

# TimeOut

## Delhi

**GET MORE OUT OF DELHI**

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# Haunted Delhi

The bhoot is out there





# Haunting season

Early sunsets and misty nights are upon us. We introduce you to Delhi's spookiest residents – and tell you how to dress up to join their ranks. Illustrations by **Tara Sapru**.



## Spirit Uprising

Once upon a time, the Old City was besieged by ghosts, finds **Sonal Shah**.

“**N**o native ghost has yet been authentically reported to have frightened an Englishman,” wrote Rudyard Kipling in a short story from 1888, “but many English ghosts have scared the life out of both white and black.” Kipling understood the distinction between the gothic Christian notion of once-living souls trapped between this plane and the next (your basic bhoot) and our more colorful native procession of djinns, yakshis, churails, vetalas and other spirits and demons.

With its concentration of defunct nineteenth-century Christian cemeteries, Mughal tombs, crumbling walls and abandoned gates, the Old City is the natural haunting ground for the ghosts of real people. And if ghosts in general are the spirits of those who died violent, untimely deaths, it's not surprising that many of Delhi's archetypal ghost stories – still just about in circulation – are rooted in the twilight of the Mughal empire and the bloody months surrounding the Uprising and siege of 1857.

In the years just before 1857 though, there were stories of restless white ghosts wandering the galis and gates of the Old City. The most famous is that of British Resident William Fraser, who was murdered on the orders of Shamsuddin, a young nawab of Ferozepur, on his way home from a nautch in 1835. He's said to lurk around Hindu Rao hospital, formerly his residence in the northern Ridge.

That area, between the Ridge, Civil Lines and Kashmere Gate, was the locus of most of the action during the siege, and





it has its share of apparitions too. In May of 1857, after the rebel army attacked, the enthusiastic editor of the *Dehli Urdu Akhbar* wrote that “Some people even swear that the day the horsemen came here, there were she-camels ahead of them, on which rode green-robed riders. Then they instantly vanished from sight; only the troopers remained, and they killed whichever Englishman they found, cutting them up like carrots or radishes.” Some of these julienned Englishmen may not have vanished quite so quickly: Delhi chronicler RV Smith recalled that in the early 1900s, a headless horseman soldier would be seen riding

“**They killed Englishmen, cutting them up like carrots and radishes**”

on Lothian Road, and another “sar kata bhoot” in Tees Hazari.

Civilians wander the battlefield as well. Like George Beresford, the manager of the Delhi Bank on Chandni Chowk, who had written a Delhi guidebook just the year before. He passed up his chance to escape the city and was butchered, along with his wife and five daughters on a roof in the complex on May 11, and possibly left unburied until the end of 1858.

There’s the deep Khuni Jheel in the Northern Ridge, which became a mass grave for British civilians and Indian soldiers. It’s almost gentrified and pleasant now, but in the aftermath of 1857, dead soldiers, women and children would be seen there. The actual graveyards in the area – the Lothian, Nicholson and Mutiny (Rajpura) cemeteries – were of course haunted too. Brigadier-General John Nicholson, who was mortally injured in September 1857 while leading the crucial push to recapture of the city, is still said to haunt the hallowed ground where his remains are interred. Though no one in the area – least of all the caretaker’s family – wants to talk about it, we have it on good authority that the warrior’s ghost appears atop a white horse, brandishing a naked sword.

When British reinforcements wrested control of Delhi, it was the turn of Mughul royals and aristocracy to suffer execution and murder most foul. Both the prison of Salimgarh Fort and the execution ground at Khooni Darwaza had histories of previous haunting, and the events following the Uprising helped entrench their reputation. Salimgarh Fort, where Bahadur Shah Zafar was incarcerated briefly after trying to escape via Humayun’s Tomb,

has a haunted past thanks to Aurangzeb, who supposedly kept his ghazal-writing daughter Zebunnisa (pen-named Makhfi) here. She died single, and her ghost is said to haunt the prison. Perhaps she consorts with the ghosts of the minor princes of the late Mughal period, allegedly raised captive in jail-cells here to make sure they were incapable of revolt. Flash forward from 1857 to the next war of Independence, and Salimgarh was used to incarcerate members of the Indian National Army, some of whom died and

can be heard rattling their chains.

Prisoners and royals haunt the Red Fort too. In the 1960s, the *Hindustan Times* sent a photographer to spend the night in the diwan-e-khas, after the caretaker heard eerie sounds and saw ghosts. And while the Uprising was long over and Bahadur Shah Zafar far away in Rangoon when he died in 1862, people who lived around the Lal Qila said they would see him, his wife Zeenat Mahal and a retinue of his dead family members, circumambulating the fort on Thursday nights. How awkward if they were to encounter the restless spirits of the British soldiers, who still prowls the tunnels below the Fort, seeking Mughal loot.

A day before Nicholson died, Bahadur Shah Zafar’s sons and grandson were shot at the “Bloody Gate” and are said to haunt it still. Khooni Darwaza is near the graveyards behind the *Indian Express* building and was used by other capital punishers, including Aurangzeb, who mounted Dara Shikoh’s head here. The Khooni Darwaza is one of the few sites that retains its ghostly notoriety, partially perhaps due to the rape of a medical student here in 2002. But in general, the commonly held belief in ghosts around the ruins south of Shahjahanabad has petered out. Writer Sohail Hashi remembered that even as recently as his father’s youth, it wasn’t considered safe to mill about around the area. “But many of these ghost stories have died with the expansion of the city,” he said.

It’s difficult to now find old Dilliwalas who believe or even know the stories about the phantoms of 1857. Mostly, they’re found just wandering down the memory lanes of people like RV Smith, who know the Old City well but have studied its history too. There are still a few haunted spots around – an abandoned house near Turkman Gate, a white lady who smokes cigarettes at Kashmere Gate – but these are just a fading part of the fabric of daily life, nothing much to talk about. Maybe the stories of these specters will return some day. Smith certainly hopes so. “Everybody loves ghost stories,” he said. “There was a time that it was fashionable to read them. Now they’re making a comeback, especially on TV shows.” Or perhaps it’s only fair that those old ghosts of old Delhi be allowed to die, at last, a natural death.

# Favourite haunts

*Time Out* staffers round up chilling tales for your next bonfire.



## Garlic ghost

If you moved into a flat on Mall Road early in the last decade, your neighbours would be less likely to welcome you with mithai than with a bag of garlic and a plate of turmeric. Residents believed they were afflicted by the ghost of an old woman who went door to door asking for some garlic. If she was refused, a gradual but deadly curse fell upon that home. There were apparently only three charms against her haunting. One was stamping the door with the turmeric hand-prints of everyone who lived there. The second was laying a broomstick across the threshold. Or third, just giving her some garlic.

## Statistically spooking

The students of the Indian Statistical Institute know that 95 per cent of all ghost stories are made up on the spot. But there's one that they're unlikely to dismiss in a hurry. In 2004, the ISI campus nearly shut down because students reported the apparition of a peer who'd died a bizarre death. The boy was a first-year student of the M.Stat course. According to one old-timer (who didn't want his name published), the student walked into class for a lecture and suddenly fell to the floor. He was rushed to a hospital, but was dead on arrival.

Soon afterward, students began to hear knocks on their doors; others felt they had been shoved around in the staircase. The dead student was believed to be a heavy smoker, and a few hostel residents thought they could smell traces of his

brand of cigarettes in the bathroom. Some even reported getting a whiff of his aftershave. These incidents left 13 of the 19 students of the first-year batch so badly spooked, they left the institute to go back home until things settled down. This, despite the institute allegedly offering to ferry students to a temple nearby, to placate the restless spirit.

Eventually, the haunting was found to be a null hypothesis. The student was a victim of a pre-existing medical condition, said one professor from the institute. "The aftershave and the cigarettes were just pranks in very poor taste." When we visited, the guards and the security officer refused to acknowledge that the incident had ever happened. "I have been here for the last 25 years, and have never heard of any ghosts on campus," claimed the security officer, before laughing nervously. They're keeping their skeletons in the proverbial closet.

## The snake gourd scare

Tori, never the most popular of vegetables, took a real dip in West Delhi in the early '90s. According to urban legend: A truck-driver was roaring down NH 10, carrying a load of tori from Panipat, when he squished a snake on the highway. The snake was, of course, an ichhadari saap, crossing the road to where his nagin lover awaited him. The nagin, enraged and grieving, proclaimed that all tori would now be lethally poisoned – giving residents, or at least local schoolkids, a renewed terror of the sponge gourd.

## The woman in white

The white-sari-clad spirit is an old cliché, given eternal life by Rajkumar Kohli in *Bees Saal Baad*, in which Dimple Kapadia stops traffic as a vengeful ghost. Whether the woman in white is a Hindi-film construct haunting popular imagination or the other way around is hard to say. But stories of wronged women in their see-through nighties or wedding gowns come from cultures far and wide, and they seem to be the apparitions mostly frequently spotted in Delhi.

Delhi's women-in-white have a predilection for haunting lonely stretches of road. As one story goes, a woman in white roams the Ashok Vihar flyover between 1am and 4am. Anyone who passes by at that hour, and stops to ask her for directions, will not find their way home that night. Their vehicles break down or they go around in circles.

The apparition also makes appearances near the Delhi Cantonment, where she's the one flagging down passing vehicles. If you're impolite (or too freaked out) and don't stop, she will run alongside the car to teach you some manners. She's also been spotted under a peepal tree in Dwarka Sector 9 and in Andheria Mor, where call-centre employees and their cab drivers are strictly advised against pulling over to have a chat. Sometimes, she appears in the middle of the road, only to disappear under the wheels.

There's a twist on the tale, popular with DU students, about a ghost in the northern Ridge, a sardar with his hair hanging loose. Men see him from behind, take him to be a woman and approach him, at which point the angry sardar spins around and drives his kirpan into their gut.



Headed nowhere Twilight at the Nicholson Cemetery



If there's one thing we do know, it's our film tropes. So our advice is that if you do run into a white-sari spirit on a dark winter night, don't pray or run or, god forbid, ask for directions. Just throw water on her and she'll turn into Mandakini from *Ram Teri Ganga Maali*.

## The haunting of 10 Janpath

In 1990, as former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi prepared to move from Race Course Road to 10 Janpath, new security measures were added to protect him: a tall, spiked fence, metal detectors, and watch towers. However, an older tradition of warding off evil spirits from the house fell by the wayside when the Gandhis moved in. An Associated Press report from the time interviewed previous resident Krishna Kant Tiwari, Gandhi's former Minister of Information. "It is not one of the classical window-rattling, door-slamming-type haunted houses," he said, "but I am told there is something." Tiwari's wife had carried on the tradition, established by 10 Janpath's former residents and staff, of lighting candles under a large banyan tree outside the house, and occasionally summoning a pujari to purify the area.

The government bungalow's reputation for being cursed was built on a few solid facts: Lal Bahadur Shastri, who once lived here, died mysteriously while in office; a senior advisor died after moving in; and Sanjay Gandhi was using 10 Janpath as

an office when he crashed to his death a decade earlier. Between Sanjay's death and Tiwari's occupation, the house actually remained empty for five years.

"I thought it proper that I should tell Mr Gandhi about it," Tiwari told the AP, "but our leader does not believe in ghosts, demons or stuff like haunted houses."

Perhaps not. But it could explain why Rajiv Gandhi – supposedly as a courtesy during the Congress' brief support of Chandra Shekhar – once offered the house to LK Advani, "so that," the BJP leader recalled in 2008, "the opposition leader can have a permanent address."

## The Delhi Purple Sapphire

Gripe as much as you like about the Kohinoor, but here's one rock we should be glad is no longer in Delhi. The cursed Delhi Purple Sapphire now inhabits the Vault Gallery of the Natural History Museum in London, but it left a trail of misfortune on its way there.

According to a history provided by the Museum, the gem (actually an amethyst) was looted by an officer of the Bengal Cavalry during the Uprising of 1857. He brought it to England, but grew sick and became bankrupt. His son, who inherited it, also inherited terrible luck. The son

gave it to a friend, who committed suicide, and willed it right back.

In 1890, the cavalryman's son donated the stone to Edward Heron-Allen, a gentleman scholar, geologist and later fellow of the Royal Society. For all his expertise, Heron-Allen fared no better with the Delhi Purple Sapphire. He tried a number of ways to deflect the curse. He

had the stone bound with a "double-headed snake" from an astrologer's ring and two amethyst scarabs belonging to Queen Hatasa of

Thebes. After one disaster, he threw the amethyst into the Regents Canal, only to have it returned by Wardour Street dealer who bought it from a dredger.

Finally, in 1904, Heron-Allen had the stone packed in seven boxes and sealed in his bank vault, instructing that it should not be opened until 33 years after his death. His eldest daughter donated it to the Natural History Museum, where her father had worked, along with Heron-Allen's letter of warning: "This stone is trebly accursed and is stained with the blood, and the dishonour of everyone who has ever owned it... Whoever shall then open it, shall first read this warning, and then do as he pleases with the jewel. My advice to him or her is to cast it into the sea."



# How to... Exorcise a ghost

**Karanjeet Kaur** learns the five-step process for shaking bad spirits.

The only thing more difficult than nailing down a ghost for an interview, is nailing down an exorcist. But help is at hand: or at least in the innards of New Seemapuri. The folks over at the Shree Goga Jahar Pir Dharmik Seva Ashram Medical Trust (Registered) have a well-oiled system in place. Their repertoire includes exorcising as well as treating general discontent. The one-size-fits-all "course" lasts four days. An assistant to the head honcho, the Vaid ji, cautioned us to not consume meat from the day we started visiting the centre, until the course was over.

**Day one** You donate ₹31 and they give you a lemon (no pun intended). You register your complaint with a desk manned by two people. The Vaid ji sticks pins in the lemon and gives it back to you. You take it back home and put it in a "holy" place.

**Day two** You bring back the lemon and show it to the Vaid ji, who'll interrogate the lemon and reveal to you, who or what is responsible for your troubles. You take the lemon back home with more pins and repeat. Plus donate ₹31.

**Day three** You bring the lemon back and the flunkies hand you a printed pamphlet with a list of a few things you're supposed to bring back. These include jaiphal (nutmeg), garlic, a green coconut, dhoop

batti, two meetha paan and an iron nail. Repeat the donation.

**Day four** You bring these items back in a potli, and the Vaid ji blesses it. He whacks you with a whip of pigeon feathers and also gives you a batasha (which looked like it was smeared with some ash). You eat the batasha and take back the potli and go around your house thrice with it. Then you eat the edibles in the potli and leave the rest in your house. Do not forget the donation.

**Forevermore** For the next 40 days, you call the centre to give your "haziri". Basically, keep the centre updated on whether the evil spirits are gone. Presumably, they tell you to keep coming back, because a couple of people we spoke to said they'd been coming for months.

**Shree Goga Jahar Pir Dharmik Seva Ashram Medical Trust** E-48/A, 282 New Seemapuri, next to Bhole Baba Mandir, opp New Seemapuri Depot (2235-5586, 92133-86903). Daily 7am-9pm.



# A wild mongoose chase

A talking rodent from Delhi is still a legend among fans of the occult, says **Uday Bhatia**.

**D**elhi's oddest otherworldly creature never actually un-lived here at all. The tale begins in 1931, on a farmhouse called Cashen's Gap on the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea. That autumn, the Irving family began to hear something mimicking the sounds of their farm animals. They thought they saw a weasel-like creature, and they grew afraid. One night, as young Voirrey Irving was singing nursery rhymes to lull herself to sleep, she heard the creature repeating them back to her, in a voice two octaves higher than any human's.

As it turned out, it was a temperamental but harmless spirit, who would sometimes help the family by killing rabbits for them, and at other times would curse and hurl things at them. As it began to feel at home, Irving took to calling it Gef, and Gef in turn revealed his story. He was born in Delhi, on June 7, 1852, where he lived with "a tall man who wore a green turban on his head". Gef explained that he was no weasel, but a marsh mongoose. If the spirit rodent is to be believed, he was a ghost-specimen of *Herpestes palustris*, the only species of marsh mongoose in India. (Since the species is indigenous to the swamps of Bengal, we assume Gef's ancestors were transported to Delhi).

In January 1932, both the *Manchester Daily Dispatch* and the *London Daily Sketch* ran articles about the talking mongoose. Irving himself kept a diary about Gef between the years 1932 and 1935. In 1936, paranormal investigator Harry Price published *The Haunting of Cashen's Gap*, drawing on Irving's notes and interviews with the family, and bringing the story to wide public attention. Seventy-five years on, the cult of the talking mongoose has refused to die a natural after-death. Brad Steiger, author of over 150 books dealing with matters supernatural and superweird, included the case in his 2003 compendium *Real Ghosts, Restless Spirits, and Haunted Places*. "In the late 1960s, I 'inherited' some of the research papers of Harry Price and this kept my interest in the talking

mongoose alive," Steiger said in an e-mail.

According to Steiger, Price hired a former Scotland Yard inspector to visit Cashen's Gap and bring back evidence of the haunting. Gef pulled pranks on Captain McDonald's investigation: he once provided a hair sample, which the

the throwing and moving of objects, in the rarest of cases, the paranormal expression of psychokinesis begins to develop a voice and a rudimentary personality."

Given the generally low standard of conversation from beyond the grave,

Gef was no less than the Oscar Wilde of ghosts – quotable, pithy and sardonic. His declarations range from metaphysical head-scratchers ("I have three spirits, and their names are Foe, Faith and Truth") to wildly varying self-descriptions ("I am a ghost in the form of a weasel"; "I am not a spirit. I am a little extra, extra clever mongoose." "I'm a freak... If you saw me, you'd be petrified, mummified") to Ed Wood-like rants ("I'll split the atom! I am the fifth dimension! I am the eighth wonder of the world!").

Local mongoose lovers and occultists alike may be disappointed that Gef, while Delhi-born, wasn't very Indian in language or behaviour. In his book, Price called it "curious" that Gef's vocabulary had so little of any Indian language, and so much of English and Manx. He did, however, list "Allah", "ballah", "yogi", "punkah", "rani", "maharajah" and "nabob" as words Gef had been heard saying.

As Gef's legend grew and grew, his hosts had to contend with an alternately sceptical and breathless crush of press-men and paranormal enthusiasts who hiked out to Cashen's Gap to talk to them. Voirrey, interviewed in the '70s, admitted that the case had taken a toll on her – she cited Gef as the reason she moved away from the Isle of Man and never married, though she maintained

that it was no hoax. Gef himself was reportedly wary of attention. "You'll put me in a bottle if you catch me," he once said. How would the mythical mongoose of Manx have reacted to "Eighth Wonder", a 2009 song by Boston-based artist Lemon Demon, with lyrics drawn solely from Gef's utterings? To quote a few lines of his that aren't in the song, he might have said "Nuts! Put a sock in it! Chew coke!"



lab at the London Zoo found to be a dog's. Later he conceded to leave paw-prints in plasticine blocks, which the British Natural History Museum said could only have belonged to an American raccoon. Gef was also captured in the occasional blurry photograph, but his real mark was his gift of gab. That put him in a special group of poltergeist, Steiger said. "While the common poltergeist case involves





MANITBALMIKI

# I ain't afraid of no ghost

A real-life paranormal investigator answers **Raghu Karnad's** top ten questions about surviving in a haunted city.

**A**s a child mortally afraid of the dark, I knew who I was going to call: ghostbusters. But I never knew their number. Today, a quick web search can put any big, blanket-hiding baby in touch with the Indian Paranormal Society. The network of 34 investigators, researchers and parapsychologists is spread across the country, but headquartered in Delhi, in the home of IPS founder-director Gaurav Tiwari. When he was 22, Tiwari moved to Florida to be trained as an airline pilot. He returned with an additional certification, as a paranormal investigator. He now investigates reported hauntings, for free.

I met Tiwari at that landmark of South Delhi spookiness, “the Vasant Kunj Haveli”, which turned out to be Sultan Garhi, the first Islamic royal tomb in Delhi, built for the son of Sultan Iltutmish. “We’ve recorded some EVPs [electronic voice phenomena] at this place,” Tiwari said, which meant a positive indication of a haunting. In 1200 AD, when Iltutmish was the ruler of Delhi, there was a saint in his kingdom, Tiwari explained. “One day he took samadhi under the trees, but he was burnt alive and his ashes were buried in this haveli. People have seen full-bodied apparitions of the saint. People pray here in the daytime, but only adventure-seekers go at night.” I took advantage of the sharp daylight to sort out my other unanswered questions.

## How do you become a Certified Leading Paranormal Investigator?

The course is vast – it’s not only parapsychology but metaphysics, belief systems, human psychology, and a lot of scientific factors that help us in any kind of paranormal investigation. You have to complete 80 investigations, so wherever I used to fly, I used to go investigate some place. Eventually I could complete 80 and could appear for my exams. I also wanted to venture out into UFOs, so I took a course on certified UFO field investigation. It’s a very common thing in the USA.

## What are some haunted spots in Delhi?

In Delhi, if you go to the old cemeteries, you’ll find a lot of cases. There’s a cemetery in Paharganj where we had intelligent communication and we found a baby face on the tree, captured in a photograph. We tried to analyse it through different softwares, to see whether it’s a dust particle, or matrixing – the tendency of the mind to form a shape from complex images. But we had a lot of EVPs. We heard a woman crying; we heard a man, who sounded like he was in a lot of pain.

There’s a famous BPO building in Gurgaon, Saffron Global, the whole building was supposed to be haunted, and most of the employees witnessed something or other. It’s been shut down. The library of Doordarshan Bhavan is

supposed to be haunted, but we haven’t had a chance to investigate it. The Hindu Rao hospital has one portion left completely vacant because so people started seeing apparitions of a lady there. There’s also a report that the basement of Safdarjang Hospital has a noose in one room. Nobody goes there.

## Are there different kinds of ghosts?

Ghosts can be intelligent or residual. A residual haunting is like a tape being played again and again, an imprint of a past consciousness on the world. There’s no communication. If you see a spirit walking by, they’ll just walk past. Intelligent spirits interact with those alive.

## What’s the procedure for finding spooks?

We basically go to disprove that there’s a haunting. If we find something unexplainable by science, that is paranormal. When we visit a place, we first of all learn about the belief system of the clients. Second, we research the history of the location, from the neighbourhood, the local police station. Third thing, we go and visit the place during the day-time, and note down the loopholes – in case it’s a natural thing. We take an electro-magnetic fluctuation base-reading, with lights on, with lights off; geomagnetic field, solar flare activity; we consider each and every point that could cause EMF. At

night, we take another sweep, to take the difference between day and night. Then we start communicating with the spirit. We introduce ourselves, we speak to them.

#### Is there cool equipment involved?

We use tools, like geophones, audio recorders, motion sensors and full-spectrum cameras. One device is a K2 meter. If there's an intelligent spirit, they can manipulate EM fluctuation, and if they do, they can manipulate the lights on the K2 meter. We can ask them to tell us "Yes" or "No", by giving us two lights, three lights, four lights.

#### Can ghosts talk?

Sometimes when we play back a recorded EVM you hear some answer, you know, in whispering mode. We've always seen that the pitch and the frequency is double than a human being – so we bring them down to a normal level using software. This way we've found out names.

#### So is Bhangarh haunted, or really haunted?

People consider it haunted for a thousand years. It's a very freaky place, a very eerie place to go at night. We went there and checked out whether there were spirits to make people afraid. We didn't find any. We figured out all the things making the place feel haunted. Mostly, it's that people who visit Bhangarh at night are drunk.

#### Do ghosts only come out at night?

Wherever there's paranormal activity, it's 24x7. The only reason we investigate at night is the silence, there's much less disturbance. Yes, full-moon nights generate a lot of paranormal energy, because spirits can feed on lunar energy. But this could also be wrong, because it's been found that the full moon can manipulate humans' imaginative power.

#### Ghosts are scary, but should they be?

Spirits and ghosts aren't negative. There's not a single proof of someone being killed by one. They're stuck on this plane because of lot of factors – their mental condition at death, their unfinished business, their fear of moving on to face judgement. We need to understand them as another human being that has lost its body, but has not moved on.

#### So what do I do if I see a ghost?

Spirits want to communicate. They don't want to harm you, they want you to know there's someone there. The frustration of a spirit makes it behave like a child, seeking attention, seeking acknowledgement. A person with self-confidence and self-esteem can never be possessed or harmed. Be stronger, believe in yourself: that's the only mantra for dealing with spirits. And if you do not have the inner strength, contact a professional.

**Indian Paranormal Society** Visit [www.gripteam.org](http://www.gripteam.org), or contact Gaurav Adhikari (93118-57156, [gaurav@gripteam.org](mailto:gaurav@gripteam.org)).

## Boo tube

**T**elevision anchors Rocky Singh and Mayur Sharma are well known for their investigative skills at finding good places to eat. In their new show *India's Most Haunted*, on NDTV Good Times, the duo apply those skills to tracking down haunted spots around the country. **Sonam Joshi** talked to director and co-anchor Singh about what they discovered.

#### Do you really believe in ghosts?

The first episode of *India's Most Haunted* was the true account of a paranormal experience we had at Jamali Kamali in Delhi 20 years ago. Since I was there and the events of that night unfolded in my presence, I cannot disbelieve. I have looked for proof for 20 years now and until I find it I won't disbelieve. So I guess I am in no man's land – I am a sceptical believer.

#### What were the places you visited in Delhi? Are Delhi's ghosts spookier than the ghosts elsewhere?

We visited Jamali Kamali in the Qutab Minar complex and the Sufi shrine of Khwaja Moluddin Chishti at Dhal. Delhi definitely has a strong paranormal quotient due to its strong red aura, which, in theory, makes sightings more frequent. Also, a city with a history of over 4,000 years is bound to have its fair share of paranormal presence. This is

a city of ghosts, jinns and churails. For sceptics it is a matter of amusement, for the believers a matter of unease and for many thousands a matter of fact. Delhi is well and truly haunted.

#### The dargah of Moluddin Chishti was in our last issue – we wrote about the saint's fondness for a good smoke. Between that and Jamali Kamali, which gave you the bigger creeps?

I've experienced a first-hand haunting in Jamali Kamali, so the place always holds some dread for me. It was tough to spend time alone there walking between the graves. The dargah of Moluddin Chishti is a spiritual place with a lot of power, and a peaceful aura, though "sightings" are much more frequent here.

#### You started the series to investigate the paranormal. So what really is out there?

It's hard to provide proof of the existence of the paranormal. You can't see it or hear it but you can feel a tangible presence at places that have legends of spirits associated with them. I actually believe I've felt them. Though we had a few unexplained occurrences, we did not conclusively prove what is out there. Perhaps we can do so in the future.

**India's Most Haunted** airs on NDTV Good Times on Mondays at 8pm, Fridays at 4pm and Saturdays at 10.30am.



Scooby duo Rocky Singh and (right) Mayur Sharma



# Those who came before

Long before Delhi became a city filled with ghosts, it was a city full of jinns. The spirit kind still populate Firoz Shah Kotla, where every Thursday, devotees leave them offerings, prayers and petitions in the smoke-filled chambers below the ruins. In an extract from his dissertation, **Anand Vivek Taneja** tells the story of a meeting that laid the ground for the veneration of jinns in modern Delhi.

**T**he jinn, much longer lived than human beings, have memories stretching back a very long way, several generations of human history. They can connect individuals hundreds of years apart instantaneously, forsaking human institutions of memory and generations of transmission, short-circuiting genealogy into electrifying, other-worldly jinnealogy. A jinnealogical story which is quite popular in Delhi, and a version of which I heard from Chand, Laddoo Shah's son, concerns Shah Waliullah.

In Chand's version, the story is directly linked to the mosque at Firoz Shah Kotla. The story goes that Shah Waliullah was once praying here when he saw a snake approaching him. He killed the snake with a stick. That night as he was sleeping, he was carried back to the court of the king of the jinn in the ruins of Firoz Shah Kotla, where the king of the jinn told him that that he stood accused of murder. He had killed the son of the king of the jinn, who had taken the form of a snake. In his defence, Shah Waliullah quoted a *hadith* [saying] of the Prophet, saying that it was perfectly legitimate to kill a dangerous creature approaching you if you are praying. Had he known that the snake was actually a jinn in disguise, he would have done no such thing.

The king asked the gathered jinn if what Waliullah said was true. An old jinn said, yes this saying is true. I have heard it myself from the lips of the Prophet. The old jinn was a *Sahabi*, a companion of the Prophet by virtue of being a Muslim who had met the Prophet in his lifetime. So meeting this old jinn gave Shah Waliullah the stature of one of the *Tabi'un*, those Muslims who were born after the death of the Prophet, but had met the *Sahabah*,

the companions of the Prophet. The whole thing happened, in the explicit logic of Chand's story (and other retellings of the story) precisely because Allah wanted to raise the stature of Shah Waliullah. Jinnealogy makes it possible for Shah Waliullah to skip the thousand years of falling from the grace of the time of the Prophet to become one of the *Tabi'un*, the best generation after the companions of the prophet.

Shah Waliullah, of course, is the founding father, as it were, of the reformist tradition in modern Indian Islam. His being raised to the status of *Tabi'un* through the jinn is an about-turn of sorts from the criticisms of jinn veneration (and from considering them mostly malign) that we see in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The new respectability given to jinn by the reformist tradition is seen most clearly in Mufti Shabir Hasan Chishti's accounts, in *Jinnat Ke Purasrar Haalaat* (*The Condition of the Jinns with All Their Secrets*), a book first published in Delhi in the 1950s, which has since become a bestseller for the publisher Astana Book Depot, currently going into several reprints a year. It tells of jinn studying at the great reformist seminary, the Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband:

## Jinn also study at the Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband

From the verbal accounts of some professors at the Dar-ul-Uloom I learned that jinns also study at the Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband. One night, around midnight, when Hazrat Maulana Habib ur Rahman Sahib, the mohtamam (caretaker) of Dar-ul-Uloom was patrolling the campus, he saw two young snakes fighting and playing with each other in a locked

room. Books lay open in front of the snakes. On seeing this, Hazrat Mohtamam Sahib immediately scolded them and said – is this a time to study or to fight? Upon hearing this, those two snakes instantly came back to regulation human form and started apologizing and swore that God willing, we will not give you an occasion for complaint again.

It is the respectability of the jinn within the reformist tradition that lays the ground for Firoz Shah Kotla to go from being a marginal space to becoming one of the most visited sacred spaces in Delhi. It is significant that this respectability, as seen in *Jinnat Ke Purasrar Haalaat*, manifests first in the 1950s, in the decade after Partition. It is also significant that this respectability of the jinn, as in the story of Shah Waliullah and the *sahabi* jinn, is linked to jinnealogy, to the transmission of knowledge not dependent on the institutions and genealogies of human memory. For the all-pervasive violence of Partition and its continuing aftermath has seen the widespread destruction of all such institutions of memory, particularly for north Indian Muslims. Tens of thousands killed, millions displaced, social relations sundered, properties and documents lost, and landscapes entirely transformed. We are left to rely on the memory of jinns, and on jinn-like old men, increasingly frail and insubstantial, their fading memories unsupported by any documentary proof. And when they die, all we will be left with will be the jinn. And they are mortal too.

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# Time to pretend

There's a costume for every occasion at Abhiruchi.

Two men walk into a costume shop. They're looking for a child-sized potato outfit. Mrs Wadhwa doesn't bat an eyelid. She has an entire vegetable patch worth of costumes: onions, tomatoes, aubergines and even ruched, emerald karelas. She pulls out two spuds – one oblong, one squat, complete with squinched eyes – to be tied on over small green pants and shirt.

During the half-hour we spent at Abhiruchi, perched on a stool in a sea of bandhni turbans, graduation gowns and sequined fabric scraps, Madhu Wadhwa and her husband SR Wadhwa received requests for a potato, an ostrich, a giraffe. We went in looking for a Halloween outfitter, but costumes are just business as usual for the Wadhwases, who've run this Lajpat shop for about nine years and recently shifted into a bigger showroom in Central Market.

"What's Halloween," asked SR Wadhwa dismissively, as his wife bustled about, plonking cups of tea in front of us. "Halloween is an upper-class affair. It lasts two-three days. We have to survive year-round." The couple know a bit about hanging on. Madhu, a former teacher at the Apeejay School, and her husband started the shop as an NGO after SR retired from his career in marketing. The non-profit was supposed to promote theatre for children. "It was very difficult to survive unless there was continual income, so we converted to a shop," SR said. In the early days, he'd go around to schools peddling costumes, but now the schools come to them. The Wadhwases could probably earn more if they raised the security deposits on their get-ups (only about half are ever returned). Instead they scrape along, managing to stay ahead of the competition.

Most of Delhi's original costume shops are in Kinari Bazaar in old Delhi, and though Abhiruchi works with them, it's positioned itself as a cut above. "They ask

us what new things we are doing," SR said, "The kind of things they have there are about 100 years old! I once asked who is taking these things... they said some people come from the village to take them outside."

By contrast, SR explains, the Wadhwases bring back the latest trends from America when they go to visit their daughter in Las Vegas. "Mahatma Gandhi ki topi is better in USA than here," Madhu avows. She shows us Rabindranath's imported beard too; "Tagore is going well these days," she tells us, on account of his 150th birth anniversary last year. Freedom fighters and professional vocations are almost as evergreen as vegetables. We asked SR Wadhwa about the Sheila Dikshit outfit mentioned on their website. He cocked his head and said, "It looks pretty much like what you're wearing."

While Abhiruchi mostly caters to school events, the Wadhwases will take on any work that comes their way. They used to have a full-fledged workshop, but now outsource most of the stitching. They enjoy the occasional order that requires a bit more inventiveness, and are proud of their contribution to the Commonwealth Games (they dressed the dancers at the opening ceremony, but try making a serious statement this Halloween with their CWG balloon costume). "Anything out of the world is actually our cup of tea," SR said. He showed us the popular Chess King and Queen of Hearts costumes. It's as we suspected. Lajpat Nagar really is Wonderland.

**Sonal Shah**

**Abhiruchi Fancy Dresses**

D-22 Lajpat Nagar-II, Lower Ground Floor, Central Market (6660-1414). ☎ Lajpat Nagar. [www.abhiruchi.in](http://www.abhiruchi.in). Costumes from about ₹250 per use, plus a deposit. Chess king costume about ₹1,500 per rental.



MANITABALMIKI

## Costume central

American sitcoms are primarily responsible for introducing Halloween to India, and thus largely to blame for the slutty nurse, the skimpy bunny and the black-caped Dracula clichés that follow. Remember the *Friends* episode, the one in which Ross (dressed up as Spudnick but looking more like a turd) and Chandler (a pink bunny) arm wrestle to see who's tougher? With that kind of backing, it's safe to say Halloween has arrived.

Rajiv Mehra of **Aliyed The Parrry Shop** in Khan Market has seen the demand for Halloween costume and party goods shoot up over the last three years. His store is well-equipped with costumes and accessories, including the Dracula cape (₹650), pointy hats, princess crowns and earrings, wand, spears, swords, wrinkled hand gloves that glow, pumpkin hand lights, glow-in-the-dark teeth, nails and face cream (₹250), rubber masks (from ₹150-₹800). It also has decorations (think glowing spider webs, ₹350) and stationery (pirate rings or witch pens that light up, ₹75).

Across the market, **Allied Stores** is also chock-a-block with disguises. Owner Sanjiv Mehra said that costume trends change over time. "First there was a devil or witch," he said, "now everybody thinks this is common and they ask for new things." The store has about 20 different costumes at the moment. They're mostly pre-packaged costumes like the ones you've seen on TV, and like all

good American products, they're manufactured in China. "Today, I think maybe the human beings are not Chinese," Mehra noted, "but everything else is."

**Nirvana Sawhney**

**Allied Stores** 10B Khan Market (2461-8871). ☎ Khan Market. Daily 10.30am-8.30pm. Costumes from ₹999. **Aliyed The Parrry Shop** 4A Khan Market (2461-6570). ☎ Khan Market. Mon-Sat 11.30am-7.30pm. Costumes from ₹400.



ANSHIKA VARMA (2)





# Chitrashala corner

Go shopping in Delhi's most gruesome gali.



**Skeleton crew** At Puran Chand Gyan Prakash; (below) a Shimla shopkeeper stops by to stock up

A couple of shops in Kinari Bazaar keep the costume party going all year round. Though most of them stay in business supplying tinsel crowns and play swords for Ramlilas and other religious festivals, we found a few that stock Halloween-appropriate accoutrements.

**Puran Chand Gyan Prakash** might look like one more crowded costume store, but it's the most comprehensive in the gali. Every square inch of wall is covered with hats, masks, skeletons, handcuffs, gladiator helmets, plastic six-pack abs and tombstones. One floor is dedicated to decor and accessories and another to full-fledged costumes. They're stacked up in a dingy room that branches off into smaller sections. Hiding here are get-ups of every conceivable kind, from Naga tribal skirts to sheep, bananas, sailors and Casper the Friendly Ghost. Puran Chand's been around for 60 years and supplies to parties, events and haunted houses. Shopkeepers from Ghaziabad to Shimla swear by its wholesale stock.

**Vishal Chitrashala** has flourished in Kinari for over 40 years. The spacious shop attracts customers not only for Halloween, but also for school events, plays and dances with its costumes, jewelry, wigs and cosmetics. Owner Vishal Gupta has stocked up an abundance of ghosts and skeletons for Halloween, but also has the standby Spidermen, Superman and menagerie of animals, not to mention Anna Hazare caps. The costumes aren't all that well stitched, but Gupta is helpful and happy to make new ones on demand.

Nearby, **Shri Amar Chitrashala** also has readymade and tailored outfits, which it



rents out. It's small, but Sri Amar has a good lot of props like fake amputated arms and legs for spook-seekers. We found the shopkeeper a bit grumpy, but chalked it up to him getting into character. **Nirvana Sawhney** and **Priyanka Mogul**  
**Puran Chand Gyan Prakash** 2197, Kinari Bazaar (2328-8473). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Mon-Sat 11am-8pm. Costumes from ₹200.  
**Shri Amar Chitrashala** 2699 Chatta Pratap Singh, Kinari Bazaar (2328-4185/98114-47610). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 10am-7pm. Rentals from ₹150 per day.  
**Vishal Chitrashala** 2208 Kinari Bazar (2326-9221). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Mon-Sat 11am-7pm. Rentals from about ₹100 per day.

## SOMETHING UNUSUAL...

Incontrovertible proof! Catch a documentary about paranormal phenomena. See p83

## The freaks come out at night

Have a bloody good time at these Halloween parties.

**W**ant to see something really frightening? Watch the stock market. But if you're spooked about what to wear for Halloween, you really have nothing to fear. The capital is scaring up a selection of parties for which you'll want to don your witch's hat or devil horns, so start breaking out the fake blood (to find more creative costumes, see p29). With Halloween actually falling on a Monday this year, the capital's party planners have gone into overdrive, spreading celebrations across the weekend prior. So if you're planning to make it out alive, you'd better pace the spook juice. Follow *Time Out Delhi* on Twitter (@TimeOutDelhi) for the latest costume party updates.

### Fri Oct 28

#### Delitronica Halloween party @ Zook

Looking for a Halloween party that'll leave you feeling dead the day after? Try moshing to BLOT and DJ Uri, who're kicking off the weekend in suitably messy style. There's no dress code, but if you make an effort you might be the lucky recipient of freebies. Head straight to this disco for a night of boos and booze.  
3 Community Centre, PVR Anupam Complex, Saket (99994-00001). ☎ Malviya Nagar. 9pm-1am. Free.

#### Halloween weekend deals @ Café Morrison

At Café Morrison, scary goblins and monsters will do what they do best – mash. This bar is offering drink deals all Halloween weekend, rock 'n' roll from DJs Siddharth and Maddy and free drinks for anyone who dresses up.  
E-12 South Extension Part-II, First Floor (5510-6169). 9pm-midnight. Free.

### Sat Oct 29

#### Hacienda Hallucienda (Haunted House) @ TLR

The dead and debauched will come together at TLR's raging annual spooktacular with AV duo WYZZZZRRDDZ. It all hinges on the outrageousness of your costume. Everyone who dresses up as a ghost or a dead celebrity stands to win free drinks and prizes, but there's one massive grand prize (no, they're not telling) for the best of the night.

31 Hauz Khas Village (4608-0533). ☎ Green Park. 8pm-1am. Free.

#### Night of the walking dread @ 1 Boulevard Café

If ghosts and zombies don't float your boat, try Rastafarianism on for size this Halloween. DJs Uri and MoCity will keep the fright-fest going.

G 11-40, Select Citywalk Mall, Multiplex Building, near PVR Gold and in front of 1 Café Bar, Saket (4100-6956, 93113-00001). ☎ Malviya Nagar. 9pm-1am. Free.

### Sun Oct 30

#### The Future @ Out of the Box

By this point in the weekend, everyone will be the walking dead. But pull yourself together, because this fancy dress future rave will mash together Dualist Inquiry, Jatin Puri and Order Of The Essence (B.R.E.E.D & Nucleya) for a final party before you head off into the afterlife.  
9-A Hauz Khas Village (98101-74707). ☎ Green Park. 8.30pm-1am. Free.