CONCLUSION

This dissertation is written with the assumption that dreaming is a cultural act. Therefore, sufi dreams must be read with reference to the specific tradition of dreaming in Islam. Although, there are variations in shades of opinion regarding dreams, within the Islamic civilizational ethos there are certain determining features of dreaming in Islam that are cardinal to the beliefs of all Muslims. This belief is sacrosanct and beyond questioning because the Quran and the hadīth support its authenticity. The Quranic story of Yusuf and Zulaikhā in the Surā Yusuf clearly indicates the incorporation of pre-Islamic antecedents in the Semitic dream tradition. Other stories in popular Arabic literature, especially stories about divination through dreams, also refer of this background. However, despite this cultural affiliation with the Semitic tradition, the phenomenon of dreaming in Islam acquired a signification that was distinct from meanings attributed to it in Judaism and Christianity.

The Islamic belief in dreams revolves around certain axioms, the central among them being that some, though not all, dreams are true. This belief is derived from the Prophet’s statement that after his death revelation (waḥy) will discontinue except for mubashshirāt or good tidings, which are good dreams that appear to a righteous man. Another tradition declares that a vision of the Prophet in a dream is deemed equal to his actual appearance, for the Devil cannot take his form. In other words, seeing the Prophet in sleep is like seeing him in reality. Therefore, just as he guided the community in his
lifetime, his vision in sleep is sufficient to guide the individual or the community at large in moments of doubts or crisis. Another Prophetic tradition states that a good dream is one of the forty-six parts of Muhammad’s prophecy, thus linking dreams with prophecy. Other related aspects of dream, such as the method of dream interpretation, are also legitimized by the Prophet’s practice of interpreting dreams. However, not all dreams are worthy of interpretation, as some are false in that the Devil or disfunction of bodily humours causes these.

These traditions signify the importance of dreams in Islamic civilization and indicate that dreams can function as a potential source of authority. Prophet Muhammad is the source of authority *par excellence* on any question that may trouble the believer. I have illustrated this with numerous examples from Islamic literature of Muslims asking Muhammad for something as a prophetic mediator between God and humans and receiving a reply in a dream. After Muhammad died, his followers, assumed that he would intercede with God concerning their affairs, especially if they visited his grave.¹ This assumption contributed to the general belief that the dead would inform the living about the affairs of the unseen world. Therefore, good dreams consisted of dreams about Prophet Muhammad, God and the dead.

Since these dreams are divinely inspired their veracity was seldom questioned. In fact, the question of verification would have been crucial if there was a centralized

¹ This belief is supported by a *hadīṣ* according to which the Prophet said: “Whoever visits my grave will be given intercession”, see Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985, p. 85.
religious authority in Islam comparable to the Church in medieval Christianity which, through its clergy, acted as mediator between the divine forces and humanity. That is why, the religious culture that gave meaning to dreams in medieval Islam assumed a particular flexibility. The 'ulamā’-i zāhīrī, who were concerned with the external aspects of Islam, did not necessarily have access to the unseen world from where the dreams originate, and hence did not mediate the relationship between the divine and the individual. To this extent, Islamic attitude to dreaming is democratic; any Muslim can claim to have had a good dream.

However, the message contained in a dream may be encoded in a symbolic language which requires interpretation. The interpreter of dreams in pre-Islamic Arabia was the kāhin, but with the coming of Islam such pagan traditions were condemned and the principle of oneiromancy was re-defined in conformity with the new religion. The kāhin was replaced by the muʿabbir, who was trained in the art of taʿbir, to unlock the hidden meaning and the logical content of the dreams as codified in the oneiric manuals. Since dreams are considered a source of knowledge from the unseen world, the muʿabbir enjoys a tremendous power as decipherer of such information.

In addition to the content, there exists a philosophical concern regarding the degree of reality attributable to dreams. Various strands of opinion within the Islamic culture concede that dreaming is a function of imagination. However, the interpretation of imagination varies from theologians to philosophers and mystics in Islam. In the cosmological conception of the sufis, who derive their understanding of the universe from Ibn ʿArabi’s theosophy, imagination is granted a distinct ontological status in the realm of
the `ālam-i miśāl. This is the realm in which the paranormal occurrences of the sufis take place. This facilitated explanation of various types of visions and dreams that were experienced by the sufis in states of wakefulness and sleep.

The dream narratives of the sufis contain several layers of meaning that are expressive of the various functions attributed to the visionary experience in Sufism. At the level of the individual the ‘supernatural’ nature of these experiences endow the mystics with a tremendous source of cosmic importance, which in their perception, is unattainable for a non-mystic. The most illustrative examples of such visions are those of spiritual initiation in which God, Prophet Muhammad, Khīr, or a deceased shaikh appear. These visions primarily contributed to the authority of the shaikh, which became manifest in the social interactions of the sufi shakhsīyat (personality).

This authority was supported by a certain belief that evolved in the early centuries of Islam. Since the ninth century A.D. Muslims have expected sufi shaikhs, as ‘heirs to the Prophet’, to perform mediatory functions between God and humans, and between humans themselves. The sufi shaikh, like the Prophet, also became the intermediary (barzakh) between the two worlds of the Creator and the created. However, at least in the majority of the narratives, the mediation between the divine and the human formed the basis of interpersonal and socio-political action of the sufis. But what legitimated the shaikh’s claim as a mediator between God and humanity?

By the ninth century the relationship between Prophet Muhammad and the sufi shaikhs was theorised by Ḥakīm Tirmizī. A fundamental belief in Islam is that prophethood ended with Muhammad; there can be no prophet after his death. This raised
the question of the leadership of the Community after Muhammad. According to Ḥakīm Tirmiẓī neither the Shi'a genealogical transmission of Prophetic authority, nor the Sunnī proposition favouring the 'ulamā' as 'heirs to the Prophet' was an acceptable solution to the problem. He suggested instead that leadership should be bestowed on those forty chosen men, whom he calls siddiqūn or auliya' allāh, who were the true successors of the Prophetic tradition. As the second of creation, the first being Muhammad, these forty men formed the second echelon in the spiritual heirarchy of the cosmos. Their characteristic is not prophethood (nubūwat), but is 'friendship with God' (walāya). The prophetic gift of revelation corresponds to their inspiration (ilhām). They can perform karāmat as the prophets performed āyāt. Like the prophets they too possess knowledge of the 'ilm al-ghā'ib (knowledge of the unseen world). They do not bring the shari'a (law) to the people, because Muhammad had revealed it in totality, but they guarantee through their knowledge the perfect explanation of the revealed law. The knowledge of these friends of God is known as 'ilm al bāṭin (esoteric knowledge), which is the highest level in al 'ilm billāh 'the knowledge of God'.

A sufi shaikh claims to be a mediator between God and humanity because he is a 'friend of God'. The legitimacy of the sufi shaikh's claim is based on four sources of authority – transmission of religious knowledge, lineage which links the sufi to Prophet Muhammad, spiritual travel, and Prophetic exemplar conduct. But how does this claim become manifest? The visionary narratives in the sources consulted for this study are both explicit and implicit in the transmission of the notion of walāyat as it was observed and
recorded in the sufi sources from medieval India. Within the sphere of the sufi community such suppositions influenced relationships to a significant extent. The position of the spiritual guide is pivotal in the sufi system as it is through him that mystic knowledge is disseminated. The entire mystic organization revolves around him. Consequently, the master exercises his domination in the affairs of his disciples and the latter subjugate themselves to his will. This seems to be the accepted norm in all sufi orders, but there are variations in matters of detail, and each order may have its peculiarities. The Naqshbandiya are a case in point. Nor is the relationship between the shaikh and the disciples, necessarily, harmonious. For example, in the *Malfuzat-i Saiyid Hasan Rasulnuma* Muhammad Hashim’s reservation about his master resulted in a vision in which he was denied the dust of the Prophet Muhammad’s feet, which was being distributed as a benediction.

Another aspect of intra-community relationship concerns the nature of interaction among disciples of a sufi shaikh. Badruddin Sirhindī describes the animosity felt by the Firozābdī group towards the claim of Ahmad Sirhindī to the *wilayat* of Delhi after the demise of Bāqī Billāh. Further, visions also illustrate the spirit of competitiveness that existed among the sufis of different orders. I have demonstrated this with an example from the *Hažrātu'l quds* where a dream narrative marks the tension in the nature of relationship between the Naqshbandiya and the Chishtiya during the seventeenth century.

However, the primary function of the sufi visions in our texts seems to be to highlight the mediatory role of the shaikh in medieval society. The society associated tremendous powers of intercession with the shaikhs. In the view of their believers, the
shaikhs were conduits through which divine blessedness reached the world and, conversely, prayers of ordinary individuals were rendered effective through their agency. The people believed that the supernatural powers of the pīrs could affect the course of mundane realities and approached them for various material and spiritual benefits. This is evident from the narratives in which the sufi shaikh has been described as responsible for affecting cure in a dream. It is also possible that the shaikh might recommend *istikhāra* (dream incubation) for his disciple and through his *tawajjuh* (concentration) control the content of the dream. In several dream narratives the shaikh interprets the dream, and going by the belief that the dream follows its interpretation, he is able to control the behaviour of the dreamer.

The various functions attributed to dreams so far are universally applicable to the experience of the sufis in different parts of the Islamic world. However, there are certain environment specific features which appear to be unique in the experiences of the Indian sufis. These features include, for example, the occurrence of figures from Hindu cosmology in the visions of the mystics. It has also been observed that certain symbols, which are associated with particular meanings within the Islamic oneiric tradition, acquire new interpretations that are derived from the Indian cultural ethos.

The points raised in the discussion so far have been illustrated with the examples of the Uwaisī sufis. The choice of the Uwaisīs has been determined by a number of considerations. The Uwaisīs occupy a unique position among the sufis because in an age when *silsila* was the dominant mode of sufi organization, the Uwaisīs remained outside their fold. In other words, the Uwaisīs did not conform to the usual elder-disciple
relationship. Thus, in order to legitimize their status as authentic sufis, they claimed a direct association with the Prophet Muhammad or some other invisible teacher through their visionary experience. In other words, in the absence of a spiritual genealogy acquired through the traditional channel of the silsila, the Uwaisīs transcended this requirement by means of their dreams and visions.

The manner in which this was achieved is exemplified by the legendary life of the ascetic Uwais Qaranī. Uwais Qaranī was supposed to be a contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad and was initiated into Islam by the Prophet himself, even though they had never met. The initiation was made through a spiritual connection the nature of which has not been explicitly stated. However, despite the physical distance, Uwais Qaranī continued to have close association with the Prophet, which the Prophet recognized and rewarded. According to the legend, the Prophet instructed his two Companions, 'Umar and 'Alī, to take his robe to Uwais Qaranī after his death. The gift of the robe symbolized the transfer of the Prophet’s intercessionary powers to Uwais Qaranī. Thus, Uwais Qaranī epitomized the possibility of deriving authority from the Prophet without direct association with him. This became a source of inspiration for those who aspired for communion with the Prophet without the direct mediation of a spiritual guide. This could be achieved through the vision of the sacred, identified as God, the Prophet, Khīżr, a deceased shaikh, or any other revered figure of the Islamic cosmology. Those who claimed initiation through such means were known as the Uwaisī sufis.

The notion of the Uwaisī sufis was not a static one. It evolved over a period of time and assumed distinct identities in different parts of the Islamic world. I have
discussed the Central Asian variant of this tradition as described in the Tażkira'ī Bughrā Ḳhānī, which deals in some detail with the dreams and visions of the Uwaisī sufis.

This serves as a backdrop to the discussion of the Uwaisī sufis in northern India between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. During this period the Uwaisī motif had diverse application in the Sufism of the subcontinent. I have made an attempt to highlight the significance of this tradition as it acquired prominence within diverse organizational setups. On the basis of the study of hagiographical sources I have identified three distinct patterns of Uwaisī identity, each serving a specific function which is spelled out in descriptions of dreams and visions.

In practice the Uwaisī association with the mentor is not just a model for the direct transmission of spiritual energy from the Prophet Muhammad, but it is also the archetype for initiation by the imaginal form or rūḥāniyat of a deceased shaikh through a visionary experience. This feature of the Uwaisī phenomenon had a particular function in the Naqshbandī silsila. In order to ensure a continuity of spiritual genealogy from Abū Bakr, the Naqshbandīs had to substitute an imaginal connection of the Uwaisī type between the initiate and the initiator. In the earliest links of the Naqshbandī spiritual genealogy, where a historical connection with the master was not possible, as the death of the master was preceded by the birth of the disciple, the Uwaisī type of dreams and visions were used to establish a continuity of links.

Further, the Uwaisī style of vision was used to legitimate some of the principal practices of the Naqshbandiya. Let us consider, for instance, the vision of Khwāja 'Abdu'l Ḳhāliq Ghujdawānī in which he was instructed by Ḳhīẓr to observe silent
invocation (zikr-i khafi) that was contrary to the practice of loud invocation (zikr-i jahr) taught by his teacher. To this extent, the conventional pattern of power equation between the master and the disciple is defied, as Ghujdawâni’s practice of the silent zikr becomes the norm for the Naqshbandiya. Similarly, by theorizing the idea that concentration (tawajjuh) on the spiritual presence (ruhaniyat) of a deceased shaikh is a station (maqâm) of sulûk, which an initiate can reach by his own effort, Bahâ’uddîn Naqshband created a legitimate space for visions inspired by the invocation of the dead as part of the spiritual training of the Naqshbandiya. Such visions acquired a prominent place in the hagiographical narratives of the Indian Naqshbandîs like Khwâja Bâqî Billâh, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindî, Shâh ‘Abdu’l Ra’hîm and Shâh Wâlî Allâh Dihlawî, and convey a continuity of Central Asian traditions into the practice of the Indian Naqshbandîs.

The Uwaisî phenomenon raises important questions about Islamic institutions and the very nature of religious belief and experience in Islam. One problem concerns the nature of relationship between Prophet Muhammad and the ordinary Muslim believer. The position of the Uwaisî is in fact the position of every Muslim with regard to Prophet Muhammad. Like Uwais Qaranî himself, the ordinary Muslim has not met the Prophet in flesh, but wishes to know him. This problem comes to fore in a significant manner during the sixteenth century which also marks the end of the first millennium of Islam. The Muslim expectations of the millennium were linked with the inevitability of the Day of Judgement, which was supposed to come at a time when religion and religious sciences suffered decay, largely, on account of the innovations that creep into Islam. There was
also an expectation of the *mahdī* or ‘the guide’ who would arrest the process of decline and avert the imminent disaster of the end of the world by means of religious renewal that included revival of the Prophetic usage (*Iḥyā’ al sunna*). It is during this time that leading sufis founded new orders or sub-orders while claiming to receive guidance directly, through Uwaisī method, from Prophet Muhammad himself. For example, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī claimed to be the *mujaddid* (renewer) of Islam on the strength of his visionary experience and initiated a new sub-order of the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidiya. This demonstrates the Uwaisī problem as it relates a certain paradox in Islam: any attempt to escape from the traditional institution of the *silsila* merely results in its re-emergence. In other words, any attempt to transcend the older structures of allegiance between the master and the disciple merely reproduced them under a new label. Therefore, Shaikh Sirhindī was to be succeeded by disciples who studied under earthly masters.

Within the Uwaisī tradition, however, there is a different solution offered for the problem of the Islamic millennium. This response was represented in the practice of Saiyid Ḥasan ‘Rasūlnāma’, an Uwaisī sufi who lived during the seventeenth century in Shāhjahānābād. According to the Islamic eschatological belief, all pious Muslims will be blessed with the vision of the Prophet on the Day of Judgement. This ‘seeing’ symbolizes the intercession which the Prophet had promised to his community on that Day. Given this belief, the vision of the Prophet acquired a renewed significance for the Muslim community which was facing the anxiety of an impending disaster that was associated with the end of the first millennium of Islam. Within this historical context Saiyid Ḥasan’s hagiographer represents him as the perfect guide to the Prophet because of his
extraordinary ability to enable the vision of the Prophet for those who associated with him. Through this vision Saiyid Ḥasan facilitated a direct link between an ordinary Muslim and his Prophet. As per the Islamic belief, seeing the Prophet in dream is akin to seeing him in reality. Therefore, the vision of the Prophet in sleep ensured for the believer the possibility of seeing him on the Day of Judgement and of securing his intercession.

The nature of Saiyid Ḥasan’s relationship with the Prophet replicates the experience of Uwais Qaraṇī in several ways. Just as Uwais Qaraṇī, through the gift of the robe, acquired the right to intercede on behalf of the Prophet, Saiyid Ḥasan ‘Rasūlnumā’, through his ability to evoke the vision of the Prophet, performed the same function of intercession for the Muslim community at the turn of the Islamic millennium. Therefore, Saiyid Ḥasan ‘Rasūlnumā’ has been described as the ‘Second Uwais’ or Uwais Qaraṇī Sānī by his hagiographer. Herein lies the importance of the Uwaisī method of Saiyid Ḥasan in the history of Indian Sufism.

By the seventeenth century an attempt was made to define the Uwaisī phenomenon in terms of a silsila. In his Ῥaṭā’īf-i naftsīya dar faṣā’il-i Uwaisiya, Ahmad Chenābī projects Uwais Qaraṇī as the perfect exemplar of the Prophet’s conduct and as the eponymous founder of the Uwaisiya. He provides a fictitious genealogy for this silsila and even defines the principle of zikr and norms of conduct for the Uwaisī sufis. However, the method of initiation into this order was not through the conventional hand-shake between the initiator and the initiate but by the invocation of the rūḥānīyat of Uwais Qaraṇī. Later biographical dictionaries are rich in descriptions of visions in which
the *rūḥāniyat* of Uwais Qarani initiates the dreamer into the Uwaisī *silsila*. In contrast to the above mentioned pattern, where the Uwaisī method is assimilated within the folds of a pre-existing *silsila*, like the Naqshbandiya, in this case there is an attempt to realize a distinct identity for the Uwaisīs. This feature is given due recognition from the nineteenth century onwards, if not earlier, in the hagiographical dictionaries like the *Khazīнatu‘l asfiyā* and the *Hadīqatu‘l auliyā‘* which assign a distinct space for the notices of the sufis belonging to the *silsila‘i Uwaisiya*.

Dreams are a historical phenomenon which, in different times and places, vary in content and meaning. Dreams are a part of the general belief system of the medieval Muslim society in India. Although a personal experience, the dreams of an individual, from the moment they are recounted, codified and disseminated, take on a public profile and collective significance. This explains the immense quantity of documents available on the subject in medieval India. I have made an attempt to understand the historical significance of dreams recorded in sufi texts. For this purpose it has not been necessary for me to question the authenticity of the dreams, but to raise questions about the place and time in which these were told. I have used each dream as a piece of historical evidence and on that basis attempted to reconstruct the historical circumstances and the ideas it reflects. In other words, I have treated dreams as a product of their cultural environment. I hope to have substantiated the hypothesis with which I had begun, i.e., that sufi dreams should be read through the medium of the cultural repertoire of Islam of which these dreams are a product.