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2 Defining the postcolonial sacred

Contested places of worship and urban planning in Delhi after Partition, 1947–1951

Clemens Six

Introduction

The partition of British India into the two sovereign states of India and Pakistan in the summer of 1947 was one of the major humanitarian disasters in world history after the Second World War.[1] The (by now) significant body of literature on this event has illuminated many obvious and less obvious facets of human suffering related to inter-religious violence, forced displacement, mass exodus, starvation and gender-related forms of humiliation.[2] Some aspects of this collective trauma, however, have so far been underacknowledged in historical research, although they seem to concern some fundamental and far-reaching layers of Partition, which influenced not only the direct witnesses but also subsequent generations of Indian and Pakistani citizens.

Jawaharlal Nehru, prime minister of India's transitional government during decolonisation, emphasised in November 1947 that, in his view, the most terrible dimension of Partition and its aftermath was the "psychological part" – that is, the "perversion of man's mind" especially among the younger generations on both sides of the new borders "growing up seeing these horrors."[3] Until today it is indeed challenging for historians to fully grasp the immediate as well as long-term psychological impact of Partition.

This chapter seeks to contribute to this reflection by addressing one specific dimension of Partition's "psychological part," namely, the hostility towards and the annihilation of religious infrastructure, material culture and religious representation in urban areas. Although historians have extensively analysed the far-reaching consequences of Partition due to (forced) migration and the consecutive demographic changes on both sides of the new borders, the collective trauma of inter-religious mass violence had an important cultural-psychological dimension. The separation of the two states was also a contestation of the sacred, in particular in Northern Indian and Pakistani cities. The violence deliberately targeted what the other religious community considered as sacred, sought to extinguish the sacred in its manifold representations and thereby aimed to redraw the boundaries of the "own" sacred in order to establish it as the undisputed national heritage. In this light, Partition was a period not only of mass killings and forceful evictions but

also of widespread destruction of cultural and religious traditions and their architectural forms of representation and, by extension, of collective identities, particularly in urban areas. As such, these acts of annihilation, together with the numerous successful and failed efforts to reverse them, determined the socio-cultural landscape of Northern Indian and Pakistani cities for generations to come.

During the months and years after Partition, the city administration in Delhi was confronted with around 500 disputes over places of worship including desecrated mosques, destroyed Islamic graveyards and Sufi shrines, damaged Hindu temples, as well as religious claims over locations previously unrecognised as sacred. These conflicts reflected a broader dialectic of Partition between the redrawing of the new nations' external borders and a reconstitution of these societies' internal boundaries between religious, regional and social communities. Not all of these disputes led, of course, to major controversies, and many could be solved by state authorities without any significant altercation. From a larger perspective, though, these disputes were significant because they occurred in a general atmosphere of inter-religious hatred between Hindus and Sikhs on the one side and Muslims on the other side. Furthermore, the context of decolonisation, a more than shaky law-and-order situation, the general shortage of almost all resources and confusing competencies among state institutions aggravated the explosive potential of these conflicts. On this backdrop, the disputes reveal three more specific, context-bound lessons on the meaning of the sacred (and the secular) in early postcolonial urban space.

First, the conflicts over Islamic and Hindu sacred spaces were an opportunity for the state and its new elites to install their authority over society. More specifically, they defined and implemented this authority through the certification and authorisation of the sacred as well as the self-image as a secular instance located above the conflictive claims of religious communities. As Eric Lewis Beverley has shown for colonial South Asia, cities had since long been spaces of political negotiations, in which conflictive claims of order, the subversion of this order, as well as different forms of agency were negotiated (Beverley 2011). In this view, postcolonial Delhi was simply a continuation of political contestations in the radicalised and rapidly evolving context of the transition from colonial to postcolonial order. The disputed status of sacred places during Partition, however, was an opportunity for state authorities to open a new chapter in these political negotiations through the medium of urban space and in this way implement their (not yet self-evident) political legitimacy.

Second, these disputes provided an occasion to implement the state's vision of a model (urban) society in the capital city as the torchbearer of independent India. In this model society, both the sacred and the secular were of central importance. In urban studies, questions of hegemony and its production, preservation and decline have a long tradition. Henri Lefebvre started his magisterial work on the production of space with the question of how hegemony in a Gramscian sense influences the formation of class as well as space in a capitalist system. According to Lefebvre, space not only has an active role in the existing (capitalist)

mode of production but is also actively used by hegemonic milieus to manifest their predominance (Lefebvre 1991: 10–11). For Gramsci himself, historical change was fundamentally "spatialized" in the sense that claims to urbanity (and rurality) were for him moments of hegemonic struggles.[4] In this view, contests over urban space are at the centre of struggles for predominance and control. What the disputes over places of worship in post-1947 Delhi illustrate, however, is the central meaning of the sacred (and the secular) for these urban processes to produce hegemony. Built environments became loaded with hegemonic forms of religious meaning and thereby constituted a diverse and power-connoted urban landscape. Yi-Fun Tuan's notion of urban architecture as a space that instructs, reveals and teaches is a good starting point to grasp these power-related dynamics around the urban sacred (1977: 114, 116).

Third, conservative and extremist Hindu as well as Islamic organisations instrumentalised and fuelled the disputes over mosques, shrines, temples and graveyards to counter state-authorised visions of the city and postcolonial society. They deliberately used the contested "sacred" as a means to propagate their own versions of the nation, religious-cultural hegemony and social order. In this sense, urban space also functioned as a medium of opposition and subversion. The framing, authorisation and certification of the sacred turned into a central arena in which ideas on the state, society and the future were negotiated. In light of the empirical evidence discussed next, the more recent breakthrough of Hindu majoritarianism under the leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in contemporary India appears more as a conjunctural rise of an ideology and political practice that was alive and striving during the very foundation period of the republic. Parts of the government and the bureaucratic apparatus at various levels actively enhanced this majoritarianism also during and after Partition.

Authorising the sacred and legitimising the secular

Delhi's 20th-century architectural history is characterised by many different, often contradictory and conflictive claims over urban space and its monuments. Time and again, the city was confronted, on the one hand, with large-scale social challenges such as poverty, soaring inequality and a lack of housing, and ambitious political-ideological utopias on the other. As a consequence, social, economic and devotional realities on the ground frequently thwarted the municipality's endeavours of planning, control and social engineering (Sutton 2018). However, Delhi as the capital city of British India after 1911 and of the Indian Republic after independence functioned as a torchbearer of the elite's normative ideas about the state and society, including the administration of religious affairs. Historians have come up with contrasting interpretations of Prime Minister Nehru's own approach to India's religious traditions. Some prominent voices in the field of South Asian history accused him of uncritical devotion to scientific progress, technological modernity and anti-religious Enlightenment ideas that sought to break altogether

with the ties of the past (Chatterjee 1986: 132–133). More adequately, though, it seems that, especially after Partition, Nehru developed a rather nuanced interpretation of Indian history as a delicate combination of continuity and change.[5] His vision of a secular state as "the only modern and civilized approach"[6] to India after colonialism was embedded in important national traits of historical *longue durée*.[7]

Others in the administration, such as B. R. Ambedkar, saw no contradiction either in a strong commitment to India's religious-cultural inheritance, state-led religious reform and much-needed social change (Lamba 2013: 187–206). In this light, the preservation of sacred spaces belonging to different religious communities was not only a practical necessity to restore law and order, but also an indispensable requirement for India as a religiously composite nation. The preservation of Islamic sites in Delhi and elsewhere enjoyed a particular relevance for this vision of postcolonial India in the face of the multiple contradictions of urban realities on the ground. A more detailed look at the programmes and strategies to solve the conflicts of sacred space in the aftermath of Partition helps to explain these contradictions.

On 18 September 1947, only several weeks after India's formal independence, Mahatma Gandhi chose a pressing topic for one of his regular speeches to his closest adherents during his daily prayer meetings at the Birla House in New Delhi.[8] He criticised the expulsion of Muslims from India and the widespread destruction of mosques and other Islamic sites in the city. In his view, these developments were disastrous not only for India's Islamic communities but also for the religions of Hinduism and Sikhism themselves. The annihilation of Islam in the city was a contradiction to these religions' core ethics. Similarly, Nehru was increasingly concerned about these cultural-religious destructions, which threatened to forever transform Delhi's social and cultural landscape. For that reason, he reminded his home minister Vallabhbhai Patel that "the question of mosques" was of "outmost significance" for the nation as a whole.[9]

Although the disputes also concerned damaged Hindu and Sikh sanctuaries, the large majority of cases were about mosques that had been converted into Hindu temples. In order to address and, if possible, solve these disputes before they could escalate into major inter-religious clashes, the state bureaucracy created formalised procedures to authorise contested sites either as "Islamic" or "Hindu," or declare them as altogether "secular." In the latter case, no religious identity could be identified and, as a consequence, no religious acts of any nature were permitted. The concrete form of these procedures varied, but, as a general pattern, the municipal authorities undertook research and historical investigations on British colonial modalities. The main interest of the government thereby was to ensure continuity from colonial times and thus reject any change in status triggered by Partition. The city administrators sent out inspectors to visit and investigate the disputed sites, looked into colonial tax registers, and tried to identify the leases concluded between the British authorities and the officially recognised Hindu and Muslim organisations.[10]

The government interventions were not only about the principled religious status of land and architectural sites but also concerned religious provocations in the context of inter-religious violence and religious conquest. In several cases, unknown persons had installed images of Hindu deities in mosques in order to symbolically convert these buildings into Hindu temples. This pattern was a particular concern in the outskirts of Delhi where arriving Hindu refugees and emigrating Muslims had significantly altered the religious composition of local neighbourhoods. The share of Hindu communities had risen sharply. As a consequence, the remaining but shrinking Islamic communities struggled to sustain their social and religious presence as they increasingly lost political influence and control over their religious infrastructure.[11] In other cases, refugees occupied mosques to simply have a roof above their heads. Hindu images inside mosques were frequently just a provocative spin-off of the broader issue of refugee housing and the overwhelming challenges of relief work. As a reaction, the government sent significant police forces to remove the images or even destroy any architectural alterations that had been made inside the Islamic compounds.

The historical method of the city authorities was sometimes close to arbitrary. In order to clarify the historical status of a disputed sacred place, the municipal bureaucrats consulted British tax registers, contracts over the use of land or other formalised arrangements between the state and the religious institutions. But what exactly counted as historically verified was a question beyond clear criteria. In the case of a mosque in Takia Bela Road, for example, historical research into the official registry unveiled that this piece of land had been claimed by an Islamic clergy as early as 1923.[12] The British, though, had prosecuted the Maulvi and rejected his claim. In 1946 – that is, before Partition – the successor clergy again initiated plans for the construction of a mosque but was (again) rejected by the colonial administration. Now, in the postcolonial context, the Delhi administration concluded in line with British colonial practice that a mosque had never existed on that particular spot. Any Islamic or other religious claim was thereby illegal, and the spot was declared "secular."

The cultural extinction of Islamic heritage

The government and the municipal administration undertook several concrete efforts to protect Islamic infrastructure in the city. The authorities repeatedly instructed their police force to restore the original condition of mosques used as temples or "inhabitations" and to consequently punish any forms of misdeeds in accordance with existing laws.[13] However, the general atmosphere of hatred and violence as well as the – at best – half-hearted response within the police forces made the immediate clearance and restoration of mosques and other Islamic sites frequently impossible.

In the traditionally strong Muslim areas of Qarol Bagh, Subzi Mandi and Paharganj, where many Hindu and Sikh refugees had settled, the municipality was forced to readapt its procedures to settle the disputes and ordered its own

"custodian of Evacuee Property" to take control over the mosques.[14] Due to the ongoing tensions and violent clashes, the city administration decided not to repair these Islamic sites immediately because it expected them in such a case to be damaged or even destroyed again. Refugees, who had provisionally settled in the immediate neighbourhood or even on the compounds of the mosques, were evicted by the police.[15] In reaction to this, refugees organised public demonstrations against the police, which frequently escalated into riots. For the authorities, the almost unsolvable dilemma was that the official policy of restoring Islamic sites was frustrated by the legitimate material and social needs of the refugees. In spite of its already exhausted capacities, Kingsway Camp, one of the biggest refugee camps in Delhi, and other comparable premises in the city had to be expanded in order to accommodate the refugees evicted from these mosques.[16]

In the long run, the problems of the restoration policy towards Islamic sites became even more apparent. The overall trend was that in the following years the city administration was forced to reduce its restoration and repair efforts due to a lack of funding, lukewarm political support from within and ongoing pressure from the streets to give in to the pressure exerted by refugees and their socio-economic interests. In 1951, Delhi's chief commissioner admitted that the restoration of mosques and other Islamic sites was no longer a political priority.[17] In contrast to official orders, many mosques had actually been occupied and inhabited by refugees and factually repurposed as cow shelters, food stalls, small shops and other forms of economic infrastructure. In numerous other cases, the actual status of mosques was fully unknown to the administration.

Again a few years later, the municipality conceded that action taken hitherto in Delhi against the unauthorised occupation and desecration of mosques had largely been "ineffective." Refugees but also non-refugee Hindu and Sikh inhabitants were using these Islamic premises for various social and economic purposes. A brief overview on the status quo showed that, where once Muslims used to pray, non-Muslims had erected housing, engine workshops, tea and pan shops, schools or nurseries.[18] The problem was not only the pressing needs of refugees for a source of income as well as social infrastructure.[19] Equally important, it seems, was the strong business acumen of established residents, who interpreted the overall chaotic situation and inter-religious hostility as a welcome opportunity to enhance their own prosperity.

A peculiar form of religious-cultural annihilation concerned the realm of the dead. Islamic graveyards were exposed to several forms of destruction and, consequently, extinction. In the centre of Delhi, Muslim graveyards were occupied by refugees who used the land for housing.[20] Their central location in the midst of soaring land prices made these graveyards an attractive resource for the new residents. The municipality was clearly not always on the side of the Islamic communities, which tried indefatigably to defend their ancestors' last resting places. Especially when the local Islamic communities were poor, officials tended to join wealthier refugee circles and decide these disputes in their favour. In New Rhotak Road a little outside the city centre, for example, the administration itself

destroyed an Islamic graveyard for the profitable construction of new residential areas.[21] This inability – or, better, lack of political will – to effectively protect Islamic sites resulted in the vanishing support among Muslim communities for the Congress Party. Originally, the Indian National Congress had been the biggest hope for Indian Muslims to secure a secular India in which Muslims would be on an equal footing with Hindus and others. Now, confronted with the harsh realities on the ground, which meant a gradual decline of Islamic cultural presence in the city, Muslims were disappointed by the Congress's quiet and sometimes not-so-quiet acceptance of this religious displacement.

Engineering religious pluralism

Addressing the disputes over places of worship was an opportunity for the government to communicate and enforce its vision of postcolonial India. In this sense, religious architecture in urban space functioned as a medium to manifest and propagate concrete ideas about social and political order after the formal abolition of colonial rule. In the aftermath of Partition, Delhi's governmental authorities discovered a specific form of religious architecture that appeared exceptionally suitable as a form of "petrified ideology" (Maran 2006: 10). In this case, the hegemonic state ideology comprised a secular state in which religious pluralism was a core feature of society, and religious communities would coexist peacefully or even support each other in their respective religious endeavours. To be sure, not all factions within the bureaucratic apparatus and the national administration – at that time in charge of the national capital city – shared this vision. From the very first day after independence, there were conflictive ideas about the desired shape of religious pluralism and the existence of a cultural-religious (Hindu) mainstream in post-independence India. What these conflicts and the official policy of state secularity illustrate, though, is that religious pluralism is indeed not something given but a product of historical construction efforts (Formichi 2014: 1–2; Malik 2005). In other words, religious pluralism is the result of political engineering that converts religious diversity into an object of political-administrative management.

The sacred spaces the authorities discovered to propagate their vision of postcolonial India were the so-called *dargāh*s, Islamic Sufi shrines usually built over the graves of Sufi saints and dervishes. Over generations, these dargāhs had regularly attracted large numbers of Muslim worshippers from various regions in South Asia but also significant numbers of Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. Dargāhs were also connected in wider urban networks and in this way formed their own spatial identity. As such, these shrines were not only exceptional spaces of co-worshipping but also places that enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy from established Islamic authorities and (conservative) clergy.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Islamic reform movements as well as secular state authorities in the Muslim world repeatedly targeted Sufi orders and their places of worship (van Bruinessen 2009). Because of their internal

heterogeneity, liberal theological orientation and contested meaning as a religious label, Sufi orders were frequently suspected of breeding political subversion and religious non-conformity. The most extreme example of such a controversy between Sufi orders and a modernising state was Turkey after 1925, where Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and his prime minister Ismet Inönü outlawed Sufi orders altogether, accusing them of providing an organisational framework for political opposition. The unintended consequence was, of course, that state repression politicised Sufi orders and, together with Kurdish tribal groups, pushed them into a position of resistance and opposition against the state's all-encompassing efforts to penetrate all segments of social life (Bianchi and Yavuz 2003: 52–53). In a slightly different manner, Sufi dargāhs in modern South Asia also became key sites of political contestations over administrative control and state secularity, as well as Muslim belonging (Dandekar and Tschacher 2016: 9–10).

Sufi shrines have occasionally been idealised as manifestations of religious reconciliation. Scholars of religion and anthropology have emphasised, though, that throughout the centuries, dargāhs in South Asia were not mere places of inter-religious harmony and dialogue. By contrast, they are better understood as spaces of non-interference. Their distinct sphere of religious tolerance was more the result of indifference rather than deliberate mutual appreciation (Hayden 2002: 206). In the context of Partition, though, these shrines turned into opportunities to propagate and engineer inter-religious understanding, irrespective of a more active or passive form of tolerance. One of the most prominent dargāhs in Northern India is located in Mehrauli in the southern outskirts of New Delhi. During the annual *Urs* festival, Muslims and other believers used to assemble at the shrine and celebrate this festival upon the grave of a Sufi saint who lived 800 years ago. In 1942, the British had stopped these celebrations due to the war, Gandhi's pro-independence campaign and rising inter-religious tensions.

During Partition, the dargāh in Mehrauli was severely damaged. Serious harm was done to its marble fencing, the magnificent terracotta work, and the minarets. Nehru himself recognised the political significance of this case for the reputation of the government, the secular state and the persistent ill-feelings between Hindus and Muslims. In spite of the government's severe financial constraints and the overwhelming task of "refugee relief and rehabilitation," he declared the repair of this shrine a national priority.[22] The repair that followed was determined by good will but had also practical limitations. Local Muslim clergy, for example, were disappointed that the precious marble elements of the architecture were replaced by ordinary wood constructions. The ongoing security challenges related to riots and inter-religious hostilities strongly impacted the repair works and led to delays and additional architectural compromises.[23] Nevertheless, the authorities succeeded in correcting at least parts of the damage done to this site and in initiating Muslim worship that gradually extended to other religious adherents.

As the dargāh in Mehrauli made headlines in these months and parts of the national political elite became aware of its political significance, Delhi's municipality reinforced its efforts to also investigate other comparable cases within

the city's territory. A special opportunity for Muslim representatives to urge the city administration for more repair funding and for politicians to engineer inter-religious co-worshipping were the annual Urs celebrations. "Urs" is an Arabic word for a wedding ceremony. But an Urs festival can also commemorate the birth and death anniversary of a (Sufi) saint, usually celebrated with prayers, singing and dancing.

Under the British, a dargāh near Connaught Place in the centre of New Delhi, for example, had usually hosted two Urs gatherings every year. These gatherings were attended by thousands of Muslims as well as Hindus from Delhi but also other Northern Indian regions. After Partition, the Delhi administration made plans to revive this tradition by repairing the extensive damage done to this site.[24] Inside the dargāh in Ferozshah Khadar, six graves had been seriously damaged during the mass violence but could be repaired right on time for the upcoming Urs festival in the fall of 1948.[25]

Dargāhs also became subject to social dynamics related to migration and a general shortage of housing and land in Delhi. In Qutub Road in the north of the city, the dargāh had been a centre for Muslim pilgrimage for more than 600 years. In 1948, the site was surrounded by Hindu refugees who had provisionally settled in the houses nearby. The dargāh itself had been seriously damaged inside, where the footprints of the Prophet had for generations attracted pilgrims from India as well as abroad. Muslim worshippers were hesitant to access the shrine due to the ongoing hostilities between the religious communities. As a consequence, Muslim representatives demanded the large-scale relocation of local Hindu refugees and the resettlement of more than 300 Muslim families in order to restore the "original" social environment of the dargāh.[26] These representatives interpreted the immediate neighbourhood of the shrine as an integral element of the sacred site. As such, it also fell under the responsibility of the government in order to secure the unhindered access to the dargāh itself.

Co-worshipping in particular by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs became a central element in the officialised image of postcolonial India. Leading bureaucrats and political decision-makers increasingly recognised the relevance of religious architecture to accommodate social coexistence. The sources also illustrate, though, that some high-ranking observers recognised that repairing religious architecture could only be the beginning of a reconciliation process.[27] Mutual respect between Hindus and Muslims in everyday life was far more important but also much harder to achieve.

A sacred geography of resistance

Government authorities were not the only relevant party in the contestations of the urban sacred after Partition. Hindu reform movements such as the Arya Samaj, founded in Punjab in 1875, were key players during and after the separation of India and Pakistan. The inter-religious violence, the weakness of state institutions and the lack of financial and logistic resources were an opportunity

for such organisations to extend their organisational reach, recruit new members, expand their institutional networks and selectively influence national and local politics. One of the scarcest resources in Delhi and other Northern Indian cities after 1947 was land. The pressure on Delhi due the hundreds of thousands of refugees streaming into the city and extensive land speculation by the urban land-owning class culminated in severe conflicts over the allocation of land. Land dedicated to religious purposes and allotted to religious organisations was thereby no exception.

The agenda of the city administration in the aftermath of Partition in relation to religious affairs was complex and also contradictory. On the one hand, the authorities intended to foster a diverse religious life within the city boundaries. Delhi was supposed to become the torchbearer of a religiously diverse, peaceful and prosperous India. On the other hand, the municipality had no interest in supporting religious movements that had enhanced inter-religious hatred or even violence. Land allocated to religious organisations was to be limited to clearly humanitarian purposes and would only be granted (at a significantly reduced fare) to charitable religious institutions.

The Arya Samaj is a particularly controversial case in point. As was already known at that time, this organisation had been involved during Partition in the unauthorised occupation and desecration of mosques and had thus contributed to the tensions between Hindus and Muslims.[28] In particular in fast-growing Hindu neighbourhoods in Delhi and among refugees, the Arya Samaj provided social services in the form of education, childcare, youth work etc. In a nutshell, these services were designed along and meant to support its Hindu nationalist ideology. In the aftermath of Partition, the Arya Samaj pursued an aggressive agenda of expanding its temple network across the city in order to broaden its strongholds particularly in new Hindu neighbourhoods. In a refugee colony today known as Sarojini Nagar in South West Delhi, for example, the Arya Samaj came into conflict with the municipality over a piece of land of around 500 square yards for a temple.[29] For months, the organisation portrayed itself as a charitable institution serving only humanitarian purposes beyond religious sectarianism and thus entitled to concessional rates of land acquisition. In the end, the land was indeed allotted to the Samaj after secular circles within the ruling Congress Party were outmanoeuvred by influential Congress members more sympathetic to Hindu nationalism.

The archives in Delhi reveal many more comparable cases in which Hindu organisations not only pursued their own religious agenda but also managed to influence governmental decisions in their own favour. However, this became harder in the second half of the 1950s when the scarcity of land resulted in soaring land prices in Delhi. The demographic change, which the city had experienced throughout the years since 1947, and the continuing pressure on land forced the government to adapt its policy of land allocation.

The policy to give land at concessional rates to religious and charitable organisations in particular in the rehabilitation colonies, where refugees primarily

settled, became pricier. Land also turned into a speculative asset that generated huge profits for wealthier residents in Delhi. In return, the speculation drove the prices up even further.[30] To cope with this development, the municipality introduced a sharper distinction between charitable social institutions such as schools, hospitals and orphanages, on the one hand, and religious and political institutions on the other hand. For the latter, the privileged access to land was abolished.[31] In other words, the overall economic pressure on the city forced the government to secularise its subsidy policy towards religious affiliations.

Disputes over the sacred in the city were not always handled in a consistent way by a coherent body of state bureaucracy. Rather, the practice of state secularity was the result of conflictive interests, views and approaches within the municipality and the (at times more coherent) strategies of the religious organisations. In all these cases, however, the definition, authorisation and certification of the sacred was a central arena for the struggle over postcolonial order.

Conclusions

To conclude then, let me emphasise some more general observations from my case study over the meaning of sacred space in (modern) urban history.

First, the sacred is usually understood as a transitive category that arises from people's ritual practices and their attribution of meaning and value (Knott 2010: 34). The sacred is thus not simply a given but an imminent historical product. While I agree with the historical character of the sacred, my case study in this chapter illustrates another facet of the sacred gradually detached from people's practices and meanings. In post-Partition Delhi, the sacred was a contested concept reflecting both state interventionism and the attempt to keep the sacred pure, that is, beyond the (secular) state's agenda and interest. Thus, the sacred is historically significant for at least two reasons: it enables and brings to life secular statehood; and it is the sphere beyond this secularity that demonstrates its boundaries and limits.

Second, the analysis of the urban sacred provides valuable lessons about decolonisation and the discussion around (dis)continuities from the colonial era.[32] Scholars of history have repeatedly analysed the impact of colonial discourses and imperial administrative apparatuses on the definition of religion and the secular.[33] For the postcolonial era, however, this line of argumentation tends to overemphasise continuity and underestimate change.

The findings in this case study are not beyond the dialectic of continuities and discontinuities during decolonisation, but they rebalance this dialectic in favour of discontinuities and a focus on change. The political struggles over hegemony within the state structure as well as in the field of religious policies cannot be understood simply as continuations of colonial practices. Rather, they are a distinct product of decolonisation itself. The case of Delhi after 1947 refocuses historiographical attention towards the spaces of manoeuvre that opened up during decolonisation in some important areas: new notions of the future (manifested

in urban architectural orders), struggles for (national) cultural-historical authenticity in which religion was central, new appropriations of the past (in which, again, religion was central) and the role of new elites in redefining the boundaries between the sacred and the secular.

Finally, the city is a specific historical context for the sacred that scholars are only now beginning to understand in its multiple complexities. Justin Wilford argued already some time ago that we should see modern urban space "not as secular*ist* space but rather as differentiated and fragmented space marked by specific limitations and affordances for religious activity" (Wilford 2010: 329). In other words, in spite of undeniable dynamics of secularisation, the modern city is a space that transforms traditional forms of religion and religiosity and produces new ones. More recently, Peter van der Veer (2015) suggested to analyse cities as spaces of aspiration. Religion provides a fascinating lens to understand what these aspirations are about, how they change and which social dynamics they reflect.

The case of Delhi after 1947 takes this agenda further and interprets early postcolonial nation-building in the light of the sacred. Struggles around the sacred in urban space can be read as a matrix for socio-economic and political processes in (urban) society as a whole. Consequently, Delhi's history during and after Partition underlines the importance of an integrated approach in the analysis of the sacred in urban space. In principle, this is nothing new. The social dimension of space has been repeatedly analysed before. Roy Shields's "social spatialisation" (1991: 31) or Kim Knott's "simultaneity" of space (2005: 23), integrating different layers of social dynamics into spatial configurations, are valuable suggestions in this direction. The example of Delhi, however, illustrates the religious in its various interdependencies and mutual entanglements with not only the social but also the economic and political matrix of the city during the compressed history of decolonisation. Because the sacred is here not limited to people's perceptions but is also a result of state authorisation and certification, sacred urban space reflects as well as co-determines these other facets of historical change and is itself determined by them.

Notes

1 This paper continues a discussion started in Six (2018: Ch. 2).
2 A critical review of the existing literature is provided by Gilmartin (2015) and Pandey (2001), Chapter 3.
3 Speech, November 29, 1947, *SWJN*, 2nd series (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987). Vol. 5, pp. 192–199.
4 On Gramsci's notion of hegemony, space and the city see Kipfer (2013).
5 Purushotham (2017: 839, 842), Brown (2003: 189–190), Bhargava (2017).
6 Report to the All-India Congress Committee, New Delhi, July 6, 1951, JN Papers, NMML, excerpts reproduced in Iyengar (2007: 364–370).
7 This emphasis of historical long-term developments is present in several speeches and letters Nehru drafted around Partition; cf., for example, his Note to the Cabinet Ministers on the "Muslim Population in India," 12 September 1947, JN Papers, NMML, reproduced in Iyengar (2007: 303–306). For an early evidence on Nehru's understanding of Indian history based on "cultural unity" see Nehru (1938: 231–243).

8 Speech at Prayer Meeting, New Delhi, 18 September 1947, *CWMG* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1983), Vol. 89, p. 201.
9 Letter to Patel, 22 October 1947, *SWJN*, 2nd series (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), Vol. 4, p. 174.
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17 The Chief Commissioner, Delhi, U.O.No.406/ST/CC/53, 5.2.1953, to the Superintendent R&R, DA CC Office/17(11)/1950 Health and Public Works 1950, 28.
18 Ibid.
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Abbreviations used in notes

BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party)
CWMG	Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
DA CC Office	Delhi Archives, Chief Commissioner Office (Delhi)
DA DC Office	Delhi Archives, Deputy Commissioner Office (Delhi)
NAI	National Archives of India (New Delhi)
NMML	The Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (New Delhi)
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Organisation)
SWJN	Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru