaan se chalta hai aur kahien dhool

dhamal se. inka Silsila hamesha se dhol dhamal se chalta hai. Jese maine ne aap se zikr kia hai ke dhol dhamal kerte hue aap ne adiyan mari aur pao mare teen manzil neeche chale gaye..mizar.(pointing towards the corner of the wall in front of us) aur wahan pagal khana ban gia.

A gathering takes place here every Thursday. And this special event that we have here, you can also search for it on the internet, it combines drums and dhamal(a specific kind of dance) with chants associated with Sufism. (He paused for a second and then continued). In some places the gathering starts with samaa () and in others they use drums and dancing. Here it has always been through drums and the twirling dance. Like I told you before while the saint was in the trance of the sound of the drum, he stomped his heels on the ground and three stories of the shrine collapsed (pointing towards the wall in front) and there the madhouse was made.

Mahnoor: han gee. To ye yahan..

Yes, I see. So, about this...

(After the Jumma prayer ended after 10-15 mins in the background on the speaker a man was reciting naat for the prophet pbuh) (the naat is called mitha mitha hai mere muhammad ka naam)

Guide: to wahan corner per dekhian gay to samne nazer aye ga aap ko corner main.

If you look in that corner over there, you'll see it right in front of you, in the corner.

Mahnoor: to ye jab dhamal dalte hain to ye koi khas log aa ker kerte hain yap hir sare?

So, when they perform this dance, do specific people come to do it, or is it open to anyone?

Guide: ye specially haan, jin ko ijazat hoti hai wohi ker sakte hain.

Yes, it's specially done by those who have permission to do so.

Mahnoor: to ye ijazat kahan se lete hain?

Where do they get this permission from?

Guide: ijazat maslan jo is line pe ho jo is ko samajhte hon, ye samaj len mazhabi rasoomat main ati hai, ye sufiana adab main ja ke ati hai.

Hamare aur app ke logon ke jonsa na, kuin ke deen to humara phela hai asia main na dhol dhamal se.

Permission, for example, those who are in this line, those who understand it, they understand that it comes in religious customs, it comes in Sufi etiquette.

You know to us our religion, you know it spread through drums and dancing(eluding to music).

Mahnoor: (I didn't know what else to say so I just added a affirmative) han jee.

(I didn't know what else to say, so I just affirmed) Yes, I understand.

Guide: kuin ke ye hum log jo jonsa hain na gane bajane ke saath phir ijazat milli jo bhi musician ka saman islam main jis ka muh band hai wo islam main halal hai. Jiska musician ka muh bandh hai jesse duff hai, dhol hai, dholki hai ye islam main jaiyaz hai. Phir wo iske Silsila hota hai jo age chalta hai. Dhol dhamal ka.

Because we people in this field who are involved in playing music, have received permission. Whatever musical instrument has a sealed mouth is allowed in Islam. Like the duff (a traditional hand drum), the dhol (drum), the dholki (smaller drum). These are considered permissible in Islam. Then there is a lineage that follows from there, the dhol dhamal.

Mahnoor: to in instruments main bus dhol hi hota hai?

So, in these instruments, is it only the dhol that is used?

Guide: dhol hai, jese Nabi (SAW) ki amad pe bache duff bajate the uska bhi muh band hota hai.

Yes, the dhol is used. For example, when the children used to play the duff upon the arrival of the Prophet (pbuh), its mouth was also sealed.

Mahnoor: han gee

Yes, I understand. (at this point I realized that I didn't ask the question correctly so I will have to rephrase and ask again)

Guide: dholki hoti hai jese, istemal hoti hai choti dholki, musician ka koi bhi esa jiska muh age se band ho ga na wo islam main jaye hai.

There is also the dholki, which is used. Any musical instrument whose mouth is sealed from the front, that is permissible in Islam.

Mahnoor: han gee lekin jab aap log dhamal dalte hain to us ke liye sirf dhol hi istemal hota hai..

Yes, I understand, but when you perform the dhamal, only the dhol is used, right?

Guide: sirf dhol. Koin chan waghera kuch ni aur is ke ilawa istemal hota.

Only the dhol. Nothing else is used besides the dhol. (he used the word chan which I supposed is used to refer to a tambourine.)

Mahnoor: aur us ke doran koi zikr waghera hota hai jo aap log kerte hain.

And during that time, you recite some form of zikr (remembrance of Allah), right?

Guide: woou parte hain" Allah ho allah hoo. sdfth(something I couldn't make out what he said." isse hota hai zikr.

We recite "Allah Ho Allah Ho" and something else (inaudible) for zikr.

Mahnoor: bas is ke ilawa aur koi zikr nahi hai.

Okay, so apart from that, there are no other forms of zikr?

Guide: hote hon ge mere ilm main beta nahi hai

There may be other forms, but I don't have knowledge of them, my child.(beta literally translates to son but in this context it meant child)

Mahnoor: app yahan per kab se hain?

How long have you been here?

Guide: hum to yahan bachpan se idher hi hain.

We have been here since our childhood.

Mahnoor: to app uh...yahan manage kon kerta hai ye sari cheezein?

So, who manages all these things here? (because he said we, I wanted to know who that we includes)

Guide: ye to ab mehkma aukaf ke under aa giya hua hai na wese wo jo committee age banti hai wo phir intezamiah dekhti ha, jese humare baba jee the, hum un ke saath attach the wo nasal der nasal sath pushton se yahan hidmat guzar hain

That is now under the department of Aukaf's control. Those who form the committee handle it, just like our baba jee (either baba jee was his father or another righteous teacher of his, I could get clarity on it and just noticed that it could mean one of the two) was We were attached to him, belonging to the same lineage, serving here since seven generations.

Mahnoor: to app log sare jo ye Fakhrudin imam(I messed up and called him an imam, although he is not an imam) unke sath app log unki family se hain?

So, are you all related to this Fakhrudin (The adopted son of baba shah jamal)?

(I couldnt make sense of his connection with the department of aukaf and then him later claiming to be serving the shrine through ages so I wanted to inquire further with this question)

Guide: nahi. Hum samaj len ke yahan ke jo hamare bare the unhon ne hume age jora hua hai kea ne wale zahireen ki hidmat kerna, idher jese auraton ki partition ka hiyal rakhna.

Mukhtalif chote chote jo kaam hain, langar takseem kerna, in cheezon main phir age Silsila allah ta'lla chalai ja raha hai. is ki duty allah ne dena hoti hai, char soo saal se chal hi rahi hai.

No. Let's believe that the ones who were in charge before us brought us forward to continue the service for the visitors. Like taking care of women's partitions, managing various small tasks, distributing langar (free communal meal), the lineage continues with the guidance of Allah. This duty is bestowed by Allah. It has been going on for four hundred years.

Table of Scripts

Inscription number	Location	Language	Verse, Pir's saying, etc. and translation
1	Fig 34 Outside wall of the tomb	Urdu	"O weakness, come to my aid and let me fall on your beloved door, Even if the gatekeeper says, 'Rise,' I say, 'I cannot rise.'"
2	Fig 35	Punjabi	"I a destitute from generations, seek generosity from you O' Shah Jilani"
3	Fig 33	Urdu	"If you seek higher ranks, serve the needy, You won't find this pearl in the treasures of kings."

4	Fig 29	Arabic	Names of Allah and the names of the Prophet (pbuh)
5	Fig 33	Urdu	Char yar Hazrat Abu Bakr Sadeeq RA Hazrat Umer-e-Farooq RA Hazrat Usman-e-Ghani RA Hazrat Ali al-Murtaza RA

6. Fig 36 In Urdu

During the reign of Mughal emperor Akbar, a palace was under construction in the for his daughter Sultan Begum. One day, Shah Jamal observed the laborers engaged in building the palace and felt compelled to build a "Damdama" (a temporary fort) of himself. Approaching the laborers, he proposed a deal: if they agreed to construct the damdama, he would pay them three times the amount they were currently receiving from the princess. However, Hazrat Baba Shah Jamal persisted, suggesting that they work on the damdama during the night and continue with the palace construction during the day.

The seven story structure of the damdma brought some complaints from the princess who claimed it hindered the privacy of her palace. On her request one night Baba performed his dhamal (ecstatic whirling), and each floor collapsed until only two floors remained.

7. Fig 37

Arabic and urdu translation

Qasida Ghosia

Qasida-e-Ghosia, is a renowned Arabic poem composed by Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, a prominent Islamic scholar and Sufi saint of the 11th century. Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, also known as Ghous-ul-Azam, was the founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi order. The qasida (poem) is composed in Arabic and consists of several verses that express deep love, reverence, and praise for Allah, Prophet Muhammad, and Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani.

Intoxicated by love and affection, they made me drink from the cup of union, So I said to my wine, 'Return to me.' You too, embrace my greatness and become encompassed in my state, For you too are among my chosen ones. You have drunk from the bounty after intoxication, And you have not declined from heights to lowliness. Your station is lofty, a gathering of the great, But my station is higher than yours, beyond estimation. I stand alone in the presence of proximity, Divine majesty supports and suffices me. Every falcon seeks its prey, as do the companions of every sage, And who can equal the status of those men? I wore a robe adorned with the threads of determination, And excellence has adorned me with a crown. I unraveled an ancient secret, And it has lessened and granted me my request. I controlled the reins of destiny, So judge fairly in all circumstances.

Even if I throw my secret into the seas, Every wave will rise and recede. Even if I throw my secret into the mountains, They will crumble and scatter between the valleys. Even if I throw my secret into the fire, It will smolder and dissipate from my essence. Even if I throw my secret onto a corpse, It will rise by the power of the exalted Lord. There is no month or year That passes and perishes except it returns. You inform me of what is to come and what is happening, So decrease my arguments and teach me. My devoted one, long for me and desire me, And do as you wish, for silence is supreme. Do not fear, my Lord is Allah, He has

granted me exaltation above the highest. Repent to me in the heavens and on earth, And witness the rising of bliss that has begun. The dominion of Allah is beneath my authority, And time has already bowed before my heart. I have surveyed the lands of Allah entirely, Like a halter upon the neck of a horse. I have studied knowledge until I became a pole, And I have surpassed happiness from among the heights. So whoever is in the allies of Allah like me, And whoever is in knowledge and mastery like me, Their men are fasting in their desires, And in the darkness of nights, they are like the full moon. And every saint has a stride, but as for me, I am on the footstep of the Prophet, the hero of Badr. My devoted one, do not fear, for I am A great warrior in the battlefield of combat. I am the champion of the Muhayudin, the one who meets me, And the flag is upon the heads of the mountains. I am Hasan, and my destination is clear, And my footsteps are upon the necks of men. And I am Abdul Qadir, famous in name, And my grandfather is the possessor of the perfect eye."

<https://ghous-azam.blogspot.com/p/qaseeda-ghausia.html>

Conclusion:

My visits to Baba Shah Jamal's shrine provided valuable insights into the shrine's physical layout, rituals, and the challenges I encountered during my attempts to engage with the custodians. The shrine's location, inconspicuous entrance, and lack of parking presented initial obstacles, and it was only on my second visit that I was able to explore the shrine fully. The casual atmosphere of the shrine, with shops at the entrance and courtyards for congregational prayers, reflected the blend of religious and cultural practices that took place there.

The interview with the guide revealed the cautious approach taken when discussing the shrine's beliefs and practices. The guide emphasized his role as an appointed custodian rather than a deeply spiritual individual, and he was careful not to provide detailed information about certain practices, attributing them to others instead. The language used by the guide himself felt unnatural to his self as he would mainly talk in Urdu and on and off would add Punjabi words. This reserved demeanor and reluctance to discuss certain aspects of the shrine's traditions could be attributed to the close-knit community of regular visitors who may view outsiders with caution.

The folklore surrounding Baba Shah Jamal, although not officially documented, played a significant role in the shrine's narrative. Stories about the construction of the shrine and the saint's interactions with individuals, such as the tale of the Hindu couple and the garland of apples, contributed to the shrine's cultural significance. Rituals like the mehfiles and langar distribution on Thursdays showcased the Sufi influences and provided opportunities for communal engagement and acts of charity.

While the shrine did not have a specific "kalaam" associated with it, the mehfiles held on Thursdays utilized Sufiana kalaam to praise the saint and God. The guide highlighted the importance of the drumming and dhamal dance during these gatherings, connecting them to the saint's trance and the collapse of the shrine's structure in the past. The shrine's true language was found in the ethereal realm beyond words, where the beat of drums and the swirling dance conveyed a spirituality that could not be encapsulated by written or spoken

language. It was a language that spoke directly to the souls of those present, forging a powerful connection to the divine and fostering a sense of unity among the worshippers.

Overall, my experiences at Baba Shah Jamal's shrine shed light on the complexity of religious and cultural practices intertwined in such sacred spaces. The custodians' cautious approach to sharing information and the sense of exclusivity among regular visitors highlighted the need for sensitivity and understanding when engaging with religious communities. Through these experiences, I gained a deeper understanding of the role of shrines in connecting people to their spiritual beliefs and traditions.



Fig.1. Entrance to the street. Monday 11:11am



Fig.2 Stairway to the Shrine.



Fig.3 the left staircase is for women's entrance into the women's side of the shrine. The right staircase is for men.



Fig.4 the shops along the men's entrance.



Fig.5 along the right side of the shrine's entrance wall. Friday 2:39pm



Fig.6 shops along the right wall of the shrine



Fig.7 along the left wall of the shrine.



Fig.8 courtyard on men's side. The courtyard on the left is an extension for the masjid.
Monday 7:55pm



Fig.9. masjid

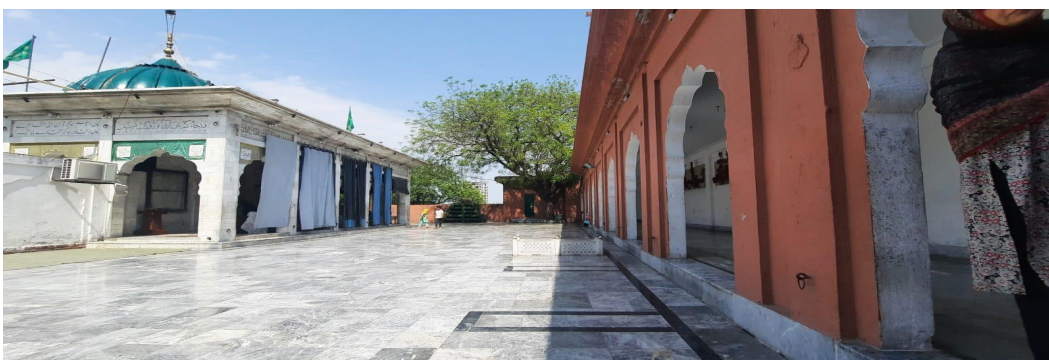


Fig.10 courtyard on women's side.

Friday 2:21 pm



Fig.11 partition wall from women's side entrance to women side



Fig 13 oil lamp shelve women's side



fig 12



Fig. 14 lamp shelve men's side

fig 15 grave of sheikh tahirud deen nakshbandi in the women's side



Fig16saltbowl
salt bowl



Fig 18 sacred tree
tied to



Fig 19 taweez and threads
Tied to the tree



Fig 20 bangles and
plastic bags
the tree

Fig 17



on women's side.

fig 21 book shelf



Fig 22 Door to the tomb
tomb
from women side

Fig 23: windows to the



Fig24 marble gridded
windows
Women's side





Fig 25 second entrance



fig. 26 main entrance



Fig 27 second door to the tomb



fig 28 windows on the men's side of the tomb



Fig 29 Inside of the tomb. Monday 8:04pm

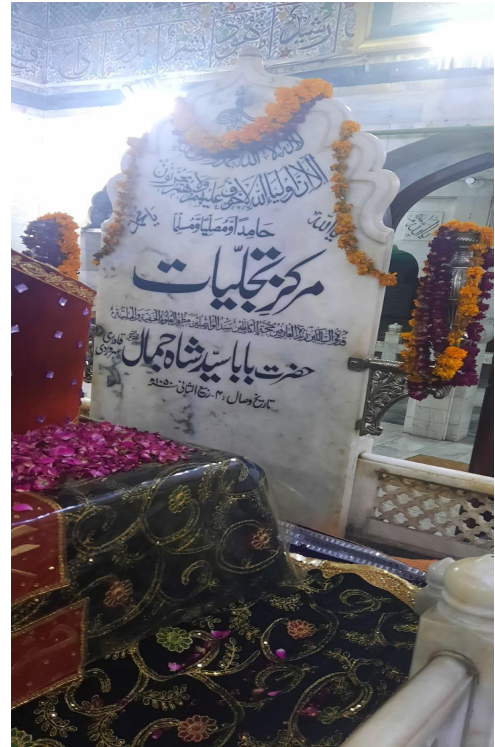


Fig 30 chandelier and inscriptions on the tomb walls



fig 31 grave of Shah Jamal's adopted son Fakhruddin
Friday 2:09 pm



Fig 32 same grave on Monday 8:01 pm

Fig 33

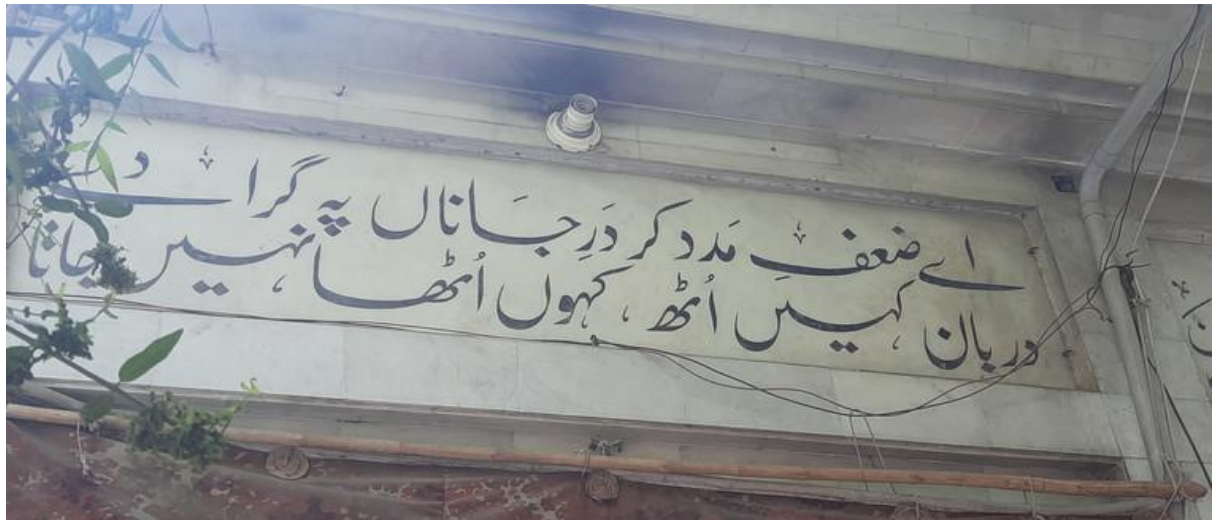


Fig 34

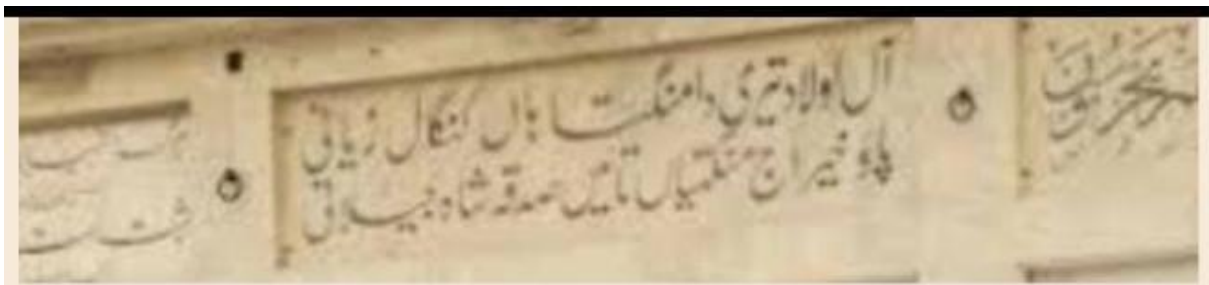


Fig 35

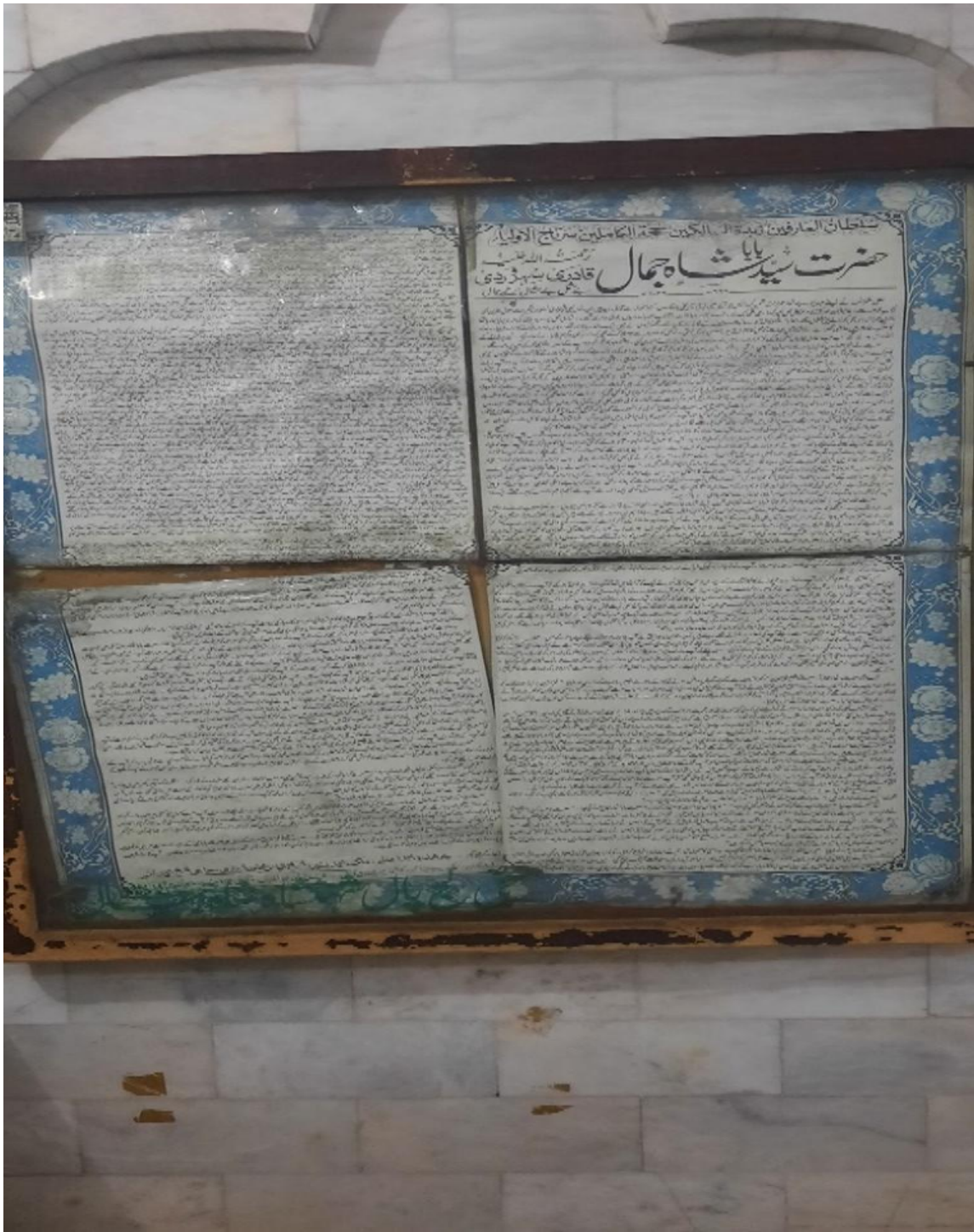


Fig 36 story of Baba Shah Jamal

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