THE VALLEY OF KASHMIR

The Making and Unmaking of a Composite Culture?

Edited by

APARNA RAO

With a Foreword and an Introductory Essay by

T.N. MADAN

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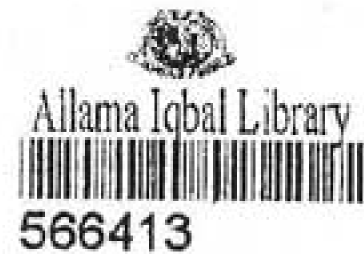

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CHAPTER 12

Popular Kashmiri Sufism and the Challenge of Scripturalist Islam (1900-1989)

YOGINDER SIKAND

INTRODUCTION

Modernity has meant a considerable redefinition of the ways in which people come to see themselves and their place in the world. For many Muslims, like others, modernity has also meant a radical re-questioning of traditional world-views and understandings of religion. One of the most significant developments in the Muslim world as a result, principally, of the challenges of modernity, has been the decline of popular Sufism linked to the cults centred on the shrines of the saints (*auliya*), it being replaced either by a more scripturalist understanding of Sufism in line with the Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions or by a vision of Islam that has no place at all for Sufism as such (Sirriyeh 1999). It is apparent that there has always been a certain tension between popular Sufism, on the one hand, and the *shari'ah*-centred Islam of important sections of the *'ulama*, on the other. The most well-known instance of *'ulama* critique of popular Sufism emerged from the noted medieval Hanbali scholar, Ibn Taimiya (CE 1268-1328), from whom many modern-day opponents of Sufism draw their inspiration.

Although the distinction between Sufis and *'ulama* has not been rigid or clear-cut, the tension between the two seems to have been exacerbated with the onset of modernity in the Muslim world from the late eighteenth century onwards. In South Asia,

challenges to popular Sufism were also mounted from within the Sufi tradition itself, by such reformers as the seventeenth-century Naqshbandi, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1634), and the eighteenth-century Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1702-63). These Sufis, who were themselves leading *'ulama*, were particularly concerned with what they saw as the 'unlawful innovations' (*bida'at*) that had come to be associated with popular Sufism, and sought to reconcile Sufism with the *shari'ah*.

The word 'Sufi' is itself not found in the Qur'an, although the Sufis claim to be the true heirs of the Prophet. They believe that the mystical path or *tariqat* leads finally to the true knowledge of God (*ma'rifat*), culminating in a particularly close relationship with God (*haqiqat*). Sufism is not one homogeneous body of thought or practice, however, and is characterized by a variety of different strands, some mutually opposed to each other. Thus, most Sufis would stress the need for strict observance of the *shari'ah* as integral to the *tariqat*. Others, known as the *be-shar'* would insist that there is no need for the adept to abide by the rules of Islamic law. Some Sufis believe in the 'unity of all existence' (*wahdat al-wujud*), finding God in all things. Others, more *shari'ah*-minded, stress instead that God is fully transcendent, and believe in *wahdat al-shuhud*, 'unity of witness'), all creatures witnessing to the One. Some Sufis preach an extreme passivity to the point of renouncing the world. Others stress a this-worldly involvement, and have even been leaders of militant *jihad* movements against colonial powers, as in many countries in Asia and Africa. Sufis are divided into different orders or mystical brotherhoods. Although they share certain core beliefs they practise different meditational techniques as part of their spiritual regimen. In Kashmir the major orders are the Naqshbandi, the Qadri, the Suhrawardi, the Kubrawi (an offshoot of the Suhrawardi), and the Rishi. All, expect for the last-mentioned, have their origins in Iran and Central Asia.

The challenge to popular Sufism from the late eighteenth century onward received a further impetus from European imperialism, as country after country in the Muslim world succumbed to the advancing forces of the British, the French, the Russians, and the Dutch. Faced with the loss of Muslim political and economic power (Chaudhuri 1985) and the

mounting challenge of aggressive Christian missionaries, several leading Sufis of the time led mass *jihad* movements in various Muslim countries. Such, for instance, were the *jihad* in Sudan under the self-proclaimed Mahdi, the *jihad* in north-west India led by Sayyed Ahmad Shahid and Ismail Shahid against the Sikhs, the *jihads* in Bengal led by Haji Shari'atullah, Dudu Mian and Titu Mir against the local, largely Hindu landlords and the British, and Imam Shemyl's *jihad* in the Caucasus against the Russians. Besides seeking to challenge imperialist rule, these Sufi-led movements also sought to cleanse Muslim societies of what they saw as 'un-Islamic' superstitions and practices which they believed had no sanction in the *shari'ah*. In this way, the message of 'reformist' Sufism began to receive a mass hearing. A more socially involved, this-worldly form of Islam now came to gain a growing popularity, and the 'passivity', 'superstition', and 'other-worldliness' that popular Sufism was seen by many to have degenerated into was sharply critiqued as having led to Muslim powerlessness in the face of external attacks.

Exposure to Western culture and the challenges of modernity, in particular the emergence of a modern educational system under colonial rule, seem also to have goaded several Muslims to re-question popular Sufism, seeing it as not only promoting superstition, helplessness and fatalism, but as also 'un-Islamic' in itself. Among the most prominent of these were the Salafis[1] Mohammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida of Egypt and Sayyed Ahmad Khan of India, all of whom were also, to some extent, influenced by the critique of Sufism of the eighteenth-century Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Wahhab of Najd, the founder of the so-called Wahhabi movement, and either condemned Sufism outright or else advocated a form of Sufism which was in keeping with the *shari'ah*.

This chapter looks at the challenges to popular Sufism in Kashmir from the early twentieth century to 1989 in the form of two separate Islamic movements, the Ahl-i-Hadith and the Jama'at-i-Islami, both of which, despite their differences, share

[1]The word 'salafi' comes from the word 'salaf', meaning pious elders. The Salafis advocated reform of Muslim society by exhorting Muslims to go back to the path of Muhammad and his companions, bypassing the centuries of tradition that had accumulated in between.

a common aversion to popular Sufism. The year 1989, which marks the launching of the mass movement for self-determination in Kashmir, represents a crucial turning point in the history of Kashmir and in the relations between upholders of the popular Sufi traditions and their critics. Prior to 1989, for many opponents of the popular Sufi tradition it was the Sufis and their followers who represented their principal target of attack, but with the onset of the mass uprising in the region, 'Hindus' and 'India' have now taken their place. Hence, the period after 1989 is qualitatively different from the years preceding it.

Among the important questions that this chapter seeks to deal with are the different ways in which the Ahl-i-Hadith and the Jama'at constructed their opposition to popular Sufism and their own understandings of 'true' Islam; the reaction of the defenders of the cults of the saints to the attacks by both these groups; and the changing notions of religious authority that these attacks seemed to suggest. In looking at these intra-Muslim debates, the chapter highlights the plural understandings of 'true' Islam and the heated, often violent contestations over it by rival claimants. The chapter is based on an examination of texts produced by the Ahl-i-Hadith and the Jama'at and is supplemented with interviews with activists and ideologues of the movements.

I first begin with a brief overview of the history of the spread of Islam in Kashmir, noting that this was almost entirely synonymous with the efforts of generations of various Sufi missionaries belonging to different orders (*silsilahs*). I then examine the emergence of the Ahl-i-Hadith, followed by the Jama'at, in Kashmir, looking at how these movements for 'reform' of popular devotion sought to relate to the powerfully rooted popular Sufi traditions in the region.

THE SPREAD OF ISLAM IN KASHMIR

The history of conversion to Islam in Kashmir as a mass movement is synonymous with the peaceful efforts of various Sufis in the area beginning from the early fourteenth century after the establishment of the region's first Muslim dynasty

(Bukhari 1998: 4). There is clear evidence of Islam having entered Kashmir considerably before that, however, but this did not assume the form of large-scale conversions. Legend has it that the Prophet Muhammad had dispatched two emissaries to the court of the seventh-century Kashmiri king, Vena Dutt, who is said to have been so impressed by their exposition of their faith that he began 'leading a simple life and even distributed one-tenth of his agricultural produce amongst the poor and needy as *ushr* [an Islamic levy]' (Mohiuddin n.d.: 44). It is also said that after Muhammad bin Qasim and his army defeated Dahir, the Hindu king of Sind, in CE 711, Dahir's son Jaisiya fled to Kashmir taking along with him a Syrian Muslim general of his army, one Hamim bin Sama. Hamim, apparently, was warmly welcomed by a Hindu king of Kashmir and given an estate, where he built several mosques and laid the foundation of a flourishing Muslim community (ibid.: 18). We also hear of an anonymous early ninth-century Kashmiri Hindu king who wrote a letter to Amir 'Abdullah bin 'Umar bin 'Abdul 'Aziz of Mansura, requesting him to dispatch a scholar to his court who could 'explain the tenets of the Islamic *shari'ah* in *al-Hindia* language' (Directorate of Information 1998: 113-14). The ninth-century Arab traveller Buzurg bin Shahryar mentions in his travelogue, *Aja'ib-ul Hind* [The Wonders of India], that the Hindu king of Mehroke in Kashmir had commissioned the preparation of a Kashmiri translation of the Holy Qur'an (Didamari 1998: 117). Firm evidence of the Muslim presence predating considerably the establishment of Muslim rule in Kashmir is available from the twelfth century onwards. Kalhana, the noted twelfth-century Kashmiri Brahman scholar, writes in his *Rajatarangini* that the Kashmiri Hindu king Harshadeva (CE 1089-1101) employed many '*mlecchas*' (a derogatory term he uses for Muslims) in his court and army (Bukhari 1998: 6 cite original).

Yet it was only from the early fourteenth century that great masses of Kashmiris began converting to Islam in large numbers. In this process, various Sufi missionaries had a crucial role to play. The earliest known Sufi in Kashmir was the Turkistani Suhrawardi Hazrat Sayyed Sharfuddin 'Abdur Rahman, more commonly known as Bulbul Shah. As a wandering dervish, Hazrat Bulbul Shah travelled extensively in West and Central Asia

before finally arriving in Kashmir in CE 1295, in the reign of the last Hindu king of Kashmir, Raja Suha Dev. It is believed that he stayed in Kashmir for a short while on his first trip and returned to Central Asia, but later came back in CE 1324 in the reign of the Buddhist ruler Rinchen Shah, in whose conversion to Islam he played a central role (Kardar 1979: 48). Following the conversion of Rinchen Shah and his family, several other leading Kashmiris also followed suit, most notably Rawanchandra, son of the Hindu king Ramachandra who had been deposed by Rinchen Shah. It is said that, in all, Hazrat Bulbul Shah succeeded in making some ten thousand converts to Islam through peaceful missionary effort, although this figure seems considerably exaggerated (Rafiq 1979: 27). The next Sufi of note to preach in Kashmir was the Iranian Kubrawi, Hazrat Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani (b. CE 1313/14), who is credited with having made numerous converts in the area. He established a Sufi hospice, the Khanqah-i-Mu'alla, on the banks of the Jhelum in the heart of Srinagar, adjacent to the city's main temple, which he built into a centre for his missionary endeavours. Mir Sayyid 'Ali was a great scholar and prolific writer, and penned numerous Sufi treatises in Persian and Arabic. Although he was strict in matters of the *shari'ah,* he understood the need to present Islam in a form intelligible to the Kashmiris. Thus, he introduced in the mosques the loud, collective chanting of litanies in praise of God and the Prophet before every prayer, the *aurad-i-fathiyya,* resembling the chanting of *mantras* in Hindu temples in Kashmir (I. Khan 1994: 25). This practice is still followed in most mosques in Kashmir till today, and is a distinguishing feature of Islam in the area, being unknown elsewhere.

This accommodation to the local Kashmiri context did not proceed far enough, however. Mir Sayyid 'Ali and his Iranian disciples who had accompanied him to Kashmir wrote and preached in Persian and Arabic, which few Kashmiris could understand. Further, they were based largely in Srinagar, close to the royal court, and thus had few links with the Kashmiri masses, most of whom resided in far-flung villages. It was left to Hazrat Nuruddin Nurani (1356-1440), commonly known as Nund Rishi, to transform conversion to Islam into a mass movement, by expressing it in a form rooted in pre-Islamic

Kashmiri traditions, using these traditions as a vehicle for the spread of Islam. Nund Rishi was born in CE 1356 at the village of Kaimuh, the son of a poor Rajput family who had recently converted to Islam. Following in the path of the Hindu and Buddhist mendicants or Rishis before him, he renounced the world at the age of thirty-two, retiring to caves in the mountains and performing severe austerities. Some years later he is believed to have come under the influence of Mir Muhammad Hamadani, the son of Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani, after which he resolved to transform the Rishi movement into a vehicle for social transformation and the spread of Islam. Renouncing the world, Nund Rishi now came to believe, was an act of cowardice and tantamount to escapism. A true Rishi, he stressed, must actively intervene in the world, taking the side of the poor and the oppressed and crusading for social justice, based on the recognition of the equality of all human beings in the eyes of the one God. Under Nund Rishi and his deputies (*khulafa*), Rishism emerged as a powerful social movement, bitterly critiquing the oppression of the Brahmans and of the '*ulama* attached to the royal court. Nund Rishi's poetic compositions, replete with motifs based on the everyday life of the toiling people, his denunciation of meaningless ritualism, and his scathing attack of social elites attracted large numbers of Kashmiris, mainly from among the 'lower' castes, into the Muslim fold. For these converts Islam did not, however, appear as a radically new or alien religion, and this, in fact, facilitated the conversion process. The genius of the missionary approach of the Muslim Rishis lay in their successful effort to inculturate their message in a form that ordinary Kashmiris could understand. Thus, in contrast to the Brahmans who despised the Kashmiri language as 'barbaric' and preached in Sanskrit, and to the Iranian and Central Asian '*ulama* attached to the royal court who spoke and wrote in Arabic and Persian, the Rishis preached in the language of the people, employing the genre of poetry to readily appeal to the masses. Indeed, Nund Rishi's own poetic compositions, considered to be among the gems of Kashmiri literature, were granted the status of *Koshur Qur'an* or the Kashmiri commentary on the Muslim holy scripture. Further, the lifestyle of the Muslim Rishis drew heavily upon pre-Islamic traditions. Thus, many of them

spent long periods in forests and caves practising stern austerities. They remained strict vegetarians, going so far as to avoid eating even green vegetables for fear of taking the life of any sentient being. Most of them remained unmarried. For these and other seeming transgressions of the Islamic law, the Rishis were sharply rebuked by many *'ulama* who could not appreciate that it was only through such accommodation to the local context that Islam could make any headway among the Kashmiris (I. Khan 1997).

Over time Muslim Rishism emerged as by far the most popular Sufi order in Kashmir and the only indigenous *silsilah*. Yet over the years, as Islam came to consolidate itself among the Kashmiris, the Rishi order was gradually absorbed into more *shari'ah*-observant *silsilahs*. The turning point in this regard was the initiation by the then head of the Rishis, the seventeenth-century Baba Harde [Haider] Rishi of Anantnag (Islamabad), into the Suhrawardi order at the hands of the leading Suhrawardi Sufi of his day, Shaikh Makhdum Hamza. Presumably by this time almost all of Kashmir had accepted Islam, at least nominally, and this act might be understood as signifying that the popular tradition had, in a sense, outlived its usefulness as a means for the spread of Islam in Kashmir. Although after that the Rishi order ceased to exist as an independent *silsilah*, the graves (*astana, dargah*) of the Rishis, scattered all over rural Kashmir, continued to attract large numbers of Kashmiris, including many Hindus (Sikand 2000).

Till the end of the nineteenth century, Sufism remained the dominant expression of Islam among the Sunnis of Kashmir. Most Kashmiri Muslims owed allegiance to one Sufi order or the other. Many had taken the oath of allegiance (*ba'yat*) at the hands of a Sufi preceptor (*pir*). Even those who had not, regularly visited their shrines, which were controlled by a class of religious intermediaries (*sajjada nashins, makhdums, pirzadas*)[2] who claimed descent from the buried saints. In return for a fee,

[2]*Sajjada nashins* are hereditary successors to the position of deputies of deceased Sufis. They are often referred to with the honorific title of 'Makhdum' or 'Master'. In many cases, although this was not true in the period of the early development of Sufism, they were sons of the Sufi

the custodians were believed to be able to mediate between the pilgrims, who consisted of both Muslims and Hindus, and the saints beseeching them to implore God to grant their requests and wishes. Over time, many custodians emerged as powerful landlords, some having been granted estates as jagirs by various rulers. Rituals at the shrines included many practices which were later to be condemned as un-Islamic, including prostrating before graves, music, sacrificing animals, and even, in a few cases, consumption of drugs. Singing of Sufi music at shrines on ritual occasions was a common phenomenon. Other practices included sacrificing cocks to ward off attacks of small pox, *roth ka nazar*, distributing home-made bread filled with nuts and sugar at shrines; shaving the hair of infants such as at the shrine of Baba Rishi near Tang Marg; revering relics attributed to saints and to the Prophet; and believing in magical portents and spirits. Writing at the turn of the nineteenth century, Walter Lawrence, Settlement Commissioner of the Jammu and Kashmir state, remarked on the 'laxness', 'indifference' and 'apathy' in matters of religion of the Sunni Muslims of Kashmir. Commenting on the common practices that Islamic reformers were to castigate as 'un-Islamic', he wrote, echoing the sentiments of the reformers, with some exaggeration thus:

> The indifference shown in the matter of mosques and Mullahs may be accounted for by the fact that the Kashmiri Sunnis are only Musalmans in name. In their hearts they are Hindus, and the religion of Islam is too abstract to satisfy their superstitious cravings, and they turn from the mean priest and the mean mosque to the pretty shrines of carved wood and roof bright with the iris flowers where the saints of past time lie buried. (Lawrence 1895: 286-7)

On the other hand, nineteenth-century Kashmir lacked a well-developed class of *'ulama* well versed in the intricacies of the *shari'ah*, thus leaving the custodians of the shrines as the main source of religious authority for the Kashmiri Muslims. Although under the sultans of Kashmir, and later under the Mughals,

saints or *pirs*, and hence called *pirzadas* or 'sons of the *pir*'. Over time, in Kashmir the *pirzadas* of different shrines came to form a sort of caste by themselves, maintaining strict endogamy.

Kashmir boasted of several *madrasas* for the training of *'ulama*, in the decades of Sikh and then Dogra rule the *madrasas* fell into rapid decline, bereft of royal patronage and victims of what was undoubtedly the anti-Muslim policy of the new rulers. Small *maktabs* attached to mosques continued to function, but larger *madrasas* were almost extinct. For higher religious training in the *shar'iah* Kashmiris were forced to travel to Punjab and Delhi, but only a few managed to do so. On the whole, then, Kashmir remained cut-off from the wave of Islamic reform that had begun to spread in north India with Shah Waliullah of Delhi and his followers.

STIRRINGS OF CHANGE

Under the Hindu Dogra rulers Muslims, who formed the vast majority of the population of the state of Jammu and Kashmir accounting for over 80 per cent of the population, remained an ill-treated, oppressed community, mired in poverty and almost completely illiterate. The Raja treated the entire state as his personal possession. In a letter to the British Resident in 1897, the then Dogra Raja, Maharaja Pratap Singh, wrote, 'The state is my property and belongs to me and it is all my hereditary property' (Committee 1993: 34). Most lands in the Kashmir Valley were owned by the Raja himself and a small class of the Dogra feudal nobility or the Kashmiri Pandits who exercised a virtual monopoly in the state services. In 1921, a Pandit writer noted that 90 per cent of the houses of the Muslims of Srinagar, the state capital, were mortgaged to Hindu moneylenders (in Bose 1997: 24). As Prem Nath Bazaz, one of the few Kashmiri Pandits to have empathized with the plight of his Muslim countrymen and to have supported them in their cause for freedom, wrote, 'Dressed in rags which could hardly hide his body, and barefooted, a [Kashmiri] Muslim peasant presented the appearance rather of a starving beggar than one who filled the coffers of the state'. Most Kashmiri Muslim villagers, he said, were 'landless labourers working for absentee landlords. They hardly earned, as their share of the produce, enough for more than three months', being forced to spend the rest of the year unemployed or labouring in the towns in British India (Committee 1993: 34).

By the closing years of the nineteenth century, new stirrings of change began to emerge, and the Kashmiri Muslims mired in poverty came increasingly into contact with new developments from outside Kashmir. The origins of Islamic reformism in Kashmir go back to the late nineteenth century which witnessed the emergence of a new urban Kashmiri Muslim middle class championing the interests of the Muslim majority community against Dogra rule. One of the pioneers in this regard was the Mirwa'iz of Kashmir, the head of Srinagar's Jami'a Mosque, Maulana Rasul Shah (1855-1909), Distressed by the pathetic condition of his people and the widespread prevalence of what he saw as 'un-Islamic' innovations among them, particularly in the form of customs associated with popular Sufism, he established the Anjuman Nusrat ul-Islam (Society for the Victory of Islam) in 1899. The Anjuman aimed at spreading modern as well as Islamic education based strictly on the *shari'ah*, combating *bida'at*, as well as creating political awareness among the Muslims of the state (Faruq n.d.: 17). Through mass meetings and personal contacts, the Mirwa'iz and his associates preached against the 'superstitions' and practices associated with popular Sufism, calling for Muslims to mould their lives according to the *shari'ah*, and 'to become real Muslims (*haqiqi musalaman*) and true human beings (*sahih insan*)' (Anjuman 1982: 6). The Mirwa'iz seems to have encountered stiff opposition from some quarters, notably from some custodians (*mutawalis*) of Sufi shrines led by the rival Mirwa'iz of the Shah-i-Hamadan shrine (Zutshi 2000: 111), but his efforts to preach his reformist doctrines earned him considerable popularity, particularly among a section of the Muslim traders of Srinagar (Anjuman n.d.).

In 1905, the Anjuman set up the Islamiya High School in Srinagar, where modern scientific as well as Islamic education were imparted, and, over the years, it established several branches in small towns in Kashmir. Rasul Shah was succeeded by his younger brother Mirwa'iz Ahmadullah who expanded the work of the Anjuman further, setting up an Oriental College in Srinagar. Under his successor, Mirwa'iz Maulana Muhammad Yusuf Shah, the Anjuman developed links with Islamic reformist groups in India. Yusuf Shah was himself a product of the reformist Dar-ul 'Ulum Madrasa at Deoband (for a full-length

study of the Deobandis see Metcalf 1982), and when he returned to Kashmir after completing his studies in 1924, he set up a branch of the Khilafat Committee to promote the cause of the Ottoman Caliphate among the Kashmiris. Later, he played a central role in bringing many reform-minded Kashmiri *'ulama*, mainly Deobandis opposed to popular Sufism, onto a common platform, the Jami'at-ul 'Ulama-i-Kashmir (The Union of 'Ulama of Kashmir). To popularize the reformist cause, Yusuf Shah set up the first press in Kashmir, the Muslim Printing Press, launching two weeklies, *al-Islam* and *Rahnuma*, to broadcast the views of the Deobandis and to combat what were seen as the un-Islamic practices of the Kashmiri Muslims. He also translated and published the first Kashmiri translation of and commentary on the Qur'an so that ordinary Kashmiris could understand the Qur'an themselves rather than having to depend on the custodians of shrines for their religious instruction (Anjuman n.d.: 22-3). This new urban-centred Islamic reformism sought, thereby, to undermine the influence of the custodians of the shrines, many based in rural areas, as authoritative interpreters of the faith. It was in this context of growing Islamic reformism in Kashmir that the Ahl-i-Hadith took root.

THE AHL-I-HADITH IN KASHMIR

In the early twentieth century, links with Muslim groups in other parts of India, notably Punjab, Delhi, and Aligarh, brought a new breed of educated Kashmiri Muslims in touch with Islamic stirrings outside the state. This growing Islamic consciousness first manifested itself in the form of the Ahl-i-Hadith, a Muslim reformist movement whose origins in South Asia go back to the late eighteenth century.[3] The Ahl-i-Hadith saw the decline of the Muslims as a result of their having strayed from the path of the

[3]The Ahl-i-Hadith drew principally on the reformist programme of the Arabian Wahhabis, founded by the eighteenth-century Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Wahhab. There is little to distinguish the two except that, unlike the Ahl-i-Hadith, the Wahhabis stress a modified adherence to the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. Both groups sternly oppose Sufism, in both its popular as well as its 'orthodox' varieties.

Prophet and from strict monotheism (*tauhid*), and sought to purge Muslim society of what they saw as 'un-Islamic' accretions, most notably the 'blind following' (*taqlid*) of the four schools of jurisprudence (*mazahib*) and the beliefs and practices associated with Sufism. For the Ahl-i-Hadith, any innovations from the path of the Prophet, as represented by the Qur'an and the records of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet (*hadith*), were condemned as un-Islamic. The Ahl-i-Hadith did not emerge as a mass movement, however, for its fierce opposition to Sufism and the schools of jurisprudence earned it the wrath of the Sunni establishment. It did, however, manage to win a limited support among sections of the Muslim urban elite.

In Kashmir, the origins of the Ahl-i-Hadith go back to the late nineteenth century, when a Kashmiri student of an Ahl-i-Hadith *madrasa* in Delhi, Sayyed Hussain Shah Batkhu, returned to Srinagar and began a campaign against the 'unlawful' innovations his fellow Muslims wallowed in (Khan 2000: 133). As in India, the Ahl-i-Hadith in Kashmir did not manage to secure a mass base, however, owing principally to the fact that Kashmiri Muslims were deeply rooted in their Sufi traditions. Bashin Ahmad Khan, in his study of the history of Srinagar, writes that by the early 1920s, prior to the arrival of the Ahl-i-Hadith, Sufi shrines, to be found in almost every street in the town, had emerged as 'the chief centres of superstition and charlatanism', controlled by 'crafty, hypocritical and materialist mullahs', who 'kept the common folk in the dark'. Priesthood, an institution foreign to pristine Islam, was deeply entrenched, with the custodians of the Sufi shrines emerging as 'an important exploiting agency in an organized manner'. For most Kashmiris, Islam seems to have been 'nothing more than the observance of a certain set of rituals'. M.I. Khan (1999: 109-12) sees the Ahl-i-Hadith as the first organized effort in Kashmir to raise its voice against these 'superstitious practices' and to appeal to Muslims to reform their beliefs and customs in line with the *shari'ah*.

The early Ahl-i-Hadith saw Kashmiri Muslim society as having strayed far from the path of the Prophet, indeed as hardly different from their 'polytheist' (*mushrik*) Hindu neighbours. As the movement understood it, the Kashmiris were still incomplete

Muslims, for despite having formally accepted Islam, they continued to follow many un-Islamic practices. Thus, the official historian of the Kashmiri Ahl-i-Hadith lamented, 'Idol-worship had been replaced by worship of the graves of Sufis, worship of the Hindu avatars by worship of the Sufis and Hindu Pandits by *dargah* custodians. While giving assent to the Islamic concept of strict monotheism, the Kashmiris continued in practice to worship beings other than Allah' (Muslim 1984: 20). The belief that the Sufis could be beseeched to grant one's wishes or to intercede with God on one's behalf and customs such as prostrating before the graves of the Sufis, reciting litanies in the mosques and shrines, celebrating the birth and death anniversaries of the Prophet and the saints, lighting lamps at shrines, and even constructing tombs over graves were all seen as tantamount to *shirk*, the unforgivable crime of associating others with God. They were also condemned as *bida'at*, wrongful innovations that had no sanction in the actual practice (*sunnat*) of the Prophet, the punishment for which was burning in the fires of hell (ibid.: 20).

Such practices were seen as having resulted from the baneful influence of the Hindus rather than as a result of the gradual acculturation of Sufism in the area, which had, in fact, enabled Islam to win great masses of converts among the Kashmiris. Hence what had till then seemed for the Kashmiri Muslims to be an integral part of their understanding of Islam was clearly defined as 'Hindu' and thus condemned. Shared religious traditions and spaces where Hindus and Muslims joined together for common worship, such as the shrines of the saints, were seen as threatening the purity and integrity of the community, and hence to be vigorously opposed. The early activists of the Ahl-i-Hadith insisted that Muslims should abandon all such 'Hindu' customs and live in line with the *shari'ah*. The Kashmiri Muslims were expected to model their lives as closely as they could on the lives of the Prophet and his Companions, for one's faith in Islam was to be the sole marker of identity for a Muslim. This had crucial consequences for how Kashmiri activists in the Ahl-i-Hadith came to understand their own selves, as Muslims plain and simple, for separate regional or national cultures and identities were seen as divisive, leading to the

weakening of the worldwide Muslim *ummah*. The custodians of the shrines were accused of 'hiding the true message of Islam, just like the priests of the *People of the Book* [Jews and Christians] did', keeping the masses ignorant of the faith and inventing rituals and customs in order to make a living from the credulous as intermediaries between them and God, which had no sanction in Islam. They were bitterly condemned for having 'converted Islam into an industry, placing themselves as indispensable middlemen, and even going so far as declaring that they were able to rescind God's commandments as a sign of the great spiritual stature that they claimed for themselves' (ibid.: 87).

Not surprisingly, Batkhu and his small band of followers raised a storm of protest with their preaching, and were bitterly opposed by the custodians of the shrines whom they condemned as 'Brahmans in Muslim guise', describing their opposition as motivated by the fear that it might threaten their power and privileges (ibid.: 127). The custodians of some Sufi shrines of Srinagar complained to the Maharaja, warning him of the possibility of great violence and strife if Batkhu and his associates were not stopped from what they described as their attacks on Islam and the Sufis. Consequently, Batkhu was expelled from Srinagar, and took refuge in the town of Shopian where, along with a fellow Ahl-i-Hadith activist, Anwar Shah, he carried on his preaching, making a small number of followers in the town and in the neighbouring villages. Here too they had to suffer considerable opposition, accused of being 'irreligious' (*be din*) and 'deniers of the Sufis' (*munkar-i-auliya*), and therefore as apostates from Islam (ibid.: 100).

The official history of the Ahl-i-Hadith in Kashmir, published in 1984, five years before the outbreak of a militant revolt in the area against Indian rule, is replete with references to bitter clashes between the Ahl-i-Hadith and the followers of popular Sufism from the early years of the movement till the early 1980s. In this account, the state, which has now come to be seen as threateningly 'anti-Muslim', remains a silent spectator hovering in the background, a neutral, unobtrusive agency to which the Ahl-i-Hadith and its opponents sometimes resort to have their conflicts, such as over control of mosques or the freedom of Ahl-i-Hadith followers to attend the Eidgah for Eid

prayers, which the Hanafis refused, resolved. It is interesting to note that in this narrative no mention is made at all to opposition to or from the Hindus, and indeed it seems that for the Ahl-i-Hadith at this time the Hindus did not seem to be of any immediate concern as a target of attack. Its sole focus remained its fellow Sunni Muslims of Kashmir, whom it saw as having abandoned the true path. Although there are stray references to debates with the Ahmadis,[4] in which the Ahl-i-Hadith presents itself as the true champion of Islam, there is no mention of similar combats with the Shi'as, whom the Ahl-i-Hadith saw as heretics. In other words, at this stage of the movement the focus of attention of the Ahl-i-Hadith seems to have been overwhelmingly the internal 'other'.

The official history of the Ahl-i-Hadith in Kashmir refers to numerous cases of violent opposition by other Muslims to the Ahl-i-Hadith for its attacks on Sufism. Thus, some Ahl-i-Hadith activists are said to have been beaten up by other Muslims, driven out of their homes, subjected to social boycott, condemned as apostates, taken to court and refused entry into the mosques. Scores of *munazaras* or public religious debates were held between the two groups, all of which, or so this account tells us, resulted in the victory of the Ahl-i-Hadith (ibid.: 127-8). As a result of this virulent opposition to them, one of the first concerns of the Ahl-i-Hadith in Kashmir was to build its own mosques, to begin with mainly in Srinagar, where its followers prayed in their own distinctive fashion behind their own imams, not only because the Hanafis refused to allow them inside their mosques but also because they believed that it was not allowed to pray behind an imam not of their own persuasion. In contrast to the Hanafi Muslims of the Valley, they refused to chant the *aurad-i-fathiyya*, and in addition, they performed their prayers in a distinctive fashion which they claimed was the true Prophetic

[4]Known to their opponents as Qadianis, they are followers of the nineteenth-century Punjabi Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, who claimed to be a successor to the Prophet and some sort of prophet in his own right. Other Muslims vehemently opposed his claims as they interpreted them as going against the Islamic belief in the finality of the Prophet Muhammad.

practice, lifting their hands to their ears before each genuflection and reciting amen aloud, all of which set them clearly apart from the Hanafis. These external markers, along with the condemnation of Sufism, worked to build and consolidate a separate identity for the Ahl-i-Hadith, who saw itself as the only truly Muslim group. Its followers defined themselves as *muwahidun* or 'monotheists', as 'upholders of the *tauhid* (monotheism) and the Prophetic *sunnat*', in contrast to the other Kashmiri Sunnis whom they condemned as *ahl-i-batil* (the people of falsehood) and 'practitioners of *shirk* and *bida'at*', Muslims in name only, and thus, for all practical purposes, polytheists (ibid.: 107).

As for Sufism, the Ahl-i-Hadith condemned it outright, not making a distinction between 'Islamic' and 'un-Islamic' varieties, arguing that neither the Prophet nor his companions were Sufis and that Sufism was a later development, an un-Islamic accretion that had no sanction whatsoever in Islam. It recognized the contributions of numerous Sufis in the spread of Islam in Kashmir, but refused to recognize them as Sufis. Instead, they were presented as learned Muslims inspired by a sense of mission to spread the teachings of the Qur'an and the *sunnat*. Thus, for instance, in the official history of the Kashmiri Ahl-i-Hadith, Bulbul Shah, Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani, Mir Muhammad Hamadani, and Nund Rishi find a brief mention, but are described simply as strict upholders of *tauhid* and the *shari'ah*, no mention being made of their having been Sufis. A claim is made to inheriting the rightful legacy of Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani on the grounds that having been a Shafi'i, he must have followed the Prophetic practice of lifting his hands to his ears before each genuflection in the ritual prayer, a practice that—as mentioned earlier—set the Ahl-i-Hadith apart from the Hanafis and was a matter of heated controversy between the two. The great Kashmiri Suhrawardi, Makhdum Shaikh Hamza, is depicted as 'constantly engaged in jihad against the people of falsehood and the revilers of the Companions of the Prophet', the latter referring to the Shi'as, while no mention is made of him having been an accomplished mystic as well (ibid.: 43-6).

The early converts to the Ahl-i-Hadith seem to have been drawn principally from the ranks of the newly emerging Muslim middle class and trading families of the towns of Kashmir, particularly Srinagar, Shopian, and Anantnag (Islamabad). Few of them had access to modern Western education. The official history of the Ahl-i-Hadith mentions just two among the pioneers of the movement who had studied in a modern school, the Punjabi, Sayyed Ramzan 'Ali (d. 1945), who rose to become the superintendent of the veterinary department in Srinagar, and Maulana Muhammad Nuruddin, who had studied till the matriculation level. A minority were *madrasa* graduates from Punjab or Delhi, while many had received an informal Islamic education from learned Muslim scholars in Kashmir itself. Several of them had studied under the Mirwa'iz family who, although themselves Hanafis and associated with the Kubrawi Sufi *silsilah*, were vehement opponents of *bida'at* and *shirk*, and were among the pioneers of Islamic reformism in Kashmir. Some of these, such as Maulana Ghulam Nabi Mubaraki, Hafiz Sayyed Ahad Shah Rifa'i, and Maulana Muhammad Nuruddin, went on to become teachers at the school set up by the Mirwa'iz, where they were influenced by the teachings of the Ahl-i-Hadith, largely through personal networks. For others, travel to Punjab, to cities such as Amritsar and Sialkot, where the Ahl-i-Hadith had a significant presence, or Delhi for trade or religious education provided their first contact with the Ahl-i-Hadith and the new wave of Islamic reformism, which they brought back with them to Kashmir. A small number of activists came from established Sufi families with large followings, but chose to turn their backs on their ancestral profession. These included one Pir Muhammad Yahya of Acchakot, near Shopian, who is said to have participated in several *munazaras* against the *ahl-i-batil*. The most celebrated of them was Mirwa'iz Hasan (d. 1937), son of Mirwa'iz Rasul Shah, who came under the influence of Batkhu and joined the Ahl-i-Hadith, renouncing his privileges as son of the Mirwa'iz, and then went on to play an important role in the subsequent spread of the movement. Some of the other pioneers of the Ahl-i-Hadith were small traders, such as Muhammad Shah Shadbaft and 'Abdul 'Aziz Chikan. Others were doctors of *unani* medicine or earned their livelihood by

dispensing amulets although, strictly speaking, this was frowned upon as 'un-Islamic' by the Ahl-i-Hadith. It is significant to note that none among these early leaders of the Ahl-i-Hadith mentioned in the movement's official history were from the peasantry, and only a few, such as Sabzar Shah, a street hawker, and Maulana 'Abdur Rahman Nuri, the son of a poor, blind reciter of the Qur'an, belonged to the urban working classes (ibid.: 264-84).

For these largely urban, lower-middle-class activists of the Ahl-i-Hadith in the first four decades of the twentieth century the movement promised them religious authenticity and a sense of empowerment against the established Sufi families that controlled the shrines and the lives of many Kashmiri Muslims. It provided them with a sense of mission, of being a religious elite as 'true' Muslims, which set them apart from the Hanafis, who were seen as wallowing in superstition and corrupt practices. These were young men, typically from lower-middle-class families in towns, disillusioned with what they saw as the 'un-Islamic' popular Sufism of the shrines and the authority of the custodians of the shrines, seeking a more egalitarian form of Islamic expression which would satisfy their need for religious purity, while at the same time answering their need for political assertion and community activism. They saw popular Sufism as having not only diluted the faith of the Muslims but also enervated them, making them indifferent to their worldly woes and thus an easy target for others. Growing education also made for growing awareness of what was seen as the oppression of the Muslim community at the hands of the Dogras, as well as of the Kashmiri Pandits who were viewed as the local agents of the Dogra regime. Association with the movement enabled them to establish links with a pan-Indian Muslim constituency, and numerous Ahl-i-Hadith leaders, particularly from Punjab, made frequent tours of the valley. This sense of bonding and the consciousness of representing the true faith must have been a powerful psychological asset in a context where the small, yet gradually expanding, urban Muslim middle class was subjected to fierce repression by the 'Hindu' Dogra state and its local representatives, the Kashmiri Pandits.

THE JAMA'AT-I-ISLAMI

The opposition to popular Sufism launched by the Ahl-i-Hadith in Kashmir was carried further by the Jama'at-i-Islami, founded in 1941 by the Islamist ideologue Sayyed Abul A'la Maududi. Like the Ahl-i-Hadith, the Jama'at too insisted that Muslims should closely abide by the Qur'an and the *sunnat* of the Prophet, but unlike the Ahl-i-Hadith, it did not condemn the schools of jurisprudence, although it insisted that Muslims need not be bound by the precedents of the medieval *faqihs* and could exercise their independent judgement (*ijtihad*) in accordance with the Qur'an and the Hadith in order to apply Islam to matters on which the scriptural corpus was silent. For the Jama'at, Islam was an all-embracing world-view that governed every aspect of the believer's personal as well as social life. The establishment of an Islamic state, ruled in accordance with the *shari'ah*, was seen as central to the Islamic mission. Hence the Jama'at believed that Islam could not be divorced from politics, and that all Muslims must struggle for the Islamic state. Unlike the Ahl-i-Hadith, the Jama'at was not opposed to Sufism as such, but only to what it found as 'un-Islamic' elements in popular Sufism. Therefore, its approach to Sufism was far less virulent and much more accommodative than that of the Ahl-i-Hadith, which explains in part why it was able to establish itself more firmly in Kashmir than the latter (Sikand 2002).

Several of the leading members of the Jama'at in Kashmir seem to have come from established Sufi families. One of these activists, who was to lead the organization as its first *amir* for many years, was Sa'aduddin Tarabali. He was born in a family with long Sufi connections, linked with the renowned Sufi mystic Ahmad Sahib Tarabali of Srinagar (Kashmiri n.d.: 277). After he graduated, he taught for a while as a teacher at the Mirwa'iz's Islamiya High School in Srinagar, and later was appointed as headmaster of the government school at Chrar. Here he began introducing Maududi's writings to a number of young Kashmiris. From Chrar, he was shifted to the government school at Shopian, where he taught science for a year. In Shopian, then a hub of Kashmiri politics, Sa'aduddin managed to bring many young Kashmiri men under his influence. One of the most

prominent of these was Maulana Ghulam Ahmad Ahrar, an active member of the Majlis-i-Ahrar, an anti-imperialist Islamic reformist group founded in Lahore, who was to go on to play an important role in the later spread of the Jama'at in Kashmir (ibid.: 293). Like Sa'aduddin, Maulana Ahrar also belonged to a family known for its Sufi connections. He received a traditional Islamic education, first at a seminary in Lahore, and then at the Madrasa Nusrat-ul Hasan at Amritsar. Another of the early activists of the movement in Kashmir was Hakim Ghulam Nabi of Pulwama. He too was born in a *pir* family. He received his early education in Delhi and then went to the famous reformist Islamic seminary at Deoband, the Dar-ul 'Ulum, where he enrolled for the *maulvi fazil* course. He later trained in Unani medicine. He was known for his good knowledge of Arabic, Urdu, and English, and was also a prolific writer. Under Maulana Ahrar's influence, he became involved with the Jama'at and later held the positions of deputy *amir* and secretary-general of the organization (Kashmiri 1984: 26-7). Qari Saifuddin, who served for many years as the *amir* of the Jama'at, was himself a practising *pir*.

A common thread seems to run through the biographies of most of the early activists of the Jama'at who later went on to become leaders of the movement. They all seem to have belonged to middle-class families, many with Sufi or *pir* backgrounds. Their standing as members of *pir* families gave them positions of leadership and authority within their own local communities in which the *pirs* and their descendants were traditionally looked upon with considerable respect and reverence. Many of them had received a traditional Islamic education outside Kashmir, in places in Punjab, the United Provinces, and Delhi, which introduced them at a young age to the new winds of Islamic reformism. Clearly, like the pioneers of the Ahl-i-Hadith, being exposed to these new trends, they became increasingly dissatisfied with the existing conditions of religious belief and practice in Kashmir where Sufism, the dominant form of Islam, had degenerated, as they saw it, into rituals and 'un-Islamic' beliefs associated with the cults of the saints. Their commitment to a sort of Islam that condemned these cults can be read as a revolt against their own family

traditions, seeing these, in some way, as responsible for Muslim marginalization and powerlessness. Their quest for a more socially and politically involved and activist Islam can be seen as part of the larger Kashmiri Muslim middle-class-led struggle against first, the Dogras, and then, after 1947, Indian rule. Islam, for them, was a call for political assertion in a context of perceived Muslim powerlessness, as well as a call for personal piety and dedication to God's Will.

Unlike the Ahl-i-Hadith, however, the Jama'at steered clear of open confrontation with the defenders of the cults of the saints. Its approach in 'nullifying *shirk* and advocating *tauhid*', notes a sympathetic observer, was 'one of tactical compromise' (Bisati 1997: 40). It refrained from openly condemning popular Sufism as 'un-Islamic', although this was implicit in the way that it understood Islam. Instead of directly attacking Sufism, the early ideologues of the Jama'at in Kashmir attempted to present a form of Sufism which they saw in accordance with the *shari'ah* and, above all, as a means for Islamic revolution, to bring state and society under the laws of Islam. Thus, for instance, in late 1945, addressing the first large, organized rally of the Jama'at in Srinagar, the Jama'at's *amir*, Sa'aduddin, declared that the Jama'at's message was not a new one, but rather a revival of the original mission of Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani, which had aimed at rescuing the Kashmiris from *shirk* and *bida'at*, and to usher in the 'Islamic revolution', for he had taught that Islam was not to be restricted to just 'a few, limited rituals' (Kashmiri 1984: 35-6). Thus the image of the Sufis of Kashmir, with whom the general populace still closely identified, was sought to be subtly transformed from world-renouncing mystics into ardent activists of the Islamic revolution and brave crusaders of true monotheism. The Jama'at's official organ, *Azan*, regularly brought out special issues on various Sufi saints of Kashmir who had played an important role in the spread of Islam in the region. Qari Saifuddin, later *amir* of the Jama'at and himself chairman of the famous Sufi shrine at Khanyar, Srinagar, translated the sayings of Nuruddin Nurani from Kashmiri into Urdu, presenting him as a staunch proponent of the *shar'iah* (ibid.: 39). Nuruddin Nurani was described as having firmly 'renounced un-Islamic Rishism

and started a new period of Islamic Rishism' (Kashmiri n.d.: 79). Likewise, Sa'aduddin translated Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani's Persian *Aurad-i-Fatahiyya* into Urdu, and penned numerous tracts attempting to reinterpret Sufi practices and concepts in a manner which reflected the Jama'at's concern with proper observance of the *shari'ah*. In a pamphlet on Sufi litanies, he critiqued the empty ritualism that had become associated with their performance, arguing that the recitation of the litanies needed to be 'accompanied by deep thinking', which, in turn, would 'change our conditions swiftly from bad to good'. This, however, he added, 'needs the understanding of the Qur'an and Hadith'. Reciting litanies in praise of God must also be accompanied by action aimed at implementing God's Will on earth, including the struggle to establish a truly Islamic social order (Sa'aduddin n.d. [a]: 7). In another pamphlet, Sa'aduddin sharply rebuked those who simply chanted the litany *allah-o-aykbar* (God is Great) without acting upon 'the responsibility that the command lays on them'. God's greatness means that His Will alone should be obeyed 'in every branch of our life', and this, in turn, demands that the society and the state should be patterned on God's law, the *shari'ah* (Sa'aduddin n.d. [b]: 2-6).

The Jama'at's attitude to the cults of the Sufi shrines, although certainly moderate as compared to the Ahl-i-Hadith's, did not seem to have made for its popular acceptance. While sections of the Kashmiri Muslim middle class could readily identify with the Jama'at's message of reform, tied in as it was with an activist spirit for political assertion, it proved incapable of reaching out to vast numbers of ordinary Kashmiris in whose lives cults that centred on the shrines of the saints continued to play a pivotal role. Charges of being 'anti-Sufi' and a hidden 'Wahhabi plot' were not easily rebutted. Despite its gradual growth from the 1950s onwards, the Jama'at had to contend with considerable resistance from several quarters within the Kashmiri Muslim community. Many Muslims associated with the popular Sufi tradition saw it as part of a wider 'Wahhabi'[5]

[5]The term refers to the eighteenth-century reform movement of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab of Najd, aimed at combating what he saw as the un-Islamic practices of the Muslims of his time.

nexus along with the Ahl-i-Hadith. Its message of Islamic reform, with its insistence that Muslims should go directly to the Qur'an and the *sunnah* of the Prophet for guidance, by-passing the authority of the Sufi saints and denying the intermediary powers that were attributed to them, was seen as an attack on cherished beliefs by practitioners of the cults that had developed around the graves of the Sufis. It was also felt to be a threat to the authority of the custodians of the shrines, the class of *pirs*, who commanded great respect among the ordinary folk. Allegations were levelled against the Jama'at by what it called 'monopolists of religion', of promoting 'wrong beliefs' (*bad ayteqadi*) and of 'denying the Sufis' (*auliya-i-allah ke munkar*) (Kashmiri 1984: 78).

Opposition from these quarters to the Jama'at was reported from many places. Thus, in August 1957, local Muslims protested against a Jama'at rally at the village of Dengi Vich in Baramulla, at which Sa'aduddin was present. Sa'aduddin tried to reason with the protesters, saying,

> We are your brothers. We believe in Allah, His Prophet and the Hereafter, and we only talk about these matters with the people [. . .] You must understand that the communists[6] might soon come here, and they do not believe in Allah, His Prophet, the Qur'an and the Hereafter. Your brave *maulvis* will probably themselves welcome them with garlands of flowers. (ibid.: 91-2)

Interestingly, the Ahl-i-Hadith, which shared a common legacy of Islamic reform with the Jama'at but which competed with it for much the same potential support-base, did not spare the Jama'at from attack, probably fearing, like the custodians of the Sufi shrines, that the Jama'at was succeeding in winning over a number of its own potential supporters. For instance, in December 1952 local Ahl-i-Hadith activists in Shopian started a virulent campaign against the Jama'at, telling the people that,

[6]This could possibly be a veiled reference to Shaikh 'Abdullah and the Leftist faction within the ruling National Conference, with their agenda of 'Naya Kashmir', which called for radical land reforms and other such social policies aimed at a transformation of the conditions of the poor.

> The Maududi *jama'at* have adopted the appearance of Muslims but, in actual fact, they are so far from Islam that the prayers said behind an imam who belongs to that sect are unacceptable [to God]. . . . In short, they are even worse than the Mirza'is,[7] Qadianis and Baha'is[8], and so they should be completely avoided. (ibid.: 84-5)

The Jama'at, however, responded to these allegations with tact. It saw many of its critics as simply motivated by a threat to their own interests because of its increasing influence. Qari Saifuddin noted that some 'selfish *mullahs*, for whom religion is a means for livelihood' were opposing the party for their own petty reasons. The Jama'at's political opponents were branding it as anti-Sufi, he said, simply in order to malign its image, fearful of its growing popularity.

Despite their opposition to popular Sufism, both the Jama'at and the Ahl-i-Hadith seemed to have recognized its potential as a resource for political mobilization. This was most clearly illustrated in the controversial affair of a sacred relic, the hair of the Prophet (*mo-i-muqadas*), housed at the shrine at Hazratbal, Srinagar, which suddenly disappeared from its repository in late December 1963. The relic was an object of deep reverence and devotion among the Kashmiri Muslims, a tangible connection between them and the Prophet. Although reverence of relics was looked upon as 'un-Islamic' by both the Ahl-i-Hadith and the Jama'at, they swiftly responded to the mass movement that erupted in the wake of its disappearance. Soon the agitation for the recovery of the relic developed into a popular upsurge for freedom and political self-determination for the people of the state. Muslim religious groups, including both the Ahl-i-Hadith and the Jama'at, were among the most active in leading the agitation. 'The incident of the missing relic', says Anil Maheshwari (1993: 4), 'brought back the Mullahs, after about five decades, to the centre-stage of politics.' Several people were killed in the police firing. Kashmiri political leaders set

[7]A term used by their opponents for the Ahmadis, followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

[8]Followers of the nineteenth-century Iranian, Bahaullah, who claimed to be a recipient of divine revelation and God's prophet for the entire world.

up the Awami Action Committee to carry on the struggle and to put forward their demands, in which the Jama'at was represented by Qari Saifuddin and the Ahl-i-Hadith by its leader Maulana Muhammad Nuruddin who served as the president of the Committee for a while. Spearheading the agitation for the recovery of the holy relic, and linking it to a broader struggle for political self-determination, senior Jama'at and Ahl-i-Hadith leaders, among others, toured the Kashmir valley to mobilize public support, demanding that the matter of the missing relic be urgently taken up in the UN Security Council and that the UN dispatch a team to investigate the whole affair and to pressurize India to abide by its promise to allow the Kashmiris to determine their own political future. In this way, although opposed in principle to the popular Sufism, both the Ahl-i-Hadith and the Jama'at showed themselves quite willing to selectively draw upon it for enhancing their own popularity and political interests.

Overlapping interests between followers of the popular Sufi tradition and groups such as the Jama'at and the Ahl-i-Hadith could work in the other direction as well. Thus, because of their present role in the militant struggle in Kashmir in opposing Indian rule, many followers of popular Sufism might actually support the political aims of groups such as the Jama'at or the Lashkar-i-Tayyeba (see Sikand forthcoming [a]), the militant group allied with the Ahl-i-Hadith in Pakistan, without subscribing to their own understanding of Islam and, in particular, of Sufism. It is interesting to note here that following the outbreak of the militant struggle, the ire of the militants has been directed principally against the Indian ('Hindu') state and, in the case of some groups such as the Lashkar, against 'Hindus', and these have taken the place that the *ahl-i-bida'at* once enjoyed as the menacing 'other'. Obviously, at a time when an effort is being made to present a united Muslim/Kashmiri front against the Hindus/India, internal differences must be ignored or suppressed, but, as in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, it is inevitable that these internal contradictions will sooner or later resurface again and cannot be wished away so easily.

CONCLUSION

> In Baba's darbar all people are welcome. Did you know that before the onset of militancy, Pandits would come here in large numbers? They used to call the Baba as Sahazanand, the Beautiful One. But all that is almost finished now. The Wahabis are taking over.
>
> 'The Pir at Chrar-e Sharif', in Yoginder Sikand (forthcoming)

All over the Muslim world, from the late nineteenth century onwards, popular Sufism has come under sharp attack from Muslim reformers, both modernists and Islamists. In Kashmir, as elsewhere in South Asia, a new breed of educated Muslims, mainly from the emerging Muslim urban middle class, came increasingly to see popular Sufism, which till then had been considered synonymous with Islam, as deviant, 'un-Islamic', and 'Hinduistic', although, as already discussed it was precisely by adapting their message to the cultural world of the Kashmiris and promoting a unique Kashmiri 'syncretic' tradition that Islam had been able to make vast numbers of converts in the area (Roy 1998: 33).[9] Many practices and beliefs on which the popular Kashmiri Sufi tradition was based were condemned as having no sanction in 'true' Islam, which now came to be seen as synonymous with the scripturalist tradition based only on the Qur'an and the Prophetic *sunnat*. The practices associated with the popular tradition were depicted as having been devised by a class of religious intermediaries for their own monetary benefit. The very notion of intercession, the belief in the powers of the Sufis or the custodians of their shrines to mediate between the individual believer and God, was rejected as akin to polytheism. In its place a direct, unmediated relationship was to be established with God, and the individual could dispense with the Sufis and the shrine custodians as religious authorities. A true Muslim, it was stressed, need only look to the Qur'an and

[9]Likewise, Asim Roy (1998: 33) argues, with reference to the Muslims of Bengal, that although condemned by later 'purists', the 'syncretic' Bengali Islamic tradition was actually a 'necessary stage' in the spread of Islam in the region.

the *sunnat* of the Prophet in order to lead a truly Islamic life. In this way, religious authority was made more diffused and broad-based, transferred from the narrowly defined Sufi elite and now made accessible to any Muslim with a proper understanding of the scripturalist tradition. This more individual-centred understanding of Islam exercised a particular appeal for the slowly emerging urban Muslim middle class in Kashmir.

For many members of this class, the popular Sufi tradition was seen as world-denying, as unconcerned with the lived realities of the Muslims. Not only was this considered as 'un-Islamic', for, they argued, the Qur'an was fiercely opposed to monasticism (*rahbaniyat*), it also had left the Muslims weak and helpless, at the mercy of other communities. The activist, socially engaged Islam that the Jama'at sought to present, such as through its network of schools and clinics and its political involvement, affirmed the need for the Muslims to understand Islam as a system (*nizam*) which covered all aspects of a Muslim's life.[10] A Muslim was to actively struggle to establish Islam in its entirety, instead of hoping for a miracle to be performed by a deceased Sufi to put an end to his or her woes. This more this-worldly understanding of Islam readily appealed to many Kashmiris disillusioned with the Sufis for their seeming unconcern for the actual conditions of the Muslims and went hand in hand with a growing involvement in political struggles against Dogra autocracy from the early years of the twentieth century onward. Mobilizing themselves as Muslims, based on a shared commitment to a universal ideology based on the Qur'an and the *sunnat*, provided these Muslims with a sense of empowerment, pitted as they were against the Dogra state till 1947, and then after that against 'Hindu' India, which they as their enemy.

Overall, by 1989, in the course of the century of Islamic reformism in Kashmir, both the Ahl-i-Hadith and the Jama'at had managed to make considerable headway, but remained largely confined to the urban middle classes whose world-views and interests they represented. However, many educated Muslims who might not have agreed with their understanding of Islam were also influenced by their critique of popular Sufism, and had begun to articulate a form of 'Islamic' Sufism, one in line with the *shari'ah*, condemning practices associated with the shrines as 'un-Islamic', 'Hinduistic', 'backward' and 'superstitious', and as serving to dampen political radicalism (see, for instance, the interviews in Hamdani and Sikand 2001). On the other hand, popular Sufism, centred on the cults of the saints, continued to claim the allegiance of most Kashmiris, but these too had begun to gradually change as a result of the growing acceptability of Islamic discourse. Some Sufi shrines in and around Srinagar have recently started their own *madrasas*, and the largest Sufi *dargah* in the state, the shrine of Hazrat Sayyed Ghulam Shah Badshah at Shahdara Sharif in Rajouri in the Jammu province, is in the process of setting up an Islamic university.

From 1990 onward, with the outbreak of the mass movement for self-determination in the region, the situation has remained unclear. Many Sufis have been bitterly critiqued for their apathy and lack of enthusiasm for the militant movement. The Ahl-i-Hadith in Pakistan has been playing a major role in Kashmir, through its militant outfit, the Lashkar-i-Tayyeba, and the Jama'at's militant wing, the Hizb-ul Mujahidin, has been one of the major actors in the present uprising. Although their active role in the uprising must certainly have made for a greater popularity of their own understanding of Islam, the popular Sufi tradition still remains deeply entrenched in Kashmir. Yet, this tradition is itself in the process of gradual transformation, as noted earlier. Further, for many allegiance to the tradition does coexist with support for the political goals of the Jama'at or the Ahl-i-Hadith—political self-determination and often admiration for the role of the Lashkar-i-Tayyeba and the Hizb-ul Mujahidin in their confrontation with the Indian army. Equally importantly, the decline in attacks by the Ahl-i-Hadith and the Jama'at on the popular tradition must not be seen as evidence of their having come to terms with the popular Sufi tradition. The hostility

[10]It is interesting to note that while the focus of the Ahl-i-Hadith continued to be its narrowly constructed notion of *tauhid* and the extirpation of *shirk* and *bida'at* was its principal objective, the Lashkar-i-Tayyeba calls for setting up an Islamic state and sees Islam as a complete 'system', and in this there is little to distinguish it from the Jama'at.

to the tradition remains deep-rooted and is, indeed, one of the defining features of the movements, for they see it as not only 'un-Islamic', but also as serving to promote a distinct sense of Kashmiri identity which conflicts with their agenda of pan-Islamism and of Kashmir's merger with Pakistan. It is significant to note in this regard that the secular nationalist Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), regarded with considerable suspicion and hostility by both the Jama'at-i-Islami and the Lashkar-i-Tayyeba for undermining their pro-Pakistan agenda, regards Nund Rishi as the patron saint of Kashmir, and it was at his shrine that the JKLF actually launched the Kashmiri nationalist struggle in 1989. It is obvious, then, that the need for presenting a united front against Indian rule has necessitated a cooling off of anti-Sufi rhetoric for the present. But, as the Afghanistan case so strikingly suggests, internal contradictions and widely differing visions of Islam are bound to emerge sooner or later, and, as elsewhere, the debate about Sufism in Kashmir remains alive, to be argued continuously over, as Muslims of Kashmir rethink their tradition in the light of the changing times and fortunes.

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PART III

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: CULTURE AND POLITICS