

Intellectual Groundings of Collective Ijtihad

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Introduction of Ijtihad:

Ijtihad is an Arabic word. It is derived from the root word "jah'd" which literally means: strain or great effort (1). The verb "jahada" or "ijtahada" literally means: to exert oneself or do one's best, and is generally used in an activity which entails a measure of hardship. Thus, it would be in order to use it in respect of one who carries a heavy load, but not so if he carries only a trivial weight (2). The word "ijtihad" is the noun, and literally it means: exertion or putting in the greatest effort possible to achieve something (3). From this linguistic meaning of ijtihad, the scholars of usul al-fiqh borrowed the word and used it for intellectual exertion on the part of the jurist. But in defining ijtihad technically, the scholars differed. Some have defined it as: "The total expenditure of effort made by a jurist in order to infer, with a degree of probability the rules of Sharia from their detailed evidence in the sources" (4). And others have defined it as: "The application by a jurist of all his faculties either in inferring the rules of Sharia from their sources or in implementing such rules and applying them to particular issues" (5). Essential to the meaning of ijtihad is also the concept that the endeavor of the jurist involves a total expenditure of effort in such a manner that the jurist feels an inability to exert himself further. If the jurist has failed to discover the evidence which he was capable of discovering, his opinion is void (6).

The above definition of ijtihad in its technical sense is explicit on the point that only a jurist (faqih) may practice ijtihad. Thus, the definition as Imam al-Shaukani (7) has pointed out "precludes self-exertion by a layman in the inference of a ruling" (8).

From all what has been said, we can see clearly that the word "ijtihad" literally means exertion, and that from this literal meaning of the word, the scholars of usul al-fiqh borrowed that word and used it for the exertion by a jurist of the greatest intellectual effort possible to arrive at the correct conclusion in the light of judgment of Allah and His Apostle, Muhammad (SAWS) in any given problem. When a problem crops up, it requires much intellectual effort to gather all the relevant texts of the Qur'an and Hadith that may have direct or indirect bearing on the issue. And then, making a correct interpretation of these texts equally requires much effort. Equally demanding is the problem of considering other texts with negative implications. Therefore, arriving at the true judgment of Allah and His Prophet on any given problem is actually "ijtihad."

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- 9 For detail see Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Reza Khan Bareilwi and his movement, 1870-1920* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 5.
- 10 Nevertheless, presumably the Wahhabi criticism of this sort of popular piety cannot be ignored as well, as the reverence of images also deals with polytheism, though we find no reference in this respect. Usha Sanyal, *op. cit.*, p. 209.
- 11 It was a time when making and keeping of images of human being was forbidden according to the Shia School of law, but currently this issue is viewed entirely in a different way. As somebody enquired Ali Khamnai, a contemporary grand leader of Shias and the companion of Imam Khomeini, about the publishing, selling, and displaying or keeping of the pictures of the Prophet, Imam Ali and Imam Husain, for which he replied: "as such there is no harm in doing so, but there should not be the element of contempt that could go against the stature and grandeur of immensely honorable figures." Ali Khamnai, *Istafta'at Ke Jawabat: Muamla't*. Vol. II., Ma'arif Islam Publishers (trans.), (Qum: Ma'arif Islam Publisheres, 1423 Hijrah), 65.
- 12 In fact, according to the constitution, India embraced secularism much later in 1976.
- 13 Same conditions have been observed in the Sachar Committee Report too. A Report on "Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslims Community", Prime Minister's High Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, November 2006. p. 14. It is popularly known as Sachar Committee Report and available on the official website (www.minorityaffairs.gov.in) of the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India.
- 14 Sachar Committee Report, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-15.
- 15 W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005)
- 16 Sachar Committee Report, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- 17 Amongst these programs: *Hasb-e Haal* and *Mazaak Raat* by the Dunya TV, *Darling* by the Express News and *Khabar Naak* by the Geo News, are very popular.
- 18 The failure of lollywood film industry is also one of the reasons in this regard.
- 19 Yousuf Saeed, "Mecca versus The Local Shrine: The Dilemma of Orientation in the Religious Art of Indian Muslim," in *India's Popular Culture: Iconic Spaces and Fluid Images*, ed. Jyotindra Jain, 89 (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2007).
- 20 For detail see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition, (London: Verso, 1993), and Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 21 For detail see Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000). pp. 84-98.

to be tall and among the people he appeared to rise higher than others – (Bara bin Azib); the abdomen was not protruding – (Umme Mabad); despite he has poor conditions and lack of proper food, his body was stronger and more virile than those of better nourished persons – (Al-Mawahib); I have not seen a braver and stronger man than the Prophet – (Ibn Umar); **Shoulder and Chest:** Chest broad and even with the abdomen – (Hind bin Abi Hala); chest broad – (Bara bin Azib); width between shoulders more than usual – (Hind bin Abi Hala and Bara bin Azib); portion between shoulders fleshy – (Ali); **Arms and Hands:** Wrists large, palms wide and fingers symmetrically large – (Hind bin Abi Hala); I have not touched any thick or thin silk or anything else which was softer and fleshier than Prophet’s palm – (Anas); **Calves and Feet:** Calves were not fleshy but symmetrical – (Jabir bin Samra); feet were fleshy, lower parts of feet little hollow and feet so smooth that they could not retain water – (Jabir bin Samra); very little flesh on heels – (Jabir bin Samra). The most graphic description of the Prophet was given by an old woman at whose house the Prophet stopped on his way from the cave of Saur to Medina and her goats gave so much milk that the Prophet and his companions were fully satisfied and yet there was much left over. When the old woman’s husband returned home and expressed his surprise, the woman gave the description of the appearance of Prophet as follows: Handsome features, bright face, likeable temperament, neither the abdomen protruding nor hair of the head fallen out, graceful, handsome, eyes black and large, hair long and thick, voice clear, long neck, bright black of the eye, natural grey corners, thin and drooping eyelashes, black and curly hair, silent with dignity inclined to cordiality, graceful and captivating at a distance and very sweet and most handsome from near, talk sweet and words clear, neither more nor less than necessary, all talk consistent, middle-sized, neither short so as to look insignificant nor tall to look unbecoming, a fresh twig of handsome plant, charming to look at and well-built. His companions are so devoted that they always surround him, quietly listen to what he says and promptly obey what he orders. Obeyed, liked, neither verbose nor cryptic. The *Rashtriya Sahara*, 28 February 2010, New Delhi.

6 The data was retrieved from <http://www.zakariva.net/resources/hilve.pdf>, on November 21, 2012.

7 Ibid.

8 According to W. J. T. Mitchell, a relationship of “word and image” seems to be better understood as a dialectical trope, which explains the potentiality of the word as image. Here the term “textimages” is used as a reverse form of Mitchell’s term “imagetexts”, which combine words and images, as a dialectical trope, or figurative condensation of a whole set of relations and distinctions, that crops up in aesthetics, semiotics, accounts of perception, cognition, and communication, and analyses of media. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Word and Image*. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds), *Critical Terms for Art History*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. Second edition), p. 57.

References

- 1 It is also a replica of the shrine of the Imam, although its form is altogether different from the original shrine in Iraq. As my cultural and structural analyses of the form of tazia suggests that it is highly influenced by the local Hindu temple architecture. The study also elucidates how the lack of transportation facilities and the “burning desires” of *ziyarat* compelled Indian Muslims to replicate this shrine into the Hindu temple oriented-form of tazia. One might assume that in absentia of the visual and textual references, it might not have been possible for Indian artist to replicate the original form of shrine.
- 2 For detail study see Ghulam Abbas, *Tazias of Chiniot*, (Lahore: Tarikh Publications, 2007)
- 3 Diana L. Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1998), op, cit. p. 3.
- 4 For detail study see, op, cit. p. 9.
- 5 Following is the translation of the description: **Face:** His face shown like the moon – (Hind bin Abi Hala); his face was round like the moon – (Bara bin Azib); his face was not quite round but inclined to roundness – (Ali); broad forehead, slanting thick brows parted in the middle and a vein protruded between the two parts which became more prominent in anger – (Hind bin Abi Hala); **Color:** Neither white like lime, nor tanned, but brown with whiteness predominant – (Anas); white, reddish – (Ali); white but wholesome – (Abu Tufail); white and bright – (Hind bin Abi Hala); **Eyes:** Black, with long eyelashes – (Ali); black and drooping. Habit of looking from the corner of the eyes in shyness – (Hind bin Abi Hala); red lines in the white parts, wide sockets, and natural grey corners – (Jabir bin Samra); **Nose:** Somewhat high with unique brightness whereby it looked large at first sight – (Hind bin Abi Hala); **Cheeks:** Even and soft, a bit of flesh drooping at the lower end – (Hind bin Abi Hala); **Mouth:** Wide – (Jabir bin Samra); moderately wide – (Hind bin Abi Hala); **Teeth:** Thin and bright, symmetrical, openings in front teeth – (Ibn Abbas); when talking a light seemed to sparkle from the teeth – (Anas); **Beard:** Full and thick – (Hind bin Abi Hala); **Neck:** Thin and long, beautifully chiseled like a statue, color of the neck white like silver and handsome – (Hind bin Abi Hala); **Head:** Large but symmetrical – (Hind bin Abi Hala); **Hair:** Neither quite straight, nor sheep like – (Qatada); slightly curly – (Anas); thick, sometimes touching ear lobes and sometimes reaching up to shoulders – (Bara bin Azib); parted in the middle – (Hind bin Abi Hala); the body did not have much hair. A line of hair running from the chest to the navel – (Ali and Hind bin Abi Hala); there were some hairs on shoulders, arms and upper chest – (Hind bin Abi Hala); **General Structure:** Body well built, bones joining, limbs large and strong – (Hind bin Abi Hala); body was not fat – (Ali); neither tall nor short, small but middle-sized – (Anas); inclined

present, which developed the capacity for objectivity and analytical thought that ultimately helped to bring about the new historical consciousness, the reification of religion and the emphasis on this-worldly action. At the same time, the migration of word from sound to sight instigated another process of interiorization.

The interiorization, as an expression of a growing sense of self, of the manifold nature of the human being, prompted to spring up the idea, in religious terms, in which the Prophet became the one symbol on which religious imaginations could focus their desires to love and to trust. However, both processes of distancing and interiorization influenced the religious understanding and the new vision of Islam as a system developed in the Muslim mind. As a result, the first-half of twentieth century saw a considerable amount of biographies of the Prophet came out. In the Punjab, moreover, from the 1920s, there was a special the Sirat movement, to distribute pamphlets and sermons about the Prophet, which had success amongst the middle classes.²¹

Similarly, the revolutions led by technologies entered next phase with the advent of photo-, or/and media-technologies. The excessive use of cutting edge technologies developed the universal sense of globalization and were subject to put human life at ease. But these prompted to generate the counter narrative of regionalism and unleashed anxieties. As a result, the crucial impact of the photo- and media-technologies on religious practices once again was inevitable. The process of interiorization of mind also progressed further and the sight which was earlier restricted to the written word, a highly abstract form of an idea. It now has got shifted to an image, a comprehensive visual description of the same written word or any idea. In a way, this shift, in the canons of epistemology of knowledge, denotes a transformation of knowledge from the oral/aural sources to the visual. It identifies the next level to certify the information and formation the rational mind.

critical even from its outset, but especially in modern times, it has become interesting as every sect seems conscious to establish its religio-cultural transcendence. So, to surpass each other and to comply with the local cultural ethos it is not surprising to get fascinated from each other.

The involvement of Pakistan in the war against terrorism from more than last one and a half decade, the law and order situation; peace and security condition in the country is another big issue of the day. The extreme feelings of insecurity of life and property and persistently growing demands of the modern life have unleashed anxieties on the society in abundance. These elements have seriously infected the morality issues of the nation.

People have become so fed up of the sore news of suicide assaults, bomb blasts, drone attacks and target killings that nobody is interested to see either newspaper or any TV news channel. In order to engage the general viewers, mostly private TV news channels have employed well-known comedians, who discuss and criticize current social and political affairs in satirical manners.¹⁷ Such programs are very popular in public as these are one of the sources of social catharsis and entertainment. Similarly, public liking of Bollywood films and Indian television channels have also increased incredibly over the last one decade.¹⁸

Indeed, presently the rocketing anxieties of the modern life and the crucial objective realities of the contemporary Islamic cultures and societies of both countries have brought common man to the point where he is ready to accept every deity who could bribe him away from the difficulties of perplexity and artificial daily life. As Yousuf Saeed elaborates on natural inclination of poor Muslims towards the local shrines in South Asia:

When all possible efforts fail to solve a particular problem in someone's life, she or he is ready to go to any extreme – any god, deity, priest, or house of worship that may resolve the crisis. People in distress often help each other with a little talisman, a *Prasad* from Tirupati to cure a disease, or a *tawiz* from Nizam ud-Din Auliya to get the ideal job.¹⁹

The role of modern technologies – print-, media- and photo-technology – cannot be overlooked as these have imparted immensely in fashioning the images of the relics and sacred shrines, as a symbol of popular piety in devotional practices of popular Islam in the Subcontinent in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-centuries. Benedict Anderson has noticed that the print-technology played a significant role in awakening of distinctive cultural, political, communal and religious consciousness amongst the masses.²⁰

Robinson has elucidated further, psychologically, the printed world led to new qualities of the Muslim mind and new forms of mental behavior. The migration from oral/aural into visual space put the mind into the process of distancing or the separation of the knower from the known and past from

and how the varying contextual backgrounds plays the role to constitute diverse Islamic behaviors in different localities.

The contemporary socio-political and religio-cultural conditions of the Indian Muslims are getting critical day by day, which demonstrate the extreme feelings of insecurity. Fear and sever identity crisis¹³ created after the demolition of Babri mosque in 1992; stereotyping of the “Indian Muslims” as “criminals”, associating them with the underworld mafia by the Bollywood cinema in 1980s and 90s; and typecasting of the same as “terrorists” by the Indian media (and the police) after the communal riots in Gujarat in 2002 and Mumbai attack in 2008, imitating the post-9/11 western media policy against Muslims across the world.

All these factors have made the Indian Muslims so frightened, as I have realized during my long stay at Jawaharal Nehru University, New Delhi (JNU) that the Muslim students felt reluctant while interact with me, only because I am a Pakistani. I personally know an Indian Civil Servants and a couple of Professors, who after their retirement choose to live in Muslim concentrated regions of Delhi only due to security reasons.

To understand the nature of problem, it will be appropriate to study Sachar Committee Report of 2006, which provides very rich qualitative insights on the Muslims’ perceptions regarding their problems faced by in contemporary Indian multi-religious and multicultural environments.

Muslims carry a double burden of being labeled as “anti-national” [or “terrorist”] and as being “appeased” at the same time ... In general, Muslims complained that they are constantly looked upon with great degree of suspicion not only by certain sections of society but also by public institutions and governance structures ... This has depressing effect on their psyche ... This sense of discrimination combined with issues of identity and insecurity has led to an acute sense of inferiority which comes in the way of its full participation in public arena and results in collective alienation ... Many also feel that any change in the attitude of the state requires “commitment and a change in the mindset” observed some.¹⁴

Coming back to the focal theme, the other visual symbols are worth mentioning. The metaphorical use of the *topi*, the beard and the *burqa* by the Indian Muslim men and women explicitly demonstrate, as per acts of “showing” and “seeing”¹⁵, the desires to be seen as “a Muslim” in public spaces. It is also confirmed by the popular Sachar Committee Report in which all three symbols are declared as “Markers of Muslim Identity”¹⁶ in India.

The identity crisis, on the other hand, in Islamic society of Pakistan, reflects an extreme hostility of relationships between the Shia, the Sunni Barelvi, and the Wahhabis. Although, this sectarian conflict has been very

occasions of *majalis* (mourning assemblies) at different places in India. He told that generally the Shias do not buy the pictures of Imams. He has a catalogue of the Shia posters which he presents to those customers only who demand it. He reproduces the pictures of Imams if ordered, which indicates that the pictures of Imams are available only at private places.

According to Farzand, exhibition of such images in public arena is problematic in India. For instance, putting the picture of Imam Ali on *taboot* (replica of the bier of Imam Ali) caused riots among Shias in Ali Garh in 2009. He told that like the Sunni Muslims, the Shias are also conscious about their Muslim communal identity. This disparity between the Sunnis (of India and Pakistan) and the Shias (of Pakistan, Iran and India) marks the distinctive cultural behaviors which are mainly subject to the varying contextual backgrounds. It questions the authenticity of Orientalists' concept of Islamic cultures and societies as "monolithic" on one hand; while on the other hand, it underscores the strength of cultural values against the religious coherence at doctrinal level.

This comparative study of the popular Shia and Sunni visual practices in the Subcontinent reflects that it is merely the Muslim communal identity issue which makes Indian Muslims sensitive in the face of icono-philiac Indian cultural context. On the other hand, in Iran, Pakistan and India, it shows how varying contextual backgrounds cut across the Islamic prohibition on the figurative representation of a deity to constitute distinctive sectarian identities within Islam.

There are certain reasons for the emerging new forms of "popular Indian Islamic visuality", which represents the notions of individual and/or visual piety and the salience of local multi-faith shrines in the popular Muslim devotional traditions in South Asia. Amongst these are: varying contextual backgrounds; legal sanctions granted by the religious leadership; identity politics; modern photo-, print- and media-technologies; and anxieties of the changing new pattern of everyday life could possibly be the fundamental reasons.

A range of conflicts stemming from colonial modernity and identity politics around religion ravaged the social, cultural and political landscapes of the Subcontinent in the middle of twentieth century resulting in Partition and great trauma. The region was divided into two countries – India and Pakistan – that shared same historical and cultural past, but faced different prospects. India assumed its secular identity and Pakistan embraced Islam.¹²

The impact of varying contextual developments on Islam in two different localities is manifold – within the religion (Islam) and across the religions, and within the region and across the regions. Within the religion it deals how the popular devotional behavior of the same sect (as Shia or Ahl-e Sunnat) towards the same issue changes region to region or culture to culture,

There are *hilyas* for some of the pre-Quranic Biblical prophets in one of the great works on *hilyas* – *Qasas al-Anbiya* by al-Sulabi (d. 1035). Zakariya describes the general features of *hilyas* that begin with a succinct description of the subject's physical characteristics, including height, built, complexion, eyes, hair, hands, and gait, and then move to the subject's individual and moral characteristics.⁷ In a way, the description of the appearance and the *hilya/hulya* may be called "textimages"⁸ of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The religious sanctions of the reverence of the replicas from both sects of the Shias and the Sunni Barelvis have reinforced the popular traditions of the visual piety. As Ahmad Reza Khan (1856-1921), a Sufi scholar, who took stand so firmly against Wahhabi ideology that his followers were later known as "Sunni Barelvi", simply because he was a resident of the town of Bareilly in Rohilkhand, Utter Pradesh. His movement is also called the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jamaat (Followers of the Tradition of the Prophet (PBUH)).

According to Usah Sanyal, the celebrations of Milad and the Sufi Urs, which she calls "shrine centered devotion," was carried out in a spirit of reform, and was a conscious choice. She describes further that the Ahl-e Sunnat movement, in its self-conscious, was based on a sense of individual responsibility (piety).⁹ He issued a huge number of *fatwas* (legal decree) against Wahhabi, Ahl-e Hadis and Deobandi puritanical tenets. He authored a treatise entitled "*Majmua-e Rasail: Radd-e Rawafiz*" in 1903-4, in refutation of the Shia *tazidari* (tazia rituals), in which he passed his judgment as:

"In principle, there was no harm in keeping reproductions of Husain's tomb as a tabarruk (sacred relic). It was like keeping pictures of the Kaba, or of the Prophet's tomb, or reproductions of the Prophet's shoes. These were all sources of baraka, or grace, and keeping and reproductions of inanimate objects is permitted in Islam."¹⁰

This decree must have substantiated the consumption of the devotional images, especially amongst the Ahl-e Sunnat devotees, as a symbol of piety in popular devotionism. Though, picture publishers, Muslim press or rather the modern photo-, print- and media-technologies played a phenomenal role in popularizing the devotional images, but unequivocally it was the religious legal sanctions that prompted to create, in Yousuf Saeed's words, the "devotional gaze".

Likewise, a huge number of pictures of the Prophet and his family are decorating the Shia places in Iran and Pakistan. Ironically, instead of the *fatwa* of Ali Khamnai¹¹, the Shias of India do not use the Iranian images of their Imams publicly. Farzand Ali Zaidi is a Shia Muslim and sells the Shia posters, souvenirs and other utensils related to the Muharram rituals on the

saying and the poor man's act indicates the "popular beliefs" that reflects the profound devotional concerns and immense popularity of local Sufi shrines, even the replicas of the holy shrines in South Asia. Considering the annual *haj* and/or *umrah* (a supplementary *haj*) one of the basic five pillars of Islam, this juxtaposition of the local Sufi shrines, and the replicas of the shrine in Makkah become critical as it directly damage the foundation of Islam at both levels of visual and the performance of religious rituals.

There is a new virtual image of the Prophet Muhammad that I encountered in Delhi in 2012. Accordingly, the description of the appearance of the Prophet was published under the title of "*Huzur ka Hulya-e Athar*" (auspicious appearance of the Prophet) in Urdu newspaper, the daily *Rashtriya Sahara*, on very day (12 Rabi I) of the Milad celebrations.⁵

Indeed, the description is called *Hulya-e Athar* and is a compilation of the "*Shamail al-Nabi*", the accounts of the appearance of Prophet, from various sources of Islamic history. More important is the Milad occasion when this description of the Prophet was published to substitute the figurative representation of Prophet, which means that mere "words" can, somehow, be the replacement of a figurative "image".

It offers the most abstract form of the image of the Prophet as compared to the painted one because it depends on the cognitive abilities and the visual vocabulary of readers/listeners. It permits its readers/listeners/(artists) to create countless but unclear, hazy, incomplete, distorted and invisible images on the soft canvases of minds. Considering the Islamic stricture on figurative representation, this indefinite quality of the virtual image becomes the sign of visual piety. Though it is meant to quench the visual thirst or temptation of devotees, yet its impact is entirely opposite as such a soft image would intensify the emotions of love in absentia of the visual/figurative representation.

There is another example of the same kind, like the Turkish "*hilye*", the Urdu word "*hulya*" also seems to be the corrupt form of the Arabic word "*hilya*", which has several meanings, including physiognomy, natural disposition, likeness, depiction, characterization and description. In the art of Islamic calligraphy, the term "*hilya*" is used for the certain genre of calligraphic painting throughout the Muslim world in which the *hilya* of the Prophet Muhammad is inscribed mostly in *Sulus* and *Naskh* – the names of two scripts, popular for the Quranic calligraphy (Fig: 4).

According to Mohamed Zakariya, an American scholar and calligrapher, the *hilya* was a part of oral literature of ancient Arabs, long before it was used in calligraphy.⁶ The centuries old tradition of praising the Prophet through his appearance may also be found in contemporary devotional poetry of *naat* (an epithet of the Prophet) which is meant to be recited and heard.

connection between tazia and *Sharia*. It is difficult to make you understand as it's all about *ishq* (love)." He became emotional, but continued: "tazia is our *ishq* with Husain and *ishq* has nothing to do with *Sharia*. Always remember! *ishq* begins where *Sharia* ends. Today, if Husain were reappearing to us and say, abandons the tazia practices; we would not accept him because now we have become engrossed into it that to us "tazia" is "Husain"." Keeping in view the Islamic stricture on graphic representation of human being, Sami's comments describe vividly how a deity is conceived, transformed or personified into a metaphorical architectural form, in popular devotional practices of Islam in South Asia.

This practice may have been influenced by multi-religious and multi-cultural environments of India as the inception of replicating the sacred shrines may be comprehended with reference to the Hindu tradition of *jhankis* and the Shia tradition of tazia as both traditions are older than the Sunni Barelvi tradition of making replicas of the sacred shrine in Makkah and Medina. We have already discussed the Shia tradition; yet in Hindu ritual tradition, the "*jhanki*" is referred to "*darshan*" or religious "seeing," or visual perception of the sacred. Diana L. Eck has tremendously elucidated on the darshanic tradition as: "the central act of Hindu worship, from the point of view of the lay person, is to stand in the presence of the deity and to behold the image with one's own eyes, to see and be seen by the deity."³

She goes further elaborating on "seeing" in Indian context, a kind of touching, and quotes art historian Stella Kramrisch, who wrote: "seeing, according to Indian notions, is a going forth of the sight towards the object. Sight touches it and acquires its form. Touch is the ultimate connection by which the visible yields to being grasped. While the eye touches the object, the vitality that pulsate in it is communicated..."⁴ According to the Hindu darshanic tradition, an eye contact is developed between the deity and the devotee through which one feel blessed upon being seen by the deity.

The replicas of the holy shrines in Makkah and Medina are very popular in South Asian tradition of celebrating the Milad (the birthday celebrations of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)). These are made during the first twelve days of Rabi I. As per regional traditions of celebrations, these replicas are displayed in the streets, bazaars or roadsides, and sometime, these are carried on bullock-carts in the form of Milad processions on the final day of celebrations. In popular Sunni Barelvi devotionals, these are revered so greatly that devotees would not even hesitate from kissing and touching.

A couple of years ago, I observed an old man circumambulating a replica of the Kaba displayed in the bazaar of Sanda in Lahore. When I asked the person why he was doing so, for which he replied, "I am a poor man and cannot afford to go to Makkah for the performance of *haj*". This humorous

relics are also available. Another genre of the popular Islamic visual culture is comprising of Sufi poster and calendars, which manifests the colorful and vibrant figurative representation of Sufis. All these images may be viewed everywhere – displayed on vehicles, in shops, houses and offices in the form of posters and calendars etc. All these images of popular Islamic devotion have constituted the “popular Indian Islamic visuality” in the era of visual.

Considering the stricture of figurative representation in Islam, well-defined Islamic ideology of monotheism, and the fundamental belief in formless and invisible divinity, the printed figurative images of the Sufis, the *Ahl-e Bayt* (Prophet’s family) as well as some textual, abstract, or rather soft images called “*hilya*” and “*huliya*” of the Prophet, found in the Islamic tradition of calligraphy and in the historic accounts of the Prophet known as *Shamail al-Nabi* respectively, are solicited to be studied in line with the historical “miniature paintings” which emerged as “religious” and had spread across Turkey, Persia, and India.

Unlike today’s fashion, these religious paintings were fostered by the Ottoman sultans (kings), Safavids, and Mughals as part of the court art and alienated from the mosques. Considering the Islamic proscription on the figurative representation of the living being, this study concentrates on how these elements of the “popular Indian Islamic visuality”, in the modern era of visual, cut across the *Sharia* or doctrinal Islam to constitute the South Asian popular Muslim devotional behavior.

In popular practices of the Muslims in South Asia, we see that the divinity is visualized into different forms as oppose to the Islamic concept of the formless and invisible God. Let’s first discuss the Sunni Barelvi and the Shia perceptions of the divine with reference to Sunni devotional images (images/replicas of the relics and the shrine of the Prophet) and the tazia. The tazia could be the best example to better understand the influence of local Indian perception of the deity, at the level of visual, on Islamic ideology of the formless divinity. The issue may be understood from the artist’s perspective. The tazia is principally known as an icon of Shia devotional tradition in the Subcontinent and, as per popular understanding, the Shias are more tolerant as Muharram rituals comply more than the Sunni Barelvi faith with the South Asian cultural ethos.

As far as the making of tazias is concerned, it is apparent from the data provided by my earlier research that almost all tazia-artists in Pakistan, even today, belong to the Sunni Barelvi faith.² It reflects intense propensities of the Sunni Barelvi faith towards the Hindu darshanic tradition or South Asian cultural ethos.

In 2004, I interviewed an old Sunni tazia-artist Muhammad Sami in Hyderabad (Sindh) for my M.A. studies on tazias and asked about the permissibility of tazia in *Sharia*. He replied: “who told you that there is any