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OFFICE of  
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

# हरियाणा की आवाज़

HARYANA KI AWAAZ

Volume III Issue II



Photo credit: Freepik

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We would also like to acknowledge and extend our appreciation to all our respondent for sharing their time and experiences with us.





**To,  
Redefining and Reclaiming the Story of Haryana**



## **Prachy Hooda**

Curator


There is always a stereotypical understanding of Haryana: rustic, rural (read: *dehati*), highly patriarchal and violent towards women. This had led to a very one-sided, homogenous representation of the region and its people, that lacks not just the nuances and complexities of its socio-cultural fabric, but a complete lack of interest and engagement by various stakeholders, in varied capacities (including mass media and academia alike), to acknowledge the depths of and differences in people's lived experiences.

My own experiences in “progressive” university spaces made me first-hand realise the “casual” stereotyping that those coming from the region face, mostly in the form of “jokes” (which aren't humorous) and even passing remarks like “*You don't look Haryanvi*” or that “*You don't speak like Haryanvis*”. This is also partly affected by the caricature-ish depiction of Haryanvis in Bollywood, where actors try to speak a language that is nowhere close to the different dialects spoken in Haryana. In this vast pool of poor projection of what is commonly considered Haryanvi (only by those who are not from the region), recent work by a few actors, social media content creators as well as young academics feels like a breath of fresh air, precisely because it consciously aims to challenge these stereotypes and carve out a space for grassroots voices.

In this backdrop, this monthly issue *Haryana Ki Awaaz* is a small step to counter this over-simplistic view of the region and its people by providing a platform to the people of Haryana, from all walks of life, to share their stories and lived experiences. It is aimed to project them as the active agents that they have always been but have never been given enough acknowledgement for. Each issue will focus on different facets of the socio-cultural fabric of Haryana as well as its diverse social groups.

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Tomb of  
Khwaja  
Khizr,  
Sonipat

स्वाज्ञा  
खिज़्र का  
समाधि  
स्थल

## Volume III – Haryanvi Religiosity Issue II – The Maqbaras of Haryana

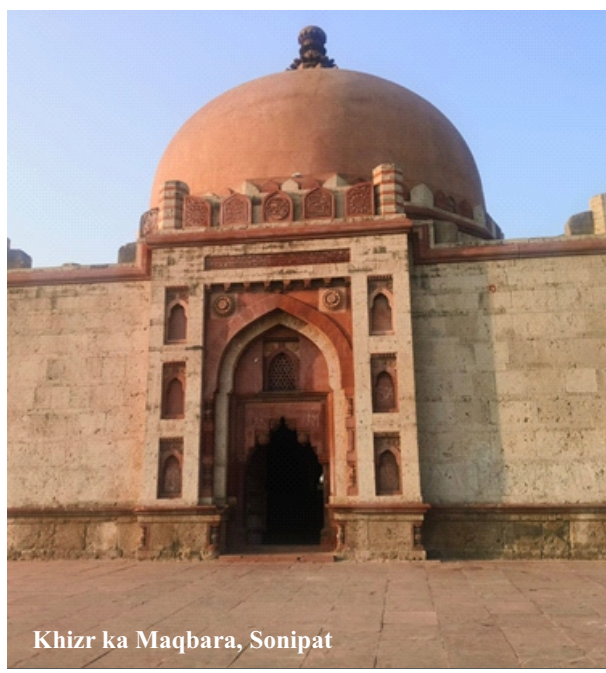
In Haryana, everyday religiosity is not confined to formalised, mainstream places of worship. It is part of daily life, with structures and ideas like dada than, peers, local Matas, folk deities and deras shaping the spiritual contours of rural Haryana.

Across villages, communities are organised around local saints and folk deities. Rural women play a central role in keeping these traditions alive. Throughout the year, they offer grain from the harvest, jaggery, and simple homemade sweets at village shrines. These offerings are not just symbolic; they are acts of protection and gratitude. People turn to these deities to keep illness and misfortune away, and to ensure the well-being of family and cattle.

While some, like Guga Pir, are followed across regions beyond Haryana; others, such as Kheda or dada than belong to a particular village or a particular clan and are closely tied to its land. The ancestral shrines dedicated to pitars are where families remember their own dead and seek their blessings. In some cases, a small village shrine gradually attracts devotees from neighbouring areas and becomes a recognised place of pilgrimage.

Folk worship of this kind is not unique to Haryana. Yet in Haryana, these traditions have a distinct form shaped by agrarian life and local memory.

This volume brings together reflections on these living practices. By focusing on folk deities, and ancestral shrines, we hope to highlight a dimension of religiosity that remains central to rural Haryana



Khizr ka Maqbara, Sonipat

In Sonipat's Jatwara village, Khizr ka Maqbara is not the kind of place people plan special trips to. It is simply part of people's quotidian lives. One reaches it while walking through crowded lanes of the village (again, a village that does not “look/feel like a village” because it is within the fold of Sonipat's old city), past small shops and houses, and suddenly the space gives way to an old walled complex with domes. For many residents, stopping by the

maqbara is part of everyday routine – something done on the way back from work, students bunk schools to play cricket there, some come there daily for an evening walk, and it is the ideal place for the elderly to socialise. The maqbara is not seen as some distant historical monument; it is more like a familiar local spot.

Historically, the structure is believed to date back to the early sixteenth century, the peak of the Lodi Sultanate. Built in red sandstone and brick, the tomb is associated in local memory with Khwaja Khizr, a saintly figure known in north Indian folklore as a guide and protector. Over time, the maqbara came to be surrounded by additional graves and by a small mosque, gradually turning the site into a modest religious complex. While its architectural style places it firmly within a particular historical moment, its significance today lies in the many ways different generations have continued to use and reinterpret it. For readers unfamiliar with Sonipat, it helps to think of the maqbara not only as a medieval monument but as a long-standing local shrine that is enmeshed with the town's social and spiritual milieu.

What is striking, on spending time there, is how familiar the patterns of worship feel to those who come from agrarian backgrounds. The gestures one sees at the maqbara are often the same ones performed at, say, a dada than in a village. The logic behind them is similar too. When a child is born, families make a visit here, carrying milk or kheer in steel containers. A portion is placed near the grave, the rest shared among those present. Some come after a cow or buffalo has calved, offering



sweets or lighting incense in gratitude and to seek blessings. These acts are not framed as belonging to any particular religious tradition. They are simply part of how rural households in Haryana mark important moments – birth, recovery from illness, a good harvest in the fields, the inclusion or birth of livestock.

At the qabr, this continuity of religiosity is apparent in many ways. Agarbattis and dhoop are usually lit, patashas are offered. At the same

time, we saw a man standing silently with his hands raised, while a woman with folded palms was circling the same space. No one seems to find this unusual. For many visitors, the maqbara is approached in the same spirit as any other local shrine that promises protection and continuity in an uncertain agrarian life.





People often explain their visits in practical terms. A farmer from a nearby village described coming before the sowing season to “take blessings for the crop,” much as he would at his ancestral *thaan*. Another spoke about returning with his family after a successful harvest, offering simple food and sitting for a while under the trees. These habits reflect a worldview where the sacred is closely tied to land, seasons, and household wellbeing. The figure of Khwaja Khizr – remembered in folklore as a guide and guardian – fits easily into this local belief.

Alongside these routine acts of faith, the maqbara is surrounded by stories that circulate informally among visitors. There are several graves within the complex, and their identities are matters of interpretation. Some say they belong to members of Khizr's family. Others insist that two small tombs outside the main boundary mark the resting places of his horses. A more dramatic version, told with varying degrees of seriousness, recounts how thieves once tried to steal hidden treasure from the shrine and were unable to leave alive and their graves appeared there as a sign of divine power. These accounts are less about establishing historical fact and more about keeping the site alive in popular imagination. Each telling adds another layer to how the maqbara is understood.

At the same time, the grounds function as an ordinary public space. The open park within the complex attracts young men who play cricket in the afternoons. Elderly women sometimes gather to sing bhajans in the evening, while older men are seen sharing hookah and playing cards. Couples sit in quieter corners, occasionally carving their names into the walls. The monument becomes part of daily social life: a place to pass time, meet others, or simply soak in the peace and calm.



As it gets late in the evening, families begin to leave. Some regular visitors mention that there has been an increase in the instances of drinking and drug use. The maqbara, like many such sites, reflects the contradictions of a town that is growing and changing.

To look at Khizr ka Maqbara closely is to see how older agrarian ways of practising faith continue to find expression in different settings. The shrine is connected with the network of local sacred places through similar rituals and expectations. Offerings made here resemble those at a village dada than; visits are timed around family and agricultural events; stories about the site evolve through everyday conversation.

## Meet our Team

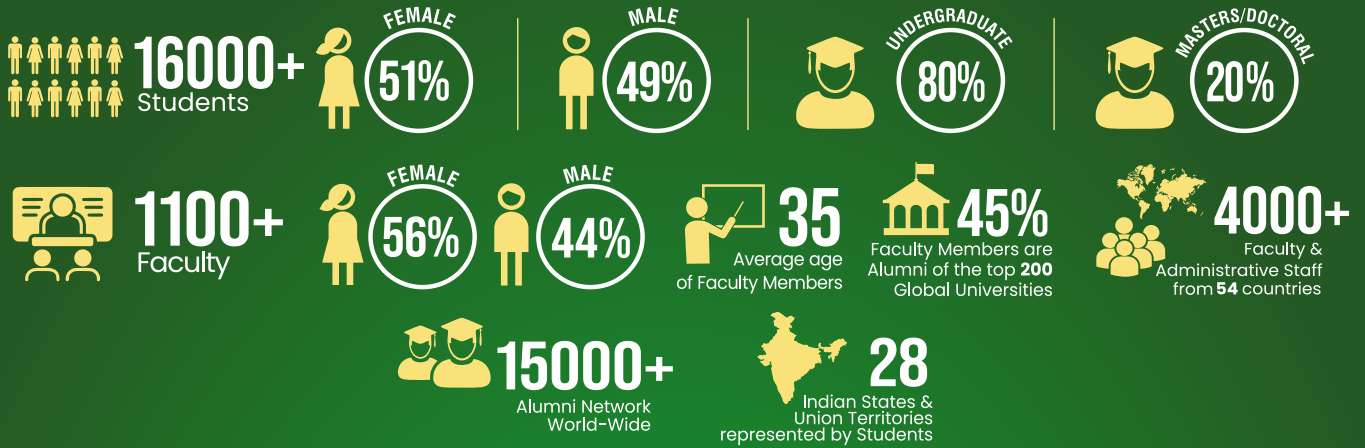


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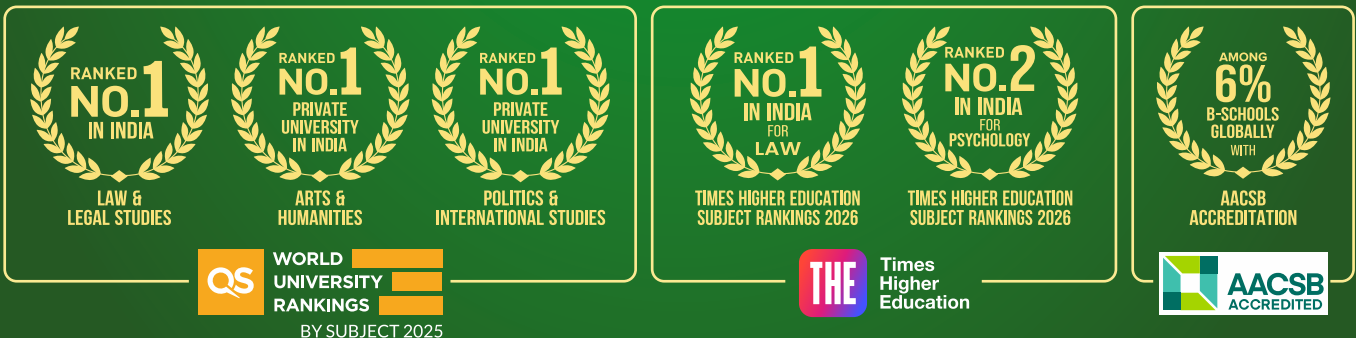
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