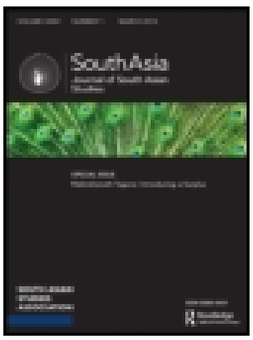

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ARTICLE

Constructing Religious Authority: Creating Exclusion along the Matrix of Knowledge and Power in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that in Pakistan, intra-Islamic differences and the contested field of Islamic identity politics affected and moulded the country's integrated and overlapping religious identities into distinct and disparate categories at the micro level. The article discusses the process of formation of the *jamaat* of the Sufi-inspired *silsila*, the Naqshbandia Awaisia, by Major Ghulam Muhammad among the military and an urban middle-class constituency. It shows how the *jamaat* conceptualised and imbued Sufism with an exclusivist approach, positioning Sufism and Sharia within an Islamic discourse that categorically rejected the religion's ritual and devotional aspects. This embroiled these mutually constitutive and intersecting dimensions, Sharia, esoteric Sufi doctrine and the devotional and ritual aspects in an ambivalent relationship. The exclusion of the devotional and ritual aspects became a boundary-setting label of difference between the 'proper' Muslim and the 'other' along a matrix of knowledge and power.

KEYWORDS

Barelvi; Deobandi; esoteric; exclusion; *jamaat*; knowledge and power; military; Naqshbandia Awaisia Silsila; reformist; revivalist

Introduction

With the loss of political sovereignty, the Muslims of India were made aware of the severity of the competition and challenge from colonial modernity. For Muslim reformists, better religious knowledge of the Quran and the Hadith and putting Sharia into operation were the only answer to meet the challenges of colonialism and modernity. Print was central to broadcasting this knowledge and came to be a crucial forum in which religious debate was conducted.[1] A rapid sectarianism emerged as a result, with group after group, such as the Deobandi school, the Barelvi movement, the Ahl-i Hadith and the Ahl al-Quran springing up. The Darul Uloom Deoband seminary was set up in 1866 and its proponents sought to propagate correct Islamic norms.[2]

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1. Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 77–82.
2. Francis Robinson, 'Islamic Reform and Modernities in South Asia', in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 42, nos. 2–3 (2008), pp. 259–81; also see Farhan Ahmad Nizami, *Madrasahs, Scholars and Saints: Muslim Response to the British Presence in Delhi and the Upper Doab, 1803–1857* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983); Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 2002); Francis Robinson, 'Religious

Deobandi reformism gave centrality to the study of the Hadith. The eighteenth-century Hadith scholar Shah Waliullah was a key figure in Deobandi genealogy. The Deobandi school was connected to the tradition of Sufism, notably to the Chishti order of Sufism. Two of the founders of Darul Uloom Deoband, Muhammad Qasim Nanautvi (1833–1877) and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829–1905), were heirs to the rich Sufi legacy of Haji Imdadullah Muhajir Makki.[3]

The Barelvi movement occupied a large space in modern South Asian Sunnism and was associated with Ahmed Raza Khan (1856–1921) from Bareilly in North India.[4] In reaction to the perceived threat to local shrine culture, many South Asian Sufis and their followers, who were shrine devotees, organised under the new identity of 'Ahl-e Sunnat wa-l-Jamaat' (the people of the Sunna and the community). This was often called 'Barelvi' in order to resist the modernising and purifying efforts of the Deobandis and other Islamic groups such as the Ahl-i Hadith.[5]

The Deobandis, often caricatured as fundamentalist puritans, saw Sufism as an essential part of a Muslim's moral life. However, they were, and remained, critical of a range of devotional practices such as pilgrimages to Sufi saints' tombs, celebration of saints' death anniversaries, and visiting and worshipping graves. They positioned themselves on a middle path which strove to avoid any form of 'excess' or 'extremism', and consistently 'balanced' Deoband's 'comprehensiveness' (*jamiyyat*).[6] Barelvis are in the same Islamic tradition and are as thoroughly grounded in Islamic legal discourse and tradition as the Deobandis, and are not antithetical to them.[7] Ahmed Raza had also advocated reform of those rituals which overstepped the boundaries of Islam.

Disagreement between the Deobandis and Barelvis arose on the competing imaginaries of the Prophet Muḥammad.[8] The most crucial difference was the question of the nature and scope of the Prophet's knowledge of the unknown (*ilm-al-ghayb*) and the normative legitimacy of the celebration of the Prophet's

Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia since 1800', in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. XX, no. 1 (1997), pp. 1–5; Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982); and David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 1989), p. 54.

3. Qasim Nanautvi, Rashid Ahmed Gangohi and Yaqub Nanautvi set up a seminary at Deoband near Delhi in 1866. They stressed the teaching of the orthodox version of Islamic law through a theologically oriented curriculum. Those who studied there subsequently came to be known as Deobandis: see Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Avril Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (London: Curzon Press Ltd, 1993).
4. Ahmed Raza Khan, a prolific scholar of nineteenth-century Sunni Islam in India, provided an intellectual basis for the Barelvi tradition named after the North Indian town of Bareilly which was the residence of the movement's founder.
5. The term Ahl-e Sunnat referred to the conformity of the Barelvis with the Sunna: see Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Moin Ahmad Nizami, *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam: The Chishti-Sabris in 18th–19th Century North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 21–2.
6. Brannon D. Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), p. 21.
7. Prominent early Deobandi *muftis* included Rashid Aḥmad Gangohi (1826–1905), Ashraf Ali Thanvi (1863–1943), Aziz al-Raḥman Usmani (1859–1928), Anwar Shah Kashmiri (1875–1933) and Mufti Muḥammad Shafi (1897–1976). These men were *muftis* steeped in Sufi thought and practice.
8. SherAli Tareen, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020); also see Ingram, *Revival from Below*, p. 29.

birthday (*mawlid*).[9] The disagreement on prophetology produced theological pronouncements of unbelief (*takfīr*). Reading this polemic in popular and academic discourse through the prism of binaries as puritan versus mystical is misleading, and this article seeks to dispel the persistent stereotype that Deobandis represent the stern inflexible Islam of the urban middle classes while the Barelvis represent popular 'folk' Sufism.

The Sufi dimension of the Deobandi movement has been explored by historians, but little is known of its manifestations in today's Pakistan, particularly now when religious identities have been radicalised and Sufism is construed essentially as associated with the Barelvis. One of the most notable examples is of the Deobandi *jamaat* rooted in the Naqshbandia Awaisia Sufi order in Wan Bhachran, a small town in Mianwali district in the north-west of Pakistani Punjab, which was established by Major Ghulam Muhammad in 1992. This order promotes a Sufism closely integrated with Sharia. Many who are sympathetic to Sufism would consider this *jamaat* to be 'orthodox', and some might even see it as Islamist. In the past decades, the order has established strong networks among the military, and this influence might partially explain the latter's gradual Islamisation. This article explores the mechanism by which the power of the social networks of the military was used to establish religious authority and knowledge. The focus is also on an institutional process in which military patronage helped in developing the *jamaat*'s religious knowledge and authority and in sustaining exclusive control of the elite; the local rural society, which was predominantly comprised of the Barelvi denomination, was excluded along a matrix of a true and superior knowledge of Islam and power.

Orientalists often view Islam in dichotomous terms, with law and mysticism as distinguishable discursive domains and a perpetual conflict between two Muslim factions, the generally pacifist 'Sufis' and the more aggressive and fundamentalist '*ulema*'.[10] The split of Sufism as a mystical philosophy from local practices associated with shrine networks is still visible in the disciplinary boundaries of scholarship on South Asian Islam. This problematic expression of the law/Sufism binary is also found in the works of Rex O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke, Aamir Mufti, David Pinault and Pnina Werbner.[11] According to Pinault and Werbner's descriptions, the Barelvi–Deobandi conflict represents a struggle between reformer jurists and sainthood jurists locked in continuous religious controversy. Mufti's conceptualisation of Sufism as the 'other' of Sharia and fundamentalism is untenable and factually incorrect. One major problem with this

9. Usha Sanyal, 'Sufism through the Prism of Sharia: A Reformist Barelvi Girls' Madrasa in Uttar Pradesh, India', in Katherine Pratt Ewing and Rosemary R. Corbett (eds), *Modern Sufis and the State: Politics of Islam in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), pp. 128–44 [134].
10. A.J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 119–22; J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 103; Marc Gaborieau, 'Criticizing the Sufis: The Debate in Early-Nineteenth Century India', in Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke (eds), *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) pp. 452–67; and H.A.R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1947).
11. R.S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke, 'Neo-Sufism Reconsidered', in Der Islam, Vol. 70 (1993), pp. 52–87; Amir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); David Pinault, *Notes from the Fortune-Telling Parrot: Islam and the Struggle for Religious Pluralism in Pakistan* (London: Equinox, 2008); and Pnina Werbner, 'The Making of Muslim Dissent: Hybridized Discourses, Lay Preachers, and Radical Rhetoric among British Pakistanis', in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 23, no. 1 (Feb. 1996).

framing is that both the Barelvis and the Deobandis were Sufi masters as well as scholars of law. The Barelvi orientation was never mere saint worship; it has always represented a highly literate and textually anchored political theology.

Contemporary scholars of South Asian Islam argue that Sufi and legal traditions in Islam are integrated and not binary opposites. Qasim Zaman, Brannon Ingram and SherAli Tareen call attention to how the very term 'reform' and its deployment are politically fraught. These scholars show the ambivalence of the Deobandis toward Sufism. They assert that Sufism is essential to the cultivation of piety, yet places strict limits on what is permissible at shrines, considering many Sufi beliefs and practices illicit. Tareen proposes that this intra-Muslim contestation rests on opposing imaginaries of the relationship between God, the Prophet and the community, theology, law and ritual, which ultimately questioned the sovereignty of the Prophet. Sanyal says that the Barelvis defy classification as rural, traditional or 'unreformed' in their Sufi orientations. He cites a Barelvi girls' *madrasa* in India that teaches a commitment to Sharia interwoven with Sufi orientations, but does not prioritise visits to shrines.[12]

This article disrupts any categorisation of Deobandis as pro-reform and Barelvis as anti-reform, but shows how these identities and traditions overlap with liminal boundaries. It shows that the three dimensions of Sufism—literary, institutional and devotional—are intersecting and mutually constitutive. The article discusses areas of convergence and overlap in the reform agenda of Deobandis and critiques of everyday religious life. Rituals and devotional practices are contested terrain, represented by local interpretations of Islam, where distinct religious identities are forged. This devotional aspect as a part of the tripartite concept of Sufism was historically grounded in the rural social space. Any contestation or outright rejection of it and the internal logics of the differences led to sectarian conflict.

Drawing on the insightful works of Katherine Ewing, Jamal Malik and Yasmin Saikia on the relationship between Islam and the army, and through a study of the local dynamics of religion in the town of Wan Bhachran, I examine the penetration of the Sufi-inspired Deobandi *silsila* (Sufi religious order) into the cadre of the Pakistan Armed Forces.[13] The governing elite had drawn on Sufi symbolism to bolster their legitimacy, which provided greater space to Sufism. The *silsila*'s Sufi–*alim* rapprochement was susceptible to the military's role in Islam. The article will show that the exclusion of the local society took its impulse from the Deobandi exclusionary rhetoric, strongly embedded in Pakistani politics in the 1980s and early 1990s. This exclusionary rhetoric based on the national narrative became instrumental in shaping the *jamaat*'s religious discourse.

12. Nizami, *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam*; Tareen, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity*; Ingram, *Revival from Below*; and Katherine Pratt Ewing and Rosemary R. Corbett (eds), *Modern Sufis and the State: Politics of Islam in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020). Also see Ali Altaf Mian, *Invoking Islamic Rights in British India: Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's Huquq al-Islam* (Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press, 2021); Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); and Sanyal, 'Sufism through the Prism of Sharia', p. 134.
13. Katherine Pratt Ewing, 'The Politics of Sufism: Redefining the Saints of Pakistan', in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XLII, no. 2 (1983), pp. 251–68 [267]; Jamal Malik, *Colonialization of Islam: Dissolution of Traditional Institutions in Pakistan* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1996); and Yasmin Saikia, 'Ayub Khan and Modern Islam: Transforming Citizens and the Nation in Pakistan', in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 37, no. 2 (2014), pp. 292–305 [298].

The research is based on vernacular sources that range from biographical accounts and Urdu *malfuzat* (the collected discourses of Sufi *shaykhs*) to private letters and articles. Ahmed-ud-Din's *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, a biography of Allahyar, the *shaykh* of the *silsila*, and Major Ghulam Muhammad's *Murshad Jaisa Na Dekha Koyi* provide detailed information about the penetration of the *silsila* into military and urban professional groups. Vernacular sources are randomly compiled and there is no chronological order. Most of them offer an exaggerated account of the spiritual powers of the Sufis and provide no information about the social relationships between the Sufis and the local people. These are original materials created in the current era which have never been utilised before. Oral history is also part of these sources which provides deeper information and an alternative view about the local people of Wan Bhachran and their response to the *silsila*.

Maulana Allahyar Khan's Naqshbandia Awaisia Silsila

The Naqshbandia Awaisia Silsila was first introduced by the *shaykh* of the *silsila*, Maulana Allahyar Chakralwi (1904–1984)[14] in 1960 during General Ayub Khan's military rule. Ayub Khan used the emotive power of Islam to boost the legitimacy of the state. To avoid direct participation in the politics of the hereditary *pirs*, the *ulema* and the traditional *sajda-nasheen* (the one who sits on the prayer carpet), the secular government of Ayub Khan chose to identify itself with the doctrines of Sufism which were devoid of political authority.[15] By taking over the management of shrines through the West Pakistan Waqf Properties Ordinance of 1959, state leaders gave Sufism and rural Islam a new interpretation.[16] Allahyar's urban middle-class constituency concentrated on the Sufi aspects of the relationship, describing it in a manner fairly consistent with the image of the Sufis that the governing elite was trying to project. One example is of Pir Dewal Sharif, who extended his influence over many army officials and high-level civil servants and even won Ayub Khan's favour.[17] Thus, a modernist version of Islam was conjoined with traditional spirituality. Allahyar's vision of a Sufi as an *alim* who guided his adherents in the tenets of Islam in conformity with Sharia seemed amenable to Ayub Khan's identification with Sufism.[18] The development of Allahyar's constituency in Pakistan's armed forces was the outcome of the state's policy towards Islam. The institutional support by the army constituency linked his *silsila* to the centre of power.

Maulana Allahyar was born into the land-owning Sarjaal Awan tribe. He studied the Hadith at the Madrasa Ameenia in Delhi under the tutelage of Mufti Kifayat Ullah, Anwar Shah Kashmiri and Maulana Khalil Ahmed Anbethwi. He went back to Chakrala in 1935 and started teaching at the Chitti Masjid there. In 1942, he entered

14. Maulana Allahyar Chakralwi pledged allegiance to the spirit of the *shaykh* of the Naqshbandia Awaisia Silsila, Sultan ul-Arifin Khawaja Allah Din Madni, who was buried in Langar Mukhdum (Sargodha district) 400 years earlier. Maulana Allahyar was introduced to the spirit of Sultan-ul-Arifin by a Sufi of the Naqshbandia Mujadadia order, Maulana Abdur Raheem: see Abul Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba* (Chakwal: Awaisia Publishers, 2005).
15. Ewing, 'The Politics of Sufism'.
16. Umbar Bin Ibad, *Sufi Shrines and the Pakistani State: The End of Religious Pluralism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 56.
17. Ewing, 'The Politics of Sufism', p. 269.
18. Saikia, 'Ayub Khan and Modern Islam', p. 295.

the path of *saluk* (spiritual training) at the Naqshbandia Awaisia Silsila. Theologically, due to his Deobandi leanings, Allahyar maintained strict adherence to the Quran and the Hadith with great resonance in the Sufi tradition.[19] Having a strict reformist streak, he rejected the hereditary *sajda-nasheen*, prostration at tombs and the holding of *urs*. At the heart of this *silsila* lies its most distinctive feature: spiritual conversation with the *mashaikh* (saints) in the *barzakh*[20] and seeking guidance from them. This transcendental dimension of his cult, which is defined by the power to contact the sacred, established his religious authority and gave him an exclusive identity among his followers. The *silsila* was internally organised in the form of the *halqa-e-dhikr*,[21] which took the formal shape of the *jamaat* of *dhakirin* in Chakwal, which is situated in the Pothohar region adjacent to the Salt Range military belt in 1960. The *jamaat* was later shifted from Chakwal to Manara in Jhelum district, which grew into a permanent centre of *silsila* and *tablighi* activity in 1977 called Dar-ul-Irfan.[22] The *jamaat* propagated a message of puritan reformist Islam spawned by the Darul Uloom Deoband along with Sufi-inspired rituals such as *tasawwuf* (the act of being a Sufi).[23] The *silsila*'s reformist message, steeped in the esoteric knowledge of *tasawwuf*, appealed to the educated constituency of the *jamaat* which included religious teachers such as *madaris*, *imams* and *qaris* in mosques, professors in the local colleges and *ulema*. Professor Hafiz Abdur Razzaq, Maulvi Suleiman, Maulvi Fazal Hussain and Professor Buniyad Hussain Shah were some of the prominent ideologues of the *jamaat* in its initial stage.[24] The *silsila* was first introduced in 1962 to non-commissioned officers of the armed forces from towns such as Chakrala, Talagang, Chakwal and its surroundings. Hafiz Ghulam Qadri from Chakwal was the first non-commissioned officer who joined the *halqa-e-dhikr*. The *silsila* extended to the officer cadre through Lieutenant Ahsan Baig who belonged to a family with religious orientations and had joined the *silsila* before he obtained a commission in the army. Captain Muhammad Hanif, Captain Hadi Hussain Shah, Major Zain-ul-Abideen (East Pakistan), Lieutenant Ghulam Muhammad, Captain Muhammad Rafique, Captain Muhammad Umer and Captain Muhammad Ghaus, educated in military colleges with liberal leanings, were among those who joined the *silsila* and became instrumental in disseminating its work in Kakul, Bhimber, Kharian, Gujranwala, Okara and Jhelum cantonments.[25] A sophisticated intellectualism in a framework of esoteric doctrine as well as a strict

19. Maulana Allahyar Chakralwi believed the community's fortunes depended on strict observance of Sharia and complete submission to the Prophet: see the letters of Maulana Allahyar to Colonel Matloob, 27 Aug. 1971, in *Maktubaat* (Chakwal: Awaisia Publishers, 1989).
20. *Barzakh* is the celestial world, the (spiritual) other-world where souls reside in a living form: see Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*.
21. A *halqa-e-dhikr* is a circle or group of followers who assemble at one place and perform *dhikr*.
22. The centre would be coupled with the regional centres, working in connection with the *jamaat* headquarters Dar-ul-Irfan. A department of press and publications was also set up and it published a monthly *risala* (collection of Islamic rulings and prescriptions) titled *Al-Murshid*. The Committee of Publication comprised Hafiz Razzaq, Colonel Matloob, Professor Buniyad Hussain, Professor Baagh Hussain Kamal, Fazal Akbar, Haji Altaf Ahmed and Muhammad Hamid: see Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 313.
23. On the Sufi/reformist *jamaat*, see Dietrich Reetz, 'Sufi Spirituality Fires Reformist Zeal: The Tablighi Jamaat in Today's India and Pakistan', in *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, no. 135 (juillet–septembre 2006), pp. 34–40, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.3715.
24. Maulvi Suleiman was a teacher of Arabic in a local school. Hafiz Abdul Razzaq and Buniyad Hussain Shah worked as lecturers in Islamic Studies at the Government Degree College in Chakwal and the Government Degree College Jhelum, respectively: see Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 99.
25. Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 358.

manifestation of Sharia was the perfect model for both the educated officer class as well as soldiers with a background in customary rural Islam. The *jamaat* found its strongest expression in 1971 in the prisoner of war (POW) camp at Gaya in India, where Allahyar's disciples, including Major Ahsan Baig, were imprisoned. Allahyar instructed them to establish the *halqa-e-dhikr* in the POW camp. The *jamaat* was expanded by the POWs once they were released.[26] Ayub Khan's perception of the army as the true protector of Islam and the nation, and as the upholder of Islamic identity, was badly damaged after his defeat in the 1971 Indo-Pak war. The war exposed and broke the attempt to impose national unity by using religion to construct a singular, homogenised Islamic identity for the country. The *halqa-e-dhikr* in the POW camp forged a humanistic moral community of Pakistanis besides a commitment to a singular Islamic identity.[27] After the exit of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's military government attempted to minimise the distinction between Sufism and Sharia to make his Islamisation agenda succeed. In defining Sufism and the significance of the saints, the Zia government, taking an essentially reformist position, stressed the synthesis between Sufi and *alim* in its definition of the saint while denying the legitimacy of the hereditary *pir*.[28] Zia's Islamisation once again strengthened the state's monopoly over religion by enforcing a narrower 'legalist' interpretation of Islam based on the Deobandi ideology of Shariatised Islam.[29] It was in this context that Ghulam Muhammad built his military constituency in the post-Zia period in 1992, based on the old connection between the *silsila* and the armed forces. The military served as an institutionalised model and a channel to disseminate Ghulam Muhammad's reformist message. The military patronage legitimised the Deobandi theology; however, it did not make itself amenable to the Barelvi-dominated local society, which was not happy with the Deobandi proselytisation. The condemning of their devotional practices as deviating from normative Islam and the exclusion of shrine devotees resulted in a narrowing of the space for the Barelvis within Deobandi circles and the sharpening of religious categories.

My assertion is opposed to the argument in the existing literature that rituals and shrines are integrative, act in building interfaith bridges, and help in assimilating different elements of society. I draw upon Michel Boivin's and Patricia Jeffery's argument that to maintain elite control over a *silsila* and its religious traditions, certain elements of society are excluded, because of which, subsequently, *silsila* and rituals become an instrument of social discrimination and contention.[30]

26. For a more detailed study, see Saadia Sumbal, 'The Jamaat of Allah's Friends: Maulana Allahyar's Reformist Movement and Sacralising the Space of the Armed Forces of Pakistan', in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 31, no. 1 (Jan. 2021), pp. 1–21.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Ewing, 'The Politics of Sufism'.
29. Farzana Sheikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2009) pp. 3–5; and Qasim Zaman, 'Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shii and Sunni Identities', in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, no. 3 (1998), pp. 689–716.
30. Michel Boivin, 'The Sufi Center of Jhok Sharif in Sindh (Pakistan): Questioning the *Ziyārat* as a Social Process', in Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey (eds), *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation and Destiny* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 95–110 [95]; also see Patricia Jeffery, 'Creating a Scene: The Disruption of Ceremonial in a Sufi Shrine', in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), *Ritual and Religion among Muslims in India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1981), pp. 163–94.

The jamaat of Ghulam Muhammad and the socio-religious landscape of Wan Bhachran

In relation to local oral history narratives, the Wan Bhachran area is represented as tribal with tribal chiefs being the fountainheads of political influence. The Bhachars, who are the leading clan in the town, were the first settlers there, which is why the place is named after them. Wan Bhachran is a both a town and a union council, an administrative subdivision of Mianwali district in the north-west Punjab province of Pakistan. The area to the north is a continuation of the Pothohar Plateau and the Kohistan-e-Namak. The southern side of the district is a part of the Thal desert which is bordered by the Indus and Jhelum rivers. Combined with the pressures of uneven topography and tough terrain, fragmented landholdings, crop failures, and sales, the transfer and mortgaging of cultivated land have worsened the material conditions of the agriculturists there. The colonial state did not invest in this region because investment would not have yielded economic benefits; instead, the district was used to generate military recruits. Mianwali district with its predominantly Pathan population was ideally fit for the martial race theory. In the face of these pressures on land, a viable alternative for income was getting recruited into the colonial army.[31]

Islam in this region was popularised and sustained by the Sufis as a result of constant interaction between Sufis professing Islam, the pre-existing religious beliefs and the local environment. Like in the rest of rural Punjab, the politics in this region too had a strong pro-British orientation in the colonial period. The colonial state used the religious and social influence of Sufis through a mutual relationship of collaboration to consolidate its control over local society. In return, the Sufis were the beneficiary of the state's benevolence through grants of land and official positions.[32] The political interests of the local landed elite as colonial intermediaries were also linked with their relationship to the Sufis and *sajda-nasheens* in the town through ties of economic and social dependence and also bonds of political interests.[33]

A strong Barelvi–feudal nexus still dominated in the town in the post-colonial period, which became a means of fostering sectarian identities. The religious power politics articulated into inter-tribal rivalry as the dominant elite tribe of Bhachars patronised the Barelvi denomination. Most of the local elites in the town patronised Barelvi Islam as disciples of the Chishtiya *khanqah*, Sial Sharif, because of which the *khateeb* (prayer leaders) of the Barelvi mosques were called *sialwi* and alleged to be agents of Barelvi Islam.[34] Malik Muzaffar Bhachar and Malik Surkharu, who belonged to the local elite, established and funded Barelvi mosques.[35] The elite patronage of the

31. D.J. Boyd, Esquire, ICS, Lahore, 'Record of the War Services of Mianwali District (1914–19)', *Civil and Military Gazette Press* (1922), p. 7, Deputy Commissioner Record Office, Mianwali, Pakistan; also see Saadia Sumbal, 'Defending the Empire: Analyzing Military Recruitment in Colonial Mianwali', in *The Historian*, Vol. 8, no. 1 (Jan.–June 2010), p. 6.
32. Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, pp. 41–2; also see Sarah F.D. Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sind, 1843–1947* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
33. Sultan Zikria, a Sufi of the Qadriyya order, was married to the daughter of Malik Yari Khan of Musa Khel, Mian Muhammad Ali was married to the daughter of Malik Ghazi Khan of Piplan, and Mian Hussain Ali was married to the sister of Malik Fateh Khan Tiwana of Mitha Tiwana: see Sumbal, 'Defending the Empire', p. 4.
34. Interview with Professor Wali Anjum, Wan Bhachran, 27 July 2019.
35. Interview with Professor Arif Ahmed, Wan Bhachran, 7 Aug. 2019.

Barelvis strengthened them and turned Deobandi Islam into a contested phenomenon in the town. The system of shrines was implicitly linked to the Pakistani political landscape. The Sufis and *sajda-nasheens* of the *khanqah* were not only placed at the centre of Pakistani religious life but also its electoral and political life. Similarly, in the town, Sial Sharif's support to the local elite in electoral politics strengthened Barelvi religious authority and made the functioning of the religious institution necessary for the continuity of feudal arrangements. The local elite tried to control rural folk by extra-economic factors such as ideological and political control.[36] The indoctrination of Barelvi religious ideas in the rural society meant a conscious manipulation of religion by the dominant group to secure the subordination of the marginalised.

Mosques and *madrasas* emerged as the nerve centres of sectarianism.[37] They had their own exclusivist sectarian affiliations with religio-political parties like the Jamiyat-e-Ulama-e-Islam (Deobandi group), Jamiyat-e-Ulama-i-Pakistan (Barelvi group) and Jamaat-i-Islami. These religio-political parties provided ideological support to the *khateeb*. According to a confidential memo by the superintendent of police, they were paid and patronised by religious associations to peddle their political agendas via mosque pulpits.[38] Ibad maintains that the post-colonial state of Pakistan controlled all religious institutions from mosques to shrines under the Waqf ordinance which had replaced pluralistic practices with a singular Islamic identity.[39] However, not a single Deobandi or Barelvi mosque or *madrasa* worked under the Waqf—rather, they operated in an autonomous space in the town, which is why, subsequently, the religious ideologues could use uncontrolled threatening rhetoric and propagate bigotry.

The Naqshbandia Awaisia Silsila lost a charismatic *shaykh* with the death of Allahyar in 1984. There was continuous vying for ascendancy among his *khalifas*; moreover, a good number of followers whose association with the *jamaat* had been due to Allahyar's charisma left. Allahyar had nominated four *khalifas*, Major Ahsan Baig, Buniyad Hussain Naqvi, Akram Awan and Major Ghulam Muhammad. The *jamaat* split between two *khalifas*, one under the patronage of Akram Awan in Manara in Jhelum district and the other under Major Ahsan Baig and Buniyad Hussain in Rawalpindi. The *jamaat* of Ahsan Baig restricted itself to religious activities, whereas the political and religious context for the operation of the order changed in the *jamaat* of Akram Awan from the era of Ayub Khan to that of Zia-ul-Haq and political leaders after him. Ghulam Muhammad joined Akram Awan's *jamaat*.[40] The Deobandi *ulema*'s vision of the implementation of Sharia served the needs of the army, which took a fresh turn to Islam to legitimise the unconstitutional military coup of 1977.[41] The army

36. Bryan Turner, *Religion and Social Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1983), p. 139.
37. Zaman, 'Sectarianism in Pakistan', p. 715.
38. Wishing to rein in sectarian conflict and the violent activities of religio-political organisations, the district administration suggested the curtailment of the religious authority of the *imams* by bringing mosques and *madrasas* under the government's Waqf department: see Memo no. 4265/HC issued from superintendent of police to deputy commissioner, 22 May 1968, Deputy Commissioner Record Office, Mianwali, Pakistan.
39. Ibad, *Sufi Shrines and the Pakistani State*, p. 6.
40. Major Ghulam Muhammad, *Murshad Jaisa Na Dekha Koyi* (Chakwal: Awaisiah.com, 2014).
41. Sheikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan*, p. 109. See also Jawad Syed *et al.* (eds), *Faith-Based Violence and Deobandi Militancy in Pakistan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Vali Reza Nasr, *Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the Making of State Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Vali Reza Nasr, 'The Rise of Sunni Militancy

began touting new pretensions of being an 'army of Islam'.[42] The military regime's patronage of the Deobandis as its ally to further the concept of the Afghan Jehad enhanced the political power of the Deobandi ideologues, articulated in the violent politics of ultra-orthodox Sunni Islam.[43] The *jamaat* had been, in this context, overwhelmingly politicised under its ideologue, Akram Awan, through the formation of a political wing called the Tanzeem-ul-Ikhwan (organisation/movement of the brothers) in 1992. The *jamaat* tried to develop an ideological emphasis on Islamic norms for the conduct of everyday life in the larger political climate of Pakistan in which personal practice of Islam was seen as increasingly important as the ideological basis for establishing a Muslim community.[44] The implementation of Sharia and the setting up of a 'real' Islamic state were part of the ideology of its political branch. Most of the cadres of the Tanzeem were retired soldiers, officers, brigadiers or generals. There is very little information available about the Tanzeem; however, its members, mostly military men, threatened to launch a march to Islamabad in 2000 if General Pervez Musharraf, then in power, did not implement the Sharia. According to Major Ghulam Muhammad, Akram Awan swindled funds from the intelligence agencies of Pakistan and made false promises to send 300,000 recruits to Afghanistan during the 1990s.[45] The *jamaat* was generally tagged as having ties with militants owing to its Deobandi identity and radical activities. However, there is no documented evidence of the *jamaat*'s connection with militants.[46] Ghulam Muhammad separated himself from the radical Islam of Akram Awan's *jamaat* because, as he said, 'Awan defamed the *jamaat* overall and the *silsila*'.[47] Ghulam Muhammad founded a separate *jamaat* in his native town, Wan Bhachran, where he had settled after his retirement from the army. His aim was to delink the *silsila* from political activities and revive it along the esoteric traditions imbibed by the *shaykh* of the *silsila.*

Ghulam Muhammad joined the army in 1966 and was initiated into the Naqshbandia Awaisia Silsila in 1969. He did *baiyat* with the soul of the prophet in 1970, and in the fifth year of his initiation, in 1974, he received the *khirqa khilafat* (initiatory gown of a vicegerent).[48] According to one legend mentioned in the hagiographic sources, Allahyar presented five names in the court of Prophet Muhammad to be chosen as *khalifa* and the prophet placed his finger on Ghulam Muhammad's name.[49] He formally established his *jamaat* of *dhakirin* in 1992. The process of revival or 'waxing' only required a successor *khalifa* who could continue the traditions

in Pakistan: The Changing Role of Islamism and the Ulema in Society and Politics', in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, no. 1 (2000), pp. 139–80.

42. Nasr, *Islamic Leviathan*, pp. 78–9; also see Aqil Shah, *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
43. Sheikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan*, p. 7; Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010); and Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), p. 28.
44. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 36.
45. Interview with Ghulam Muhammad, Wan Bhachran, 2 June 2020.
46. Interview with Wali Anjum, Wan Bhachran, 12 April 2020.
47. Interview with Ghulam Muhammad, Wan Bhachran, 24 April 2020.
48. The *khirqa* was a source of spiritual *baraka* (blessings). It symbolises that after attaining it, a person rejects material things for spiritual riches: see Jean Louis Michon, '*khirka*', in P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (n.d.), 5:17.
49. Muhammad, *Murshad Jaisa Na Dekha Koyi*.

established by the founder *shaykh* of the *silsila*.[50] As a devoted vicegerent of Allahyar, Ghulam Muhammad founded a new centre of the cult, moving it from Chakrala to Murshidabad, where Allahyar was buried. This *silsila* is elitist; the order mainly recruits from the urban middle and upper-middle classes, notably from among the pious bourgeoisie of cities such as Lahore, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Faisalabad, Sialkot and Gujranwala. Ghulam Muhammad used the old support base of military clientele to develop his *jamaat*.[51]

Constructing religious authority

The continuity between Allahyar and Ghulam Muhammad was not only in terms of their tenets and beliefs, but in terms of the social structural contexts in which the *silsila* was built first in Pothohar in the Salt Range military belt, and then in Wan Bhachran. While the change in geographical location was motivated by the need to introduce the *silsila* to a new social space of the town where it was less known to people, it carried challenges as well. To maintain the old religious traditions of the *silsila*, Ghulam Muhammad constructed his image among his followers as the chosen and dynamic *khalifa* and traced the spiritual genealogy in a chain of saints from Shah Rahim to Allahyar to Ghulam Muhammad to validate the authenticity of his new cult. There was an increased receptivity to Ghulam Muhammad's Sharia-oriented message with the esoteric Sufi doctrine among the urban middle-class constituency consisting of people from the military, businesses, trade and government services as well as religious ideologues and the *hafiz*, *qaris* and *khateeb* of mosques and madrasas.

The central task was to make Murshidabad a sacred site, the devotees' symbolic universe and a cultic centre imbued with the *shaykh*'s charisma. *Urs* was never celebrated because Allahyar had instructed his followers to 'never make my grave [a] center of devotion'.[52] At the annual *ijtema* (congregation) and other sacred occasions like Ramazan and Shab-e-Miraj (ascendance of the Prophet to heaven), followers came together. The proceedings opened with *dhikr*, followed by *muraqaba* (meditation) at the grave, which the devotees believed would spiritually connect them with their deceased *shaykh*, and the supplicatory prayer addressed to God which culminated in the communitarian meal (*langar*).[53] The *dhikr* (remembrance of God)[54] sessions were periodically held in the town and also in private and individual meetings at disciples' residences in various cities, but mostly in Lahore, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi.

50. Ron Geaves *et al.* (eds), *Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality* (New York: Routledge, 2009); also see Pnina Werbner, 'Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah: Zikr and the Sacralizing of Space among British Muslims', in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 11, no. 3 (1996), pp. 309–38 [322].
51. For Sufi orders, see Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, p. 23.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Interview with Fahim Ahmad, Gujranwala, 24 Aug. 2019; also see Beatrix Pfleiderer, 'Mira Datar Dargah: The Psychiatry of a Muslim Shrine', in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), *Ritual and Religion among Muslims of the Sub-continent* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1985), pp. 197–8; and Pnina Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2003), p. 41.
54. In the Naqshbandia Awaisia Silsila, *dhikr* is done through *pas-i-anfas* (guarding one's respiration). In this particular exercise, the worshipper summons in his mind a picture of his heart situated within his left breast and imagines that he sees the word Allah engraved on it in luminous Arabic characters, and that while inhaling, he produces the sound 'Allah', and while exhaling, the sound 'hu': see John A. Subhan, *Sufism, Its Saints and Shrines* (Sheridan, WY: Creative Media Partners, 2018), pp. 51–2.

This not only enabled the dissemination of reformist Islam but also gave legitimacy to Deobandi theology and acted as a shield against the disfavour of the local society.

An urban Sufi network developed which was evidenced in the *halqa-e-dhikr* whose members used esoteric mystical practices and *dhikr* to cultivate a richer inner life. With the initiation of the urban client community into the *silsila*,[55] Allahyar's shrine was visited and the rituals were conducted by new members who had no ancestral history in the region. This delinked the *silsila* from its place of origin and made it more popular among urban followers who believed a pilgrimage to Murshidabad was literally a visit to a living Sufi; as Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence note, 'it is an approach to the divine presence over the threshold of the saint's tomb'.[56] The central aspect in this Sufi *silsila* was the *dhikr*, and as the religious understanding of his constituency was of textual knowledge, the *halqa-e-dhikr* became crucial in transforming them into a cohesive, homogeneous religious community.[57] Common belief, the *adab*, the shared practices and, most important, their relationship with Ghulam Muhammad brought them together under the single category of '*murid*'.[58]

The military officers came through the modern school system (generally people from less strict religious backgrounds) as well as through religious seminaries. Hafiz Usman brought into the *jamaat* a contingent of followers from Gujranwala and Lahore. This can be understood more pertinently in the context of an evolving national political and religious environment in which religion had been regulated by the state in Pakistan from the 1960s onwards, and the ways in which discourses of modernity of various provenances (religious and secular, liberal and orthodox) have interacted and defined what constitutes proper 'religion' for 'modern' people. The popular rehabilitation of visible Islamic piety (through, for example, the use of Islamic greetings, women wearing the veil, and the inclusion of Friday religious observances in offices) was reinforced. All this created a religiously committed middle class and stimulated the spread of religious life-ways and a deepening of personal piety.

The Sufi network became part of a larger network of elite institutions as Ghulam Muhammad concerned himself with broadening the *silsila* network with other institutions of power like the air force and the judiciary. He claimed in his biography that after the 1971 Indo-Pak war, he prayed to God for one hundred air force pilots to be initiated into the *silsila*, and that it took him 25 years to achieve this goal.[59] Now his target was to get one hundred judges into the *silsila*. His connection with the institutions of power formed a shared social and conceptual field that was governed by men

55. Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey (eds), *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation and Destiny* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 187.
56. Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 95.
57. See Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (New Delhi: Shambhala South Asia edition, 1997); also see Robert Rozehnal, *Islamic Sufism Unbound: Politics and Piety in Twenty-First Century Pakistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
58. Desiderio Pinto, *Piri–Muridi Relationship: A Study of the Nizamuddin Dargah* (Delhi: Manohar, 1995) p. 21. For the same concept, see Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984).
59. Prominent air force members who joined included Group Captain Sarfraz, Group Captain Arif Kazmi, Wing Commander Muzamil Jibran, Squadron Leader Mohsin Khan and Squadron Leader Faizi: see Muhammad, *Murshid Jaisa Koi Na Dekha*, p. 56.

of physical power (military, judiciary), but in whose affairs men of spiritual power (*barakat*) were called to make occasional interventions. As Ghulam Muhammad claimed, 'the spiritual association with the *silsila* would help them morally and ethically to dispense justice more vigorously'.[60] Katherine Ewing maintains that the primary research she conducted during 1976–77 indicated that several justices of the Lahore High Court were devout followers of various Sufis and were intensely interested in Sufism. This was also true of army generals, police officers, a former chief minister of the Punjab, authors, businessmen and other members of the Western-educated elite of Pakistan who were in fact practitioners of Sufism themselves.

Ghulam Muhammad built his relationship with his adherents on the concept of *baraka* (blessing). As *khalifa* he did not possess the charisma of the *shaykh*, so to conjoin his followers to his cult he constructed a narrative that *baraka* or spiritual benefit could not be acquired until a disciple was connected to the soul of the *shaykh* via mediation by the *khalifa*. According to the philosophy of mysticism, the miracle-making powers of a Sufi saint continued even after his death—in fact, posthumous powers were stronger.[61] The shrine therefore became the fount of *baraka*, transmitted to followers through the *khalifa*.

To make mysticism adaptable and relevant in his followers' professional and urban lives, Ghulam Muhammad exercised a decisive influence on the outcome of material desires, which enhanced his religious authority. He tied his adherents to himself with a system of spiritual help and patronage, and mediated the access of his followers to the *shaykh* of the *silsila* who could intercede with God regarding their mundane life desires. A group of fifteen pilots from the Pakistan Air Force planned to visit the *shaykh*'s grave. A few hours before their departure, Ghulam Muhammad received a message through his spiritual conversation with the *shaykh* to postpone the visit. A short while later, the pilots received official orders to fly to their forward operating bases.[62] Ghulam Muhammad described his unique way of initiating people in his *silsila* through *alqa*, or controlling the heart and bringing the soul into submission through spiritual labour. The ability to master the spiritual world and reach its source of power, the power of a transcendental encounter, the spiritual power of *kashf-ul-qabur* (to know, see and communicate inside the grave), which empowered him to communicate with the dead in the grave, were the key tropes that connected him with his followers.[63]

Unlike Allahyar, who had made his disciples conscious of the moral dangers of over-attachment to temporal power, Ghulam Muhammad only advised his followers to live a righteous life. This was a practicable way to respond to both worldly and otherworldly concerns and a real key to his sustained vitality.[64] It was in this context that Ghulam Muhammad developed a sphere of influence in the military; he managed to

60. Interview with Major Ghulam Muhammad, Wan Bhachran, 23 July 2019.
61. See Claudia Liebeskind, *Piety on Its Knees: Three Sufi Traditions in South Asia in Modern Times* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Jurgen Wasim Frembgen, 'The Majzub Mama Ji Sarkar: "A Friend of God Moves from One House to Another"', in Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu (eds), *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 140–59 [155].
62. *Ibid.*
63. Interview with Major Ghulam Muhammad, Wan Bhachran, 6 Sept. 2019.
64. See Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2013).

stay distant from the locals but still created a community which indicates a nexus between military patronage and Deobandi Islam.

Comrades-in-arms: The power of the military socio-economic network

The *jamaat* worked with a combination of prestigious clientele, financial support from the followers and *baraka*. The relations between Ghulam Muhammad and his followers were extensions of other socialities as well. The followers were not only *pir-bhai*, they were also consociates in many contexts, comrades in-arms, and this served to deepen relations of amity between them. It countered the formal relations of hierarchy in military settings. Their religion became a means to create shared relations of sociality among the followers, transcending the formal occupational relationship of the military's hierarchical ranks. Diffusion of fame was enabled by linking the *silsila* with the centres of power, moved from one cantonment to the other through these officials, who thus became an important motor of social and religious change.

The political economy of the *jamaat* was an essential aspect of its ability to sustain itself and those who were associated with it. The shrine network continued to operate as an economic nervous system. The client community had the economic power to patronise the *jamaat.* The patronage ranged from the petty cash offerings of *nazar* or *futuh* (unasked for charity) to financing annual *ijtema*, arranging *halqa-e-dhikr* on special sacred occasions like *mawlid* (birthday of the Prophet), and construction of residential areas for members of the *jamaat*. Voluntary labour was provided by the women of their households for cooking food and arranging accommodation and other accessories for devotees at *ijtema.*[65] The *jamaat* was entirely funded by its urban constituency which might be one reason for its dissociation from the local community. The disciples' monetary support was the principal means by which they exerted their influence in the religious economy of the *jamaat.*

In a religious sense, the *baraka-futuh* system defined and sustained the Sufis' intermediary status between devotees and God. As Eaton maintains, 'the Sufi' giving of *baraka* and [the] devotee's giving of *futuh* provided a structural framework upon which the subsequent devotionalism of [the] shrine rested'.[66] The Sufi served as a channel to intercede with God for the fulfilment of wishes.[67] In a social and institutional sense, the *baraka-futuh* system served as a source of distribution of material wealth. It is through recognition of such patronage that we can make sense of the reciprocity that supported this religious culture. It assured satisfaction to both the providers and users of the Sufi's supernatural services. This is not to underestimate the affection between the Sufi and his followers but to understand the institutional influence through patronage above emotion.

65. Interview with Sibt-e-Hassan, Lahore, 16 July 2019.
66. Richard Maxwell Eaton, 'The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid', in Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), pp. 336–7.
67. Nizami, *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam.*

Exclusion along the matrix of knowledge and power

Ghulam Muhammad started the *silsila* based on the Deobandi model of teaching, the esoteric (Sufi doctrine) and the exoteric (Sharia) perfectly fused in his theological thinking.[68] He used his mystical powers such as *muraqaba* (contemplation), *dhikr* at the graveside, *kashf-ul-qabur* (power to see the spiritual condition of the deceased in the grave), and domination over the supernatural, the *jinns*, as a marketable service to attract followers and to create a niche in the social space of rural society. In the traditional rural cosmology, a *pir* or a spiritual figure is crucial in impeding, intervening in and transforming material conditions, regardless of his outward religious affiliation. Their interest in the religio-mystical dimension took them to Ghulam Muhammad to seek his help in their sociological-existential needs.[69] According to Ghulam Muhammad, the greatest relief he gave to people was in the exorcism of *jinns*, a common problem in rural communities.[70] People visited him to get amulets to cure an ailment against the evil effects of the devil.

Approaching Sufism through the lens of exclusion and inculcating mystical practices within the different strands of Islam undermined the esoteric aspect and were not counted by its practitioners as a real expression of Sufism. This was evident when Ghulam Muhammad defined the boundaries of religion by denigrating tomb-based practices and said that ritual celebrations such as *mawlid* and '*urs*, invoked conflict'.[71] He took a superior position which he defined as separation from devotional practices, considering it an embodiment of true religious ideas, and declared the shrine-oriented practices as excesses and deviance from Sharia. The conflict was partially because of a division between the Deobandis and the Barelvis in terms of performative actions, everyday life rituals, prayers, funerals and religious institutions from mosques to *madrasas*. It is instructive to note that religious ideology worked at two levels in Wan Bhachran—the ideology articulated by the reform-minded *ulema* represented the Deobandis, and the ideology which consisted of popular interpretation of shrine-based religious traditions marked the Barelvis. Both converged on *tasawwuf* and Sufi ethos, but the two dimensions of these ideologies continually came in conflict with each other and created divisions between them.

Ghulam Muhammad's contestation of devotional practices opened a space for the people to question his grave-centred practices. He trod on the modernist and reformist discourse of Sharia Islam, however, in terms of performative actions, he observed rituals and practices that carried the labels 'traditional', 'shrine-oriented', 'heterodox' and antithetical to Deobandi theology in the perception of a lay rural following.[72] This also indicates the resilience of the local devotional traditions which led him to embrace these practices to bolster his authority but adapt them to his own needs by putting an Islamic content into them. As he claimed, the practices he performed were mystical,

68. On the same concept, see Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*.
69. Existentialism is a form of philosophical inquiry that explores the problem of human existence and focuses on the lived experience of human beings—feeling, acting a sense of fear, everyday life problems, confusion and anxiety: see Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1983).
70. Interview with Ghulam Muhammad, Wan Bhachran, 18 Sept. 2019. Also see Katherine Pratt Ewing, 'The Sufi as Saint, Curer, and Exorcist in Modern Pakistan', in *Contributions to Asian Studies*, Vol. 18 (1984), pp. 106–14 [108].
71. See Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*.
72. Interview with Professor Ziauddin, Mianwali, 26 Dec. 2019.

but within the boundaries of Sharia.[73] The contestation by local people found its expression in ridiculing the way *dhikr* was performed at graves, which they contemptuously called '*gardan tor dhikr*' (neck-breaking) as the *dhakir* moved their necks briskly during *dhikr*. The *dhikr* acted as a coherent set of practices to combat heterogeneous practices, so it was often condemned. The Barelvi ideologues, especially the *maulvi* and the *khateeb*, who considered himself to be the upholder of Islam, questioned Ghulam Muhammad's claims to be able to perform *kashf-ul-qabur* and *muraqaba*.[74] He rebuked them, saying: 'I will show you the conditions of deads (*sic*) inside the grave and will communicate with them before you. Then you have to exercise all those rituals which I undertake, i.e., recitation of *wazaif*, *chilla* (retreat) of forty days, fasting and abstain from certain foods like fish, meat onion etc.'.[75] According to Ghulam Muhammad, the *khateeb* did not accept his challenge and tried to mobilise the influential local elites against him and to restrain his religious activities.[76] Ghulam Muhammad's claim to celestial powers was seen by the *maulvi* as a challenge to his hegemonic position and the established norms. Ghulam Muhammad's strong response to the *maulvi* showed that he neither attempted to convince nor impose rationality on the *maulvi*, but preferred to dismiss him.

Ghulam Muhammad took a subject position against the negative views of the *maulvi* and the *khateeb*, saying: 'I am not a *pir*' and that 'people don't come for me, they come for their personal needs, they are not interested in *dhikr* or joining the *silsila*, I am not a *pir*, these practices affect my *dhikr*'.[77] By saying this, he denied religious services to the local people who were mostly of the Barelvi denomination. This shows that he reinforced the partial split in scholarship between Sufism as a rigorous spiritual discipline transmitted from spiritual teacher to qualified disciple on the one hand, and '*piri-muridi*', a term that is usually used pejoratively in Pakistan today which denotes the blind devotion of lay followers (*murids*) to a *pir* who they expect to act as a spiritual mediator for them, on the other. Denying them access to religious services created the space for speculation and contestation.[78] The exclusion of local society created a social distance which became a means of self-concealment and awe, keeping the local people in a state of mystification regarding Ghulam Muhammad's religious practices.[79] In their view, Ghulam Muhammad could not empathise with the social and cultural climate and the needs of the locality.[80]

The exclusion of local society was done along the matrix of knowledge (Sharia, law) and power with an exclusive rhetoric embedded in the reformist variant of South Asian Islam which, in subsequent years, became the principal determinant of the national identity of Pakistan. I use the word, power, in the Foucauldian sense, as a strategy to

73. For a contestation of Sufism, see de Jong and Radtke (eds), *Islamic Mysticism Contested*; Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*; and Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), chap. 5.
74. Interview with Ghulam Muhammad, Wan Bhachran, 12 Aug. 2019.
75. Interview with Ghulam Muhammad, Wan Bhachran, 10 Sept. 2019.
76. Interview with Salman Ahmad, Lahore, 24 Sept. 2019.
77. *Ibid.*
78. Dominique Sila Khan, *Crossing the Threshold: Understanding Religious Identities in South Asia* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004).
79. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1956), pp. 44–5.
80. Pinto, *Piri–Muridi Relationship*, p. 165; also see Richard Kurin, 'The Structure of Blessedness at a Muslim Shrine in Pakistan', in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 19, no. 3 (July 1983), pp. 312–25.

exclude the local society to sustain the social cohesion and homogeneity of the constituency.[81] A common socio-cultural background and professional affiliation amongst Ghulam Muhammad's followers was vital to maintaining homogeneity and elite control in the *silsila*. Ghulam Muhammad claimed that the exclusion of local society was achieved by a strategy of gathering urban and military disciples who had superior rational knowledge and by categorically excluding locals who followed devotional practices. He differentiated between mystical and devotional practices, classifying the former as steeped in esoteric Sufi doctrine which could not filter down to rural common folk in a comprehensible and appealing form.[82] He believed only his followers were capable of having the right inquiring perception of religion. Considering rural adherents to be of inferior cognitive status in the socio-religious world, he disconnected from the local manifestation of Islam because he thought the integration of local or popular interpretations of religious culture into the *silsila* could only disrupt its social cohesion. Here religion was used in terms of its functional importance to social integration and in terms of maintaining the status quo.

Since the production of the discourse of knowledge and the exclusion of the locals was a simultaneous process, the knowledge produced in this process of exclusion created binaries between esoteric and popular/devotional religious traditions. Inside the *jamaat*, it created a cohesive community which became a means of disseminating Ghulam Muhammad's textualist and mystical traditions; however, outside in society, it led to religious differences. Exclusion on the basis of religious difference was the leitmotif that exacerbated the conflict. Hence, here, religion served as an instrument of social discrimination and boundary-making along the matrix of knowledge and power.

Conclusion

If local elites provided a cover for Barelvi Islam, the patronage of a military constituency extended legitimacy to Deobandi theology. However, the support and patronage of a military constituency did not give Ghulam Muhammad social prominence since he had no theoretical integration in the microcosm of local society. His relationship with Sharia and Sufism was of a strict and disciplined form within the normative framework of an intellectual tradition. His Sufi-inspired Deobandi Islam did not reflect Sufism's tendency to build bridges across divides, rather it developed an ambivalent relationship with the popular/devotional form of religiosity which in turn created conflict and strife. The rituals and practices which were construed as the central fabric of social relations became sources of strife as disparate religious beliefs could not act as social cement but bounded people into competing groups. This was primarily because rural Islam, rooted in devotional practices, was contested by the reformists and reduced to some form of 'deviance', whereas the other two aspects, textual Islam and Sufi doctrine, were considered to be the 'true religion'. On one side, religious identities and

81. See Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (Routledge: London, 2003); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 38; and Giuliana Parodi and Dario Sciulli (eds), *Social Exclusion: Short and Long Term Causes and Consequences* (Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2012), p. 45.

82. For the argument about traditional and reformist Islam, see Nizami, *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam*; and Julia Day Howell, *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007).

traditions are integrated, diffused and overlapping, whereas on the other, they are sharply defined. The former's diffuse identities that cut across communities persisted side by side with the latter's vigorous attempts to articulate singular, exclusive identities rooted in a Sharia-oriented national narrative. Textual and devotional practices co-existed in a state of tension in the country.[83] Religious authority thus became involved in boundary-making and boundary-breaking. Religion became an instrument of religious 'binary' and 'social category', and this binary was created along the grid of knowledge and power.

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83. See V.S. Kalra and N.K. Purewal, *At the Interstices of Religious Identity in India and Pakistan: Gender and Caste Borders and Boundaries* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); and Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld (eds), *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation and Conflict* (Delhi: Social Science Press, 2003).