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A Report on Dargah Khwaja Saheb, Ajmer

...After Mecca, the dargah of Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti is considered to be the most sacred site for Muslims. Pilgrims, belonging to all communities, pour into the city in large numbers throughout the year. According to a conservative estimate, the offering at the dargah are to the tune of Rs. 25 crore each year.

The practice has been to give 50 per cent of the offering to the *sajadanashin* or religious head, who is a direct descendant of Chisti, while the other half is divided between the 3,000 Khadim families. However, because of unfortunate turn of events most of the money is concentrated with some powerful families who now exercise tremendous clout.

Immediately after partition, the former *sajadanashin*, Sayyid Ilmuddin got into a long, legal tangle when the government appointed a distant relative as a caretaker head. Because of an appeal against his succession, matters dragged on till 1987 before the Supreme Court finally gave a decision in his favour. In all these years, the Khadims had a free hand in the running of the place and ended up becoming very powerful.

When Ilmuddin took over, he signed an agreement with the Khadims whereby they would pay him Rs. 12,500 per month. The Khadims were willing to offer the present *sajadanashin* an annual contract for Rs. 1 lakh per year which he has refused to accept. Instead, he has filed a case in the lower court against them, claiming that 50 per cent of the offerings should come to him.

Citizens to Ajmer are anxious that this convoluted legal battle come to a quick end because they are convinced that only then will the situation around the dargah begin to change. Many of these lodges meant to house pilgrims are being used for smuggling, drug trafficking and prostitution.

Official sources are aware of several rackets where girls are supplied to gangsters who come and stay as 'guests' in these lodges. What is more, a large number of properties and havelis have been purchased in benami transactions by some of the better known dons from Bombay. ... The attempt of these gangsters to control the business around the dargah is being resented by local Sindhi businessmen. So far they have formed a cartel whereby they have been able to resist their takeover efforts. But many of these underworld gangs have money and possess sophisticated weapons and local businessmen fear they may be forced out unless local authorities take strong action.

The Ajmer Dargah Committee is supposed to oversee the activities and day-to-day running to the dargah. Local officials, however, point out that since all the members of the committee are outsiders they have little first hand experience of what is going on. As a result, the feud between the Khadims has increased to the extent where disputing parties have filed 70 FIRs against each other. Many of these charges include murder, rape and extortion charges. Even worse is the accusation that some of the not-so-well-to-do families are making against the more

powerful groups, saying that they have given a contract of Rs. 60 lakh last year to a group of professional pickpockets from Kanpur allowing to operate from outside the dargah. This is an annual feature, with the amount increasing every year. In fact, each part of the dargah, it is alleged, is auctioned out for an enormous sum of money.

Even more disturbing is the charge made about the delicate gold inlay work done on the dome of the dargah which was removed eight months ago on the grounds that some renovations had to be made. One of the *anjumans* run by the Khadims claims this gold was worth several crores of rupees and records, prove that over three mounds of gold had been used to cover the dome. The dargah is a protected monument. How could such a massive renovation task be undertaken without the prior permission of the archaeological Survey of India? What is more, it is well known that the gold they have used to recoat the dome is of lower quality...

...Money, which is deposited with the dargah committee, is accounted for, but, they insist, most of it never reaches it.

...The central government's decision to place the dargah under the ministry of social welfare has only helped worsen the situation. Earlier, it was under the ministry of law, justice and company affairs, with the help of the home ministry. This helped keep the dargah administration under a tighter noose.

The Rajasthan government has been apprehensive about taking stricter measures, fearing the communal angle.

(Source : The Anti-Corruption, 18-25 October, 1992)
(Contd. from page 517)

discussion for a thousand years should be allowed to run its full course. For, if the past is imperfect, the future cannot but be tense.
(Source : The Pioneer, 20 October, 1992)

March this year demanding that the bulletins be handled by confirmed staffers.

...The Urdu bulletin... lasts only for five minutes and... includes commercials for around a minute-and-a-half.

This is followed by a 20-second montage and visuals for around almost three minutes. "What kind of news can you give in the remaining time?" a news editor in the AIR Urdu service argues...

(Source : The Sunday Observer, 6-12 Sep. 1992)