The subject of this paper is a traditional visit to the graves of Sufi saints, the ziyārat, at a particular shrine in contemporary Hyderabad. One aim is to highlight, through a symbolic analysis, the peculiarities of this type of sacred journey. Another aim is to discuss the symbolic transformations that pilgrims undergo in the pilgrimage process. The paper concludes that the ziyārat can be viewed as a journey, undertaken by a person in quest of a place that embodies a valued ideal, from an imperfect and mundane environment to a perfect one. Ritual hints at the superiority of the moral universe embodied by the saint over the system that rules secular society, through the softening of social divisions among participants, and through emphasis on status differences in the internal hierarchy of the shrine.

1. THE SUFI SAINTS CULT IN SOUTH ASIA: THE ZIYĀRAT

This article analyses a particular aspect of Indian Sufism: the visit to graves of the saints. In particular, it focuses on the area of the city of Hyderabad, the capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh, spreading across the Deccan plateau. Hyderabad was founded in 1590–91, on the right side of the river Musi, by Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (1580–1612), the fifth

* I wish to thank Prof. Demetrio Giordani for his comments and for biographical material on Šams al-Dīn Mirzā Mazhar Gān-i Gānān; Fabrizio Speziale for reading the first draft of the paper and for his valuable suggestions; and Tommaso Schneider for the editing.
sultan of the Quṭb Šah dynasty (1518–1687), who made it the capital of the Golkunda sultanate. The earlier capital, Golkunda, was built on a granite mountain surrounded by a plateau, where there was a Hindu fort, periodically renewed by the sultans, and turned into a massive fortress.¹

In this part of the Subcontinent the Sufis were decisive in the spread of Islam, and their work preceded the formal establishment of the Muslim political power of the Delhi sultans, which took place from the second half of the XIV century (Siddiqi 1975). The masters, who came mainly from northern India, Iran, or the Middle East, had a significant role in shaping the Deccani culture. It has been recognized that they promoted the integration of the various social groups, especially through the establishment of their shrines, which became meeting-points of different religions and languages (Naqvi 1993; Speziale 2002; Green 2006). Sufis notably contributed to the cultural and linguistic development of Deccan Muslim society, and influenced both the masses and the courts of local sultans (Siddiqi 1975; 1989; Naqvi 1993; Basheer 2001; Green 2006).

It is important to note that, since the colonial time, rituals and beliefs that occur in Sufi shrines, along with saints’ intercessory and miraculous powers, which had been recognised by Islamic orthodoxy during the classical period of Islam, came to be strongly questioned in the Subcontinent. A bitter criticism against Sufism grew, under the influence of the fundamentalist ideologies coming from Wahhabi central Arabia, and it was chiefly directed towards two points: the excessive veneration of the Sufi masters, and the dead saints’ cult. From the beginning of the XIX century, the Subcontinent witnessed the circulation of contentious writings against the belief in the saints’ intercession and the rituals taking place at their graves, which were assimilated to pagan rites. From the second half of the XIX century, among Muslim modernist and fundamentalist movements, the college of Deoband and Ahl-i Hadith (People of Hadith) stood out for their religious activism.² Presently the saints’ cult is still a remarkably widespread social practice in Hyderabad. However, it has to be stated that

1. The capital was moved because of demographic and economic issues, and partly because of the proximity to the grave of Šah Čarag (m. 1543), a saint from Najaf, who lived among Brahmans and gained a large following in the area (Speziale 2002, 58).
the disputes of religious reformist and traditionalist movements, along with the spread of the western, secular and rationalistic way of thinking, represent a challenge to this type of piety (Liebeskind 1998).

This paper analyses, from a symbolic perspective, the visit to a Sufi master’s grave, which, in Persian language, is called ziyārat. In South Asia the building complex rising from saints’ graves is called dargāh, ‘royal court’. The Persian word hints at the acknowledgement of the saint’s spiritual authority, who, symbolically, is viewed as a sultan.⁢ As regards the descriptive level, the ziyārat in South Asia is broadly documented in literature, concerning both past (cf. Subhan 1960, 107–08; Ernst 1993; Ernst and Lawrence 2002, 86–104) and contemporary pilgrimages (cf. Liebeskind 1998, 86–120; Werbner and Basu 1998; Speziale 2002; Troll 2003; Suvorova 2004, 19–22), though not always in detail.⁴ With reference to the phenomenology of this particular ritual, extremely popular among the dargāh of Hyderabad, literature is quite rich in cases, but perhaps something more can still be written regarding its symbolic analysis.

All this considered, this paper tries to outline the peculiarity of this sacred journey in Indian Sufism, describing the ziyārat in a specific dargāh of contemporary Hyderabad.⁵ The concept of sacred journey is a complex one and contains a variety of practices, images and meanings. Complexity

---

3. The dargāh works mostly as a place for preservation and transmission of Islamic tradition and Sufi esoteric knowledge, as a place for the cure of physical and mental ailment, or as an intercession centre (Gaborieau 2003a, 84–87). Intercession is exercised both by dead saints (with or without the mediation of the shrine caretakers), and by living masters. Devotees believe that Sufi masters, because of their proximity to Allah, are endowed with barakat (Divine blessing, spiritual power), an attribute that, after the masters’ death, moves to their burial place, turning it into a sacred centre.

4. Different authors highlighted the varied rituals of the ziyārat (cf. Ernst 1993; Ernst and Lawrence 2002; Speziale 2002; Troll 2003), increasing the academic knowledge of this type of pilgrimage. The vows to the saints and the intercessory petitions of pilgrims are largely discussed (Liebeskind 1998, 86; 228; 237; Speziale 2002; Troll 2003). Much has been written on the therapeutic element in the ziyārat (Werbner and Basu 1998; Speziale 2002; Troll 2003), on the traditional regulation of pilgrim’s behaviour (ādāb) (Böwering 1984; Ernst 1993; Liebeskind 1998, 87–93; Ernst and Lawrence 2002; Troll 2003), or on the fact that the ziyārat, for many poor men and women, is a symbolic substitute for the Pilgrimage to Mecca, that is inaccessible due to their economic condition (Meri et al. 2004, ziyāra; Suvorova 2004, 19).

5. The term sacred has been problematic since the theoretic applications of Durkheim; here I use it, following Morinis (1992, 2), “to refer specifically to the valued ideals that are the image of perfection that a human being sets out to encounter or become on a pilgrimage”.

---

203
results primarily from the multiple meanings of the symbols; meanings originate both amongst participants and in the religious-cultural tradition.6

After this brief introduction (§§ 1 and 1.1), the second paragraph provides a description of the ziyārat in the tradition of Indian Sufism, and within the devotees’ practice. The third paragraph attempts a preliminary, not comprehensive, analysis of this type of pilgrimage, relating the cultural model of meaning to the individual model, and using the categories ‘journey’, ‘sacred places’ and ‘pilgrims’, put forward by Morinis (1992). The fourth paragraph underscores the centrality of movement in the sacred journey; in addition, it connects ritual movement to metaphoric movement and discusses the symbolic transformations that pilgrims undergo.

1.1 Methodological issues

Study of pilgrimage, in anthropology, is a recent interest, but it generated a number of important works.7 Victor Turner (1974; Turner and Turner 1997 [1978]) is owed credit for bringing anthropological interest on pilgrimage as a central subject of study, and in spite of the legitimate criticism that ensued, his work has been seminal and has highlighted noteworthy aspects of this research subject.

Turner (1969) states that pilgrimage is similar to a rite of passage: to the category of pilgrimage he applies a modified version of his theory on ritual process he developed following van Gennep. Turner’s idea is that pilgrimage entails, for the pilgrim, coming out from his own daily environment, born of rigid social roles and statuses; access to a dimension in which social values and regulations can be questioned; and finally the return to ordinary life. During pilgrimage, participants have the chance to live the communitas experience, namely a direct and spontaneous relationship between equals, deprived of structural attributes (Turner 1969, 131; 1974, 202).8 In pilgrimage a rejection of the symbolic structures which rule within the social system occurs, not through the absence of any struc-

---

6. In this article, the worth of the historic dimension and the influence of social contest, in the study of a pilgrimage tradition, are acknowledged, but, for reasons of brevity, these two facets are not analysed in depth.

7. For a review of the different theoretical approaches to the study of pilgrimage see Morinis (1984, 233–75; 1992, 7–9).

8. The pilgrimage ritual process is parted in the typical three phases of the rites of passage: separation, limen, aggregation, which represent the following sequence: structure, anti-structure, structure.
ture or division, but through symbolic structures that could be defined ‘alternative’. Indeed, though pilgrimage is anti-structural, it does not bring about an ‘existential communitas’, it does not completely erase structural divisions, it softens them (Turner 1974, 169; 207; Turner and Turner 1997 [1978], ch. 4). Pilgrimage is a form of “normative communitas”, that is the deconstructing experience of spontaneous communitas “[…] organized into a perduring social system” (Turner 1969, 132).

The hypotheses expressed by the Turners have been put to test in different ethnographic contexts (cf. Greenfield 1990, Eade and Sallnow 1991, 4–5; Morinis 1992, 8), but a large number of researches did not confirm them. Morinis (1984, 274) maintains that the Turners’ conclusions can be reassessed, dissociating their theory in two parts: the anti-structural journey can be discussed separately from the discourse on communitas. Eade and Sallnow’s (1991) paradigm exercised substantive influence on recent researches in pilgrimage studies. Their deconstructivist approach draws attention to the heterogeneity of pilgrimage. They put forward a vision of pilgrimage principally as an arena for religious and secular discourses, seen as contrasting and competing (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 2–3). They claim that pilgrimage is pervaded by utilitarian and self-interested symbolic exchanges, from which money and market ideology are not excluded (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 24–25).

Perhaps the most programmatic approach to the analysis of pilgrimages is put forward by Morinis (1992), in the introduction to the book Sacred Journey. The author outlines four “planes” of pilgrimage: Ego Plane, Cultural Plane, Social Plane, Physical Plane, that, however, cannot be clearly distinguished (Morinis 1992, 22–25). The author interprets these planes of pilgrimage through a matrix made of two poles, always culturally constructed, and movement between them (Morinis 1992, 25–26). The poles are the ‘Familiar’ and the ‘Other’, that represent the imperfect, “[…]
which is the all-too-well-known circumstances of human life”, and the
defect, “[…] which is the unknown ideal” (Morinis 1992, 25). On these
two poles are built the following binary oppositions: known/mysterious,
human/divine, social/ideal, imperfect/perfect, mundane/miraculous.¹¹
According to this theory the key to pilgrimage process is movement
between these two poles; the pole of Otherness is set out of time and space.
Following Morinis (1992, 9), it seems reasonable to re-evaluate Turner’s
analysis, which, in spite of the questionable facets of his theory, high-
lighted, encouraging the exploration of both structure and experience,
“[…] the two pronged approach the study of pilgrimage requires”.¹²

Coleman and Elsner (1995, 205) remark, like Morinis (1992, 15–16), the
relevance of the category of journey and of the element of movement, that
Eade and Sallnow neglected.¹³ Morinis (1992, 15) claims that movement “[…]
encompasses significant aspects of meaning and experiences that are central
to sacred journeys”. This idea is expressed also by Coleman and Eade (2004,
3), who analyse “[…] various forms of motion — embodied, imagined, meta-
phorical — as constitutive elements of many pilgrimages”. They examine
movement to, movement at and movement from sacred sites and present
pilgrimages as kinetic rituals, following Edith Turner (1997 [1978], xiii). The

¹¹. Clancy-Smith (1990, 210), analysing ziyārat in the Algerian Kabiliya, mentions
a movement from unhappiness to happiness in this world and from damnation to salva-
tion in the next.

¹². The notions of the pilgrimage ‘social field’ and ‘informational field’ (cf. Morinis
205). Other positive reflection on Turners’ conclusions, are put forward by Coleman and
Elsner (1995, 202; 13), and Coleman (2002, 356–61), who observe varied analogies between
Turnerian paradigm and that of Eade and Sallnow, in this way putting in perspective the
ground-breaking reach that generally was ascribed to Eade and Sallnow’s theory. The
theoretical approach put forward by Coleman (2002, 363), suggests to look upon historical
and social dynamics, as well as ritual action, rather than focus on the institution itself as
firmly bounded category of action. He shows interest in an emic understanding of pilgri-
mage and to relationship between movement and memory (Coleman 2002, 364).

¹³. Coleman and Elsner’s approach does not bring about substantial theoretical
innovations, but arouses important reflections on crucial aspects previously highlighted
by other authors, such as, for instance, the cultural variability of the content of the varied
pilgrimage traditions and the significance of devotees experience expressed by Morinis,
or the Turnerian journey from a familiar environment to a sacred centre and return. The
statement that “sacred journey outside one’s own culture” is a distinguishing feature of
the pilgrimage development in world religions, can not be deemed valid, at least for what
concerns Islam. Indeed, while we could discuss the pertinence of this feature to Hajj, this
is not the case for the practice of the ziyārat, which holds a strong local character.
significance of movement can be traced also to more general theoretical approaches. As an instance, the anthropologist David Parkin (1992), views the ritual as always connected to movement and directionality. This view emphasizes the ritual as concerned with directionality and as making up a journey undertaken by participants, who find themselves within a spatial relationship to each other (Parkin 1992, 16). This paper agrees with Parkin, who claims the legitimacy to observe the use of space both at physical and at metaphorical level. As he states (Parkin 1992, 23), directional and spatial metaphors account for positioning and directions taken by ritual action; for movements and passages that occur symbolically; and for the way participants are placed and distributed, both physically and metaphorically.

Another significant recent contribution to the study of pilgrimage is that developed by Pnina Werbner, in her research on a Sufi saint cult in north-western Pakistan. The author notices that pilgrimage, within this particular setting, is a highly structured process of metaphoric and metonymic transformation, which can be labelled, in Turner’s words, as ‘counter-structure’. She holds as valid a central point of Turner’s theory, namely that pilgrimage centres “[…] produce sacred geographies where alternative, non-temporal and non-administrative ethical orders are ritually embodied and enacted” (Werbner 2003, 19). Following R. Werbner (1989, 261–62; 296), and Eade and Sallnow (1991, 24–25), she claims that symbolic transformations which pilgrims undergo enact a sacred exchange between two symbolic worlds, which in this way come in contact (Werbner 2003, 101).

14 One of the most recent reassessments of pilgrimage studies is attempted by Coleman and Eade (2004), who stress the significance of the cultural, social and economic dimensions of pilgrimages (Coleman and Eade 2004, 6). They seek to understand pilgrims’ own models of pilgrimage, and claim that this journey is not separated from other aspects of social, cultural and religious life (Coleman and Eade 2004, 17). In their view, pilgrimage can be seen as involving “[…] the institutionalisation (or even domestication) of mobility in physical, metaphorical and/or ideological terms” (Coleman and Eade 2004, 17). They aim at going into pilgrimages from one perspective, that of movement. However, they admit that “[…]
there are many other ways to examine sacred travel in relation to wider social theory” (Coleman and Eade 2004, 18). Coleman and Eade (2004, 18) seek to “[...] explore the interfaces between forms and representations of mobility within diverse cultural and religious contexts”.

The view expressed in this paper agrees with the approach, based on structure and experience, contained in Turner’s methodology, though the analogy with rites of passage, along with discourses on liminality and communitas cannot be deemed valid for what concerns the ziyārat in contemporary Hyderabad. Following the theoretical perspective put forward by Morinis (1992), this article acknowledges the significance of different planes (experiential, cultural, social, physical) in the analysis of a complex social practice such as pilgrimage; however these are not discussed in depth, since the aim is mainly a symbolic analysis.15 The standpoint focuses on a particular shrine located in Pahari Šaríf, a district in the outskirts of Hyderabad. The shrine houses an Iraqi saint’s grave, Sayyed Bābā Šarf al-Dīn Suhrawardi (d. 1286), who is held to have been the first sufi to settle in the area, three centuries before the city was founded (cf. Speziale 2001).16

2. THE ZIYĀRAT IN THE MASTERS’ WORDS

The performance and experience of pilgrimage are influenced both by institutional patterns and individual thought and behaviour (Morinis 1984, 5). Since in Islam there is not a centralised clergy, and since neither in Qurʾān, nor in Hadith, detailed ritual prescription about the ziyārat can be found, it can be useful to have a look to the writings of outstanding Sufi masters, who embody the highest ideals of the religious tradition, in order to understand the place this practice occupies within the Sufi and Islamic theological-literary universe.

15. Morinis’ reflections proved broadly influential in recent works on pilgrimage. For instance, the stress on movement, and the idea of movement as a cultural performance, contained in Coleman and Eade’s (2004, 17) introduction, can be traced to Morinis (1992). Coleman and Eade (2004, 1–25) express the need to understand the participants’ own model of sacred journey, the need to place pilgrimage within wider semantic and theoretical discourses, and the need to consider pilgrimage’s social, cultural and historical context. All these needs were earlier stated by Morinis (1984; 1992).

16. The data have been collected during a period of field-work research, carried out for my graduation thesis, from January to May 2006 in the city of Hyderabad. In Hyderabad I attended regularly the Pahari Šaríf dargāh, and I visited occasionally the main dargāhs of the city, especially on the occasion of their weekly, monthly and annual ceremonies.
The great sufi Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), in his *Ihyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, expressed himself in favour of the legitimacy of the *ziyārat* and explained its correct meaning. According to him, the practice does not refer only to the visit to saints’ graves, but encompasses also pilgrimages to places defined by the presence of holiness. Muslims hold a universal awareness of the holiness of the dead, which manifests itself in the devotee’s physical and spiritual contact with the place of burial. Al-Ghazālī emphasizes the universality of experience of self-surrender and total connection with the dead, experienced by the devotee during the *ziyārat*. In his account, the main assumption is that the *ziyārat* should take place within the limits set by Prophet Muḥammad. The aims are contemplation, remembering death and obtaining blessings. However, the devotee can gain blessings only through personal contemplation and supplication, and not through the dead saint (cf. Al-Ghazālī 1955).

The celebrated saint Hazrat Nizamuddīn Awliya (d. 1325) of Delhi, touchstone not only for Čišṭi, but also for all Sufis of the Indian Sub-continent, talks about the *ziyārat* in the *Fawaʾid al-Fuad*, through two anecdotes. The Šayḥ tells that one time:

> My mother (God’s mercy be upon her) fell ill. She asked me to visit the graves of such and such *šahīd* [martyrs] and *wāli* [saints]. As directed, I visited those graves and told her about the visits on my return. Each time when I did that, I found her illness a bit alleviated, and a marked relief was visible. (Faruqi 1995, 159–60)

In another occasion, he relates that his master, Šayḥ Farīd al-Dīn *Ganj-i-Šakar* (d. 1265), when he was ill, sent the disciple various times to visit the graves of some martyrs buried around Ajodhan.

> After visiting the graves when he returned to his presence, the Šayḥ observed that his prayers had produced no effect, meaning that he felt no relief in his illness. He was unable to respond to the remark, but one of his friends, ʿAlī Biḥārī, standing at a distance, spoke out that they were deficient and imperfect and the Šayḥ was perfect in his spirituality. How could the prayers of the imperfect in respect of the perfect be effective? As the Šayḥ could not hear him, he had to repeat what had been said. The Šayḥ told him that he had prayed to God to give him whatever he wished to have. Then, he gave his staff to him and asked him and Badruddīn Išāq (God’s mercy be upon him) to retire to such and such place and busy themselves with the remembrance of God. Both of them did accordingly.
Next day when they presented themselves to him, his remark was that it was good and excellent. (Faruqi 1995, 160)

Another prominent master, Šayḫ Šarafuddīn bin Yahya Maneri (d. 1381), the most renowned saint of Bihar, wrote positively about the practice of ziyārat. In his Makhtubat-i-Sādi, he states that there are huge benefits for people who visit cemeteries, both the saints’ graves, and those of ordinary believers. The Šayḫ relates a saying of the Prophet Muḥammad: “Visiting tombs causes tenderness to take root in hearts; tears flow freely; and one is reminded of one’s last end” (Maneri 1980, 88). Furthermore he reports that:

Once a man asked for advice about his hardness of heart. He was told to look at cemeteries and to take them as examples, weeping and wailing the whole time. It is profitable to make a visit each week, as Muhammad was commanded: ‘O Prophet, visit the graveyard every Friday!’ And God alone knows what benefits derive from such visits and what they really mean. (Maneri 1980, 88)

The Šayḫ gives also advices on how to make the ziyārat; for instance when one gets in the cemetery, one should remove his/her shoes, then, with the face aimed at the grave, one should recite the prayers for the dead, asking God to bestow the merit of recitation to the dead.

Even among the great masters of Indian Naqšbandiyya, the visit to saints’ graves is an ascertained practice and a source of immense spiritual benefits, mainly because focussing on the spirit of a particular dead saint increases their spiritual power (cf. Schiemmel 2003, 175). As an instance, concerning the eminent Naqšbandi Šams al-Dīn Mīrzā Mazhar Ĝān-i Ĝānān (d. 1781), high-profile mystic of the XVIII century Delhi, it is told that after his first master’s death (Nūr Muḥammad Bagāyūnī, d. 1722), he

[…] for six years stuck around his grave, continuing the initiatory journey led by the non-corporeal presence of the master; thanks to his spiritual concentration (tawaqquhāt-i rūhānī), he went beyond the circle of Attributes, and beyond the circle of Modes and their Origins, he gained access to the theophanies of the Divine name Huwa al-bātin and achieved the supreme Holiness station. Ṭalī Kašmīrī, a ḥalīf of Muḥammad Siddīq, said it to him, but, during a vision, Nūr Muḥammad told him: “Divine perfections are endless. Life is finite and it has to be completely dedicated to the Search of Him. To draw benefit from graves is not the rule, it is necessary to go to a living master in order to gain the proximity stations”.
It was only after repeated visions that instructed him in that way, that Mazhar started to search for a guide. (Ghulām ‘Alī 1993, 28–30)

From these anecdotes it can be gathered that graves are places in which saints’ spiritual power and influence keep working even after their physical death. For many Sufis, graves represent a means to gain access to the barakat of particular saints, and to go forward in their spiritual path. As Nūr Muḥammad affirmed that “[…] to draw benefit from graves is not the rule”, it can be legitimate to suppose that the practice was quite customary for the young Mīrzā Mazhar and his contemporaries.

The last quotation highlights another significant reality: this type of pilgrimage represents the extension, beyond time limits, of the relationship between a Sufi master and his disciples and devotees. It is the extension of the master-disciple relationship and of the practice of ‘meeting the šayḥ’ (šayḥ se milnā), namely the visit to a master, to pay respect to him, to get his spiritual teachings, to obtain his blessings, to ask for his therapeutic assistance or for help in any matter of daily life (cf. Robinson 1984, 155; 168; Tapper 1990, 236–7; Ernst 1993; Sharīf 1999 [1906], 297; Ernst and Lawrence 2002, 95).

Undoubtedly these words and anecdotes are sketchy, but they can contribute to outline the notion of the ziyrāt in the tradition of Indian Sufism. To summarize, the aims of the ziyrāt are contemplation, recollection of death, quest for blessings, that can lead to spiritual and material benefits (especially cure of illnesses), and supplicate God on behalf of the dead. Ritual behaviour is not described in detail, what matters is that it should remain within the limits of Sunna. One should remove his or her shoes before approaching the tomb, as a mark of respect, and recite the prayers for the dead, whose merit goes to the dead. As regards pilgrims, the experience of self-surrender and total connection with the dead is mentioned, and it is related that the ziyrāt promotes feelings of sweetness and tenderness, even in the hardest hearts.

2.1 THE ZIYĀRAT IN THE DARGĀH
OF SAYYED BĀBĀ ŠARF AL-DĪN SUHRAWARDĪ

Sharīf (1999 [1906]), in his pioneering work on culture and customs of Muslims in India, describe the ziyrāt as a widespread practice in the Subcontinent, at the beginning of XX century, both for the saints’ graves and those of relatives and friends.

The city of Hyderabad is scattered with dargāh and the ziyrāt is a common custom, not only among Muslims, but even among Hindus. One of the most visited dargāh is that of Sayyed Bābā Šarf al-Dīn Suhrawardī,
regarded amongst the most influential and cherished saints of the city, known also as Sultan-ul-Deccan (sultan of the Deccan). Sayyed Bābā Šarf al-Dīn was born in Iraq in 1185, came from a sayyid family, whose silsila originated from Jaʿfar al-Sādiq (the sixth šīʿa Imām). He was initiated into Sufism by Šayḫ Šihab al-Dīn Abu Hafs Omar Suhrawardī (d. 1234), in the tariqa (Sufi Order) Suhrawardīyya, in Baghdad. According to hagiographical sources (cf. Speziale 2001), after obtaining hilāfat from his master, he came in this area, located not far from the Warangal fort, along with a following of sixty or seventy fuqara (sing. faqīr), among which his brother Šihab al-Dīn and his nephew Farid al-Dīn, or even more brothers, according to a local tradition. He settled on the top of a hill, where there was a Hindu temple. The region was under the rule of the Kakatiya dynasty rājā (1083–1323) of Warangal, and in the second half of the XIV century was annexed by the Bahmani kingdom sultans (1347–1527), who ushered in the long period of Muslim domination over Deccan (Speziale 2001). The saint spent here all his life until 1286, when he passed away, at the age of 101. Speziale (2001) mentions various anecdotes and tales on his life that stress his care for people’s problems, the relationships with the Hindus of the area, and several miracles that are ascribed to him. According to hagiography, the Bābā lived peacefully among Hindus and had numerous Hindu disci-

17. According to Islamic calendar, the 16th of the month ša‘ban of 586.
18. This term refers to descent from Prophet Muhammad.
19. In this particular case, ‘genealogical chain’.
20. Nephew of Šayḫ Ziya’u’d-Dīn Abu Najib Suhrawardī (d. 1168), the founder of the tariqa Suhrawardīyya, laid the foundations for the consolidation of the order. Abu Hafs was born in 1145, studied theology under Šayḫ ʿAbd al-Qadir Jilani (the founder of the tariqa Qadiriyya) and under other eminent theologians, and was initiated to Sufism by the uncle Abu Najib; in Baghdad he met Khwaja Muʿin al-Dīn Čišti (who introduced the tariqa Čištiyya in India), who came from Khurasan. At his times, Šayḫ Šihab al-Dīn was deemed Baghdad’s most outstanding Sufi, and mystics from all corners of Muslim world sought his suggestions in spiritual matters (Subhan 1960, 185). He held the office of ambassador for ḥalīfa an-Nasir (1179–1225) at the Egyptian and Quniya courts, and an-Nasir built a massive ḥanqah for him and his family. The Šayḫ visited important Sufi centres travelling across Iran, Khurasan, Transoxania, Syria and Turkey. He made several pilgrimages to Mecca and died in 1234 (cf. Rizvi 2003, I, 88). Šayḫ Šihab al-Dīn is the author of many books, among which the famous Awarif al-maʿārif, which became one of the most studied texts in the Sufi circles.
21. Vicegerency, the office of vicegerent, bestowed by a saint on particularly spiritually gifted disciples.
22. Beggar ascetics, who combine the quest for mystical union with Allah, with the abandonment of earthly goods and pleasures.
23. According to Islamic calendar, the 19th of the month ša‘ban of 687.
ples; he is portrayed as an extremely pious, ascetic, generous man, and as a distinguished healer. It is told that he spent his nights in prayer, and after the morning prayer, devoted his time to the sick (Speziale 2002). Sayyed Bābā Šarf al-Dīn, unlike his spiritual brothers who settled in the north, did not firmly establish the order and did not lay the foundations for an organised development of a cult. Other ُحُلَفَ (vicegerents) of Šayḫ Šihab al-Dīn Suhrawardi, who correspond to the first large wave of Suhrawardi saints who came in the Subcontinent, durably established the order and distinguished themselves by their literary works. Among them we can mention Baha al-Dīn Zakariya (d. 1249), who introduced the Suhrawardiyya in India, and gained a highly influential position in Multan; Qaẓi Hamid al-Dīn Nagawri (d. 1244), who settled in Delhi; and Jalal al-Dīn Tabrizi (d. 1244), who developed his teaching and praying centre in Bengal.24

Sayyed Bābā Šarf al-Dīn did not leave any written text and no biography compiled by someone of his disciples reached us. He did not appoint a successor, and in Pahari Šarif it is not possible to meet any living representative of the saint, but there are only caretakers (ُحَدِيم, sing. ُحَدِيح), who are part of a committee appointed to manage the dargāh.

Morinis (1992, 14–15) claims that pilgrimages can be placed along a continuum between two poles: a highly formalised behaviour, some times obligatory, and a more informal behaviour. Pilgrimage to Mecca certainly is closer to the first pole, while the ziyyārat to the second one. The ziyyārat can be defined a quite informal pilgrimage, since it has not to be performed at a predetermined time and occurs, in praxis, in several ritual variations, which depend on individual thought and behaviour, all of which are tolerated, provided that they remain within the limits demarcated by ādāb (cf. Ernst 1993). Generally it involves the individual or his/her family group. In the dargāh there are also highly formalised rituals, which take place daily (the five canonical prayers, or the ُحَدِیم), monthly (collective gatherings of dhikr or samāʾ),26 or annually (the ʿurs),27 and have a more


25. Persian word which literally means ‘service’; in Deccan it refers to the ritual of cleaning of a Sufi saint’s tomb.

26. Dhikr is a typical Sufi spiritual exercise which consists in the repetition of specific formulas and names of Allah, and often includes bodily movements and breath control techniques. The term samāʾ refers to the listening of Sufi music.

27. The term ʿurs, of Arab origin, literally means ‘wedding’, and refers to the annual death anniversary of a Sufi saint.
standardized programme. These rituals often involve a great number of people, which can be remarkable during the annual anniversary.

The *ziyārat* is principally an individual ritual, which devotees perform alone or together with some relative or friend. Tradition does not prescribe particular days or hours to visit the saint; in Pahari Šarif devotees can come at any time, the *dargāh* being twenty-four hours open, while most of the *dargāh* of the city close before or after the night prayer. As stated, the performance of the *ziyārat* is not standardized, and involves varied elements that can occur in different combinations; variations depend on pilgrims (cf. Ernst 1993). Observing the numerous pilgrimages that are performed daily at Pahari Šarif, it is difficult to isolate a single ritual pattern.

1. One element concerns preparation to the meeting with the *Bābā*, which requires ritual purity. Unless one is found to be in that state of purity, when people arrive at the *dargāh*, they do the ritual ablutions (*wuḍū*): in the pond close to the *dargāh*, or at the water taps.  

2. Another element is the offering to the saint. According to tradition, devotees offer, agreeably to their means, a gift to the saint, as a token of love for him. After having kissed the threshold and greeted the saint with respect, pilgrims place flowers (*phul*) on the grave, or flower garlands (*hār*), or sheets (*ġilaf*) embroidered with *kalima*, the name of the Prophet or of his family members. More rarely do pilgrims light incense sticks (*agarbathi*) and *čirāġ* (small earthen lamps in which oil or clarified butter is burnt). In addition, perfume (*ithr*) is sometimes sprinkled over the grave, and rice, sweets and coconuts are offered. Customarily, when food is offered (especially when the devotees’ petitions are fulfilled), the *mutawalli* (the *dargāh* administrator), or one of the caretakers, recites the

---

28. People go to the *dargāh* when they want to do it, when job and family obligations allow them, or in local semantics, when they receive in dreams the calling of a saint (*bašarat*).

29. Devotees often emphasize the will to come to the *ziyārat* in a state as pure as possible. Some claim that in order to make a *ziyārat* to certain *dargāh*, a pilgrim has to observe a set of prohibitions since the previous day, like abstain from eating meat, from drinking alcohol, from sexual intercourses and masturbation. Consequences that trespassers will have to face can be unpleasant. For instance they tell that, in the shrine of Jahangir Piran, not far from Hyderabad, something bad on the way back will happen to trespassers (an accident, an unpleasant encounter…); in the small shrine of Madar Sahab Baba and Salar Sahab Baba, in the village of Bathihamba, near Bidar (in Karnataka), trespassers will be stung by bees or bitten by snakes that live in the *dargāh*.

30. The Muslim profession of faith: *lā ilāha illā-l-lāh, Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* ‘there’s no God but Allah, Muḥammad is His Prophet’.
\textit{fatīha} over it; half of the food goes to the author of the offering, who then starts the distribution, and half to the caretakers, who can store it or distribute it among the poor. Occasionally pilgrims offer gifts in the form of tribute (nazrana) to the mutawalli or to the family of the ḥuddam (the caretakers) and the \textit{dargāh} depends, to a large extent, on these offerings of goods and money, for its preservation (cf. Liebeskind 1998, 115–16).\textsuperscript{31}

3. Contact is of pivotal significance. After having placed his offering on the pile of flowers and sheets that covers the grave, the pilgrim touches the grave. This action is performed in other ways too, but its essence remains the same, that is, physical contact.\textsuperscript{32} By physically touching the grave that embodies the Bābā’s spiritual power, devotees perceive to gain access to his power and to have Divine blessing flowing in their body.

4. Once the offering is completed, the pilgrim goes on to recite the \textit{fātiha}, the first \textit{sura} of Qur’ān, universally recited, in the Muslim world, at the Sufi saints’ tombs and at the graves of relatives and friends. It is recited also in each sequence of the canonical prayer (\textit{namaz}). By Šayḥ and sajjāda \textit{našin}, Sufi masters and living representatives of saints, it is uttered over food in order to bless it, before distributing it freely, as \textit{tabarruk} (blessing), to the poor and to the devotees of the \textit{dargāh}.

5. Some devotees perform clockwise circumambulation around the grave.\textsuperscript{33} This ritual is called \textit{ṭawāf}, an Arab term which means ‘to walk in circles around something’ and, in particular, within religious jargon, to run or walk around a sacred object. \textit{Ṭawāf} is a key ritual of the Pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, and is performed by making seven rounds around the \textit{Ka’ba}, the building that houses the Black Stone. In the \textit{dargāh} of the Subcontinent, \textit{ṭawāf} came to be a widespread practice among pilgrims, promoting the view according to which the saint identified metaphorically with the \textit{Ka’ba}, as symbolic centre of the universe (cf. Bashir 2000, 290; Rizvi 2000, 334).\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Some devotees offer freely their own work, helping the caretakers in the maintenance works and during the preparations for the ʿ\textit{urs}, which represents a moment of great activity for the \textit{dargāh} (Liebeskind 1998, 120; Werbner 2003, 110–13).

\textsuperscript{32} For instance, pilgrims can get down on their knees, lean their forehead against the grave and kiss it, they can rub their cheeks and eyes against the sheets, or put the head under the sheets and kiss the where the saint’s feet are supposed to lay.

\textsuperscript{33} The number of rounds is not fixed, depending on pilgrims.

\textsuperscript{34} While in Arab world it is performed anti-clockwise, in South Asia it is made clockwise, and among Hindus it is regarded as a good omen (Gaborieau \textit{et al.} 2004, \textit{ziyāra}). Certain saints (like for instance the renowned Khwaja Muḥammad al-Husayni Gisu Daraz, d. 1422) claimed that pilgrimage to their own tomb or to those of other saints
6. Another act is to hold certain objects such as water bottles or incense sticks, and make rounds with them, clockwise, on the grave. Objects, imbued with the saint’s blessing; are carried home by devotees and employed for therapeutic and propitiatory purposes. Indeed not only is the grave itself a source of benefits for the people, but even the objects that came in contact with it (Liebeskind 1998, 92). To come back home with this kind of items is a deep-rooted custom in South Asia (cf. Werbner and Basu 1998; Speziale 2002; Werbner 2003; Troll 2003 [1989]); and in other pilgrimage traditions too (cf. Turner 1997 [1978]; Morinis 1984; Werbner 1989; Greenfield 1990).

35. Among pilgrims, those who are initiated into the different Sufi ṭuruq,⁶⁶ may come for different purposes. They come mostly to seek spiritual enrichments and benefits. Usually they can be seen spending time in contemplation (muraqaba), practicing dhikr or reading Qurʾān. According to Sufi tradition, the night, especially Thursday night, is particularly propitious to the achievement of spiritual blessings; indeed it is possible to observe people coming at this time to the dargāh.

8. Most pilgrims make the offering directly, but those who came from afar, or for the first time, are generally assisted by the ḥuddam. The ḥuddam show them the proper behaviour to follow, the correct way to make the offering, lead them in the recitation of the fāṭiha, or recite it on their behalf, if pilgrims do not know it.³⁷ In Pahari Šarif also women can reach the tomb (tomb) predominantly from the southern side. This is a rare case among

was equivalent to the Pilgrimage to Mecca, and could be a substitute for it, if Hajj was impeded by critical circumstances (cf. Sharif 1999, 210; Suvorova 2004, 19; Zarcone et al. 2004, ziyāra). Besides, for the poorest part of population, Hajj, though being an obligation prescribed by šariʿa, is an inaccessible practice.

35. Traditionally dead saints’ spiritual power is considered to be able to pass on to objects which come in contact with their grave, or that can somehow be identified with them. These objects extend the saints’ physical presence, so that their powers can work even far from their tombs, within the secular world. (cf. Landell Mills 1998, 31–54).

36. Sufi Orders (sing. ṭariqa).

37. In this case people approach the ḥuddam, carrying respectfully on the head the material for the offerings, then give it to the ḥuddam, who place it over the tomb. Customarily, pilgrims offer some money to the ḥuddam, in the form of religious tribute (nazrana). Then ḥuddam hand in sugar sweets mixed with petals taken from the saint’s grave to them, give the blessing with the peacock-feather-made broom, recite the fāṭiha, and tell pilgrims to perform circumambulation around the mazār.
the dargāh of Hyderabad, where usually women are not allowed access the mazār, because of their periodical impurity given by menstruations, and have to go through the mediation of ḥuddam (cf. Speziale 2002, 89–91).

9. Some devotees express a vow (niyaz, nazr) to the saint, so that the saint helps them to overcome everyday problems. Customarily, when the pilgrims’ wishes are fulfilled, they return to the dargāh to thank the saint and to distribute food and money, according to their means, to the poor and the needy. Devotees beg the saint’s help for any conceivable purpose: health, job, family, marriage, school, judiciary problems (cf. Liebeskind 1998; Werbner and Basu 1998; Troll 2003; van Doorn-Harder et al. 2004, ziyāra). As stated by Speziale (2002), the demand of protection and intercession is the main motivation that urges devotees to go to dargāh, in Hyderabad, and it is numerically more significant than the demand of spiritual affiliation to Sufi Orders. At Pahari Šarif, as we have seen, the dargāh is not managed by a living Sufi master who could look after the sick: curative power lies in the grave itself. Therapeutic assistance is one of the major aspects of the social commitment of the dargāh in this region (cf. Speziale 2002), and this function is fulfilled neither by living healers, nor by other cult experts, but by the saint himself.38

3. THE JOURNEY

Morinis (1992, 14–21) adopted three categories as target for analysis (‘journeys’, ‘places’, ‘pilgrims’), in order to lay down a basis for cross-cultural comparison. This section of the paper will try to apply these categories to the analysis of the ziyārat. The journey to a sacred place, viewed as repository of the highest moral ideals and as return of the individual to the

38. A widespread therapeutic ritual, in this dargāh, is to sleep for some days nearby the tomb. The key element of oneiric healing is the appointment with the saint. Many devotees relate that the Bābā appeared to them in a dream, as an old man with a long, white beard, completely dressed in white. Since dreams are regarded as intermediate states between the human world and the upper worlds, the oneiric circle is a special place where saints can keep on fulfilling their functions for the devotees (Speziale 2002). This view is supported by belief in the dead saints’ spirit viability and powers, and by the tradition, common in Islamic world, according to which dreams are the auspicious place for contact with souls of the dead, since they represent a state analogous to death. For the significance of dreams see Qurʾān VI: 60 and the corresponding note of Bausani (2007): “[…] cf. also XXXIX: 41. From both passages one can infer (it seems that this idea is found in Jewish tradition, too) that during sleep, souls are called back to God and sent again on earth in the morning. This proves the large significance of dreams, which metaphysical value is recognized in Qurʾān (cf. Sura XII, passim).
core values of religion and to a source of spiritual renewal, is an essential element of both Islam and Sufism. Journey and pilgrimage are authentic experiences of space in Islam (cf. Eickelman and Piscatori 1990, preface and 3–25; Amir-Moezzi 1996, 21). This analysis of the ziyārat seems to confirm the idea, expressed by Morinis (1984, 276–77; 281–83; 1992, 15–6, 21) and by Coleman and Elsner (1995, 205), of the centrality of journey in pilgrimages. In Sufism journey is a recurring topos: firstly the disciple’s ascetic path of inner purification is regarded as a journey (sulūk) towards mystical union with God, which passes through varied stations (maqām) and during which one experiences different spiritual states (aḥwāl) (Subhan 1960, 67–76; Schimmel 2003, 98–148). Secondly, Sufis from every corner of the Muslim world, ever since travelled to the major cultural centres of knowledge, for the purpose of learning, to meet eminent masters and spend time at their service, or to visit friends and spiritual brothers. Thirdly, another journey is the one undertaken by masters, after having obtained permission from their spiritual teacher, or following their šayḥ’s instruction, in order to establish their own teaching centre.

These are the implicit cultural models of the meaning of journey actually undertaken by pilgrims. Besides, there is another dimension of the notion of journey in Islam. In the classical Islamic thought, it is possible to find out the idea that the physical one is not the only existing universe. The aesthetics of space, formulated by philosophers in the classical period of Islam, conceives sensible world as the first step of an architecture, whose higher levels are constituted by “the world of soul” and “the world of spirit”. This architecture is crowned by God’s throne, a “place” neither spatial, nor temporal (Jambet 1996, 16–17). Journey through physical space can continue in the other space, namely, the one of spiritual wanderings, and as in our setting, it is oriented by a “pole”, a gravitation point, repre-

39. The one who embarks in this path is called sālik, traveller, wayfarer.
40. Certain Sufis, such as qalandar, spend their whole life on the move, moving from place to place and refusing to take a fixed abode, in order to refrain from accumulating earthly goods and interests and from being diverted from contemplation of God. They turn their own life into a long journey, parallel to the spiritual journey, which lead them to maturity in the Sufi path.
41. The third typology of journey often takes on heroic features, by virtue of occurring in unknown and hostile territories, amongst wilderness or infidels. For this reason it represents one of the main sources of prestige and charisma for Sufi masters (cf. Werbner 2003).
42. Following Eickelman and Piscatori (1990), we could add to these the models of Ḥajj (the main pilgrimage to Mecca) and hijra (emigration).
sented by the saint or his tomb. The wayfarer can pass from a space to the other through their convergence points, where the Divine takes on a sensible image, where the physical world meets the world of soul and the world of spirit (Jambet 1996, 19).

As claimed by Morinis (1992, 15), the essence of journey is movement. Movement encompasses significant aspects of meaning and experience of pilgrimage. The ziyārat is a journey of linear type: a movement from the devotee’s familiar environment to a sacred centre, which enjoys a special and privileged relationship with God and embodies ideals of moral perfection, and then a reverse movement from the sacred centre to the devotee’s house. This movement, within Sufism, can be understood as an approach to God, a spiritual and moral renewal both of the individual and of the community.

In order to outline the cultural meanings of the ziyārat, we need to consider not only the frame of Islamic tradition, but also the Indian cultural setting, since India is not an Islamic country, and Islam is not the main cultural tradition in the Subcontinent. In the Hindu religious culture one can find out that pilgrimage embodies the key features of religious ideology, like for instance, opposition between purity and pollution (Morinis 1984, 276–77). The theological and literary description of cosmos and journey of the man through it are significant aspects of Hindu pilgrimage tradition; the implicit model is that of the journey of the individual soul to the divinity (Morinis 1984, 282–98).

The ziyārat involves another type of movement, the circular one. Circumambulation, which takes on interesting cosmological implications in Islam, refers to a crucial ritual of the Pilgrimage to Mecca. Pilgrims’ movement was traditionally associated to movements of heavenly circles around the earth, while apogee and perigee of the stars recall pilgrims’ movement, namely when they approach and leave Mecca. However, this ritual bears a controversial meaning, since reformist and fundamentalist Muslims believe it is restricted only to the Ḥajj and do not consider it licit,

43. In Islam the pole is chiefly the Kaʿba, in Mecca, which points to the prayer’s direction.
44. The earth as centre of the universe is assimilated to the Kaʿba and the heavenly circles that move around the earth are assimilated to pilgrims performing tawāf around the Kaʿba. The saint is the Qutb, the pole, the axis of cosmos and stands for eternity, while devotees walking around him, represent man’s transitory and ephemeral existence; tawāf is a symbol of the reunification of the human dimension, which is transitory and material, to the Divine dimension, which is eternal and spiritual (Bausani 1978, 111; 131).
if performed at the saints’ graves. It is intriguing to note that circumambulation is a common ritual also in Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism, and it seems quite deep-rooted in Indian culture (Morinis 1992, 16).

3.1 The dargāh

Pilgrimage places generally claim to possess a privileged relationship with Divinity: on the spot where they stand, Divine power manifested itself and still keeps doing so (Morinis 1992, 17–18). In Sufi tradition the dargāh are regarded as sacred places, since they house the remains of individuals who, because of their holiness, were reputed to be “close” to God. Through a metonymic symbolic process, a simile between the place of burial and the saint is enacted, and graves acquire the saints’ spiritual powers and their role as mediators between men and God.

According to Morinis (1992, 18) pilgrimage centres develop and project an image that represents a “purer” or “more ideal” version of some accepted cultural ideals. The author defines this type of cultural intensification as “[…] the central force in the creation, maintenance and success of pilgrimage shrines”. This can be held as valid in regard to the dargāh, where cultural ideals such as devotion to God, spiritual guidance, tolerance, generosity, spiritual search are intensified. The statement that pilgrimage places imply a social field and an informational field (Morinis 1992, 18) is also acceptable. The dargāh indeed is a place for gathering which draws people with specific social characteristics, and projects an image encoded in stories and legends. The conventional way to refer to pilgrimage places as centres is compelling. However, centrality is only a spatial concept that can be used to locate “[…] the sacred place in relation to its fields. Geographically, the sacred place is actually seldom central” (Morinis 1992, 19).

Another significant remark is that sacred places tend to be placed “[…] out of time and space” (Morinis 1992, 26). They are conceived as discontinuities in physical territory, as spots in which the Divine is more accessible. The dimension of time tends to undergo symbolic manipulation in sacred places. Sacred places work to “[…] cancel time by representing continuing presence” (Morinis 1992, 26). The data of Pahari Šarif seem to confirm these hypotheses. In the dargāh, for instance, the day is marked by the five canonical prayers (namaz), and time is calculated according to the Islamic lunar calendar: more specifically, computation of time tends to follow traditional methods, unlike in secular society, where modern and rationalist methods prevail. Furthermore, the dargāh, like other sacred centres,
endeavours to enact historical continuity, as a means to “[...] denying the effect of time, which ordinarily breeds change” (Morinis 1992, 27). The saint, though physically dead, is believed to hear devotees’ supplications and, God willing, to be able to act in this world. His soul is believed to be still alive, and devotees come in quest of spiritual and material help, as happened about 750 years ago, when the residents of the area (supposedly) used to come to this unknown Iraqi master, to seek relief and consolation.

Having a glance superficially to the broader cultural context, one can see that the meaning of the dargâh as interface between human world and God (cf. Bashir 2000, 302), more generally, the implicit model of the pilgrimage centre as a bridge between these two universes, is a widespread pattern in the Subcontinent. This can be stated at least for what concerns the Hindu culture, in which sacred places are conceived as bridges or fords (tīrtha) between different realms (loka) of the universe, which connect Divine and human world (Morinis 1984, 282–99).

3.2 The devotees

If we consider the ritual as a process, accepting a part of Turner’s theory, in light of the reflections of Morinis and Werbner (cf. §1.1), in pilgrimage pilgrims move out from the familiar context of ordinary social life, conceived as structure, in order to reach goals through the enactment of a rejection, or a revision, of that structure of rules and values. In the ziyârat, the journey prepares the pilgrim to the meeting with the saint, by gradually stripping him of his mundane links and thoughts, and by bringing to his attention his religious obligations, the exemplary figure of the saint and his teachings (cf. Werbner 2003, 101). Thinking to the moral perfection of the saint, the pilgrim is prompted to meditate on his own condition in relation to God, and on his own existence; consequently he is inspired to repent for certain actions and to formulate good intentions for the future (cf. Ernst 1993). Once he reached the dargâh, the pilgrim enters a place that represents an intensification of the highest cultural and religious ideals (devotion to God, renunciation, humility, tolerance etc.), and is perceived by the pilgrim as opposed to secular society.45 Within this micro-

45. Both the caretakers and the devotees tend to emphasize the image of the dargâh as refuge from the values and consequences of modern, secular society: selfishness, personal interest, profit, career, the consumption and accumulation of goods, aggressive competition, deceit etc.
cosmos, the pilgrim is assimilated to other pilgrims and social differences are smoothed. However, questioning aspects of social structure does not entail complete abandonment of any structure, since the ziyārat, though being a quite informal ritual, possesses a certain degree of formalisation. Furthermore, the micro-cosmos of the dargāh is hierarchically structured, though hierarchy does not follow norms based on birth and income, but on spiritual principles.\footnote{The hierarchy of the dargāh places God in the highest position, then the saint follows, then the sajjada našin and the mutawalli, and then the caretakers’ committee. A prominent position, within the hierarchy, is assigned automatically to prospective figures of eminent “spiritual pedigree”, like pir or saints’ descendants, who visit the dargāh. Going down the hierarchical scale, there are the devotees, then those who perform menial works, like sweeping and cleaning, musicians and, at the bottom, the beggars; menials generally are tied to shrines by hereditary rights, but are subject to caretakers’ control.}

In the dargāh, via the saint, the devotee achieves a contact with the Divine world. Finally he returns to everyday life bearing part of Divine blessing flowing from the dargāh (cf. Werbner 2003).\footnote{This blessing is also conceived as a moment of moral renewal for the devotee and the power of blessing contained in the objects carried home, that came in contact with the grave, is meant to regenerate secular world in which devotees spend their ordinary life (cf. Werbner 1998, 115).}

While we can hold as valid the conceptualisation of journey in terms of structure, counter-structure, structure (as in Turner’s hypothesis), we cannot apply the notion of \textit{communitas} to the performance of the ziyārat, since pilgrims do not move completely out of bonds of the structure.\footnote{For instance, gender differences remain marked; indeed, the ideal of keeping women separated from men and the limitations applied to women’s actions, are rooted in local perception. Furthermore, in the vows made to the saints, daily problems and troubles surface and find their way into the peaceful world, “out of time and space”, of the dargāh. Finally, the relationship between devotees and saints and saints’ descendants takes a shape that is found to be typical of traditional Indian social system: that of client-patron relationship.} Interviews to devotees suggest that the motivations to undertake the ziyārat can be various; virtually any conceivable purpose can motive a visit to a saint’s grave (cf. § 2.1). In some cases, pilgrims undertake the ziyārat simply to pay homage to the saint and to express their love for him, strengthening their relationship; in other cases, to obtain supernatural help in order to face health, job, economic, familiar, school, judiciary problems; finally, in other cases, to gain spiritual benefits. Generalizing, we can state that the ziyārat is undertaken voluntarily, by individuals who want to improve somehow their present or future condition, spiritually or materially.
The *ziyārat* is a quite informal ritual, but even if variations are contemplated and tolerated, its performance should remain within the limits of the unwritten rules of *ādāb*.\(^49\) Symbols, indeed, are not only built into the physical environment, but also are encoded in behavioural rules to be followed (Morinis 1992, 21).

Comparing the *ziyārat* theological and literary model with its performance, we can state that it is confirmed, to a large extent, by devotees’ experience. However, apparently, devotees seem to emphasize the quest for blessings (which leads to spiritual and material benefits), rather than contemplation, remembrance of death and the supplication on behalf of the dead. The implicit cultural models of the journey of the individual soul to God, and of the sacred centre as a connecting point between human and Divine worlds, can be found among the meanings explicitly acknowledged by devotees too.\(^50\) The idea that journey to a sacred place, in which the Divine is accessible, can bring about transformation in the individual’s life, is common and widespread amongst devotees.\(^51\)

Furthermore, a striking meaning, at the level of pilgrims, is the notion of the saint as a mediator between them and God. The saint is regarded by many as a patron, as an ally in a daily relationship with an almighty and distant God. The relationship between the devotee and the saint often takes on features of the patron-client relationship or subject-court official. The rationale of this type of bond is that if a common subject wants to approach the supreme authority, for instance a sultan, he has to go through court officials, he cannot do it directly. Customarily, ordinary devotees regard themselves as too impure and imperfect to address God directly. In order to get closer to God, devotees seek the help of God’s friends, who can bring their individual petitions to God’s attention. Offerings are but one of the symbols that confirm the saint-devotee relationship; offerings are a token of respect for saints and saints’ descendents, and are given out of love, without expectation of return. The very act of asking the saint for protection, in the Indian Subcontinent, always takes shape metaphorically as an establishment of a patron-client relationship, in which, to recognition of authority

\(^{49}\) Properties; manners; habit; practical rule of behaviour; respect of the rules; the term bears the double connotation of ‘be praiseworthy’ and ‘inherited from one’s forefathers’.

\(^{50}\) We can think of the devotee’s will to come to the *dargāh* in a state as pure as possible and of the belief in the saints’ intermediary role and spiritual powers.

\(^{51}\) Morinis (1984, 282) points out this perception among Hindu pilgrims studied by him.
correspond (spiritual and material) assistance and protection (cf. Metcalf 1984, 8; Werbner 2003, 102). The client-patron imagery can help highlight significant aspects of the *ziyārat*, and perhaps of other pilgrimage traditions of the Subcontinent; its application proved effectual, for instance, in Brazil (cf. Gross 1971; Greenfield 1990) and Morocco (Eickelman 1976).

4. RITUAL MOVEMENT AND METAPHORICAL MOVEMENT

As expressed by Parkin (1992, 22–23), directional and spatial metaphors account for moves and passages occurring at the symbolic level, and for the way participants are placed and distributed, both physically and metaphorically. The approach put forward in this paper assigns considerable theoretic usefulness to the analysis of movement, in pilgrimage, both on the physical and on the metaphoric level. Moreover, the notion of territorial sacred journey connected to a spiritual and inner journey is expressed by the tradition of Indian Sufism, as well as by Hindu sacred texts and by pilgrims’ perception itself. Physical movements enact metaphorical movements and spatial direction interacts with the symbolic one.

This paragraph will try to highlight, looking at the outward and formal actions, the transformations occurring at the symbolic level, and the effect of ritual action on participants. First of all, the journey itself (physical-spiritual, outward-inward) is a linear movement directed towards a goal, hence not accidental. The goal, a particular saint’s shrine, embodies the highest ideals of religious tradition; furthermore, according to theological and literary tradition and pilgrims’ perception, it enjoys a privileged relationship of proximity with God, is deemed a bridge between men and God and reputed a source of spiritual renewal. The journey’s linear movement entails, symbolically, the crossing of bounds between the human and Divine world, in order to come in contact with God. This movement implies spiritual and moral renewal of the individual. It is in this sense too, that we can talk about an inward movement connected to the physical-ritual one, a movement of purification and approach to God, an elevation from a lower level of awareness to an upper one (cf. Malik 2001, 377).

Ritual ablution (*wuḍū*) refers to a partial purification of the devotee, to his temporary detachment from worldliness and from his familiar environment’s imperfection, as necessary phases preceding the meeting with the saint.

52. Eickelman and Piscatori (1990, xii), discussing the types of Muslim travel, state that travel “is principally a journey of the mind, […] an act of imagination.”
The offering, which takes the form of a religious tribute, belongs to the logic of authority and subordination. With the offering (and related rituals), which sometimes is followed by a vow (niyaz), the pilgrim affirms his position of submission and subjection in relation to saint’s spiritual authority. This positioning is underlined also by participants’ physical disposition, body techniques and gestures that always follow the code of humility, submission and pleading (Landell Mills 1998, 45; Werbner 2003, 45). As stated, often the saint-devotee relationship is modelled upon the patron-client pattern. Gifts to saints (nazrana) can be defined hierarchical (cf. Werbner 2003, 101–28), and entail social prestige for the receiver (the saint, his descendants). These gifts may be meant to “please” the saint, to strengthen the relationship with him, but have actually no effect on the satisfaction of pilgrims’ wishes. Fulfilment of devotees’ supplications and requests does not depend, in any way, on their offerings, which neither the saint nor God need, but it depends only on the will of Allah. Spatiality and gestures expressed by ritual action transform, symbolically, participants, and place them within the spiritual hierarchy of the dargāh. Relationships occurring in the dargāh, ritually enact a hierarchical continuum which extends from God, who is at the top, to the Prophet Muhammad, to the saint, to the caretakers, to the pilgrims, the menials and the beggars.

Traditionally, credit for recitation of the Fātiḥa, the first sura of Qurʾān, is given to the dead, hence one effect of this prayer is accumulation of spiritual merit on behalf of the saint; another effect, that we can infer from the words recited, is the acknowledgement of God’s supreme authority. In this type of pilgrimage, it is possible to point out to the coexistence of a charismatic authority next to the institutional authority.

Physical contact with the grave, through hands, forehead, eyes, lips, and by means of incorporation of substances that came in contact with it, enacts a process of metaphoric and metonymic absorption: while touching the grave, the pilgrim comes in contact with the saint itself, who is reputed

53. The acknowledgement of the saint’s authority in ziyārat is highlighted also by Tapper (1990, 236).
54. One could remark that a prayer does not entail an actual movement, but even if words have great significance in recitation, a prayer possesses a spatial orientation. It is performed in front of the tomb and entails a particular bodily posture. Hands are kept before the breast, opened and with palms turned upwards and finally are rubbed swiftly on the face.
55. Cf. Qurʾān I: 1–7. The acknowledgement of Allah’s supreme authority and Prophet Muhammad’s special position is realised also through other prayers that can be recited after Fātiḥa, such as, for instance, duʿa and durud šarif.
to enjoy proximity to God. This process implies the passage of *barakat* (spiritual power, Divine blessing), and of all beneficial effects that *barakat* encompasses, from saint to devotee.

Circumambulation (*tawāf*) is a further acknowledgement of the saint’s spiritual authority, since it enacts an analogy between the Bābā’s grave and the *Ka‘ba*, one of the most sacred shrines of Islam, which is directly connected to the life of Prophet Muḥammad. Furthermore, circumambulation entails absorption of *barakat* not through contact, but through a circular movement.

In the *ziyārat*, rich pilgrims mix with poor ones, Muslims mix with Hindus and people belonging to other religions, everybody performs the same gestures, nobody is ousted or disqualified from the *dargāh*, and no pilgrims get preferential treatment. In this sense, the pilgrims’ journey is also a symbolic journey which implies a partial overcoming of the varied individual conditions and social barriers (cf. Malik 2001).

To summarize, among symbolic transformations enacted by the practice of the *ziyārat*, we have highlighted the crossing, by the devotee, of the borders between the human and Divine world, in order to come closer to a contact with God; the devotee’s purification and his spiritual renewal; the acknowledgement of saint’s spiritual authority; the accumulation of merit on behalf of the saint; the acknowledgement of God’s supreme authority; the absorption of *barakat* by the devotee and the ensuing favours obtained, that manifest themselves not only symbolically, but also concretely; finally, the partial and temporary levelling of pilgrims’ social status.

### 4.1 Conclusions

According to Coleman and Eade (2004, 7), there are certain basic points to discuss, in order to establish the dimension of a given form of sacred travel. In the light of these issues, observing the *ziyārat* in this particular context, we can consider it a voluntary and individual pilgrimage, which does not entail any change of social status for the pilgrim. The *ziyārat* can be local or more expansive, even transnational; it depends mainly on the prestige and authority of the saints. Unlike huge shrine complexes such as, for example, that of ḥwaja Muʿīnuddin Sijzi Čisti (d. 1236) in Ajmer, or that of Hazrat Nizam al-Dīn Awliya (d. 1325) in Delhi, the *dargāh* of Bābā Šarf al-Dīn does not draw pilgrims from all over India or from foreign countries. The *ziyārat* to this particular shrine is undertaken mostly by people from Hyderabad, from the area of Andrah Pradeš, or from other parts of Deccan; for this reason it can be characterized more as local. It appears a highly informal
type of pilgrimage, not only for being spontaneous, not obligatory, but also because it does not occur in fixed days or at fixed times, and it does not possess a standardized way of execution. For instance, the *ziyārat* differs from more formal pilgrimage, such as the main Islamic Pilgrimage, the Ḥajj.\(^56\) In the *ziyārat*, as described in this paper, we did not find out the pervasive presence of self-interested economic exchanges noticed, for instance, by Orsi (1991, 216–17) in American Catholics pilgrimages.\(^57\) Eade and Sallnow (1991, 24–25) pointed out to the implication of money and market ideology in symbolic exchanges between man and God, portrayed as self-interested, as a feature of Christian pilgrimages. This aspect is not observed in the *ziyārat*, where devotees are not pushed by caretakers to offer money, and if they offer it, they do it spontaneously and according to their means. Perhaps the *ziyārat*, as performed in the Hyderabad *dargāh*, seems to show more affinity with Hindu pilgrimage tradition, despite considerable doctrinal differences between Islam and Hinduism (cf. Morinis 1984; Coleman and Elsner 1995, 136–65). As we have seen, symbols enacted in the *ziyārat*, bring forth cultural meanings (for instance the motives of the journey of the individual soul to the Divinity, and of sacred places as connecting points between the human world and the Divine world) that do not belong only to Indian Sufism or to Islam, but also to Hindu background.\(^58\)

As we have noticed, none of the two main paradigms in the field of pilgrimage studies, that of *communitas* (Turner 1974, 1997 [1978]), and that of contestation (Eade and Sallnow 1991), can be totally applied to the case study of Pahari Šarif. Both highlight significant aspects of pilgrimage, but do not

---

56. Indeed, *Ḥajj* is obligatory, though various conditions in which exemption from obligation is legitimate are included; it has to be performed within particular days of a certain month of the Islamic lunar calendar, the twelfth, *Ḍū-l-Hijja*; it consists in a defined and settled set of rituals.

57. In this type of pilgrimages, in the XX century, an intriguing convergence between new forms and methods of devotional promotion (on the part of the organizational staff of the shrines) and the emerging American advertising industry has been realized.

58. The main affinity is observable in the objects utilized for the offerings and in the items that are blessed and carried home by devotees (cf. Speziale 2002). In all types of Hindu pilgrimages, pilgrims seek to absorb beneficial effects of contact with the deity through obtainment or consumption of sacralised objects (*prasad*), such as food, water, ash, flowers, that have been in proximity to the deity. Furthermore, we can observe the notion of ritual purification before reaching the shrine and the practice of circumambulation. One of the major differences is constituted by the notion of *daršan*: the sight of the image of the deity, which can bring spiritual and material benefits, while neither Sufism, nor Islam allocate such a role to iconic images that, on the contrary, are affected by strong restrictions and prohibitions.
account satisfactorily for its ritual functioning and for pilgrims’ experience. Morinis’ (1992) approach, interested both in structure and experience, seems theoretically more helpful, especially because it is based firmly on the social, cultural and historical context. Morinis defines pilgrimage as “[…] a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal” (Morinis 1992, 4). His considerations are confirmed by the Pahari Šarif data. According to his view, we can claim that, with regard to Sayyed Bābā Šarf al-Dīn dargāh, the ziyārat implies a journey from the “Imperfect” to the “Perfect”, in order to reach ideals that are positively valued by the individual and the culture, and a return to the “Imperfect” environment. The dimension of Perfection, in this case represented by the dargāh, is symbolically placed out of mundane time and space, and is conceived as an alternative moral universe in relation to that of secular society. Though it is not completely correct to speak of a journey from the “familiar” to the “other” and from the “known” to the “mysterious”, for the regular visitors of the dargāh, the idea that devotees, undertaking a visit to the Bābā, enact a movement from the “human” to the “divine”, from the “social” to the “ideal”, from the “imperfect” to the “perfect”, from the “mundane” to the “miraculous”, seems valid.

While analysing symbolic effects on participants, we observed two contrasting tendencies in the ziyārat: an egalitarian outlook, which tends to status homogenization and to a partial overcoming of social divisions, and a hierarchical outlook, which highlights the different ranks of spiritual elevation and values them. Pilgrims are all equal in their devotion to the saint, and in the mutual acknowledgement of his authority. Following Malik (2001, 377), we could state that “[…] an egalitarian identity under one [spiritual] leader is created”. This means that the main social hierarchies and values are overshadowed, while the significance of other hierarchical structures, and the corresponding system of values, is stressed. It is in this way that, symbolically, an opposition between two different moral universes is built: the secular one and the religious-spiritual one. While underplaying social differences among participants, and emphasizing status differentiation in the internal hierarchy of the dargāh, ritual hints at the supremacy of the moral universe embodied by the saint over the system that rules secular society. The journey from the “Imperfect” to the “Perfect” contends a pre-eminence of the latter over the former, and this pre-eminence is encoded in the symbols of the journey. This message is even more intriguing since it is formulated within a historical-geographical setting, which is distinguished by a modern, democratic and plural form of government, in which Islam does not enjoy anymore the support of the state power.
REFERENCES


Orsi, Robert A. 1991. The Center out There, in Here, and Everywhere Else: The


