KELLEY PEMBERTON

Islamic and Islamicizing Discourses: Ritual Performance, Didactic Texts, and the Reformist Challenge in the South Asian Sufi Milieu[*]

Sɪɴᴄᴇ around the close of the nineteenth century, the bazaars attached to Sufi shrines have been the repositories and disseminators of a type of demotic literature that was printed cheaply, marketed *en masse*, written in the vernacular languages, and that demonstrated a didactic tone and intent. Although the printing press had appeared in the Subcontinent in the previous century, the mass production and distribution of popular instructional literature in the vernacular languages took off only towards the end of the nineteenth century, and in the context of a rapidly changing social, economic, and political situation.[1] The majority of texts sur-

---

[1]For a good overview of the different kinds of mass-print popular texts in Urdu, see Frances Pritchett, *Marvelous Encounters* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985). In the context of Islamic ethical and religious literature in the Sufi milieu, see Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and His Movement*, 1870–1920 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Arthur Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaikh* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1998); and comments in Annemarie Schimmel, *Classical Urdu Literature: From the Beginning to Iqbal*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975), pp. 127–8, and Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *The Wahhabi Movement in India*, (Delhi: Manohar, 1994), p. 84.

veyed here—"etiquette" books, prayer manuals, instructional guides to "correct" (*ṣaḥīḥ*) Islamic practice, biographies of members of Muḥammad's family (the *ahl-e bait*), and manuals for the treatment and cure of physical and spiritual ailments—stress the importance of reform and, correlatively, condemn the state into which religious practice among South Asia's Muslims has fallen.[2] Like the demotic reformist literature published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,[3] the themes explored by the texts surveyed here pivot upon a fundamental notion that the authority of Islamic sources of the Law—the word of God expressed in the Qur'ān, and the Prophet's example enshrined in the *sunna* and *ḥadīs* literature—are the start and end points for any discussion about the reform of the religion.[4] Although many of the authors of the texts this paper examines can claim no more than a tenuous link with the reformist and reform-minded individuals, groups, and movements of years past, their messages do resonate with the tradition of renewal and reform within in the broader historical context of Islam. The aspect of that tradition highlighted here is the articulation of Islamic faith and practice as these measure against contemporary devotional practice and local customs, particularly those associated with the veneration of Sufi *shaikhs* and the visitation of shrines.

---

[2]I use the term reform as it encompasses the concepts of renewal (*tajdīd*) and reform (*iṣlāḥ*) in Islam, bearing in mind the distinctions highlighted by John O. Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: *Tajdid* and *Islah*," *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 32–3. In this article, Voll characterizes *iṣlāḥ* as "righteous reform," which connotes reform not merely for the sake of increasing the efficiency or prosperity of the community, but for the sake of increasing the righteousness of its members. *Tajdīd*, or "renewal," also contains this moral dimension, but highlights the belief that Muslims have strayed from the straight path.

[3]Some of these texts continue to be printed and remain available for purchase in Sufi shrine bazaars today.

[4]There are several good studies of *tajdīd* and *iṣlāḥ* in Islam aside from Voll's; for instance, see Fazlur Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam*, ed. Ebrahim Moosa (Oxford: Oneworld Press, 2000); Sayyid Abu'l A'la Maududi, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam*, trans. Al-Ash'ari. Third. ed. (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1976). For the Indian Subcontinent, see Syed Habibul Haq Nadvi, *Islamic Resurgent Movements in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent* (Durban, S.A.: Academia: the Centre for Islamic, Near and Middle Eastern Studies, Planning and Publication, 1987).

The works surveyed here reflect the concerns of Sufis (*shaikhs, pīrs, murīds*), scholars of the Islamic Law (*'ulamā*), and those who combine the roles of both, and have been written by a variety of individuals affiliated closely, or loosely, with the shrines in which they are sold and the Sufi orders that maintain these shrines. For example, the authors of the texts I examine emerge from various backgrounds: some are of the reformist/Sufi mold, including members of the Tablīghī Jamā'at; some are *khuddām* (attendants, servants) of Sufi shrines, *pīrzādas* (descendants), or *murīds* of (disciples) Sufi *shaikhs*; and others are ulema or members of voluntary *anjumans* (associations) connected with shrines, mosques, and Islamic schools (*maktabs, madrasas*). Many of these texts have been published by the Idāra-e Ishā'at-e Dīniyāt (Institute for the Dissemination of Works on Religion), one of the major publishers, booksellers, and exporters of works by Tablīghī Jamā'at. The Idāra-e Ishā'at-e Dīniyāt faces the Bangle-wali mosque, a major center for the movement, located adjacent to the Niẓāmu 'd-Dīn Auliyā''s *dargāh* (shrine) in Delhi. Besides distributing books for the movement, the institute publishes a number of non-Tablīghī books that are available in many different shops and markets.[5] The texts were purchased at the bazaars attached to the *dargāh* of Mu'īnu 'd-Dīn Čishtī in Ajmer Sharif and the *dargāh* of Niẓāmu 'd-Dīn Auliyā' in Delhi. All have been published within the last twenty-five years. They are distinguished by their use of simple Urdu, easily understood by the target audience (the general body of Muslims who are largely unfamiliar with Persian and Arabic); their inexpensive printing, which makes them affordable to many of the visitors to the shrines where they are sold; and by their focus upon questions of what is lawful and unlawful (or permissible and not permissible) in Islam in light of the fundamental sources of the faith.

Despite the range of issues they treat, the texts do share some common themes. This paper focuses on what is said about ritual practice, particularly as it relates to three issues: *ṣaḥīḥ* (true) and *ghair-maẓhab* (false) Sufism and the *pīrī-murīdī (*master-disciple relationship); true and false customs; and the importance of the scriptural sources of the tradition as guidelines to understanding what constitutes truth and falsehood in Islam. The claims made about true Islam in the texts seek to define a normative core of teachings centered on the prescribed worship and ritual

---

[5]Barbara D. Metcalf, "Living Hadith in the Tablighi Jama'at," *Journal of Asian Studies* 52.3 (1993), pp. 586–7.

duties incumbent upon all Muslims, *tauḥīd* (the unity of God), the Prophet Muḥammad's role as exemplar of piety and faith, and the dichotomy between a "pristine" Islam, particularly that centered in the heartland of Arabia during the time of the Prophet, and a "corrupted" Islam of contemporary times. Yet it is the disagreement within and among the texts surveyed about which sources of the tradition qualify as primary—despite many references to the Qur'ān, *hadīṣ*, and *sunna* of the Prophet as *dalā'il* (proofs)—that mars their endeavor to articulate a normative blueprint for correct faith and practice, Islamically speaking.

Articulations of Islamic Identity

The articulation of "*ṣaḥīḥ*" Islam—couched in terms of what I will refer to as "Islamicizing discourses"[6]—as evinced in the surveyed texts can illuminate some of the more obvious currents of reformist discourse, past and present. What the texts reveal is the importance of a core group of symbols in producing a common ideological basis for many of the Islamically-oriented reform movements in the Subcontinent, as, indeed, they have for many movements of resurgence in the past. In the Sufi milieu, the use of these symbols—the Qur'ān, *hadīṣ* reports; the Prophet as model of piety and as intercessor with God; the moral and ethical examples provided by the early *umma* (community), particularly the *ahl-e bait* and the *ṣaḥāba* (Companions of the Prophet); the writings of legists, particularly those who combined the roles of Sufi *shaikh* and scholar of the Law; and "classic" (meaning heavily Arabicized and Persianized) as well as "localized" forms of Urdu—served as an effective means of nurturing a pan-Islamic layer across a wide spectrum of South Asian Muslim society. Reform-minded Sufis, in particular, promoted the use of these symbols to lend legitimacy to practices their rivals condemned as *bid'āt* (innovations), and to counter what many perceived as the "degeneration" of the Sufi orders.

The belief that Muslim societies had deviated from the truth of Islam as an explanation of the cause of their decline—and need for their reform—has been a recurrent theme in the history of *tajdīd* and *iṣlāḥ*

---

[6]In other words, the question of ritual practice is contextualized in light of what I refer to as a "normative" Islamic, and thus legitimating, framework for ritual practice.

(revival and reform).[7] Although the experience of European colonialism informed reformists of nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Asia, the texts surveyed here display little overt hostility towards Europe or towards the influence of European (or American) cultural, political, or economic institutions. Instead, the authors of these texts remain inwardly focused, reserving their most sweeping condemnations for elements within the South Asian Muslim community itself—especially *Shī'a* Muslims, "false" Sufis, and corrupt ulema. Nor is the influence of Hinduism directly cited, although this is perhaps due, at least in part, to the contemporary political situation in India, including flare-ups of Hindu-Muslim communal violence, the rise of Hindu conservatism, particularly in the political arena, and the marginalization of Indian Muslims.[8] Rather, most of these texts focus on "corruption" among Muslims, the implication being that Muslims have willfully abandoned "true" Islam in favor of the conventions of custom. One recently published prayer manual, written for a female audience, presses such an argument quite clearly. In a section titled "The Rule of Parda," the author states:

> Today's immodest women, who elaborately ornament themselves in order to show their beauty and adornment, freely go strolling about outside [just as] in the ancient *jāhilīya* times [women] strolled about. Allah Most High has commanded, "remain [sitting], restraining [yourselves] modestly in your homes." In the Holy Qur'ān is a sign: "and continue to restrain yourselves in your homes; don't walk around showing yourself in the manner of [the women of the] *jāhilīya* times."
>
> After the revelation of this verse, Muslim women began to put the veil on their faces, and the custom of going about with [an] uncovered face

---

[7]See Voll, "Renewal and Reform," p. 33. For the use of these arguments in Islamic political movements of the post-World War period, see John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[8]David Gilmartin points to the dilemma faced by the *sajjāda-nishīn*, who were at the forefront of the publication of demotic reformist texts but who, as landed élites who derived political and economic benefits from the colonial administration, had been drawn into close relationships of cooperation with the British authorities, particularly under the terms established by the Alienation of Land Act of 1901. See his *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 39–72.

was stopped, and coming out of the house without necessity was discontinued. May Allah Most High guide Muslim women, that they take charge of their veiling and parda according to the commands of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīs̱, and [that they] avoid the immodesty and lack of parda of the present age.[9]

The arguments advanced by the author of this text attempt to forge links between the customs of the pre-Islamic era and the customs of the present age. This device is commonly used by the authors of the texts surveyed: what is wrong in the eyes of Islam is often equated with the corruption of the *jāhilīya* times (rather than, for instance, the influence of local custom or social, economic, etc., changes through time). By drawing a parallel between the social conventions of the current age and the pre-Islamic customs of ancient Arabia (and here, a subtle allusion is made to the pre-Islamic Arabians' abandonment of God's law as laid down by the prophets before Muhammad), the author is then able to cite scripture in such a way that the passage itself appears to make a direct link between contemporary and ancient customs. It is "in the manner of [the women of the] *jāhilīya* times" that women of the present age adorn themselves and enjoy freedom of movement outside of the home, and that they have abandoned God's law (which, after being issued through the command of God and recorded in the Qur'ān, placed an abrupt cap on these activities). Finally, the author exhorts his readers to (re)turn to the "Qur'ān and Ḥadīs̱" for guidance about proper comportment for Muslim women, and not to the customs of the present age. This method of argumentation juxtaposes an immutable core of Islamic faith and practice against its contamination in contemporary contexts. In so doing, it avoids the mention of the local dominant culture by instead drawing examples—of what not to do—from Islamic history.[10]

The question of the status of the Muslim community in India continues to underlie the assumption of the necessity for reform, and this question is often situated within a critique of customs. In the reading of

---

[9]Maulāna Saiyid Muḥammad Quraish and Muftī Muḥammad Yaḥyā Ṣāḥib, *'Aurtoṅ kī Namāz Ẓarūrī Aḥkām-o-Masā'il* (New Delhi, Ḥaẓrat Niẓāmu 'd-Dīn: Idāra-e Ishā'at-e Dīniyāt, n.d.), p. 30–1.

[10]The problems with this kind of center-periphery model—as applied to theories of conflict and "syncretism"—is explored in a recent article by Tony K. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter Through Translation Theory," *History of Religions* 40.3 (2001), pp. 260–87.

the text cited below, the customs alluded to are both local and those that, in my discussions with Sufi interviewees, were explained as due to the influence of Hindu culture, although for the most part, the texts do not explicitly address the question of Hindu influence as such. Rather, the criticisms of custom that appear in the texts tend to confine themselves to the Muslim community. One exception (subtly implied, however) is visible in the *Jannatī Zēvar,* a 1979 text.[11] Its author, ʿAllāma ʿAbdu ʾl-Muṣṭafā Aʿẓamī, a scholar of the Law, a Sufi of the Aʿẓamī order, and a member of the reformist Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jamāʿat organization, identifies three approaches (lit., "the people of three kinds of schools of thought") to those customs among Muslims which he describes as being influenced by the cultural environment of Hindustan:

> 1. These peddlers of supreme truth (*ḥaqīqat*) and wisdom (*maʿrifat*)—those who wear red, yellow, and green-colored clothing, [and those who] are long-haired and babas of colorful disposition—if they have become Sufis by [merely] garbing [themselves] in the cloak of Sufism, then [their talk is all] nonsense and they unlawfully perpetuate customs that go against the *Sharīʿa*. Inasmuch as they have gained their high level (*miʿrāj*) of wisdom through [listening to] the beats of the dholak and the tabla, and the ragas of the harmonium and the *sāraṅgī*, these people have, through their ignorance, ruined Muslim society and blotted the holy face of Islam with the stain of nonsense, *bidʿāt*, and customs that go against the *Sharīʿa*, transforming it into something inferior (*maskh kar ḍālā hai*).
>
> 2. There are Wahhabi and Deobandi sects which have bled the Islamic community in the name of reform. These people have committed such wrongs as declaring all customs (in terms of their lawfulness and unlawfulness) forbidden (*ḥarām*) and innovation; moreover, they have [sought to] establish [these things as being] infidelity (*kufr*) and polytheism (*shirk*) … and the best of it is that when searching for the proofs (*dalāʾil*) from these people on the infidelity and polytheism and innovation and forbiddenness of these customs, they say that we have circumspectly written about these things as infidelity and polytheism and forbidden and innovation, so that people will fear [divine retribution] and abandon these things…God [considers] this to be slander and false imputation…(A verse

---

[11]In format and content, the *Jannatī Zēvar* appears to be modeled on the *Bihishtī Zēvar,* a manual of etiquette for Muslim women written in 1905 by the Deobandi scholar and Sufi *shaikh,* Shaikh Maulānā Ashraf ʿAlī Tʰānavī.

from the Qur'ān to support the author's argument follows.) In any case, the essence of it is this: which customs have God and the Prophet not declared forbidden? Willing or not, they battle and set the terms of the forbidden; this in itself is a great sin. It is fitting that one remain separate from these Muslims, and in no case should one accept the spiritual guidance of these people.

3) We are all of the order of the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jamāʿat, among whose standard bearers are the great ones of the religion (*buzurg*), Ḥażrat Shaikh ʿAbdu 'l-Ḥaq Muḥaddiṡ Dihlavī, and Maulāna Shāh ʿAbdu 'l-ʿAzīz Muḥaddiṡ Dihlavī and Maulānā Baḥru 'l-ʿUlūm Lakʰnavī, and Aʿlā Ḥażrat Maulānā Aḥmad Riżā Khān Ṣāḥib Barēlvī, etc. These great men have issued fatwas about the customs of the Muslims [saying] that those customs of the Muslims which the *Sharīʿa* has forbidden are certainly unlawful, like singing and dancing, playing musical instruments, fireworks, dressing the bridegroom in gold and silver jewels, women and men gathering together during festive occasions without observing parda, and the sisters-in-law, et al. tease him, laughing, taking the bridegroom's shoes and demanding gifts, etc. But one cannot in any way declare to be unlawful and forbidden those things which the *Sharīʿa* has said to be lawful, or those customs about which the *Sharīʿa* is silent. In sum, as long as the prohibition on it is not confirmed by the *Sharīʿa*, one cannot say that it is forbidden and unlawful. Like it or not, it is an extreme excess to fight over the issue and to declare forbidden and prohibited all of the customs of the Muslim community, and [it] goes beyond the boundaries of the religion to declare without reason that Muslims are committing forbidden [acts] and innovations.[12]

The conflict inherent in Aʿẓamī's characterization of the first two groups rests upon his condemnation of false teachings about Islam, rather than his condemnation of the groups themselves, who are portrayed as occupying two ends of a spectrum. In the first example, it appears that the author is critical of the "customs" of ecstatic Sufis: wearing colorful clothes, having long hair, and listening to music. Yet there are two points to be made in clarifying Aʿẓamī's critique: first, it is not simply the ecstatic Sufi as such who is condemned, but rather the type of ecstatic Sufi who has no knowledge of *Sharīʿa*-centered Islam. Further, by Aʿẓamī's reckon-

---

[12]ʿAllāma ʿAbdu 'l-Muṣṭafā Aʿẓamī, *Jannatī Zēvar* (Lahore: Żiyāʾu 'l-Qurʾān Publications, 1979), pp. 112–3.

ing, this type of ecstatic Sufi proclaims himself to be knowledgeable simply because he (or she) has experienced mystical states through the vehicle of music. Second, there is Aʿẓamī's position viz-à-viz a disputed "custom"—in this case, musical performance. The value of music as a vehicle for mystical experience is in itself not disputed; rather, what is condemned is the action of the ecstatic who, out of ignorance, spreads false teachings about Islam. The question remains, however, what exactly are these false teachings? Nowhere in this section does the author identify any particular teachings of this group. One may infer, on the one hand, that the author is alluding to the idea that one can become a great mystic simply by experiencing mystical states (as through the vehicle of music), but what seems more likely is that Aʿẓamī's opinions about the false teachings of ecstatic mystics derive more from a blanket condemnation of their alleged ignorance of the basic tenets of Islam.

Aʿẓamī's assessment of "Wahhabi[13] and Deobandi sects" likewise pivots upon a critique of the actions of these sects in promoting false teachings about Islam. Whereas the ecstatic Sufis in the first example are described as acting out of ignorance, however, the reformists are condemned on the basis of the deliberateness of their actions. They, in fact, are the scholars and learned ones of the faith. And while ignorant Sufis are blamed for debasing the religion of Islam, reformists are accused of acting out of their own selfish motives, with the result that the South Asian Muslim community has been sapped of its vitality. Ecstatic Sufis are criticized for an attitude that the author implies is rather too open and tolerant, while the fault of "Wahhabi and Deobandi sects" lies in their presentation of an Islam that is too rigid and intolerant. Both schools of thought, in the author's opinion, miss the point because they present a truncated—and wholly self-absorbed—view of what Islam has to offer Muslims.

In part because of the author's (perhaps deliberate?) omission of historical, cultural, and social facts, one may do little more here than discern a few of the major currents of opinion about the status of Muslims in the Subcontinent. One is identified by Aʿẓamī's presentation of the third school of thought, which may be said to represent the middle view, and

---

[13]The term Wahhabi was (and is) pejoratively used in the South Asian context to denounce various reformist groups. It is actually a misnomer, and bears little or no relationship to the Wahhabi movement that arose in eighteenth-century Arabia.

the view of the author. First, the author surmises that one must not unequivocally condemn the customs of the Muslims, but rather, look to the *Sharīʿa* for explicit statements about what is lawful and unlawful. Second, what is not deemed lawful or unlawful by the *Sharīʿa* can be judged to be neither. Third, one may conclude that certain customs may be considered permissible, regardless of opinions about their desirability. An obvious question to consider, though, is: what is the author's definition of *Sharīʿa*? And what of, in speaking about determining the lawfulness or unlawfulness of a particular issue, the jurisprudential mechanisms available—such as the *qiyās*, (analogical reasoning) and *ijtihād* (independent judgment)—to address matters that have not been explicitly treated in the *Sharīʿa*? Since it seems not to be the author's intent to launch into a detailed analysis of Islamic law in this section (and other sections of the text do go into a bit more detail on this front for particular matters of faith, especially the obligatory duties), we may surmise that the purpose of this section is, rather, quite different. The necessity for reform is implied here, as indeed by the production of the text itself, seventy-five years after the publication of its model, Maulānā Tʰānvī's *Bihishtī Zēvar*.

While the production of the *Jannatī Zēvar* may in a sense be characterized as highlighting the dichotomies between the more conservative position (regarding custom) of the Deobandi platform as represented by Maulānā Tʰānvī's text (and here the rivalry between the Deobandi and Ahl-e Sunnat organizations, which endures even today, should be noted), and the more tolerant position of the Ahl-e Sunnat, its assessment of the status of Muslims in the Subcontinent pivots upon the community's knowledge of the fundamental teachings of the faith, and the sources from which these are derived. Apparently, the author considers much of Hindustani Islam to be a debased form of the religion (the subtle implication being that environment is partly to blame), because the community has neglected to make the Law their guide in life. Further, Aʿẓamī implies that despite years of efforts by reformists to change the status quo, there still remain many Indian Muslims who are largely ignorant of the basic tenets of Islam, especially Muslim women, for whom the *Jannatī Zēvar* was particularly, but not exclusively, written.[14] Finally, the very reason

---

[14]The author and the writer of the preface both note that the book was written for general audiences: the "Muslim community:" commoners and élite, women and men, "brothers of the ahl-e sunnat" (here a general definition of "people of the *sunna*" is intended) and "sisters of the community." However,

that Muslims remain disunited and mired in ignorance is because of the proliferation of reformist organizations, which have made understanding the Law more confusing rather than clear. A more comprehensive reading of the text would reveal how the author envisions this text as a palliative or corrective to the situation, and whether or not the book proposes any definite steps—beyond the perfection of the religion, the goal stated in the book's preface and introduction—for improving the status of Muslims in India. What is most important, though, for the purposes of this paper, is that A'ẓamī's text stands in agreement with many of his past and contemporary reformists about the low status of Muslims in India, and about the need for a return to the scriptural sources of the faith, such a return providing the grist for the Islamization of the community and concurrently, the elevation of their status in a spiritual but also practical sense.

Islamic Revivalism in the Colonial Milieu

In nineteenth-century India, Islamization came to be identified with pro-active efforts to bring the Subcontinent's Muslims closer to an Islam founded upon the Prophet's *sunna* and firmly entrenched in the *Sharī'a* as handed down by God, recorded in the Qur'ān, elaborated upon, and institutionalized within the first few centuries after the birth of the faith. It entailed, above all, a reconsideration of the meanings of the scriptural sources of Islam. What this often meant in practice was that those aspects of belief and practice that did not reflect "scripturalist norms" (Clifford Geertz) or the "mainstream teachings of the faith" (Barbara Metcalf)—in short, those aspects of the faith that tended to exemplify localized, media-tional forms[15] rather than the pan-Islamic and the foundational—were labeled pejoratively as *dastūr/rasm* (custom) or *bid'a*. Yet, as I will demon-strate, there is much disagreement among the texts surveyed about what constitutes custom and innovation, in terms of their definition and their permissibility in light of the *Sharī'a*. Such disagreement, as Aḥmad Dallāl has argued, brings into question the assumption that reformist

---

several large sections of the text address women specifically. A'ẓamī, *Jannatī Zēvar*, pp. 3–4, 6.

[15]See Arthur F. Buehler, "Currents of Sufism in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Indo-Pakistan: An Overview." *The Muslim World* 84.3–4 (July/October 1997), pp. 299–314, and *Heirs.*

movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be considered a more or less homogenous whole.[16] On the other hand, it is possible to suggest some broad outlines of thought, or the ideological platforms espoused by a particular organization, at least as a way of identifying the professed intent of its leadership (what Dallāl refers to as "intellectual projects"[17]) or popular perceptions of such an intent. Whether or not the reconstruction of platforms or the characterization of reformists is fraught with problems, the one factor which did indeed serve as a unifying measure, as Barbara Metcalf has pointed out, is that although the reformers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may have failed in their efforts to adequately define the parameters of a normative Islam, they succeeded in focusing attention upon the scriptural sources of the faith as a sort of normative standard in themselves.[18]

While a focus upon the sources of the faith may be seen as one type of response among reformers to the social and historical conditions of Muslim society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it would be a fallacy to view the impetus for reform as originating with the loss of Muslim political hegemony or a "crisis of modernity" whereby confrontation with the British colonial presence and the critiques of indigenous society it engendered caused the Muslims to view a return to the fundamentals of the faith as a cure-all for the social, economic, and political ills plaguing their community. The Islamic movements of reform born in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century India were indeed affected by the decline of Mughal sovereignty and the challenges posed by European domination. However, while a few movements, such as the Ṭarīqa Muḥammadīya led by Saiyid Aḥmad Barēlvī of Rae Bareilly (d. 1831)—himself a Sufi *shaikh*—developed political and military agendas directed against the Sikhs, and several others entered into debate with non-Muslim reformist groups like the Hindu Arya Samaj,[19] many more addressed the social and political decline of Indian Muslims primarily as the culmination of a process that had unfolded throughout the history of

---

[16]Ahmad Dallal, "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113.3 (1993), p. 341.

[17]*Ibid.*, p. 343.

[18]Barbara Metcalf, "Islam and Custom in Nineteenth-Century India: The Reformist Standard of Maulana Thanawi's *Bihishti Zewar*," *Contributions to Asian Studies* 17 (1982), p. 64.

[19]For discussions of these debates, see Sanyal, pp. 90–1, and Buehler, p. 198.

Islam in the Subcontinent, and that was attributable to the failure of the community to uphold the basic obligations of the faith.[20]

For many reformist movements and schools of thought, the impact of the British was to be most profoundly seen in the role the former played in supporting Urdu print and in developing new technologies. After the 1830s, the printing press became increasingly viable as a means of disseminating information. British interest in Urdu prose also increased during this period, not least of all for reasons of expediency. A simplified style of Urdu was fashioned to facilitate its comprehension by officials of the Raj, who had to acquire practical skills in the language for administrative purposes. Printing offices were attached to schools such as Fort William College in order to produce textbooks, and the publication of mystic tales, dictionaries, grammar books, and the like ensued. The late nineteenth century witnessed a substantial increase in the production of etiquette literature in Urdu, particularly for a female readership. Many of these texts were written in a simple prose style to facilitate comprehension, while the juxtaposition of sections of Qur'ān and Ḥadīs̱ in the original Arabic with local forms of Urdu (not to mention similarly formatted translations of the Qur'ān in part or as a whole) became a favored means of spreading knowledge about the sources of the faith. On the whole, innovations in communication, transportation, and print, and the increased accessibility of these technologies facilitated the dissemination of information, offered new and more effective modes of organization to movements for reform, and enabled the incorporation of a grassroots base by some of these movements. They also facilitated the publication of debates over the constitution, conception, and revival of Islam, Sufism, and the South Asian Muslim community in a way that had not been previously possible.

---

[20]This does not imply that reformist Sufis and ulema did not react strongly to the political events of the day. The reactions of some of the Čishtī *shaikhs* who joined Saiyid Aḥmad Barēlvī's jihad against the Sikhs are briefly outlined in M. Zameeruddin Siddiqi, "The Resurgence of the Chishti Silsilah in the Punjab During the Eighteenth Century," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress,* 1970 (New Delhi: Indian History Congress, 1971), p. 410. The production of a number of anti-loyalist journals by Deobandi scholars in the early twentieth century is mentioned by Ziya ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 51–3.

Many of the debates among reformists in the Sufi milieu of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries focused upon the concept of a Sufism reconstituted in accordance with the laws of Islam and the *Sharīʿa*. These kinds of debates had been generated early on in the history of institutional Sufism, most cogently in al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111) *Iḥyā' 'Ulūmu 'd-Dīn*.[21] In South Asia, Muslim proponents of a synthesis between Sufism and *Sharīʿa* recalled the leadership of figures like Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564–1624) and Shāh Valīu 'l-Lāh of Delhi (1703–62), both of whom criticized Sufi orders for their perceived incorporation of Hindu beliefs and practices. However, these two reformers diverged in their conceptions of what a reconstituted Sufism entailed. For Sirhindī, the primacy of *Sharīʿa* over mystical *ḥaqīqa*, and Prophethood over sainthood was unequivocal, although this did not imply a wholesale rejection of the mystical element in Islamic thought. On the contrary, in his discussion of the Law, Sirhindī elevated the inner aspects of the *Sharīʿa* over the outer. Moreover, he sought to explain the ecstatic utterances (*shaṭhiyāt*) of "intoxicated" Sufis like Ḥallāj and Bisṭāmī of these inner aspects, although such facts have been largely ignored or obscured in the works of recent scholars.[22] Rather, Sirhindī's criticisms of the Mughal emperor Akbar, and his denunciations of Hinduism[23] and local forms of Islam have overshadowed his mystical thought. In contrast to Sirhindī, Valīu 'l-Lāh sought a more balanced synthesis of the mystical and the *Sharʿī*, the latter privileged as paramount, but the former acknowledged as an important avenue for intellectual and social reform. And rather than Sirhindī, it is Valīu 'l-Lāh, with his consideration for the "mental predilections and customs of the people,"[24] whose teachings are most often recalled in those demotic

---

[21]The texts surveyed here often use quotes from the *Iḥyā' 'Ulūmu 'd-Dīn* as "proofs" of the validity of an argument being advanced.

[22]These observations are made by Yohanan Friedmann in *Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi*, (Montreal: McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 1971).

[23]According to Yohanan Friedmann, Sirhindi's denunciations of Hinduism played a peripheral role in most of his writings. What distinguishes Friedmann's work is the balance that is maintained between Sirhindi's mystical and reformist thought. He very rightly points to a fundamental change in approach to Sirhindi among scholars of the twentieth century with the publication of Abu 'l-Kalām Āzād's *Tażkira*, in which Sirhindi is painted primarily as a reformer, renewer, and rebel against the contemporary state of Islam. See Friedmann, *Shaikh*, pp. 106–7.

[24]Friedmann, p. 344.

texts that seek to articulate their vision of "true" Sufism in light of the dictates of Islamic *Sharī'a*.[25]

The synthesis of Sufism and *Sharī'a* became a rallying point for Sufi-affiliated reformists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although opinions about the practical application of this synthetic mode diverged widely both within and among reformist groups. It is possible, however, to identify particular approaches to the question. The articulation of *Sharī'a*-based models for faith and practice in the reformist Sufi milieu converged upon three approaches, all agreed upon in principle: reviving the fundamentals of the faith, articulating community-building strategies, and implementing these two.

First, reformers sought to instill in the Muslim community knowledge of the most fundamental obligations of the faith. Conceptually, this meant that each Muslim man and woman should become familiar with the Qur'ān and Ḥadīs̱—the latter inclusive of the *sunna* of the Prophet—as the foundation of belief and of the Law. Practically, it entailed the performance of the obligatory ritual duties and the affirmation in word and deed of the uniqueness of Allah (*tauḥīd*) as the sole object of worship. Second, most reformists sought to forge close alliances between the ulema, or interpreters of the Law, and the Sufi orders. Many of the most prominent leaders of reform—the Deobandi scholars Rashīd Aḥmad Gaṅgōhī and Maulānā Ashraf Tʰānavī, Shāh Ismā'īl of the Ṭarīqa Muḥammadīya, and Aḥmad Riẕā Khān Barēlvī, the leader of the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jamā'at, for instance, functioned as both ulema and Sufi *shaikhs*, and in both capacities sought to effect a rapprochement of sorts between the reformist organizations in which they actively participated and the established Sufi orders. One notable exception to such active

---

[25]For more detailed treatments of Shāh Valīu 'l-Lāh's mystical thought in this regard, see Marcia Hermansen, "Contemplating Sacred History in Late Mughal Sufism: The Case of Shah Waliullah of Delhi," *The Heritage of Sufism: Late Classical Persianate Sufism,* vol. III, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), pp. 319–43, and her translation of *The Conclusive Argument from God: Shah Waliullah of Delhi's* Hujjat Allah al-Baligha (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); J.M.S. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shah Waliullah Dihlawi* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986); and Mi'raj Muhammad, "Shah Waliullah's Concept of the *Shari'ah*," *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honor of Mawlana Sayyid Abu'l A'la Mawdudi,* ed. Khurshid Ahmad and Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation; Jeddah: Saudi Publishing House, 1979), pp. 343–58.

alliances was the Tablīghī Jamāʿat, which discouraged adherents from identifying with the outward symbols of Islamic identity (e.g., Urdu, Muslim Personal Law, mosques, even the Prophet himself), in ways that encouraged factionalism and intercommunity strife. Such was often the reality of the relationships among reformist organizations—Sufi, non-Sufi, and those in-between—which fought vociferously among themselves about the practical application of *Sharʿī* principles to Sufi belief and practice. Rather, the Tablīghīs emphasized the importance of *īmān* (inner faith) and outward personal conduct, for which each individual was responsible, above all else.[26] Third, most reformist groups promoted their ideas—and platforms—partly through the use of printed materials. In order to be taken seriously, the arguments advanced within had to be supported by proofs (*dalā'il*) from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīs.[27] Indeed, in most of the demotic texts I surveyed, written in the 1980s and 1990s, this trend has continued. Although several other sources of the Law are used as proofs therein, the majority are taken from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīs literature.

Other methods used to reconcile contemporary Sufi belief and practice with a *Sharīʿa*-centered vision of Islam were based on platforms of social activism and community service—enacted, for instance, through the medium of *anjumans* or voluntary associations. For instance, the Naqshbandī *shaikh* Jamāʿat ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1951) and his right-hand man Anvar ʿAlī, an English-educated District Judge and landowner from Rohtak, Panjab, founded the Muhammadan Sufism Society, renamed the Association for Sufi Servants (Anjuman-e Khuddām aṣ-Ṣūfīya) in 1904, in order to unite Sufis against reformist groups like the Deobandis, who denounced Sufi shrine culture and saint cults as corrupting influences in the Muslim community. This association built schools, mosques, and hospitals, and promoted the idea that Sufis had a social obligation to uplift the Muslim community. *Anjumans* such as these were linked in close relationships with printing presses owned by the movements and Islamic institutions of higher learning (*madrasas*), and served both as

---

[26]Mohammad Talib, "The *Tablighis* in the Making of Muslim Identity," *Islam, Communities, and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond*, ed. Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Manohar, 1998), pp. 309–11.

[27]Arthur Buehler also makes this point. The emphasis on the necessity of Qur'ānic and Ḥadīs proofs in revivalist Sufi literature was keenly felt by 1900. See his *Heirs*, p. 170.

forums for meetings of Sufi groups (during which sermons, speeches, proceedings to mark shrine-centered recitations of devotional poetry, and debates occurred), and as the centers from which preaching tours in towns and villages were launched.[28]

The Tablīghī movement went even further in its outreach to the ordinary Muslim, instituting systematic preaching tours conducted by units (*jamāʿats*) of missionaries (*dāʿīs*) who invited local Muslims to assemble and listen to the message of the Tablīghī mission (*daʿva*); establishing networks of *madrasas*—beginning in the Mewat region from which the movement's founder, Maulānā Muḥammad Ilyās (1885-1944) hailed—to educate local Muslims about the basic requirements of the faith; and printing vernacular works (translations of the Qurʾān and Ḥadīṣ, manuals for practice, and other kinds of didactic works) that were not only distributed through commercial channels, but communicated and acted out in public settings.[29] And what is implied by M. Anwar ul-Haq's study of the movement and its founder is that part of the Tablīghī Jamāʿat's appeal to ordinary Muslims was its emphasis on practices associated with the Sufi milieu, including *żikr*, or remembrance of God; *čilla*, which in Sufi terminology refers to a period of seclusion, but which the Tablīghīs reinterpreted to mean extended preaching tours; and *murāqaba*, or meditation on and contemplation of God.[30]

An important line of debate among reformists centered upon the role of the *shaikh*, both living and deceased. On one hand, the debate begged the question of the living *shaikh* as guide for the spiritual and moral

---

[28]Buehler, *Heirs*, pp. 192ff.

[29]Metcalf, "Living Hadith," pp. 584–6, 590–1, 596–601.

[30]See M. Anwarul Haq, *The Faith Movement of Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas* (London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1972), pp. 46–7, 63–5. The links between the Tablīghī movement and Sufism are tenuous. Apparently Maulānā Muḥammad Ilyās did have some connection with institutions of Sufism, as is stated in his *malfūẓāt*, but he also criticized most of the contemporary practices associated with cults of saints and shrines. See Maulānā Muḥammad Manẓūr Nuʿmānī, ed., *Malfūẓāt-e Haẓrat Maulānā Muḥammad Ilyāss* (New Delhi: Idāra-e Ishāʿat-e Dīniyāt, 1991), pp. 15–6 (3), 34 (26), 35 (29), 39 (35), 46(41), 80 (72), 151 (178). Cf. Mumtaz Ahmad's entry in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, vol. 4 (1995), s.v. "Tablighi Jamaʿat"; and Mumtaz Ahmad, "Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia: The Jamaʿat-i Islami and the Tablighi Jamaʿat," *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 510–24.

development of followers. On the other hand—and here is where discord most keenly manifested itself—the role of the *shaikh* as intercessor and mediator between the divine and human realms was called into question by some, while others sought to defend such a role. Nevertheless, supporters of the mediatory, intercessory role of the *shaikh* came to modify that role in light of the contemporary current of *Sharī'a*-centeredness, which in the realm of the living master-disciple relationship translated into an intensified focus on the Prophet as link between the *shaikh* and his followers. It is possible to outline two general approaches to the subject. One, the role of the *shaikh* could be reconfigured in such a way that the primary emphasis lay in his articulation, demonstration, and reinforcement of *Sharī'a* law. Thus, the Deobandis and Tablīghīs sought to undercut the intercessory role of the Sufi *shaikh* by making access to fundamental texts, teachings, and tenets of Islam available to all, and simultaneously encouraging the idea that on the basis of such knowledge each individual must develop the ability to make informed decisions about what constituted "correct" and "incorrect" matters of faith, rather than relying solely upon the dictates of spiritual guides. Neither of these movements envisioned the total elimination of the role of the *shaikh*, but each sought a modification of that role. On the whole, the Deobandi and the Tablīghī movements endeavored to recast the role of the *shaikh* as an exemplar of the faith insofar as he was intellectually astute in his grasp of the fundamental sources of Islamic tradition. The Deobandis, in particular, actively sought to co-opt the figure of the *shaikh* as mediator between *dīn* and *dunyā*, the religion of Islam and the world in which the ordinary Muslim lived. As mediator, the primary role of the *shaikh* was not executor or facilitator of public ritual but rather, paradigm of a *Sharī'a*-focused faith and reinforcer of its moral and ethical obligations. Maulānā Thānavī, in particular, envisioned discipleship as an important vehicle for the correction of one's religion. As his *Bihishtī Zēvar* advises,

> If you intend to become a disciple, you should look for certain qualities in a master. Do not become a disciple of anyone who lacks them. First, the master should know the points of religion and be acquainted with the *shari'at*. Second, his beliefs should in no way oppose the *shari'at* but should be those you have studied in the first book of the *Bihishti Zewar*. He should follow the legal points and methods of amendment of the heart that you have already studied. Third, he should not practice *piri-muridi* for a living. Fourth, the prospective *pir* should himself be the disciple of someone who is regarded as venerable by good people. Fifth,

good people should regard him as good, too. Sixth, his teaching should cause love and enthusiasm for the religion to grow.[31]

Two, some groups combined the idea of the *shaikh* as exemplar of "correct" Islam with rural, shrine-centered beliefs and practices, emphasizing the mediational, intercessory aspects of his role over the directing aspects.[32] This was particularly true for the Ahl-e Sunnat and the Čishtī order as well as many of the other Sufi *ṯarīqas*. One major aspect of the reformist Čishtī platform—which according to David Gilmartin found its clearest expression in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rural Panjab, was the trinity of *pirī-murīdī*, shrine, and *'urs*, all concepts infused with a deep concern for the propagation of the fundamental obligations of Islam.[33] And as Arthur Buehler has shown, many of the Naqshbandī *shaikhs* promoted allegiance to the living *shaikh* as a duty incumbent upon every Muslim. Revivalist Naqshbandīs used Islamic terminology to link three aspects of *pirī-murīdī* to Islamic *Sharī'a*: the cultivation of inner knowledge, the search for the way to God, and *bai'at*, or the oath of allegiance taken by a disciple to a *shaikh*, which was touted by late nineteenth-century Naqshbandī *shaikhs* as a model of the relationship between the Prophet and the Companions. Moreover, the mediatory aspect of *pirī-murīdī* advocated by *shaikhs* of the Naqshbandī order positioned the *shaikh* as a link not merely between the divine and human realms, but more specifically, between the believer and the Prophet Muḥammad, the latter positioned as the major link to God.[34] Indeed, the symbol of the Prophet Muḥammad became a prominent part of the reformulation of the *shaikh*'s role for those who were amenable to the intercessory aspects of Sufi belief and practice. For instance, Aḥmad Riẓā Khān upheld the validity of the idea of the Prophet as intercessor and sought to promote those customs that elevated the status of the Prophet as such, and of the Sufis as his representatives and, in particular, the *shaikh* as a focus for devotion to him. Aḥmad Riẓā Khān's prophetology emphasized the idea of the light of Muḥammad (*nūr-e Muḥammad*), a sort of primordial force, all-knowing, all-seeing, and ever-present, incarnated in the flesh to bring salvation to

---

[31]Barbara Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 200.

[32]I use these terms as they appear in Buehler.

[33]Gilmartin, p. 59.

[34]Buehler, pp. 187, 200.

believers. On the basis of this prophetology, weak Ḥadīs̱ and local customs could be legitimized if they elevated the stature or honor of the Prophet. Much of the Ahl-e Sunnat's opposition to the Deobandis and other reformist groups focused on the fact that they did not accord this kind of recognition to Muḥammad. Key to the self-image of the movement was the veneration of the Prophet and its accompanying rituals, such as the celebration of his birthday (*mīlādu 'n-nabī*), and the composition of poems of praise (*naʿt*) to him. Aḥmad Riẕā Khān's insistence upon the importance of the Prophet's example combined with the Ahl-e Sunnat's efforts to link shrine and mosque, Sufism and *Sharīʿa*-centered Islam, and in this endeavor the group used rural and urban shrines as platforms for the expression of their ideas, creating networks of shrines and other institutions—rural and urban—that have endured to this day.[35]

Perhaps the most effective—and enduring—medium of communication used by reformists, however, was the printed word. Nevertheless, in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century reformist milieu, print served cross-purposes. Printed texts may have enabled a large number of Muslims to become acquainted with the fundamentals of the faith, and in so doing, may be at least partly credited with fostering a sense among Muslims of belonging to the larger community of Islam within and outside of the Subcontinent. However, such an awakening of the spirit of Islam has not obviated some of the more contested arenas of belief and practice. And while print enabled groups to connect over distances of time and space, it also contributed to the discord among various organizations and groups competing for audiences.

Printing ultimately undermined the sources of Islamic personal authority[36]—the person to person transference of knowledge—but it also

---

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 176–9. For a recent treatment of the two major leaders of the movement, Aḥmad Riẕā Khān and his son, and the changes in the movement that have occurred between their tenures of leadership, see Usha Sanyal, "Generational Styles in the Leadership of the Ahl-e Sunnat Movement in North India during the Twentieth Century," *Modern Asian Studies* 32.3 (1998), pp. 635–56.

[36] Annemarie Schimmel implies as much in her work on the Naqshbandī mystic Khvāja Mīr Dard. See her *Pain and Grace, A Study of Two Mystical Writers of Eighteenth Century Muslim India* (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1976), p. 73. This point of view is also shared by Francis Robinson and Arthur Buehler, among others. Although Robinson points out that many of the didactic texts were intended to be read with the help of scholars, and that print enabled the ulema to extend their influence in public affairs, he ultimately concludes that such texts contrib-

provided scope for new voices of authority to emerge, exercised by those who, it can be argued, might otherwise have found their voices stifled or silenced by their relative inaccessibility to the sources of power. In the Sufi milieu, the authority of the *shaikh* or *'ālim* may have declined, in the sense that texts could provide ready-made answers to questions about the faith, and could encourage readers to rely on their own powers of discrimination, or alternatively, on the authority provided by group transmission (and discussion) of the information therein. Indeed, many of the didactic texts available in shrines today (those written both pre- and post-Partition) are intended for both solitary and group recitation, and the texts make these intentions explicit. At the same time, the proliferation of printed materials with contrasting and often conflicting articulations of Islamic identity could provide any individual with access to formerly privileged information, and thus, with the opportunity to claim the authority of interpreting knowledge about the faith.[37] While the cheaply printed books, pamphlets, newspapers, and tracts made widely available in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were used to further the interests and goals of particular reform-minded groups, today shrines and the functionaries attached to or associated with them distribute many works using the cheap print media with a much wider variety of subject matter, agendas, and approaches to the question of what is permissible, or forbidden, in Islam. To illustrate these points about the effects and counter-effects of print I turn to a cross-section of texts available in shrine markets today, all published within the last twenty-five years, and all of which have stirred considerable controversy within the Sufi orders, not to mention the reformist organizations which sought to do away with some of the more contested practices in the shrine milieu.

Demotic Literature in the Shrine Setting Today

Several of the *pīrs* and servants (*khuddām*) of the shrines in Ajmer and Bihar I spoke with insisted that most of the texts sold in shrine bazaars are marketed to those who seek to establish themselves as *pīrs* independently

---

uted to the decline in influence of scholars of the Law. See Francis Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print," *Modern Asian Studies* 27.1 (1993), pp. 239, 242, 244.

[37]Robinson, "Technology," p. 245. Cf. Hermansen, "Contemplating," p. 322.

of a "*khānqāh* tradition," a phrase used by several people I spoke with that connotes a Sufi lineage. My conversations with these Sufis of the Čishtī, Naqshbandī, and Firdausī orders pivoted upon the subject of women as de facto *pīrs*, a very controversial but growing circumstance in the world of shrines. Access to texts that explain how to make amulets (*ta'vīz*, *falīta*) and to effect cures using, among other things, Qur'ānic verses and the names of God, has provided some individuals, women and men alike, with the tools to set up their own healing practices, particularly in the small, "auxiliary" shrines (*hujra-gāhs*, *čilla-gāhs*) affiliated with larger, public burial shrines (*dargāh*s).[38] They are able to do so without the express permission (*ijāza*) of a Sufi *shaikh* or *pīr*, and it is this lack of authority for the practices of "self-styled" *pīrs* that has incurred the censure of Sufis of the established orders.

Many demotic texts impart the type of knowledge that tends to be transmitted orally among members of the orders. For example, the collections of *na't* and *hamd* poetry; stories of the saints of Islam; and prayer manuals outlining, among other things, the proper performance of the *fātiha* prayer are written in a simple, conversational Hindi or Urdu prose style, rather than the heavily Arabicized and Persianized Urdu that many of the *pīrs*, shrine functionaries, and their families I interviewed spoke. Moreover, none of the Sufis I interviewed claimed to own any of the texts sold in shrines (except for the *Bihishtī Zēvar*). In fact they distinguished between the knowledge they had acquired through the instruction of the *pīr* (or in the case of women, through the *pīr*, his wife, and the senior women of the *pīr*'s household), and knowledge gained primarily through reading books, which one Naqshbandī *pīrzāda* in Patna characterized as being written for "people with no knowledge." The dual meanings of this statement should not be overlooked: On the one hand, didactic texts such as the majority of prayer and etiquette manuals I examined are admittedly written for people who are largely unacquainted with the basic ritual, moral, and ethical obligations of Islam. On the other hand, works such as instructional manuals that are concerned with the use of Qur'ānic verses

---

[38]The "auxiliary" shrines to which I refer can be located within a *dargāh* complex, and/or outside of it. A *čilla-gāh* is a shrine where the saint is said to have performed difficult austerities, particularly the forty-day retreat. A *hujra-gāh* is a private prayer chamber. Both types of shrines may contain relics, but in all cases they are considered, by virtue of their close association with a saint, to be imbued with his or her charismatic power (*barakat*).

or other implements to remedy spiritual and physical ailments, can provide the basic tools of *pīrī-murīdī* to those who otherwise lack the authority of spiritual prominence or the permission of a personal spiritual preceptor to establish a practice. Not surprisingly, the demotic texts sold at shrine bazaars tend to be viewed with a measure of ambivalence by Sufis of the established orders. While some texts may serve in the cause of acquainting Muslims with the fundamentals of the faith, others have merely fueled sectarian feelings within the Muslim community, while still others have done little more than perpetuate the type of customs against which so many of the reform-minded have rallied.

What can the production of demotic texts and their distribution in Sufi shrine bazaars reveal about the impact of reformist critiques on ritual practice, particularly those practices which focus upon the Prophet Muhammad, upon the *pīr-murīd* relationship, and on Sufi mystics and saints (*buzurg*)? More to the point, if the publication of Indic-language texts by reform-minded Sufis and ulema coincide with ideological and practical shifts towards the pan-Islamic aspects of the faith among Muslims, has this shift also occasioned a movement away from some of the more synthetic, local manifestations of Islamic piety? To answer these questions, I use a classificatory model of conflict, tension, and accommodation. These three positions are measured against ritual practices associated with the cult of Sufi saints and shrines, particularly as the latter reflects local customs, contested practices, and synthetic modes which emphasize the mediational and intercessory aspects of devotion.[39] The implications inherent in the use of such a model deny any kind of inherent homogeneity to the messages promoted (or contested) by the authors of the surveyed texts, and indeed, the categories I have delimited here can be rather fluid. In fact, the demarcations of the conflict-tension-accommodation model are complicated by the fact that all three components

---

[39]This model has been informed by the basic framework for the *tajdīd-iṣlāḥ* tradition in Islamic history as proposed by John O. Voll, "Renewal and Reform," pp. 32–47, and by the work of Tony Stewart. Stewart juxtaposes older academic models of "conflict" and "syncretism" for articulating the encounter between apposite religious structures with his own models of the search for "equivalence," in which the religious encounter as translation reveals moments of accommodation and appropriation of conceptual structures. See his "Equivalence," esp. pp. 261–3, 274–87. See also Hermansen, "Contemplating," p. 322, on the "contention" between legal and esoteric elements in Sufi reformist treatises.

may simultaneously exist in a single work. In short, assigning any sort of unequivocal ideological stance to the literature in question is fraught with difficulties. Rather, I consider the discussions of contested practices in light of Islamic *Sharī'a* contained in the literature surveyed as shifting modes of expression that are largely dependent upon the contexts in which they manifest themselves.

I apply the term conflict to those texts that self-consciously promote themselves as *Sharī'a*-minded over and against the mystical, mediational aspects of shrine-centered belief and practice, particularly those connected with the ideas of saintly intercession and the use of musical performance as a vehicle for mystical experience. (Alternatively, such texts may simply neglect to mention the mediational aspects of belief and practice and deal, instead, with the issue of "customs.") This category of works, including prayer manuals and what I have referred to as "etiquette literature," are concerned primarily with addressing basic issues of the faith, including questions of orthopraxy. In these texts ritual practice is given an "Islamic" reading in a very deliberate manner. Their authors endeavor to forge linkages between the text and the scriptural sources of Islam—primarily the Qur'ān, Ḥadīs̱, and works of jurisprudence, and one may assume an authorial position of "the reason for X is because it is enjoined by the Qur'ān, *sunna*, or Ḥadīs̱." However, the "proofs" provided by these sources tend to be established on the basis of evidence that is generalized and often, only tangentially related to the issue in question. For instance, in a Tablīghī text, *'Aurtōṅ kī Namāz*[40] (Women's Prayers), singing and playing music at weddings are characterized as "sinful" and "contrary to the *Sharī'at*,"[41] while elaborate wedding ceremonies and the practice of dowry[42] are condemned as "extravagance" and "a great sin." The author enjoins believers

> to render powerless these unnecessary and anti-*Sharī'at* deeds by perfecting Muslim men and women. In [this] world nothing except [one's] name

---

[40]There are two texts I have seen with this title, very similar in content, but written by different authors.

[41]Quraish and Yaḥyā, p. 41.

[42]According to *Sharī'a* law, the groom is expected to grant the bride *mahr*, or a portion set aside for her use. It is seen as a financial surety for the wife in the event of divorce. In many instances of local practice, however, the Hindu custom of dowry, in which the bride's family is obliged to provide gifts to the groom, has become the norm.

and honor are obtained [by perpetuating such practices], and in the afterlife there are [many] reasons for taking [sinners] to Hell. No understanding and believing Muslim should be prepared for this by any means, that only for one's name and honor [should] one be condemned to the pit of Hell. It is especially necessary to preserve women from this; because the creators of [these] rituals and the woman who practices them is [destined for Hell].[43]

"Proof" from the Qur'ān follows this argument. The verse is from the *Sūra-e Taḥrīm*, and reads: "O Believers! Preserve yourself and your families from that fire of Hell whose fuel is people and stones."[44]

No further proof from the Qur'ān, Ḥadīs̱, or *Sharī'a* is furnished in support of the author's condemnation of these customs, and no acknowledgement is given of the existence of a large body of literature—and a long history of debate—about the propriety or impropriety of music at weddings. This is a common method of such didactic texts—since they are written for people who presumably have little familiarity with the Law, they do not supply elaborate explanations. Rather, the finality of scriptural authority is assumed. Such an approach may be partly explained by the brevity of the text, but more importantly, the assumption that the author's authority (both are scholars of the Law in this instance) and the inclusion of a verse from the Qur'ān are enough to drive home the arguments forwarded in the text.

The tension model can be seen in that category of texts which overlay devotional practices with a *Sharī'a*-mindedness (to borrow Marshall Hodgson's phrase) that serves to contextualize, rather than eliminate, some of the more contested areas of devotion (e.g., making vows to a holy man or woman). These kinds of texts, written by reformist Sufis and ulema alike, condemn some customs but not others, reflecting some of the more mainstream aspects of Islamic tradition (such as prescribed and supererogatory prayers), but also the continued vitality of popular belief in the intercessory powers of saints in Islam. Such texts often have an apologetic tone, and the evident authorial stance is "the reason that X is permissible under the laws of Islam is because there is a precedent for it in the scripture, or because these ulema or schools of law or Sufi notables have ruled it permissible." They critique contemporary practices in

---

[43]Quraysh and Yahya, p. 42.
[44]*Ibid.*, p. 43.

Sufism but also accept wholesale the principles and spirit of a Sufism that existed in a time far removed from the present—particularly the period during which Sufi doctrines were being formulated, and the orders coalesced. And despite their critique of contemporary Sufism, these texts take the approach of scholar-Sufis like Shāh Valīu 'l-Lāh towards the question of contemporary practices. In other words, *Sharʿī* and mediational Islam are both defended, the latter given an Islamic reading with "proofs" from the scriptural sources of the faith. It should be noted that such works—and it is into this category that most of the demotic works I surveyed fall—tend to make use of a wider range of source materials as proof, including the *Sharʿī* trinity of Qurʾān-(*ṣaḥīḥ*) *hadīs̱*-juristic formulations (predominantly those from the Ḥanafī school of law), but they also employ arguments from sources of Ḥadīs̱ which are not considered *ṣaḥīḥ* but are nevertheless widely accepted, such as Dārimī and Baihaqī's collections. Al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūmu ʾd-Dīn*; al-Marghinānī's *Hidāya*; collections of fatwas from ulema of the Ṭarīqa-e Muḥammadīya, of Deoband, of the Mālikī school of law (predominant in North Africa), and from the collection compiled under the orders of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, the *Fatāvā-e ʿĀlamgīrī,* are also commonly used as proofs. It should be noted that most of these sources were required components of the curricula in *madrasa* institutions such as that of the Dāru ʾl-ʿUlūm in Deoband, and the *madrasas* Maẓharu ʾl-Islām and Manẓaru ʾl-Islām in Bareilly.[45]

Scripture and jurisprudential sources thus can function as symbols, or indicators of normative standards, but their interpretation—in light of the teachings and prohibitions advanced by reformists—varies considerably. The same customary practices condemned as unlawful on one side of the debate can be supported as permissible by the other side. This is in part due to minor disagreements among the sources (particularly the Ḥadīs̱ collections and the compendia on Law), and in part because the principles of jurisprudence employed by reformists, such as the use of rulings by more than one of the four Sunni schools of law, or the exercise of legal reasoning (*ijtihād*) in view of, or independently of, the four Sunni schools of law, can lend themselves to multiple understandings of a single matter.

For example, Maulānā Qādirī Ṣāḥib's *Khātūn-e Jannat,* a biography of the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima, draws on the authority of four of the six collections of *ṣaḥīḥ* Ḥadīs̱ (Bukhārī, Muslim, at-Tirmiżī, and Abū Dāʾūd)

---

[45]Faruqi, pp. 28–9n1, 33–5, and Sanyal, *Devotional Islam,* p. 77.

to bolster arguments for the greater participation of women in Islamic institutions of learning, using Fāṭima's example as a model. In this sense, the author's line of argument is in relative conformity with the endeavors of earlier reformists, like Maulānā Tʰānavī, to address the questions of women's education and edification from a practical (e.g., in light of changing contexts) as well as an ideological point of view. However, the author also draws on these same sources to promote the validity of (and precedent for) Sufi beliefs, such as the importance of miracles in instilling faith in believers, and the permissibility of practices, such as the ritualized repetition of the names of God (żikr) and various other devotional exercises which were condemned as harmful and forbidden customs by Maulānā Tʰānavī. Similarly, the permissibility of women singing and playing instruments during weddings and other commemorative celebrations can be both defended and refuted by drawing on examples from the Qur'ān and *sunna*. While Quraish and Yahya's *'Aurtōṅ kī Namāz* characterizes these acts in unequivocally negative terms, Maulānā Muḥammad Idrīs Anṣārī's *Musalmān Khāvind* (n.d., but one of the three versions of this text by the same author is dated 1995) paraphrases from the *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* to show how the Prophet himself allowed singing and the playing of instruments (the *daff*, or tambourine) during marriage ceremonies. The author uses this example to argue for the permissibility of singing and playing instruments not only during weddings (which would be the exact analogy), but also during ceremonies of circumcision, *'īd*, and informal gatherings of friends.[46] These arguments are further reinforced by the author's use of sources other than the Qur'ān and *ṣaḥīḥ* Ḥadīs̱.

Finally, the accommodation model can be applied to texts that focus primarily upon those aspects of practice that deal with the manipulation of "magic" means to achieve desired effects. There seems to be no apologetic tone for such practices in these texts, although some do attempt to place the practices within an Islamic framework. Generally, this is accomplished by punctuating them with Qur'ānic references, by providing "proof" as seen in select Qur'ānic verses, Ḥadīs̱ accounts, the teachings of Sufi *shaikhs*/ulema or the Prophet's *sunna*, or by recommending the recitation of prayers (such as the *durūd*, or blessings upon the Prophet) or Qur'ānic verses before, during, and after execution. For instance, the 1992 work, *Amrāẓ aur Mushkilāt kā Rūḥānī 'Ilāj* (Spiritual Cures For [Physical]

---

[46]Maulānā Muḥammad Idrīs Anṣārī, *Musalmān Khāvind* (Delhi: Idāra-e Ishā'at-e Dīniyāt, n.d.), pp. 22–3.

Ailments And [Other] Difficulties), which relies considerably on discussions of the subject by Sufis of the Uvaisī, Qalandar, and A'ẓamī orders (orders which have something of an antinomian reputation in Sufism), considers the use of amulets and prayers in the treatment of illnesses. It also focuses on Islamic prayers (*durūd*, *bismillāh*) and the payment of *żakāt* as important factors in the success of treatment.[47] Another text, *Čīn Baṅgāl kā Jādū*, the author of which remains nameless, makes no such concession: the spells described within require no Islamic framework for their execution, with the exception of *naqsh*, or "magic squares," on which part of the first verse of the Qur'ān, or the names of the *panj-e pāk* (Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusain) are written on paper which is to be worn as an amulet on the body, or immersed in water to be consumed by the person desiring the effects described in the text. Such works as these are in noticeably short supply in the shrine bazaars I visited.

Although it is difficult to assess the impact of reform movements on devotional practices without the benefit of a systematic study, it is likely that within the milieu of the Sufi shrine, the recasting of the *shaikh*'s role as exemplar of Islam, and the popularity of rituals of devotion to the Prophet, both framed by reference to *Shar'ī* sources of authority, were nurtured from within a reformist rubric. That this is the case is borne out in the use of select Qur'ānic verses as indispensable to correct (*ṣaḥīḥ*) practice, and in the focus on the examples of the Prophet and the "sober," intellectually astute (rather than the ecstatic) Sufi *shaikhs*. The recognition of the pious models of such figures in the Sufi ritual setting serves as an Islamicizing discourse that reinforces the importance of understanding and upholding the fundamentals of the faith. On the whole, the demotic literature available at Sufi shrine markets may have helped to raise Muslim awareness of the basic "Islamic" or *Sharī'a*-centered aspects of their identity, and, in so doing, have underscored a vision of a somewhat homogenized (or watered-down) vision of Islam, but it has in no way eliminated some of the more controversial practices associated with shrine-centered devotion. However much the recognition of the fundamentals of Islam may serve as a legitimizing factor in devotional practice,

---

[47]Khvāja Shamsu 'd-Dīn A'ẓamī, *Amrāẓ-o-Mushkilāt kā Rūḥānī 'Ilāj* (Delhi: Sirāj Publications, 1992), pp. 17–8. The author of this work is, like the author of the *Jannatī Zēvar*, a Sufi of the A'ẓamī order.

such recognition has not, in effect, ended the debate on where the boundaries of "true" Islam begin and end in the Sufi setting. ❐