



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
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Beyond the Nation: Historical Memory and Indian Ocean Islam in Bombay

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August 14, 2026

Thank you to the Laidlaw Scholars Program, my research advisor Professor Ananya Chakravarti, Professor Rogaia Abusharaf, the Georgetown University Laidlaw Scholars Programme, and Georgetown Laidlaw Coordinator Colleen Dougherty for their support of my research.

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Introduction:

Dargahs along the Indian Ocean coast are critical to understanding how historical memory has changed, as they carry the characteristics of the local, transregional, colonial, and anticolonial. The limits of South Asian anti-colonial nationalism are clear in the logic of Partition, the colonialism of Kashmir, and the rise of the Hindu right, all of which are predicated on the colonial logic that religious communities belong in their own nation-states.¹ A foil to these nationalist silos visible in the very structures embedded in Bombay, India on the Indian Ocean coast. These include the Haji Ali Dargah, the Pedro Shah Dargah, and the Maa Hajiani Dargah. How do these Bombay dargahs illuminate the limits of postcolonial nationalism in the Indian Ocean world? Specifically, how do these sites reveal how pluralistic, non-national identities were produced through migration, trade, and empire, and sustained through contemporary historical memory? Conversely, how are these same histories selectively incorporated into institutional narratives of national religious syncretism that ultimately reinforce the nation-state by legitimizing only certain forms of “good” minority citizenship? And what is an alternative form of historical scholarship that resists the “national” version of history?

Put together, these sites illustrate how Indian Ocean Muslim communities preserve and reinterpret historical memory in ways that both resist *and* reinforce homogenizing nationalist ideologies. Drawing on historian Nile Green’s concept of the “religious economy,” this project’s main intervention lies in distinguishing how local histories of pluralism can resist Hindu nationalist narratives, while Muslim institutions sanitize syncretism in order to make Islam more legible to the Indian state.² By placing these findings in conversation with archival historical scholarship, ethnographic observation, and a series of interviews with visitors and caretakers of the dargahs, this project offers an alternative way of understanding the past that challenges the assumptions of national history and instead foregrounds the transregional histories of the Indian Ocean world.

What is Bombay Islam?

Countless books, movies, and songs in Indian media espouse the virtues of Bombay’s different religions, languages, and peoples. Unlike the other archetypes of the Indian Ocean, like coastal cities and pure colonies, Bombay was built as an imperial city, making it conducive to such cosmopolitanism. In fact, the term “Bombay Islam” is itself a misnomer: Bombay was a hub of Gujaratis, Iranis, Marathis, and many more individual castes, leading Green to conclude that instead of coalescing into one unified religious institution, these groups participated in “a pluralizing religious economy which drove the increasing production of a variety of Islams...Bombay’s Muslim religious economy, then, was part of a larger multi-religious economy from which it borrowed in various ways.”³

This religious pluralism was not unique to Bombay, but reflected broader patterns across the Indian Ocean world. Like other port cities along the Malabar Coast, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa, Bombay became a center of Sufi saint veneration, with shrines serving as important nodes within wider

¹ Ananya Chakravarti, *South Asia Beyond Borders* (Taylor and Francis, forthcoming).

² Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 8.

³ Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 19.

networks of migration and exchange. For example, anthropologist Engseng Ho argues that these sacred spaces helped facilitate the mobility of the Hadrami diaspora, providing migrants with shared genealogies that linked communities across the Indian Ocean.⁴ Rather than functioning solely as local places of worship, these shrines connected Muslims to transregional histories that transcended territorial boundaries.

This religious exchange was primarily facilitated through the colonial development of the city itself - a city converted through colonial policies from islands and built up from the marshlands. Bombay remained an underdeveloped port city from its inception through its first hundred years. Once the British realized Bombay's value as a trading city, the city transformed into one of the economic capitals of the British Empire. Important to note was the type of urbanization that went hand in hand with colonial globalization, birthing what historian Alexandre Papas names an “urban monster” - an economy based on cotton and opium that led many to live in harsh living and working conditions near mills.⁵ Living in such an “urban monster” empowered saint veneration and religious exchange even while Bombay was at the height of industrialization. Moreover, British policies toward religion, which did not explicitly seek to convert in the same way as the Portuguese, were conducive to such religious expression, following a pattern of “colonial deregulation of religious interactions.”⁶

Throughout independence and the postcolonial period, Mumbai remained, and remains, the financial capital of India and among its most globalized, diverse cities. This self-perception runs deep within the Mumbai psyche, with anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writing that cosmopolitanism is “Mumbai's self-governing cliché.”⁷ In fact, this sentiment was repeated by every one of my interviewees, whether they be imams, khidmatgars, or trust members, whether it be to celebrate the diversity itself or the state's acceptance of said diversity. Haji Ali, Maa Hajiani, and the Pedro Shah dargah are the subjects of this study because of their precolonial history, institutional organization, and interaction with women. At each site, I conducted 1-2 interviews with the caretakers of the dargah, and talked with visitors at each site about their experiences, over a week of consecutive visits. By placing each site in the context of its specific history, Bombay's larger history as a colonially driven port city, and the wider networks of Sufi shrines across the Indian Ocean, this project reveals how Indian Ocean networks of migration and religious exchange produced forms of Muslim belonging that both transcend *and* reinforce the territorial logic of the postcolonial nation-state. It is within this tension between oceanic histories and nationalist narratives that this project situates its inquiry.

⁴ Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (University of California Press, 2006).

⁵ Alexandre Papas, “Bombay Mystical City: Muslim Shrines and Saints in the Urban Fabric from 1800 to Present,” in *Saintly Spheres and Islamic Landscapes* (Brill, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004444270_013, 336.

⁶ Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11..

⁷ Quoted in Stausberg, Michael, 'Religion in Bombay/Mumbai: A Scenario', in Michael Stausberg (ed.), *Religions, Mumbai Style: Events-Media-Spaces* (Oxford, 2023; online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 June 2023).

A Case Study of Three Dargahs

There is no better dargah to visualize Indian Ocean Islam than the Haji Ali Dargah: the dargah floats 300 feet into the sea, surrounded on all sides by water. The Haji Ali Dargah is strikingly juxtaposed with the coastal road hovering in the air behind it, a sign of Mumbai's modernity set against its rich history. The road to Haji Ali is lined with vendors, and on each of my visits to the dargah there were a number of Hindus, Muslims, and tourists, even during red and orange alerts. The immaterial religious economy Green describes was accompanied by a very physical economy, with a lively, healthy bazaar of vendors lining every inch of the walk to Haji Ali, until it becomes physically impossible on the rocky oceanic path. Religious institutions rarely fail to facilitate economic activity, and the long lines behind the Haji Ali juice stall are perfect evidence of this bustling economic activity. There are no information signs, suggesting the site does not need to justify itself to locals, the majority of visitors. However, the history of the Haji Ali site is more contested than it appears. On the Haji Ali Dargah Trust's (HADT) site, an organization of Kutchi Memons who run the dargah, it is clearly written:

"Iranian... Pir Haji Ali Shah Bukhari... traveled to India with his brother and finally reached the shores of Mumbai... Pir Haji Ali Shah Bukhari (R.A.) sent a letter with him to their mother informing her that he was keeping good health and that he had decided to reside at that place permanently for the spread of Islam and that she should forgive him.

Till his death he was praying and giving knowledge about Islam to the people and devotees regularly visiting him. Before his death he had advised his followers that they should not bury him at any proper place or graveyard and should drop his shroud ('kafan') in the ocean such that it should be buried by the people where it is found."⁸

According to a high-ranking member of the HADT, this is exactly the same story that appears in the "rivayat" (the religious record).⁹ However, the contested nature of this claim stems from the lack of historical documents about Haji Ali, since Haji Ali's death occurred roughly in the fifteenth century, leaving only oral histories.¹⁰ Alternatively, in a famous nineteenth-century Marathi record, written by Marathi historian Govind Narayan, Haji Ali's account is:

"In earlier times, a wealthy [Indian] Mussalman named Haji Ali or Mama used to stay here. His sister also stayed with him.... He distributed all his wealth amongst the poor and went to Mecca for the Haj. On his return from the Haj... he stayed on the rock in the sea. When asked why he preferred to meditate in that particular place, he replied that the goddess Mahalaxmi was friendly with the siblings; as they conversed frequently, this place was most suitable. In this way, fakirs marry the Hindu and Mussalman religions and try to inveigle the simple Hindu folk towards their religion. After a few years, the duo expired, and following

⁸ Haji Ali Dargah Trust, *Haji Ali Dargah, Mumbai (India): Tomb of Pir Haji Ali Shah Bukhari (R.A.)*, 2026, https://www.hajialidargah.in/hajiali_about15.html

⁹ Research Interviews, 2026.

¹⁰ Alexandre Papas, "Bombay Mystical City: Muslim Shrines and Saints in the Urban Fabric from 1800 to Present," in *Saintly Spheres and Islamic Landscapes* (Brill, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004444270_013, 362.

their wishes, the brother was entombed on the stone in the sea while the sister's grave was on the opposite hillock."¹¹

The differences between these narratives are striking. Throughout my interviews with fellows at the HADT, visitors, and those at the Maa Hajiani site (the sister site referenced in the passage above), no one mentioned any awareness of ties between the Mahalaxmi site and Haji Ali. The HADT member I spoke with offered a particularly linear and fixed narrative, almost a rote recitation of the information on the website. While it is possible that the Mahalaxmi tie has simply faded through the ordinary attrition of oral history over a century and a half, it is equally possible that the HADT's official narrative has actively pruned this connection, since a goddess bound to Haji Ali by friendship complicates the site's claim to a clean, legible Islamic identity for both the outside Muslim community and the Hindu state. If the latter is closer to the truth, then the external forces flattening these histories, like the Bharatiya Janata Party's Hindu nationalism, has become internalized by the Trust. The only indication of such a legacy is found within the visitor contingency: in the many Hindu visitors who revere the shrine. On my first visit to Haji Ali, a young Hindu woman asked me for the best route to visit the Mahalaxmi temple, describing her circuit through sites she felt had a "*khaas mayna*" (special importance) to her, and explaining that a similar dargah existed in her hometown. Historian Michael Stausberg comments: "By not speaking of Bombay, the story is cast in the pre-colonial era, but it reflects the existence of trading networks with distant places within the Islamic world."¹² The indigenous nature of Indian Islam is thereby erased, as the dargahs are also cast within a binary of Hindu/Muslim. This story, in which Hindu-Muslim places of worship are interlinked, is not just a Mumbai phenomenon; it is also common along the Indian Ocean coast, reflected in the Cheraman Perumal myth, in which a famous Hindu king converts, goes on Hajj, and becomes a protector of Islam, while the nearby temples remain protected and conserved under him. Compared to conversion, a story of friendship between separate traditions cannot be resolved so easily into either religion, which may be precisely why it is the version that has been allowed to disappear.

The Maa Hajiani shrine offers a particularly important comparison. Described by Govind Narayan as Haji Ali's sister shrine, the Maa Hajiani Dargah occupies a physical position through which multiple historical layers become visible. Its architecture and setting reflect the juxtaposition of colonial, precolonial, and postcolonial Bombay: Maa Hajiani was a 15th century figure, built in a shrine constructed throughout the colonial area at an extremely strategic position for the British, and maintained and renovated in the postcolonial era, facing the Indian Ocean. Again, however, my interviews at Maa Hajiani revealed how little of the site's history was known by either patrons or caretakers. Rather than articulating the shrine as part of a broader religious landscape connected to Haji Ali, interviewees repeatedly returned to its contemporary accessibility and the presence of Hindu visitors. While Haji Ali has been the subject of debates over whether women should be permitted to enter the inner sanctum, Maa Hajiani has historically remained accessible to women.¹³ Just as welcoming Hindu visitors allows a shrine to perform legibility to the secular nation-state, restricting women's access to the inner sanctum allows Haji Ali to perform legibility to a wider, more conservative Muslim world. Haji Ali's ban and its embrace of Hindu devotees are not contradictory impulses but two versions of the same strategy: each audience,

¹¹ Govind Narayan (Māḍagāvakara, Govinda Nārāyaṇa), *Govind Narayan's Mumbai: An Urban Biography from 1863*, ed. and trans. Murali Ranganathan, foreword by Gyan Prakash (Anthem Press, 2012), 86.

¹² Michael Stausberg, *Religions, Mumbai Style: Events—Media—Spaces* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 45.

¹³ Michael Stausberg, *Religions, Mumbai Style: Events—Media—Spaces* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 13.

the nation and wider Muslim world (mostly the Gulf countries), is offered evidence for the kind of Islam it recognizes as authentic.

Along the side path of Crawford Market sits the Pedro Shah Dargah, another Sufi shrine whose history, like that of Haji Ali, is uncertain and contested. Among the women I interviewed at the site, none were familiar with the history of Pedro Shah himself. More surprisingly, the caretaker with whom I spoke directed me to search for information about the shrine on the internet rather than providing a historical account himself. After a bit more questioning, according to the caretaker, Pedro Shah was a porter who worked in Bombay during the period of Portuguese rule and was eventually regarded as a saint. The most striking aspect of this account was his name: the caretaker explained that “Pedro Shah” was simply the Portuguese name of an Indian man. Yet, due to the absence of historical records, he could have been a Konkani man, or actually a Portuguese Christian, and still be remembered as Pedro Shah today. For example, to combat the “widespread tradition of Pedro Shah as a Portuguese convert,” a local bookseller wrote prolifically a “biographical counter-narrative that portrayed [Pedro Shah] instead as an Arab merchant from the Makran who belonged to the Qadiri lineage of Sufi.”¹⁴ This was exactly the history repeated by the caretaker, at a time when Arab ancestry has become a prerequisite to becoming a valid, modern saint. In fact, Green claims that “‘Pedro Shah’ was the product of an older religious economy in the Indian Ocean...[where] Islam made easy entry to the market.”¹⁵ Ultimately, the name has survived even as the historical identity of the individual to whom it refers has been obscured. In 2015, Green had said that “what's more important is that people thought he was Portuguese and worshiped him anyway.”¹⁶ My research suggests that the caretaker's insistence on Arab lineage shows that origin now matters, and locals may now have internalized a new narrative.

¹⁴ Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 82.

¹⁵ Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 82.

¹⁶ Sunavala, Nergish. “All Faiths Flock to Pedro Shah’s Dargah.” *Times of India*, December 17, 2015. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/all-faiths-flock-to-pedro-shahs-dargah/articleshow/5022114.cms>.

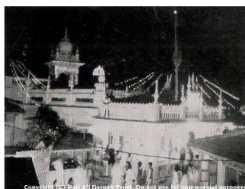


Maa Hajiani Dargah

TL: Newspaper clipping describing women's treatment from early 2000s. (Fieldwork Notes, 2026)

TR: The Maa Hajiani Main Dargah (Fieldwork Notes, 2026)

BL: English inscription on staircase (Fieldwork Notes, 2026)



Haji Ali Dargah

TL: Map of Haji Ali and Mahalakshmi Temple (Viczianny 2016)

TR (2): The Haji Ali Dargah from 1940-Present (Haji Ali Dargah Trust Website)

BL: Old Structure of Haji Ali pre-renovation (Haji Ali Dargah Trust Website)

BR: Weekly Friday Qawwali Performance (Fieldwork Notes, 2026)



Pedroshah Dargah

TL: Entrance to the Pedroshah dargah (Fieldwork Notes, 2026)
TR: Main Inner Sanctum (Fieldwork Notes, 2026)

Between Syncretism and Sanitization

I draw two conclusions from my interviews, observations, and archival research at the dargahs. The first: local histories at the dargahs display the type of syncretism that is vital to resistance to homogenizing, nationalist narratives. The second: institutional histories of the dargah, which do the opposite, absorb colonial logics to ‘sanitize’ syncretism for the state. I then suggest that viewing history through a transoceanic perspective that recognizes the overlapping identities of the Indian Ocean provides a more decolonial, meaningful historical account.

Religious syncretism within South Asia is not unique and has been widely studied. Historian Marika Vicziany compares the Haji Ali Dargah to the cult of Shirdi Sai Baba, which is venerated by both Hindus and Muslims and where Hindu patrons describe taking *darshan* of the saint, a Sanskrit term for a visual form of worship. Yet the Shirdi Sai Baba comparison also shows how fragile such syncretism can be: with the rise of BJP-aligned Shiv Sena, the marginalization of Muslims has become increasingly apparent, and the Sai Baba shrine has come to be run primarily by Brahmin elites, erasing its syncretic character through the broader politics of caste and a version of “pure Hinduism.”¹⁷ The same pressure is visible throughout Mumbai: the Shiv Sena insists that dargahs like Haji Malang are actually built on Hindu temples, seeks to remove the wealth housed within large dargahs, and participates in rewriting Maharashtrian history to center the Hindu past, a project that exists alongside the reactionary Muslim right's own insistence on a conservatism meant to institute an "Islamic character" fitted to the ideals of the

¹⁷ Marika Vicziany, “The Survival of the Syncretic Cults of Shirdi Sai Baba and Haji Ali Despite Hindu Nationalism in Mumbai,” in *Islam, Sufism and Everyday Politics of Belonging in South Asia*, ed. Deepra Dandekar and Torsten Tschacher (Routledge, 2016), 164.

Arab world.¹⁸ However, even while religious nationalism continues to heighten, syncretic practices continue to be a bulwark that reminds communities that, in South Asia, these practices are deeply historically tied. Local interactions within the dargahs provide a transformative account of viewing a history that is far outside nationalist silos, a history truly without borders. Anthropologist Carla Bellamy writes that when a Hindu visitor prays at a dargah, “they have overcome the discourses of religious difference that have...divided...the subcontinent itself.”¹⁹ While this may be an overstatement, among all the Hindu visitors I encountered, whether watching a Qawwali performance at Haji Ali or praying to Maa Hajiani, each seemed to experience the site's *khaas mayna* for themselves.

The second conclusion asserts that the institutional presentation of syncretic Muslim identity can sanitize minorities in favor of a “secular” state. This does not mean that syncretic practices are inauthentic, nor that Hindu participation at dargahs is simply imposed from above. As the preceding section demonstrates, Hindu-Muslim devotional exchange is deeply rooted in South Asian history and constitutes an important part of the lived religious landscape of sites such as Haji Ali. Rather, the problem emerges when syncretism becomes a condition through which Muslim belonging must be demonstrated. In this formulation, the “good” Muslim is not simply Muslim; they are Muslim in a way that can be readily reconciled with the secular and national ideals of the Indian state. Anthropologist Marika Vicziany writes that in India, Muslims are imagined as “perpetual outsiders, and therefore conditional citizens of a primarily Hindu nation (the Hindutva perspective), or as a fully integrated and assimilated part of the Indian nation (a perspective held predominantly by India’s secular elites).”²⁰ Drawing on academic Mahmood Mamdani’s “good Muslim/bad Muslim” dichotomy, the former narrative deems some forms of Muslimness more Indian (and safer) than others, placing the onus of assimilation on Muslims themselves.²¹ Thus, a Muslim who emphasizes syncretism, Hindu-Muslim unity, tolerance, and shared national belonging can be rendered legible as an ideal citizen, while a Muslim who foregrounds transnational religious solidarity, critiques the secular state, or expresses a more explicitly Islamic political identity risks being positioned as insufficiently assimilated. For example, anthropologist Sarover Zaidi suggested that the stories of how Pedro Shah responded to colonial oppression through the leveling of the Sita Ram building (where a bar was frequented by the British) “epitomizes early class struggle under the guise of religious conflict.”²² This is not at all repeated in any of the interviews or visible history of the site. In fact, class struggle was absent from any discussion unless the line of questioning was pursued, which contrasts with the primary visitor base of these sites: low- to middle-class Muslims who rely on the dargah far more than elites. The result of this “sanitization” is a hierarchy of Muslim identities: the Muslim who visits a dargah shared with Hindus, celebrates India’s religious diversity, and

¹⁸ Marika Vicziany, “The Survival of the Syncretic Cults of Shirdi Sai Baba and Haji Ali Despite Hindu Nationalism in Mumbai,” in *Islam, Sufism and Everyday Politics of Belonging in South Asia*, ed. Deepra Dandekar and Torsten Tschacher (Routledge, 2016), 166.

¹⁹ Bellamy, Carla. “Is All Politics Local? Neighborhood Shrines and Religious Healing in Contemporary India.” In *Modern Sufis and the State*, edited by Katherine Pratt Ewing and Rosemary R. Corbett. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.7312/ewin19574-016>. 229.

²⁰ Rachana Rao Umashankar, “Sufi Sound, Sufi Space: Indian Cinema and the Mise-en-Scène of Pluralism,” in *Modern Sufis and the State*, ed. Katherine Pratt Ewing and Rosemary R. Corbett (Columbia University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7312/ewin19574-018>, 270.

²¹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (Pantheon Books, 2004).

²² Quoted in Alexandre Papas, “Bombay Mystical City: Muslim Shrines and Saints in the Urban Fabric from 1800 to Present,” in *Saintly Spheres and Islamic Landscapes* (Brill, 2020), 354. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004444270_013

emphasizes the shrine's Hindu visitors can be positioned as evidence of India's secular character; these are usually Muslim elites. The Muslim who emphasizes connections to the wider *ummah*, critiques the state's treatment of Muslims, or understands Islam through transnational networks may instead be interpreted as "anti-national." The irony is that the latter forms of identity may be equally, if not more, historically appropriate to the Indian Ocean world that produced sites such as Haji Ali.

This problem is particularly acute because the secular nation-state is not itself a neutral framework. Secularity does not exist outside of the historical and political structures through which the state defines legitimate religion and citizenship. In contemporary India, where the state and political institutions have increasingly been shaped by Hindu nationalist ideology, even named "secular" governance is practically interpreted through a Hindu-majoritarian framework. For example, the selective enforcement of laws, targeted pogroms, and widespread discrimination towards Muslims in Mumbai only serves to prove how the "secular" has transformed into the nationalist.²³ The demand that Muslims demonstrate their Indianness, tolerance, syncretism, or loyalty to the nation therefore cannot be separated from the political conditions under which those demands are made.

The repeated assurances I received from the *khidmatgars* at each dargah - that the site is "for everyone" and "has a 60% Hindu visitor base" - depict this narrative clearly. While syncretism and Hindu worship are indigenous and characteristic of these sites, they can also become a means through which Muslim institutions demonstrate compatibility with the state. The caretakers at all three dargahs also asserted that there was always peace at this dargah, even during times of pronounced riots targeting Muslims, specifically during the 1992 riots. This claim of perpetual peace was repeated by members of the HADT. It is worth acknowledging that my own presence as an interviewer likely shaped these answers. As an outside researcher, I invited exactly the kind of rehearsed narrative I received. The *khidmatgars'* scripts may therefore have been performed as much for me as for the state or the nation, which does not undermine their significance so much as confirm it: the "good minority" narrative is available on demand. In this way, the shrine's Islamic identity is made legible through its accessibility to Hindus, while the complex histories through which Islam became embedded in Bombay are left largely unexplored. Moreover, the fluidity of the Sufi shrines, and their relative openness to forms of Hindu devotional practice of idol worship and darshan, makes them particularly vulnerable to being absorbed into nationalist narratives and a more "palatable form of Islam to India's secular elites."²⁴

Muslims now face a dual mandate: while resisting being cast as "outsiders" by the Hindu nationalist state, they must also not be too "Indian" in order to remain legible to the broader Muslim world. Haji Ali's ban on women can be understood within this second mandate, where Gulf countries encouraged such gendered practices. On the other hand, Hindutva demands the construction of Islam as a "good insider," where Muslim histories are selectively incorporated into a national narrative insofar as their histories can be reconciled with the interests of the nation. This is evident in the proposal for the highest Indian flagpole to be raised at Haji Ali by Prime Minister Modi.²⁵ The dargah is elevated because

²³ Qudsiya Contractor, "Religious Imagination in the Making of Public Muslims in a Mumbai Slum," *Culture and Religion* 21, no. 3 (2020): 222–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2022.2093235>.

²⁴ Rachana Rao Umashankar, "Sufi Sound, Sufi Space: Indian Cinema and the Mise-en-Scène of Pluralism," in *Modern Sufis and the State*, ed. Katherine Pratt Ewing and Rosemary R. Corbett (Columbia University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7312/ewin19574-018>, 270.

²⁵ "World's Tallest Flagpole to Be Erected in Haji Ali Dargah Premises, PM Modi to Unveil It." *Free Press Journal*, September 8, 2022.

<https://www.proquest.com/magazines/mumbai-worlds-tallest-flagpole-be-erected-haji/docview/27112982/95/se-2>.

it has so successfully performed the role of the "good minority" site: Muslim enough to prove India's tolerance, assimilated enough to pose no threat to it. Its popularity is not a counterexample to nationalist erasure but a product of it as histories of Muslim resistance and class struggle are erased.

The alternative is then not to reject Indian identity, nor to romanticize an uncomplicated cosmopolitanism. Rather, it is to recognize that Indian Muslim identities have always been produced through overlapping scales of belonging. Haji Ali's history, for example, cannot be separated from the broader networks connecting India with Iran, Pakistan, Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula, and the wider Indian Ocean world. Across these shrines, there exists a striking disconnect between the depth of the historical landscapes in which they are situated and the limited historical narratives communicated through colonial logics. To describe these dargahs only through their Indian identity therefore risks replicating colonial forms of categorization. The result is not that we should ignore syncretism or construct another nationalist narrative around it. Instead, we should look toward transregional identities that allow these histories to be understood without forcing them into the boundaries of the nation-state. The dargahs' history reveals a local Muslim identity produced through movement across the Indian Ocean that has formed an Islam indigenous to Bombay, outside of any nationalist narrative.

Conclusion

Historical memory is powerful because it provides the context for how we see the society around us. Do we envision the nation as a primordial and inevitable being, or is it a recent, colonially produced creature of the modern age? Investigating historical memory thus becomes equally important as uncovering the actual historical record itself. For these dargahs, institutional historical memory does not simply preserve the archival historical record. Rather, it is constantly reinvented in response to the state and its surroundings. Local historical memory preserves religious syncretism as an active resistance to the colonial logics of the state, producing alternatives that move away from simply being "Indian" or "Muslim." Framing history within national borders does not allow the themes that cross borders to emerge. Viewing these dargahs simply as "Indian" takes away from the histories of Iran, Pakistan, Yemen, and the wider Indian Ocean world, all of which carried influence through these networks. A national lens also constructs a set of "good" minorities of those who comply with a Hindu nationalist state, critical to the nation's performance both of secularism and religious nationalism.

Seeing the dargahs through a decolonial frame shows how local interactions still display the complex interconnected identities within the Indian Ocean. The history of these sites is therefore not simply a history of Islam in India, but a history of Islam being transformed through movement and being made indigenous to India. These dargahs instead force us to reconsider the scale at which history is understood. As Papas writes:

"What can remain of the early nineteenth-century vision of the city? Perhaps a certain sense of locality. Despite his celebration of the great metropolis, the author of "The Soul of Bombay" wrote a narrative where saints and shrines were intimately linked to their neighborhood, where in other words Islamic sanctity manifested itself primarily in the local environment of Mumbaikars. It is at this modest scale, at the dargah next door that, still now, Bombay Muslims and non-Muslims, especially the uprooted masses of working poor,

precarious daily workers, and wretched, seek relief from a friend (wali, pl. awliya') who is close to both God and themselves."²⁶

The emphasis on the “modest scale” of the dargah captures how the local and the transregional together preserve a history of the Indian Ocean that national categories cannot fully contain.

²⁶ Alexandre Papas, “Bombay Mystical City: Muslim Shrines and Saints in the Urban Fabric from 1800 to Present,” in *Saintly Spheres and Islamic Landscapes* (Brill, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004444270_013. 362.

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