



## Videos mediating migration and pilgrimage

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People have been traveling and migrating from small towns and villages to larger towns and metros of India for business or to find better pastures. While the migration dynamics may be different in each case and region, the newly migrated people often look for familiar sights and spaces that they can relate to. And religious shrines and mediated religious discourses are very often what connect them to their deeper cultural roots. Thus, the Islamic devotional videos are popular with people from Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and the migrant population in cities like Delhi. They usually buy these videos when visiting various shrines or markets such as “Urdu Bazaar” in Old Delhi. They either ask the shopkeeper for the videos of their choice or the shopkeepers themselves offer them various products. In most shops the videos are played continuously for buyers to see and get influenced in making a purchase decision. This presentation talks to a few users of Islamic devotional videos who migrated from Uttar Pradesh or Bihar and presently staying in the suburbs of Delhi. Somehow, a visit to a Sufi shrine or the watching of the devotional videos soothes their stress of the new urban life as well as connects them to the milieu of their hometown.



The temporary buyers of VCDs mostly comprise of tourists or pilgrims who visit shrines during the “Urs” period, during rituals or even as tourists. The tour operators ensure that buyers visit markets such as Urdu Bazaar (which is a part of conducted tours and can be linked to the business strategy of the tour operators). The taxi, bus and auto rickshaw drivers too are enthusiasts and promoters of devotional videos. They play the videos while on road – either one’s that passengers demand or something about the shrine that they are heading to. One driver during the interview said that devotees and shopkeepers in far away states like Kerala and Maharashtra request them to buy and bring the videos when they visit the next time – devotees for religious and shopkeepers for business purposes.

The videos are purchased because they are usually shown to friends, relatives and other community members back home, or gifted to them. Some also keep the videos for their private collection and viewing. The women watch them for devotional purposes and to pass the time. Watching these videos makes viewers feel secure, have a sense of closeness to and with the shrine and the saint. Some devotees said watching the videos gave them inner peace; another one said that his family would be safe due to the blessings of the saint.

Both women and men buy these videos, however a majority of the buyers belong to the low-income strata of society. It is this group that faces a socio-economic strain in their daily lives and wants salvation. Their education level ranges from being

illiterate to high school graduates and their age group varies from the early twenties and upwards. Yet another group of buyers comprises of tourists from within India and from Bangladesh and Pakistan. Also, many shopkeepers buy them for resale in their home towns for profit.

How do the VCDs change the experience and devotion of their users?

The videos travel far and wide through pilgrims, distribution networks, shopkeepers, agents and taxi and truck drivers. The videos use images of the various recognizable sections of a shrine, such as the outside façade, the gateway, the arches, graves, domes, minarets and general scenes of pilgrim crowds visiting the site, rituals being performed, interspersed with quality shots of the song being performed inside a colourful stage set and sometimes natural “sceneries.” In many ways, the videos and their music tries to transport the pilgrim into a mystical land in the same way as do dreamy song sequences in popular Bollywood movies. In fact, most of the songs in these videos liberally borrow from the tunes of Hindi movies to attract their buyers.

Devotional or popular music videos on shrines follow this strategy to captivate the masses. They combine the use of popular music and technology to create a ‘make believe’ atmosphere, and observably succeed in creating frenzy among their consumers.

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