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Author(s): Andreas Rieck

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THE NURBAKHSHIS OF BALTISTAN—CRISIS AND REVIVAL OF A FIVE CENTURIES OLD COMMUNITY

BY

ANDREAS RIECK*

Hamburg

The Sufi order named after Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (1392–1464), a branch of the Kubrāwīyya,¹ has been suppressed or merged with orthodox Twelver Shiʿism in Safawid Iran² as well as in Kashmīr, where it was introduced since late 15th century by Shams al-Dīn ʿIrāqī,³ a disciple of Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh's son and successor Shāh Qāsim Faḍlbakhsh. But it has survived to this day in Baltistan, the mountainous region north of the Srinagar-Ladakh road that became part of Pakistan after the partition of India and the first Kashmīr war 1947–8. The order's longevity in remote Baltistan stands in marked contrast to its quick absorption into Twelver Shiʿism in the valley of Kashmīr, where the Nurbakhshiyya had almost ceased to exist some decades after its persecution by Mīrzā Ḥaidar Dughlāt in mid-16th century.⁴ While being slowly supplanted by Twelver Shiʿism in Baltistan, too, a large community of Nurbakhshis there has preserved its identity,

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¹ J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford 1971, pp. 55–58; Richard Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, Vol. I, Wiesbaden 1965, pp. 13–15.

² Ḥamīd Algar, “Nūrbakhshiyya”, *EI*, Vol. VIII, Fasc. 133–134, p. 135.

³ Mohibbul Hasan, *al-ʿIrāqī*, *EI*, Suppl., Fasc. 5–6, p. 423; Abdul Majid Mattoo, “The Nurbakhshis of Kashmīr”, in: Christian Troll (ed.), *Islam in India*, Vol. II, Delhi 1984, pp. 98–113; this account of Shams al-Dīn ʿIrāqī's mission in Kashmīr makes use of some yet unpublished manuscripts like *Tuhfat al-ahbāb* of Mullah Muhammad ʿAlī Kashmīrī and *Taʾrīkh-i Kashmīr* of Sayyid ʿAlī.

⁴ Mattoo, p. 113; Algar, p. 136.

referring of itself as a distinct *madhhab* or *maslak* (see below). In the Skardū and Gānče districts of Northern Pakistan alone there are still some 70.000 Nurbakhshis, i.e. 25% of the population, the remaining being about 70% Twelver Shi'is and 5% Sunni (Hanafi and *Ahl-ı ḥadīth*).⁵ To those can be added some 10 000 Nurbakhshi migrants to the big cities of Pakistan (mainly Karachi, Rawalpindi-Islamabad, Lahore) and several thousands in the part of Kashmīr that remains under Indian control.⁶ About 80% of the current Nurbakhshi population of Baltistan is concentrated along the river Shayoq and some of its side valleys (Thalley, Hushey, Saltoro), with Khaplū (12.000 Nurbakhshi inhabitants) as its administrative and intellectual center, while 10–12% live in the Shigar valley north of Skardū, i.e. some 20% of its population. Only pockets of some 2.000 Nurbakhshis remain in the Indus valley near its confluence with the Shayoq (villages of Sermik and Panda). The Nurbakhshis of the district capital Skardū are 20th century immigrants from other parts of Baltistan and their descendants.

Spreading and decline of the Nurbakhshiyya in Baltistan, 16th to 19th centuries

The ground for the spreading of the Nurbakhshiyya in this part of the world was prepared by the mission of Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (1314–1385), who is still greatly revered as *Hadrat-ı Amīr-ı Kabīr* or *Shāh-ı Hamadān* by Muslims of all sects in Kashmīr and adjoining areas.⁷ While three visits of Hamadānī in Kashmīr accompanied

⁵ The *Census of Pakistan* of 1981 counted 212.049 inhabitants of Baltistan, without taking into account Balti migrants to other parts of the country and not distinguishing between the different Muslim sects. Comparing its data for each village with my own data collected 1992–1994 about the distribution of sects, I estimate the number of Nurbakhshis in Baltistan to have been at least 60.000 in 1981. Since the conversion movement of Nurbakhshis to other sects (see below) has slowed down after 1981, they should have grown to 70.000 by now.

⁶ They live in the regions of Zaskar and Purig, south to the river Indus between Kargil and Leh. Their number is not known, but cannot be more than a few thousands, since most of them became Shi'is in this century (see below).

⁷ Ashraf Zafar, *Amīr-ı Kabīr Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī*, Lahore 1974; Agha Hussain Hamadani, *The Life and Works of Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī*, Islamabad 1985; Muhammad Rīyād, *Āthār-o-ahwāl-ı Mīr Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī*, Islamabad 1985; Agha Husain Hamadani and Muhammad Rīaz (eds.), *Shah-e Hamadan Commemoration Volume*.

by hundreds of followers are recorded (1372, 1379–81, 1383–84),⁸ he is also said to have converted Buddhists in Baltistan, notably in Khaplū and Shigar, where mosques and *Khānqāhs* attributed to him still exist.⁹ Sayyid Muhammad Nūrbakhsh, who himself was a disciple of Hamadānī's *khalīfa* Ishāq Khuttalānī, has probably never reached Kashmīr or Baltistan,¹⁰ and we can assume that the majority of Baltistan's population was still non-Muslim when Shams al-Dīn 'Irāqī arrived to preach there in 1502 or 1505 Shams al-Dīn 'Irāqī, who stayed more than 30 years in Kashmīr, spent only a short period of exile in Baltistan,¹¹ but was accompanied by fifty other preachers and left one of his trusted disciples to continue his mission there.¹² When persecution of the Nurbakhshis started in Kashmīr in 1545, those in Baltistan were less affected,¹³ and Mīr Danyāl, the son and successor of Shams al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d. 1526), fled to Baltistan and won over large numbers of new converts to the sect. He was induced to come back to Kashmīr in 1549, was arrested and martyred the next year.¹⁴

After the death of Mīrzā Haidar Dughlāt (1551) the Čāk tribe, whose heads had been ardent followers of Shams al-Dīn 'Irāqī, gained power in Kashmīr from 1555 to 1586. But—probably under the influence of developments in Safawid Iran—they now professed Twelver Shi'ism instead of Nurbakhshiyya and proclaimed it as

Proceedings of the Shah-e Hamadan International Conference held on October 2–4, 1987 at Muzaffarabad, Muzaffarabad, Institute of Kashmir Studies, 1988.

⁸ G.M.D. Sufi, *Kashīr. Being a History of Kashmīr*, Lahore 1949, Vol. I, pp. 86–87.

⁹ Ahmad Hasan Dani, *Islamic Architecture. The Wooden Style of Northern Pakistan*, Islamabad 1989, pp. 128–130, 144–146; Muhammad Ridā Akhundzāda, *Āthār-i Shāh-i Hamadān*, Khaplū 1994, pp. 53–60, 65–67.

¹⁰ 'Abd al-Hamid Khāwar, *Shimālī 'Alāqajāt mēn ishā'at-i Islām*, in: Manzūm 'Alī (ed.), *Qaraqorum Hindūkush*, Gilgit 1985, pp. 207–210.

¹¹ Sufi, op. cit., pp. 190, 192. According to Ghulam Hasan Suhrawardī Nūrbakhshī, *Ta'rikh-i Baltistān*, Mīrpūr (Āzād Kashmīr) 1992, pp. 76–79, he stayed only for six months in 911–2h (1505).

¹² Mattoo, op. cit. (note 3), p. 106.

¹³ Baltistan may have been out of reach for Mīrzā Haidar Dughlāt in 1545–51, 'Abd al-Rashīd Ansārī Baltistānī, *Da'wat-i islām*, Karachi 1958, pp. 50ff, gives another explanation, claiming that only those Nurbakhshis who believed in *wahdat al-uwjūd* and *hulūl* were persecuted, while those in Baltistan "believed in God" and were treated respectfully by Dughlāt.

¹⁴ Mattoo, op. cit., p. 108.

the religion of the state.¹⁵ Followers of a Nurbakhshi middle way between Shi'ā and Sunna gradually disappeared from Kashmīr as well as from Iran,¹⁶ but in Baltistan the order was protected by geographical and cultural barriers: The roads of access from Kashmīr *via* Zoji La and the Indus valley or *via* the Deosai plains used to be closed during winter months; to the north, the central Karakorum chain, which could be crossed only by the extremely difficult Muztagh and Saltoro passes (abandoned since the 19th century) separated Baltistan from Eastern Turkistan (Sunni Muslim since the late 10th century). The valleys to the west (Gilgit, Hunza, Nager) became only slowly islamized from the mid-16th century onwards, and Ladakh to the east has remained Buddhist to this day. Thus Baltistan remained under local Rājās who paid only nominal allegiance to subsequent rulers of Kashmīr until subdued by a Sikh army in 1840, and who stayed in office as *jāgirdārs* under the Hindu Dogra Maharajas (1846–1947) and even in Pakistan until 1972.

But religious influence *via* Kashmīr gained strength in Baltistan and led to the gradual spreading of Twelver Shi'ism, first in Skardū and from there in both directions along the river Indus. There are neither written sources nor other traces like old Shi'ī *Imāmbārāhs* to document this change until the late 19th century—a gap which has led contemporary Nurbakhshi authors to claim that the entire population of Baltistan had remained Nurbakhshi until that time¹⁷—but it must have started already during the Čāk ascendancy in Kashmīr. Whereas the *Pīrs* of the Nurbakhshi *silsila* after Mīr Danyāl Shahīd are not known to have lived in Baltistan for the following three generations,¹⁸ there are many oral traditions re-

¹⁵ Sufi, op. cit., pp. 210, 217–235.

¹⁶ Algar, op. cit. (note 2), p. 135f; Nurbakhshis in Iran still exist, but they regard themselves as Shi'is. Since 1983 they have started to build a mausoleum at the site of Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh's grave in Solghān (not Sulfān as stated in *EI*) near Kan to the north-west of Tehran, for which Balti Nurbakhshis have also collected contributions.

¹⁷ *Ta'rikh-i Baltistān* (note 11), pp. 116, 150; this thesis of the author is widely accepted among Nurbakhshis.

¹⁸ Akhundzāda, op. cit. (note 9), pp. 93–94, gives a list of the *Pīrs* since Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh with their places of burial—the numbers relate to the complete *silsila* starting with the Prophet Muhammad—as follows: 28) Shāh Qāsim Faidbakhsh (Tehran); 29) Mīr Shams al-Dīn 'Irāqī (Zaribal/Kashmīr);

garding the advent of a Shi'ī missionary, Shāh Buriyā Walī, to Nager and Gilgit *via* Baltistan at the end of the reign of the Gilgit Rājā Shāh Ra'īs A'zam (1522–1561).¹⁹ The latter's son, Rājā Sultān Mīrzā II (ruled 1567–1600), accepted Shi'ism after he had to seek help from the Skardū Rājā Ghāzī Mīr (1565–1595) against a Āitrālī invader.²⁰ Shi'ism was also introduced in Hunza when its Mīr, Āyāsho II, married a daughter of 'Abdāl Khān, a grandson of Ghāzī Mīr from Skardū.²¹ In Baltistan itself four brothers from Tūs (Iran), who arrived around 1600, are regarded as the most important early Shi'ī missionaries.²²

But while the *Maqpon* Rājās of Skardū have probably been Shi'is since Ghāzī Mīr,²³ the *Amā'as* of Shigar and *Yabgūs* of Khaplū remained Nurbakhshi until the 19th century.²⁴ It was in the latter realms that the Nurbakhshiyya continued to flourish, it received a boost by the arrival of the *Pīr* Mīr Abū Sa'īd Sa'dā' (d. 1684) and his brother Mīr 'Arif (d. 1651) from Kashmīr in the

30) Mīr Danyāl Shahīd (Ibid.); 31) Mīr Shams al-Dīn Rashīd (Ghazni/Afghanistan); 32) Mīr Danyāl Dānā (Balkh); 33) Mīr Hasan Rahnumā (Lahore); 34) Mīr Abū Sa'īd Sa'dā' (Srinagar); 35) Mīr Mukhtār Akhyār (Kiris); 36) Mīr Najm al-Dīn thāqib (Shigar); 37) Mīr Muhammad Nūrānī (Kiris); 38) Mīr Muhammad Shāh Makhdūm al-Fuqarā' (Khaplū); 39) Mīr Shāh Jalāl (Kiris); 40) Mīr Khāna al-'Ulūm (Kiris); 41) Mīr Muhammad Akbar (Khaplū); 42) Mīr Muhammad Shāh Zaim al-Akhyār (Kiris); 43) Sayyid 'Aun 'Alī Shāh (Khaplū); 44) Sayyid Muhammad Shāh, the present *Pīr*, lives in Kiris.

¹⁹ Ahmad Hasan Dani, *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan*, Islamabad 1989, pp. 175–177.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 178, 221.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 197–198; 'Abdāl Khān became ruler of Skardū in 1633 (Ibid., p. 222), but the marriage of his daughter may have taken place before that date.

²² Ibid., p. 230, mentions Sayyid Mahmūd (d. 1669) and Sayyid 'Alī (d. 1670), whose graves are in Skardū and Kwardo respectively, see Dani, *Architecture* (note 9), pp. 118, 121–122; Khāwar, op. cit. (note 10), p. 217, mentions Sayyid 'Alī and Sayyid Nāsir Tūsī, the latter of whom “disappeared” near Dassu (Shigar). *Tārīkh-i Baltistān* (note 11), pp. 114–117, gives more details and mentions also the fourth brother, Sayyid Haider 'Alī (buried in Qumrāh), but considers all four to have been Nurbakhshis.

²³ This seems plausible due to the mentioned spreading of Shi'ism and regarding that Skardū was the part of Baltistan most easily reached from Kashmīr, but it cannot be proven.

²⁴ According to *Da'wat-i Islāh* (note 13), p. 81, Rājā Hātum Khān II of Khaplū (d. 1890) became Shi'ī during his last years, while open conversion was only done by his son, Rājā Nāsir 'Alī Khān. The time of conversion of the Shigar Rājās to Shi'ism is not known, but it was before those of Khaplū.

early 17th century²⁵ Two sons of Mīr Abū Saʿīd, Mīr Yahyā²⁶ and Mīr Mukhtār Akhyār,²⁷ have greatly contributed to the revival of the Nurbakhshīyya, founding many *Khānqāhs* in the valleys of Shigar, Shayoq and Saltoro.²⁸ Their descendants can still be found as hereditary Friday preachers in most Nurbakhshī villages.²⁹ Mīr Mukhtār wrote *Sirāj al-islām*, a Persian translation and commentary of the Nurbakhshīs' canonical book *al-Fiqh al-ahwat*,³⁰ while his grandson and successor Mīr Najm al-Dīn thāqib wrote *Zād al-jinān* and *Fasl al-khiṭāb*.³¹ A son of Mīr Mukhtār, Sayyid Ibrāhīm, in 1717 founded the great *Khānqāh* of Gamba near Skardū.³² In the late 18th century Nurbakhshīs could also for a short time conquer the throne of Skardū.³³

²⁵ Sayyid Zāhid Husain, "Ahwāl-ı Hadrat-ı Mīr 'Ārif", in: *Nawā-ı Süfiyya* (Islamabad) V (1992), p. 7 and VII (1993), p. 29; Dani, *Architecture* (note 9), pp. 141ff.

²⁶ Mīr Yahyā's year of death is mentioned on his tomb in Shigar as 1042h (1632) and that of the *Khānqāh* built by him there as 1023h (1614) (Dani, *Architecture*, pp. 126–129), thus suggesting that he can have been neither a son of Abū Saʿīd nor a brother of Mīr Mukhtār (d. 1718). Yet there is a detailed account of the two brothers (Yahyā and Mukhtār) coming together to Shigar during the reign of Rājā Aʿzam Khān (1705–1784) and Mīr Mukhtār's subsequent flight to Kirīs from Hashmatullāh Khān Lakhnawī, *Taʾrikh-ı Jammūn*, Lucknow 1939 (repr. Lahore 1991), pp. 545–548.

²⁷ His tomb is in Kirīs (Dani, *Architecture*, pp. 136–138).

²⁸ *Taʾrikh-ı Baltistān* (note 11), p. 122; all *Khānqāhs* attributed to Mīr Yahyā still exist, i.e. those of Alčūrī, Čurkāh (Sarfa Khor and Soguldo), Hashūpī, Golāpūr and Shigar, except that of Wazīrpūr which was completely rebuilt in 1991, from the 21 *Khānqāhs* attributed to Mīr Mukhtār (Ibid.) those of Kirīs, Tsino, Tallis, Surmo and Mačālū still exist in nearly original shape.

²⁹ I was able to collect pedigrees from them in 1992–94, all Nurbakhshī *Sādāt* in the Shigar valley trace their descent to Mīr Yahyā, and all those in other areas to Mīr Mukhtār, who had 18 sons (*Taʾrikh-ı Baltistān*, p. 120).

³⁰ See below (note 43); a manuscript of *Sirāj al-islām* dated 1106h (1694–5) and attributed to Mīr Mukhtār himself is in the possession of Sayyid Murtadā Shāh in Alčūrī (Shigar).

³¹ Both are accounts of the lives of Nurbakhshī *Awliyāʾ* (Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh, Shams al-Dīn ʿIrāqī and others) in Persian verses; only small extracts of them have been published by Maulwī Hamza ʿAlī, *Nūr al-muʾminīn—kashf al-tafāwut*, Rawalpindi 1370h (1951), pp. 444–448.

³² Dani, *Architecture*, pp. 122–124, the old *Khānqāh* was razed in 1990 and is presently being rebuilt as a Shiʿi *Imāmbārah*.

³³ G.T. Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak, Iskardo*, London 1842, Vol. II, pp. 253–254; they were dislodged by Zafar Khān of Shigar who ruled 1785–87 (Dani, *History*, p. 224).

However, isolated in remote valleys and without any moral or material support from outside Baltistan, the Nurbakhshiyya declined again and did not produce any noteworthy ‘*Ālim* after Najm al-Dīn Thāqib until the 20th century, a fact confirmed by contemporary Nurbakhshis themselves. While there is no evidence of local Shi‘i ‘*Ulamā*’ having studied outside Baltistan before the end of the 19th century either, there was nevertheless an increasing migration of Twelver Shi‘i *Sādāt* from Kashmīr and beyond to Balti villages all along the Indus valley from Kharmang to Rondu during the 18th and 19th centuries, which paved the way for the rapid expansion of Shi‘i orthodoxy in the 20th century.³⁴ The Nurbakhshis became influenced by the growing religious fervour of their Shi‘i neighbours and, probably during the 19th century, adopted such practices as ‘*azādārī*’ during Muḥarram and *majālīs* marking the birth and death anniversaries of the Shi‘i Imams.³⁵

Doctrinal peculiarities of the ‘Nurbakhshi madhhab’

The institutional weakness of Twelver Shi‘ism in Baltistan and the valleys to the west, where it remained only a thin layer over a plethora of pre-Islamic beliefs and superstitions until the late 19th century,³⁶ helped the Nurbakhshis to preserve a belief system which combines Shi‘i and Sunni elements. Since the last 100 years this ambiguity has furnished arguments to Shi‘i as well as Sunni proselytizers, who have both been successful to bring large numbers of Nurbakhshis into their fold (see below), but more recently it has

³⁴ This will be dealt with in length in a forthcoming book by the present writer.

³⁵ There is much controversy between Shi‘is, pro-Shi‘i Nurbakhshis and Nurbakhshi ‘purists’ (see below) about the time when *Muharram* celebrations have been adopted. They are not known to have taken place during the lifetime of Shams al-Dīn ‘Irāqī and his successor (Mattoo, p. 113), but were mentioned already by John Biddulph, *Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh*, Calcutta 1880, pp. 124–125. Until this day Nurbakhshi do not hold *Muharram* celebrations outside their *Khānqāhs* or build special *Imāmbārahs* or *Mātam-sarāīs* for the *majālīs*.

³⁶ Karl Jettmar, *Die Religionen des Hindukush*, Stuttgart 1975, passim. Shamanism and belief in fairies have survived until this day to the west of Baltistan, though becoming more and more supplanted by orthodox Shi‘i and Sunni Islam.

become a basis for Nurbakhshi pride and self-assertion in an environment plagued by rising sectarian tension.³⁷

Elements of Shiʿi doctrine have been introduced into the Kubrawiyya already by ʿAlāʾ al-Daula Simnānī (d. 1336) and Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī.³⁸ Qāḍī Nūrullāh al-Shūstari, whose *Majālis al-muʾminīn* is a major source on the early history of the Nurbakhshiyya, has portrayed both Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī and Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh as Shiʿis, the former mostly on the ground of his *Risālat muwaddat dhī al-qurbā*.³⁹ Sayyid Muḥammad Nurbakhsh's closeness to Twelver Shiʿism is evident from his *Risālat al-iʿtqādiyya* where he stresses the need to believe in *imāma*, mentioning the descent from Fātima as one of the conditions of the *Imām*. But in the same passage he writes that all necessary qualities of *imāma* have only been united in ʿAlī Ibn Abī Ṭālib.⁴⁰ Moreover, Sayyid Muḥammad Nurbakhsh's claim at the age of 31 to be the *Imām* and *Mahdī* himself—which present-day Nurbakhshis dismiss as an invention of the enemies of their sect—set him apart from orthodox Twelver Shiʿism.⁴¹

As the most important source of their doctrine besides *al-Risāla al-iʿtqādiyya* Nurbakhshis unanimously regard *al-Fiqh al-ahwat* ("the most comprehensive *fiqh*") attributed to Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh, though several historians believe Shams al-Dīn ʿIrāqī

³⁷ Andreas Rieck, "Sectarianism as a political problem in Pakistan: the case of the 'Northern Areas'", in: *Orient* 36 (1995) 2, (forthcoming).

³⁸ Marijan Molé, "Les Kubrawiyya entre sunnisme et shiʿisme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l'hégire", in: *REI*, XXIX (1961), pp. 61–142.

³⁹ Khāwar, op. cit. (note 10), p. 213.

⁴⁰ See Marijan Molé, "Professions de foi de deux Kubrawi: ʿAlī-ī Hamadānī et Muhammad Nurbakhsh", in: *Bulletin d'Études Orientales de l'Institut Français de Damas* XVII (1961–2), pp. 182–204, which contains the Arabic text and a French translation of *al-Risāla al-iʿtqādiyya*, p. 197.

⁴¹ Algar, *Nurbakhshiyya* (note 2), p. 135. Accounts of the life of Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh in *Taʾrikh-i Baltistān* (note 11), pp. 174–177, and *Nawā-i Sūfiyya* VII (1993), pp. 18–20 (Yabgū Ghulām Mahdī), simply gloss over this claim, while Khādīm Husain Pandawī, *Ahwāl-o-āthār-i Shāh Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh Quhistānī*, Karachi 1987, pp. 68–73, tries to explain that he had declared himself only as the *nāʾib* of the *Imām Mahdī*. Significantly, Nurbakhsh's book *Risālat al-hudā*, in which he tries to prove his qualifications as the *Mahdī* (see Molé, *Kubrawiyya*, pp. 131–136), has never been printed in India or Pakistan and is absent from the lists of his writings in *Taʾrikh-i Baltistān*, p. 187, and Pandawī, pp. 80–92.

to be the real author.⁴² Its Arabic original as well as its Persian translation *Sirāj al-islām* (see above) have been preserved in a number of manuscripts in Baltistan and printed since 1333h (1914–5).⁴³ Nurbakhshīs often quote one of the first sentences of *al-Fiqh al-aḥwat* as a proof of the unifying mission of Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh: “... innā Allāha amaranī an arfa‘a al-ikhtilāf min baini hādhihī ‘l-umma auwalan fī ‘l-furū‘ wa-thānīyan fī ‘l-uṣūl min baini ‘l-umam wa-kāffatī ahli ‘l-‘ālam”⁴⁴ They believe the instructions of this book to reflect the *sharī‘at-ī Muhammadiyya* in its “original” form, thus being sufficient on all important questions of *fiqh* and dispensing them from the *taqlīd* to any living *Muṭtahid*. In his quality as a *Muṭtahid* they consider Sayyid Muḥammad Nurbakhsh at least equivalent to the four founders of the Sunni schools of law, but prefer to present the Nurbakhshī *madhhab* on equal footing with the *ahl as-sunna* or *shī‘a imāmiyya* as a whole.⁴⁵ A thorough study of the differences between the principles (*uṣūl*) and legal provisions (*furū‘*) of the *ṣūfiyya Nurbakhshiyya* and the *shī‘a imāmiyya*—occasionally also comparing them with Sunni tenets—has been made by Maulwī Ḥamza ‘Alī from Khaplū on the basis of *al-Risāla al-i‘tiqādiyya*, *al-Fiqh al-aḥwat* and other books.⁴⁶ While his book *Nūr al-mu‘minīn—kashf al-tafāwut* explains in detail a wide range of more than hundred

⁴² Algar, p. 136; Mīrzā Muhammad Haidar Dughlāt, *Ta’rīkh-ī Rashīdī*, ed. and transl. N. Elias and E. Denison Ross, London 1895 (repr. 1972), p. 435; Muhammad Shafī‘, “Fīrqa-ī Nurbakhshiyya”, *Oriental College Magazine* (Lahore) Febr. 1925, repr. in Ahmad Rabbānī (ed.), *Maqālāt-ī Maulwī Muhammad Shafī‘*, Lahore 1972, Vol. II, pp. 29–30, considers it difficult to decide about the authorship of *al-Fiqh al-aḥwat*.

⁴³ The first edition of *Sirāj al-islām* was made in Mathrā, Matba‘ I‘jāz Haidarī, in 1333h (*Maqālāt-ī Maulwī Muhammad Shafī‘*, pp. 29–30). The Arabic original (with Urdu translation from Muhammad Bashīr) was first published in Karachi, 1973, by the *Nadwat-ī Islāmiyya Nurbakhshiyya*.

⁴⁴ *al-Fiqh al-aḥwat*, 2nd ed. of *Nadwat-ī Islāmiyya Nurbakhshiyya*, Karachi 1989, p. 1. English translation: “God has ordered me to remove the disagreement existing in this community (of believers), first regarding the legal provisions and secondly regarding the principles, among the peoples and all citizens of the world”

⁴⁵ An example is given in an article of Abū al-‘Irfān (= Maulana Muhammad Bashīr) in *Nawā-ī Sūfiyya* III (1985), p. 42.

⁴⁶ *Nūr al-mu‘minīn* (see above note 31), pp. 1–201, other books quoted frequently by the author are *Falāh al-mu‘minīn* (see note 48), *Najm al-hudā* (see note 89) and *Kitāb-ī Nurbakhshiyya* from Sayyid Qāsim Shāh (see notes 116, 117).

points of doctrinal disagreement with the *imāmiyya*, a more recent pamphlet⁴⁷ confines itself to the following points to show the Nurbakhshiyya as a group distinct from the Twelver Shi'a: They practice *taqlīd* from a dead person; they follow the Sunni example in their definition of *uṣūl ad-dīn* and *furū' ad-dīn*, and they have their special provisions regarding *namāz*, *khums*, inheritance, places of worship and their arrangements for *mātam* of the Shi'i Imams.

Being a Sufi order, the Nurbakhshiyya has, of course, its own ritual prescriptions, notably a large body of prayers and litanies (*awrād*, sing. *wird*) to be recited in addition to the *namāz* obligatory for every Muslim and on many other occasions of daily life. The most important collection of those prescriptions, the *Da'wat-i šūfiyya*, is attributed to Shāh Qāsim Faiḍbakhsh.⁴⁸ This book also contains the *Awrād-i fathīyya* of Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī,⁴⁹ the complete *silsilat al-dhahab*⁵⁰ and the fourteen *kalimāt-i qudsīyya* by which the Nurbakhshis define themselves.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Kull-i Pākistān Nurbakhshiyya Youth Federation Khaplū, *Ko'ī khaṣṣ farq nahīn?*, Rawalpindi n.d., but printed shortly after Rabī' II 1399h (March 1979).

⁴⁸ First published in Meerut, Matba' Qāsimī, 1318h (1900-1) or 1325h (1907-8), see *Maqālāt-i Maulwī Muhammad Shaft'* (note 42), pp. 13 and 32; Urdu editions by Maulwī Hamza 'Alī as *Falāh al-mu'minīn*, (Delhi, Barqī Press 1930; repr. Khaplū 1989); by Muhammad Bashīr (Karachi, *Nadwat-i Islāmiyya Nurbakhshiyya*, 1983) and by Sayyid Khurshīd 'Alam (Karachi, *Anjuman-i Falāh-o-behbūd-i Surmo Čoghogrong*, 1992); the latter three editions differ considerable in content and size.

⁴⁹ They are regarded as "a parting gift of Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī to the Kashmīrī Muslims", see Muhammad Ishaq Khan, "Islam in Kashmir: Historical analysis of its distinctive features", in Christan Troll (ed.), *Islam in India*, Vol. II, Delhi 1984, pp. 93-95.

⁵⁰ Nurbakhshis use this term like the Shi'i *Dhahabiyya* order in Iran (another branch of the Kubrāwiyya, see Gramlich, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 5-26), but with a correct chronology of the first 27 *Awliyā'* from the Prophet Muhammad to Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh; see also Trimmingham, op. cit. (note 1), table between pp. 30 and 31, for the *Pīrs* after Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh see above, note 18.

⁵¹ They are as follows: 1) banda-i Khudā; 2) dhurriyat-i Ādam; 3) millat-i Ibrāhīm; 4) ummat-i Muhammad; 5) dīn-i Islām; 6) kitāb-i Qur'ān; 7) Ka'ba-i qibla (sic); 8) mutāba'at-i sunnat-i nabawī; 9) muhibb-i 'Alī; 10) silsilat-i dhahab; 11) madhhab-i šūfiyya; 12) mashrab-i Hamadāniyya; 13) rawash-i Nurbakhshiyya; 14) murīd-i murshīd.

The challenge of modern Shi'ī and Sunni proselytism

As has been stated above, there are no reliable indicators for the extent to which Twelver Shi'ism had spread in Baltistan at the time of the Sikh conquest (1840). But the principality of Rondū west of the Skardū plain had never been Nurbakhshī, and in the latter the last *Khānqāh* (Gamba) fell out of use that year.⁵² In the Indus valley south of the confluence with the Shayoq (Kharmang) several Nurbakhshī villages had remained,⁵³ while a majority in the Shigar valley and all Muslim villages along the Shayoq and its side-valleys were still Nurbakhshī in the early 19th century.

It was only decades after the integration of Baltistan into the state of Jammū and Kashmīr (1846) that a dynamic Shi'ī "mission" among the Nurbakhshīs started in earnest. The Shi'īs of Baltistan had made use of the improved facilities provided by the British Empire—of which Kashmīr became an extension by "indirect rule"—first for pilgrimage to Mekka and the 'atabāt in Irak and Iran and then for obtaining religious education there and in Shi'ī centers of Northern India. The first "modern" local Shi'ī 'Ulamā²—Shaikh Jawād Ibn 'Alī from Skardū⁵⁴ and Sayyid 'Abbās al-Mūsawī from Gol⁵⁵—became energetic and effective preachers after their return to Baltistan in the early 20th century, fighting against all kinds of un-Islamic beliefs and practices as well as making converts

⁵² Interview with Süfī Ghulām Muhammad, Skardū, 17.5.94, who nevertheless claims that until 1840 the majority of the Skardū valley's population has still been Nurbakhshī; see also *Da'wat-ı islāh* (note 36), p. 36.

⁵³ There are still Nurbakhshī *Khānqāhs* in Sermik, Panda, Mahdīābād, Ghāsing, Manthoka and Tsindho, while only the first two villages have remained Nurbakhshī to this day.

⁵⁴ He had studied in Lucknow, Samarrā², Najaf and Karbalā² and taught members of the royal family in the Tehran before coming back to settle in Skardū, where he died in 1936. Ahmad Shāh Qājār bestowed the title 'Nāsir al-Islām' on him; see Muhammad Hasan Hasrat, *Ta'rikh-i adabiyāt-i Baltistān*, Rawalpindi 1992, pp. 183–184.

⁵⁵ Sayyid 'Abbās (1863–1928) was a descendant of the 33. *Pīr* of the Nurbakhshīyya, Sayyid Hasan Rahnumā (see note 18), whose father had come to Gol from Kashmīr. After his study in Karbalā² and Najaf (1889–1899) he settled down in Čutron (Shigar) for the rest of his life; see Sayyid Tāhā al-Mūsawī, *Sawānih-i Hadrat Hujjat al-Islām wal-Muslimīn marhūm Āqā-yi Hājī Sayyid 'Abbās al-Baltistānī al-Čutronī*, Qom 1382h (1963).

from among the Nurbakhshis, especially in the Shigar valley.⁵⁶

But even prior to the activities of Jawād Ibn ‘Alī and Sayyid ‘Abbās, Sunni proselytism had started among the Nurbakhshis, too. Around 1290h (1873) a Sunni-Hanafi ‘Ālim, Muḥammad Ḥusain “Mullah Peshāwarī”, arrived in Baltistan.⁵⁷ He was invited by the Nurbakhshi-*Pīr* of the time, Sayyid Jalāl Shāh, to his home in Kirīs and accepted to stay there and teach the *Pīr*’s son. His reputation of learning won him many students among the knowledge-starved Nurbakhshis who flocked to Kirīs, and he spent the rest of his life in Baltistan, preaching also in the Shigar and Čorbat valleys.⁵⁸ He carefully avoided to touch any Nurbakhshi sensibilities and taught *al-Fiqh al-aḥwaṭ* together with Sunni books, thus attracting his students to Sunni doctrines under the cover of their own sect’s tenets.⁵⁹ By encouraging them to seek knowledge in the great religious schools of Northern India (Amritsar, Delhi, Lucknow a.o.) his mission produced a snowball effect: The majority of pioneering Nurbakhshi students in those towns returned to Baltistan as Sunni converts, zealous to guide their Nurbakhshi fellow-villagers on the same path.

But by chance of circumstances the first generation of Nurbakhshi students in India became mostly attracted by schools of the *Ahl-ı ḥadīth* sect, which preached a brand of Sunni puritanism denounced as “Wahhabism” by their adversaries.⁶⁰ So it was the *Ahl-ı ḥadīth* rather than the Hanafi school of thought (dominant among Indian Muslims) which gained a foothold in Baltistan, first in the large village of Ghwārī between Kirīs and Khaplū, where a

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁷ Sayyid ‘Alī al-Mūsawī, *Kāshif al-haqq*, ed. Sayyid ‘Abbās al-Mūsawī, n.p., n.d. (printed in Iran after 1980), p. 34.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 34–35; Čorbat is the name of the Shayoq valley east of Khaplū where Mullah Peshāwarī died in the village of Siksā.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 35–37; Sayyid ‘Alī, quoting one of Mullah Peshāwarī’s disciples, claims that the latter had discovered that Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh was “a fanatical and tricky Shi‘i” but had divulged this only to some of his close followers (Ibid., pp. 36–37).

⁶⁰ Sh. ‘Inayatullah, “Ahl-ı Hadīth”, *EI*, Vol. I, pp. 259–260. The sect had spread to the valley of Kashmir before Baltistan, see Muḥammad Ishaq Khan, *History of Srinagar, 1846–1947 A study of Socio-Cultural Change*, Srinagar 1978, pp. 105–107.

Dār al-‘Ulūm was founded already in 1891.⁶¹ In the following decades a fierce competition between Shi‘is and the *Ahl-i ḥadīth* for “capturing” the Nurbakhshis started, in which clever stratagems were used and which occasionally led to violence.

The career of the most important 20th century Shi‘i *Muballigh* in Baltistan, Sayyid ‘Alī al-Mūsāwī, offers interesting insights into this competition. He was born 1309h (1891–2) in Kirīs, the seat of most Nurbakhshi *Pīrs* since Mīr Mukhtār Akhyār, being himself a grandson of the *Pīr* Muḥammad Khān al-‘Ulūm and a nephew of the *Pīr* Muḥammad Akbar.⁶² His elder brother, Sayyid Mukhtār Husain, became the spiritual head of all Nurbakhshis *per interim* during the minority of *Pīr* Muḥammad Shāh Zain al-Akhyār as well as after the latter’s death (1947–51) until succeeded by his son *Pīr* Sayyid ‘Aun ‘Alī Shāh (d. 1991). In the introduction to his book *Kāshif al-ḥaqq* (published posthumously by his son Sayyid ‘Abbās)⁶³, Sayyid ‘Alī tells about his conversion to Shi‘ism: during his first years of religious education under a scholar of the *Ahl-i ḥadīth* he became aware that Sunnis as well as Shi‘is could find answers to all questions of *fiqh* in their books, while Nurbakhshis could not. He began to reason that if the Nurbakhshiyya was really an independent *madhhab* it should not be in need of others’ books to deduct its prescriptions from them, and studied all books available about the life of Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh to find out the truth about his *madhhab*. In the end he became convinced of al-Shūshtarī’s thesis in *Majālis al-mu‘minīn* that Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh had been a Shi‘i, but had concealed his Shi‘ism according to the expediences of the time.⁶⁴

But Sayyid ‘Alī first did not openly declare his conversion to Twelver Shi‘ism which he anyhow regarded as the result of a deeper understanding of the teachings of Sayyid Muḥammad

⁶¹ Idārat at-Ta‘līm al-Jāmi‘a Dār al-‘Ulūm Baltistān Ghwārī, *Minhāj al-Jāmi‘a Dār al-‘Ulūm Baltistān*, Skardū, n.d., p. 4.

⁶² See above, note 18. The pedigree of Sayyid ‘Alī, who is given the titles *al-Mujāhid* and *Shams al-Dīn thālith*, is attached to *Kāshif al-ḥaqq*.

⁶³ See above, note 57. The book is printed in Urdu (translated by Muhammad Hasan Najafi) and in its main part (pp. 77–200) deals with generalities of Shi‘i faith, containing a polemic against the Wahhabiyya without references to Baltistan.

⁶⁴ *Kāshif al-ḥaqq*, pp. 70–72.

Nurbakhsh.⁶⁵ Instead he preached Shi'ī tenets to the Nurbakhshis—namely the necessity of celebrating the memory of the twelve Imams and of the *taqlīd* from a living *Muṭahid*—as obligations of their own sect. In this he got ample assistance from his brother Sayyid Mukhtār Ḥusain, who was invited by the Nurbakhshis of Khaplū to become their Friday preacher about 1920 and stayed there for the rest of his life. But while Sayyid 'Alī later had to declare himself, his brother kept the secret of his own conversion until his last day and succeeded to influence his students, who became either Shi'ī converts or pro-Shi'ī Nurbakhshi '*Ulamā*'.⁶⁶

Already during Sayyid 'Alī's youth, in 1906, Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan, another offspring of the *Pīr* family and an ardent convert to the *Ahl-i ḥadīth*,⁶⁷ unleashed a campaign against the *Muḥarram* celebrations in the Nurbakhshi *Khānqāh* of Kirīs, but was defeated by Sayyid Mukhtār Ḥusain in a public debate (*munāzara*).⁶⁸ Nevertheless, according to Sayyid 'Alī's account, the "Wahhabis" succeeded in creating illwill between Shi'īs and Nurbakhshis by presenting their views to the former in the garb of the latter's teachings. The trick worked and "the simple-minded Shi'ī '*Ulamā*' began to attack the innocent Nurbakhshis", thus "creating a deep gap of mistrust" and "severing a part from the Shi'ī body with their own hands".⁶⁹ But Sayyid 'Alī's own successes during four or five decades of preaching (he died in 1963) belie such pessimistic assessments. He was the first to introduce Shi'ism in Kirīs and in the Nurbakhshi stronghold to the East, where it has since further expanded,⁷⁰ and made thousands of converts among Nurbakhshis

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 69

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 18 and 25–27; among his disciples were Sayyid Murtadā, who converted the entire village of Kundūs (Saltoro) to Shi'ism in the same style, and Sayyid 'Alī "Adīb" from Khaplū, later founder of the *Anwār-i Muṣṭafā Trust* (see below note 106).

⁶⁷ He is not mentioned in the pedigree of Sayyid 'Alī (note 62), but was married to a daughter of Sayyid 'Alī's uncle, Sayyid Mahdī (*Kāshif al-haqq*, p. 38). He is said to have been famous as *munāzīr* even in Kashmir and Lucknow, and in 1938 became the first chairman of the *Anjuman-i Islāmiyya Baltistān*.

⁶⁸ *Kāshif al-haqq*, pp. 38–42.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 67–69

⁷⁰ Apart from the Rājās of Kirīs and Khaplū there had been very few Shi'īs in this area at the beginning of our century. Sayyid 'Alī completely converted the village of Gon near Kirīs and won followers in Ghwārī, Kūro and Khaplū. In the

from Nar to Kargil,⁷¹ extending his mission even beyond to Buddhist areas in Purig and Ladakh (since 1948 under Indian control).⁷² His son writes about an episode which took place after Sayyid 'Alī's open confession of Twelver Shi'ism when he visited Najaf and intended to stay there for studying: He had reported to Āyatullāh Abū al-Hasan al-Iṣfahānī, the supreme *Marja' al-taqlīd* of the time, about the Nurbakhshis, his own conversion and his *tablīgh* activities and allowed the Āyatullāh to read letters addressed to himself in order to keep him informed about the situation in Baltistan. One day Āyatullāh Iṣfahānī came excited into Sayyid 'Alī's room, showing a letter which told about a movement of reconversion to the Nurbakhshiyya in Kargil during Sayyid 'Alī's absence. The Āyatullāh ordered him to return immediately to his home country, qualifying his services there as more important than any service which he (Iṣfahānī) performed himself.⁷³

Regarding the *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* (and, to a lesser extent, Hanafi-Sunni) proselytism among the Nurbakhshis during the lifetime of Sayyid 'Alī, there seems to have been a lot of vacillating between an aggressive approach, trying to impress the Nurbakhshis with missionary zeal and to cow them into submitting to "the right path", and a soft tactic of winning them over by convincing them of the "Sunni" identity of their eponym. One example of the hardline approach was the distribution of the pamphlet *Tuḥfat-ī Tibat*⁷⁴ condemning

villages of Surmo, Ghurse, Tsino and Thagas most converts were won over by disciples of his brother (see above).

⁷¹ *Kāshif al-haqq*, p. 20; Nar and neighbouring Narbuḥḥung on the North bank of the Indus were also completely converted, as well as some remaining Nurbakhshi villages in Kharmang (see note 53).

⁷² *Kāshif al-haqq*, pp. 20 and 24, Shi'is of Kirīs relate that he used to go to the Buddhist areas with a large following of "bodyguards" and destroy Buddhist temples.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–24 (introduction of Sayyid 'Abbās). The year of the event is not given, but Iṣfahānī was regarded as supreme *Marja' al-taqlīd* between 1936 and 1945.

⁷⁴ 'Abd al-Haqq Baltistānī, *Tuḥfat-ī Tibat min ahl-ī sunnat*, Delhi 1343h, printed and distributed at the expense of Ḥāfiz Shaikh Hamidullāh, Financial Secretary of the *All India Ahl-ī Ḥadīth Conference*; its main part (pp. 11–64) consists of a detailed answer from Muhammad Yūnus, teacher at the *Madrasa* of Miyān Nadhīr Husain, Delhi, to a list of 80 points submitted to him, with approvals of a dozen 'Ulamā' from Delhi and Deoband (pp. 64–71).

the Nurbakhshis on the basis of a partially distorted list of their beliefs and rituals in 1924 or 1925. It may have frightened some Nurbakhshis, reviving the specter of persecution as under Mīrzā Ḥaidar Dughlāt,⁷⁵ but seems to have done more harm to the *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* themselves. Thirty-four years later a writer from this sect dismissed *Tuhfat-ī Tibat* as a trick of the Shi'is, alleging that its compiler was a Shi'i who had studied "as a spy" in the Sunni schools of Northern India,⁷⁶ but this is hardly trustworthy.⁷⁷ Another example of aggressive *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* behaviour towards the Nurbakhshis was displayed in Kirīs where Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan, by filing a legal case in 1931, tried to take possession of the historic *Khānqāh-ī Mu'allā* as a *Jāmi' Masjid* for his yet small group of followers in the village. When after a lapse of 14 years the Kashmīr government decided that the *Khānqāh* belonged to the Nurbakhshis, but that they had no right to prevent other Muslims from praying there, the *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* resorted to perform their Friday sermons every week simultaneously with the Nurbakhshis in one corner of the *Khānqāh* until they built their own *Jāmi' Masjid* in 1972.⁷⁸ At times this created so much bitterness that the preachers had to be silenced by the police or ordered to use only Arabic language during their sermons.⁷⁹ On the other hand, an account of the annual meetings of the *Anjuman-ī Islāmiyya Baltistān* (founded by the *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* in 1938) between 1944 and 1950 in Khaplū, Balghār, Kirīs, Ghwārī and Kūro claims that all have been held in a spirit

⁷⁵ He had submitted *al-Fiqh al-ahwat* to a number of Sunni 'Ulamā' of India who had declared the Nurbakhshis as infidels on the basis of that book; see Dughlāt, *Ta'rikh-ī Rashīdī* (note 42), pp. 435–36.

⁷⁶ *Da'wat-ī islāh* (note 13), pp. 53–54.

⁷⁷ *Ta'rikh-ī Baltistān* (note 11), p. 154, refutes the claim that no Maulwī 'Abd al-Haqq existed among the *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* in Baltistan; in the same year (1343h) two of their 'Ulamā' from Khaplū (Fadl Ilāhī and 'Abdullāh) had also distributed in Simla a poster against the Nurbakhshis' practice of seeking help from the souls of the *Awliyā'*, see *Nūr al-mu'minīn* (note 31), p. 434.

⁷⁸ Interview with Pīr Sayyid Muhammad Shāh (Kirīs), 26.8.1992, who has shown me the documents concerning the legal case.

⁷⁹ Muhammad Amīn Baltistānī, *Da'wat-ī uttihad*, Lahore 1957, pp. 51–54 and 59, and *Da'wat-ī islāh* (note 13), pp. 40–41, give conflicting versions about these events and the role of the *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* Friday preacher, Maulwī 'Abd al-Mannān.

of "unity between Muslims", with Nurbakhshi leaders taking a prominent part.⁸⁰

A more subtle way used by both Shi'is and Sunnis to win over the Nurbakhshis from the early 20th century until this day has been the printing of Nurbakhshi religious literature, sometimes introducing small but significant changes into known books and sometimes "discovering" apocryphal manuscripts attributed to Sayyid Muḥammad Nurbakhsh. Until some decades ago this was relatively easy due to the general backwardness of the Nurbakhshi 'Ulamā', most of whom could not discern between fake and genuine, and the near absence of printed canonical books among them. While some manuscripts of *al-Fiqh al-aḥwaṭ* and *Da'wat-i ṣūfiyya* existed in the houses of Nurbakhshi "religious families" (mostly *Sādāt* who held the office of *Pesh Imam* in their local *Khānqāhs* since many generations), the latter was first printed in 1318h (1900–1),⁸¹ and *al-Fiqh al-aḥwaṭ* in its Persian translation only in 1333h (1914–5).⁸² Sayyid Muḥammad Nurbakhsh's *Risālat al-i'tiqādiyya* was first published in 1342h (1923/4), introducing the terminus *Sūfiyya Imāmiyya*, which has spread from there to other Nurbakhshi literature⁸³ and has become more controversial among Nurbakhshis ever since (see below).

While the above mentioned pioneering editions seem to have been prepared by Shi'ī publishing houses, it is beyond the scope of this article to evaluate their authenticity.⁸⁴ But there are other books

⁸⁰ *Da'wat-i islāh*, pp. 37–39

⁸¹ See above, note 48.

⁸² See above, note 43.

⁸³ *Nawā-ī Sūfiyya* VIII (1993), p. 22; its title was *Kitāb al-i'tiqādiyya*, Lahore 1342, see *Maqālāt-i Maulwī Muḥammad Shafi'* (note 42), pp. 28–29. In the same year one *Risālat-i Imāmiyya Nurbakhsh*, attributed to Shāh Qāsim Faidbakhsh, ed. Sayyid Amir Hamza (Kustung/Corbat), was printed in Lahore by Shaikh Ilāhī Bakhsh Muhammad Jalāl al-Dīn; see Sayyid Husain 'Arif, *Silsilat-i Nurbakhshiyya kī 'ilmī āthār*, in: *Dānish* (Islamabad) 17–18 (1989), p. 312.

⁸⁴ Variations probably also exist between the different manuscripts still preserved in Baltistan. The pamphlet *Absār al-basā'ir*, published by the *Nadwat-i Islāmiyya Nurbakhshiyya*, Karachi 1986, pp. 22–23, tells about the difficulties which even Maulana Muhammad Bashīr faced when trying to establish unanimity on his Urdu edition of *al-Fiqh al-aḥwaṭ*: his manuscript submitted to the Nurbakhshi 'Ulamā' was made to disappear by some pro-Shi'ī elements and he had to prepare a completely new translation.

falsely attributed to Sayyid Muhammad Nūrbakhsh, such as *Kashf al-haḡiqā*,⁸⁵ *Maṣṣāʾib ʿitrat al-tāhira*⁸⁶ and *Rafʿ al-ikhtilāf*⁸⁷ as well as a new Urdu translation and commentary of *al-Fiqh al-aḡwaṭ*, called *Tanwīr al-sirāj*,⁸⁸ which clearly show a Shiʿi strategy to absorb the Nurbakhshis by “shaping” their doctrines as a first step. The *Ahl-i ḡadīth* for their part have tried the same with books like *Najm al-hudā*,⁸⁹ *Mashjar al-awliyā*⁹⁰ and *Tabaqāt-i nūryya*,⁹¹ which contain

⁸⁵ *Kashf al-haḡiqā fi bayān ʿawālim al-kathra wa-ʿl-wahda*, Tehran 1343h (1924–5), a book of verses on ʿirfān attributed to Sayyid Muhammad Nūrbakhsh, but written after 1055h (1645); see *Daʿwat-i islāh*, p. 75; *Taʾriḡh-i Baltistān*, p. 187. According to Molé, *Kubrawiyya* (note 38), p. 128, “ouvrage d’un shiʿisme prononcé”

⁸⁶ Published in Jullundur and listed among the works of Sayyid Muhammad Nūrbakhsh by Pandawī, op. cit. (note 41), p. 91, but identified as fake in *Taʾriḡh-i Baltistān*, p. 187. *Daʿwat-i islāh*, p. 76, claims that most of its contents have been taken from the *Bihār al-anwār* of Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī, written in 1098h (1686–7).

⁸⁷ Published 1992 in Iran, n.p., Kitābkhāna-ī Amīr-ī Hamadān; its Urdu translation *Āʾīn-ī tarīqat*, Skardū, Idāra-ī Wahdat Publications, was distributed free of charge in early 1993 and sharply condemned by the *Nurbakhshīyya Youth Federation*, see *Nawā-ī Sūfiyya* VIII (1993), pp. 25–26. A detailed discussion of its false points is given *ibid.*, pp. 14–19.

⁸⁸ Two Volumes, Qom 1984, ed. by Sayyid ʿAbbās al-Mūsāwī, who has also compiled *Kāshif al-haḡq* (see above), translated by Raushan ʿAlī Hindī; a strong-worded critique of this “religious treason” by Abū al-ʿIrḡān (= Muhammad Bashīr) is published in *Nawā-ī Sūfiyya* I (1985), pp. 45–57.

⁸⁹ First published in Tehran 1271s (1892–3), with Sayyid Muhammad Wālā al-Mūsāwī (= Nūrbakhsh) named as author; on p. 5 it contains a praise of the caliphs Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. A new edition with Urdu translation from ʿAlī Muhammad Hādī Shigri, Karachī 1988 (*Nadwat-i Islāmīyya Nūrbakhshīyya*), is based on that book and a manuscript in the possession of Akhund Muhammad Ibrahīm, Khaplū; it contains four main parts on *ādāb-i sharʿat*, *lawāzim-i tarīqat*, *haḡiqat* and *madārīj-i maʿrifat*.

⁹⁰ Edited by Abū Bāqir ʿAlī bin al-Husain al-Gurazī, 2 Vols., Lahore, n.d., Fayyād Printing Press and Ashraf Press; attributed to Sayyid Muhammad Nūrbakhsh, but said to be written by Maulwī Khalīl al-Rahmān from Balḡhār near Khaplū; see *Nawā-ī Sūfiyya* X (1994), p. 19. It contains biographies of the *Awliyā* from the Prophet Muhammad to Khwāja Ishāq Khuttalānī, promulgating Sunnī tenets like a *bayʿa* from ʿAlī for Abū Bakr (Vol. I, pp. 51–52) or the branding of the *Imāmīyya* as “the *fitna* of Ibn Sabā” (Vol. I, p. 202).

⁹¹ *Tabaqāt-i nūryya dar ahwāl-i mashāyikh-i Nūrbakhshīyya*, Lahore, Maktabat Quddūsiyya, 1969, transl. Muhammad Sulaimān Kīlānī. The author is named Sūfī Muhammad Ibn Muhammad, a *Murīd* of Shams al-Dīn ʿIrāqī, but said to be the same Maulwī Khalīl al-Rahmān; see *Nawā-ī Sūfiyya* X (1994), p. 19, and *Taʾriḡh-i Baltistān*, p. 9. The book contains 15 biographies of *Awliyā*, among them Shams al-Dīn ʿIrāqī and his son Mīr Danyāl.

praise of the first three caliphs and portray the Nurbakhshīyya as a branch of Sunni Islam.

The whole tug-of-war about the allegiance of the Nurbakhshis, which an 'Ālim of the *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* has compared with a "public wasteland" (*khālisa*), belonging to the one who takes possession of it,⁹² has been amply spread out in a series of pamphlets and counter-pamphlets published between 1956 and 1958, namely *Ḥālāt-ī Baltistān*,⁹³ *Wādī Baltistān ke madhhabī hālāt*,⁹⁴ *Da'wat-ī uttīḥād*⁹⁵ and *Da'wat-ī iṣlāh*.⁹⁶ The latter two contain many references to historical and religious books to prove their point of view regarding the Nurbakhshīyya. To this category belongs also the introduction to Sayyid 'Alī's *Kāshif al-ḥaqq*, which was published only recently.⁹⁷

During the last decades both Sunni and Shi'ī proselytists have relied increasingly on material means to reach their ends. The *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* have extended their *Dār al-'Ulūm* in Ghwārī to become the largest religious school in Baltistan, with 30 teaching 'Ulamā' and more than 500 male and female pupils,⁹⁸ and have built nearly 40 other schools, the largest ones in Skardū, Wazīrpūr (Shigar) and Kirīs.⁹⁹ The Hanafi-Sunnis, too, have built a large *Madrasa* in

⁹² Khāwar, op. cit. (note 10), p. 213; this comparison has also been made by Nurbakhshis themselves, see *Absār al-basā'ir* (note 84), p. 5.

⁹³ Written by Sayyid Isrār Husain, General Secretary of the *Anjuman-ī tahaffuz-ī huqūq-ī shī'a* in Karachi, in 1956. Quoted in the pamphlets of Ansārī (notes 94 and 96), for example with an appeal to save the souls of the remaining 50,000 Nurbakhshis from the "enemies of the *ahl al-bait*" (*Wādī Baltistān*, p. 18).

⁹⁴ An answer to the above mentioned (note 93) by Maulwī 'Abd al-Rashīd Ansārī (Baltistānī) from Siksā, 32 pp., published by the *Anjuman-ī Islāmiyya Baltistān*, Karachi, n.d. (1956).

⁹⁵ See above (note 79); written to refute *Wādī Baltistān* by the Shi'ī Muhammad Amīn (Khaplū) and published by the *Anjuman-ī Imāmiyya Baltistāniyya Lahore*, with contributions from Mīrzā Yūsuf Husain (Mianwali), Sayyid 'Alī al-Mūsāwī (Lahore), Sayyid 'Alī from Kirīs (see above), Sayyid Shāh 'Abbās al-Mūsāwī (Khaplū) and Sayyid Mukhtār al-Mūsāwī (Lahore); it is said to have been regarded by many Nurbakhshis as a fitting reply to *Tuḥfat-ī Tibat* (see note 74), to which they themselves had never reacted, and thus to have "done much harm" (*Nawā-ī Sūfiyya* X (1994), p. 17).

⁹⁶ See above (note 13); written as a rejoinder to *Da'wat-ī uttīḥād* and published by the *Anjuman-ī Islāmiyya Baltistān*.

⁹⁷ See above (note 57).

⁹⁸ Information received during a visit in October 1992.

⁹⁹ All of them in villages with Nurbakhshī population; only one village (Yūgo) has been completely converted to the *Ahl-ī ḥadīth*.

Skardū and a dozen smaller ones in Balti villages with mixed population.¹⁰⁰ The incentive for poor Nurbakhshi villagers to send their children to such schools is great, given the prestige of religious learning in Baltistan and the stipends offered, especially to advanced students who can get a free university-level training in Saudi-Arabia and further employment opportunities.¹⁰¹ The financial contributions from outside donors—Pakistani as well as foreign¹⁰²—to Sunni schools and mosques in Baltistan are considerable in relation to the small percentage of Sunnis among the local population, but the struggle for the remaining 25% of the Baltis who are still Nurbakhshis seems worth the effort. It is noteworthy that all Sunnis in Baltistan are either immigrants from other parts of Pakistan and Kashmir or—most of them—converts from the Nurbakhshiyya and their descendants, while conversion from Twelver Shi‘a to Sunna is almost non-existent. There is also a latent fear of “Shi‘i rule” in this sensitive borderland¹⁰³ which has always been threatened by Indian designs.¹⁰⁴

The Shi‘is for their part have also greatly extended their network of schools, mosques and *Imāmbārahs*—the latter, like Sunni mosques, are often placed in the close vicinity of old Nurbakhshi *Khānqāhs*

¹⁰⁰ They are listed in *Ru‘yḍād-ī safar-o-rīḥ-pūrt-ī imtihān-ī madāris-ī ahl-ī sunnat*, Skardū 1992.

¹⁰¹ By 1994 some 50 ‘*Ulamā*’ from Baltistan had studied in Mekka, Medina or Riyadh, most of whom have returned to become teachers in *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* schools. The large number of religious students recruited by the *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* is, however, not yet matched by a large-scale conversion among the ordinary villagers. *Ta‘rīkh-ī Baltistān*, p. 156, estimated only 8.000 followers of *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* and 3.000 Hanafi-Sunnis in Baltistan 1992; my own estimate is only slightly higher (see above, note 5).

¹⁰² The main sponsor of the *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* is the government of Saudi-Arabia; the Hanafi-Sunnis in Baltistan get support by the *Siddiqi Trust* (headquarters Karachi) and the *Tanzīm-ī Islāmī* of Dr. Isrār Ahmad (Lahore).

¹⁰³ The “Northern Areas” of Pakistan, of which Baltistan forms two districts, are still ruled by administrators appointed by the Federal Government, pending a solution of the 47 year old Kashmir dispute. The question of “Shi‘i rule” could only arise if the *Northern Areas’ Council* (elected regularly since 1975) would be given legislative and executive powers, which it does not yet enjoy.

¹⁰⁴ During the war of 1971 India has occupied three villages in the Shayoq valley (Čorbat), and since 1983 parts of the Siačen glacier north of it. Both Sunnis and Shi‘is have tried to mobilize support for their communities with “strategic” arguments already since the 1950s, see *Wādī Baltistān*, pp. 27–29; *Da‘wat-ī ittihād*, pp. 81–82, 112–114.

with merciless violation of local architectural style—helped by two organisations which mobilize donors from abroad, the *Muḥammadiyya Trust*¹⁰⁵ and the *Anwār-ı Muṣṭafā Trust*.¹⁰⁶ While their majority in Baltistan is comfortable nowadays and not endangered by any possible further success of the Sunni mission, they see no reason to give way, and their ‘*Ulamā*’ show the same zeal to extend their realm as do their Sunni colleagues. But the more far-sighted among them have long since understood that priority for them lies in keeping the Nurbakhshis in the *Imāmiyya* fold, thus making them immune against “Wahhabi” seduction.

Nurbakhshi reassertion against many odds

The *Census of India* 1911 counted 43,574 Nurbakhshis and Sunnis together in the district of Ladakh (comprising all of the present-day two districts of Baltistan) and remarked that their number was decreasing daily due to conversion to Shi‘i or Sunni Islam.¹⁰⁷ Yet their number has more than doubled since (see above), which is not much if compared with the overall population growth in Baltistan during this century, but nevertheless remarkable for a “dying” community

As mentioned above, most early Nurbakhshi students at the religious schools of Northern India converted to the *Ahl-ı ḥadīth*; but some of them chose to remain Nurbakhshis even after 5–10 years of learning at such schools. In Baltistan former generations of Nurbakhshi ‘*Ulamā*’ had referred freely to Sunni as well as Shi‘i books on *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* and Arabic grammar without any “crisis of identity”, regarding their path as a “golden middle course” which avoids the exaggeration in one direction or other (*ifrāt* and *tafrīt*) of Sunni and Shi‘i “sectarians”, while the writings of the Sufi elders

¹⁰⁵ It was founded in the 1960s (formally registered in 1985) by Shaikh Hasan from Parkotta/Mahdiābād (Kharmang) and has attracted financial help mainly from citizens of Kuwait and other Arab countries. It has built more than 25 religious schools, some of them in Nurbakhshi areas.

¹⁰⁶ It was founded in 1973 by the *Anyuman-ı Imāmiyya Khaplū* with headquarters in Karachi and Khaplū. Working in cooperation with the *Muhammadiyya Trust*, its activities are centered in Nurbakhshi areas.

¹⁰⁷ *Maqālāt-ı Maulwī Muhammad Shafīʿ* (note 42), p. 25.

and Persian poets like Sa'dī were their favourable mode of instruction. This syncretist approach has helped many Nurbakhshi 'Ulamā' of our century, who have been trained in *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* as well as in Hanafi-Sunni and Shi'ī schools first in Northern India and then in the cities of Punjab and Sindh or even in Iran,¹⁰⁸ to keep attached to their Nurbakhshi identity even if they often had to conceal it during their years of study.¹⁰⁹

Most active among them in the defence of the Nurbakhshiyya, notably against Shi'ī proselytism, in pre-partition time was Maulwi Ḥamza 'Alī from Khaplū, who, after studying in the Sunni *Madrasat Mazhar al-'Ulūm* in Saharanpur (Uttar Pradesh), became Friday preacher of the Nurbakhshi migrant colony in the hill resort of Mussoori (Maṣūri) nearby.¹¹⁰ In 1930 he published *Falāh al-mu'minīn*, an Urdu edition of the *Da'wat-ī sūfiyya*.¹¹¹ He is also the author of three books on Nurbakhshi doctrine, *Qā'im al-ḥaqq*¹¹², *'Aqā'id al-mu'minīn*¹¹³ and *Nūr al-mu'minīn—kashf al-tafāwut*.¹¹⁴ This last—and most important—book was written in response to the demand of many Nurbakhshi 'Ulamā' to explain in full the doctrinal differences between their *madhhab* and the Twelver Shi'a, which Maulwi Ḥamza 'Alī had already done in short form on posters

¹⁰⁸ Before partition there have been only two dozens of Nurbakhshi 'Ulamā' who studied in Shi'ī or Sunni (mostly *Deobandi*) schools in Northern India without becoming converts. Between 1948 and 1993 some 100 Nurbakhshi 'Ulamā' have graduated from Sunni schools of the *Barelvi* tendency—which, other than the *Deobandi* or *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* supports the cult of saints—mostly in Karachi and Lahore, while less than a dozen have still enrolled in *Deobandi* or *Ahl-ī ḥadīth* schools after 1948 without changing their *madhhab*. Some 50 have graduated from Shi'ī schools in Pakistan and 10 from Iran (information collected from interviews).

¹⁰⁹ *Tibyān-ī Nurbakhshiyya* I (1994) p. 1–2 (editorial). The chairman of the *Jam'iyyat al-'Ulamā'-i Pakistān* in the Northern Areas, Qāri' 'Abd al-Rashīd, told me that *Barelvi* schools have now stopped to receive students from the Khaplū area because too many had falsely posed as Sunnis (Interview 12.7.1994).

¹¹⁰ There have been colonies of 10.–15.000 Baltis in Simla and Mussoori, mostly worker-migrants, before 1947; see *Maqālāt-ī Maulwī Muhammad Shafi'*, p. 25.

¹¹¹ See above, note 48.

¹¹² A book written in response to a not identified pamphlet, *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq* of a Shi'ī named Sayyid Shāh 'Abbās (from Khaplū?), n.p., n.d., but printed shortly after 1345h (1926–7).

¹¹³ *'Aqā'id al-mu'minīn—inkishāf al-awsaṭ*, Khaplū n.d. (before 1948); from its contents it can be considered as a shorter version (104 pp.) of *Nūr al-mu'minīn*.

¹¹⁴ See above, note 31.

distributed throughout Baltistan in 1941.¹¹⁵ Another famous Nurbakhshi 'Ālim and Muftī of his time, Sayyid Qāsim Shāh from Kharkū,¹¹⁶ in 1928 published the *Kitāb-ı Nurbakhshīyya* on questions of *fiqh*, the first of its kind since *Sirāj al-islām*, but later dismissed by other Nurbakhshi 'Ulamā' due to its inconsistency with *al-Fiqh al-ahwaṭ*.¹¹⁷

Slowly and much more modestly than the Sunnis and Shi'is, the Nurbakhshis also started to build religious schools¹¹⁸ and founded local *Anjumans* which cared for communal affairs, notably the collection of *zakāt* and *khums*¹¹⁹ and the renovation or new construction of mosques and *Khānqāhs*.¹²⁰ Since the 1950s Nurbakhshi *Jāmi' Masjids* could be built also in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Quetta and Gilgit to take care of the Nurbakhshi migrant colonies in those towns.¹²¹ But it was only in the 1980s that the establishment of *Madrasas* spread to almost all Nurbakhshi vil-

¹¹⁵ *Nūr al-mu'minīn*, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ He is said to have never studied outside Baltistan, but had many disciples himself; he died around 1930. His book *Tuhfat al-Qāsimīyya* on Nurbakhshi *fiqh* exists only as a manuscript in the possession of Sayyid Zāhid Husain, Kharkū, but is quoted in *Nūr al-mu'minīn*; *Da'wat-ı islām* (note 13), p. 140, also mentions a printed translation of *Usūl-ı 'aqā'id* from Sayyid Qāsim Shāh, which could be the *Kitāb al-i'tiqādiyya* mentioned in note 83.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Maulana Muhammad Bashīr, Islamabad, 10.5.1994. While being blamed by some contemporary Nurbakhshi 'Ulamā' to have yielded to Shi'i pressure, he is, strangely enough, praised in *Da'wat-ı islām*, p. 140, for having *not* done so.

¹¹⁸ There has been a *Madrasat Nurbakhshīyya Sūfiyya* in Khaplū already in 1343h (1924–5), see *Nūr al-mu'minīn*, p. 439. The first Nurbakhshi school still in use was founded 1943 in Ghursey by Sayyid Shāh 'Abbās from Khaplū; in 1970 only 10 Nurbakhshi schools existed, 20 in 1980, but at least 60 in 1994.

¹¹⁹ The collection and redistribution of *zakāt* and *khums* was decentralized after the death of Pīr Sayyid Muhammad Shāh Zain al-Akhyār (1947), but the work of all local *Anjumans* is supervised since 1955 by a central *Anjuman* with its head office in Karachi.

¹²⁰ There are places of worship called *Khānqāh*—even if not all of them have the typical *hujar* for spiritual retreatment (*i'tikāf*)—in nearly all Nurbakhshi villages, many of which have been constructed during the last 100 years, but possibly on the site of older *Khānqāhs* which became dilapidated. Floods have also frequently destroyed such buildings.

¹²¹ In Karachi there are nowadays four Nurbakhshi *Jāmi' Masjids*, the largest one (Mahmūdābād) having an attendance of 1.500 worshippers. The second largest Nurbakhshi colony is in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, with a *Jāmi' Masjid* established in 1975.

lages, crowned by the opening of a large *Dār al-‘Ulūm* in Karachi in 1990.¹²²

Apart from the absence of supporting groups of co-religionists abroad, the Nurbakhshi ‘*Ulamā*’ had to cope also with the absence of an effective religious leadership. The *Pīrs* have remained a focus and symbol for their community, but do not seem to have done much to meet the challenge of other sects’ proselytizers. Sayyid Muḥammad Shāh Zain al-Akhyār (d. 1947) is claimed by Shi‘i authors to have shown a leaning towards Shi‘ism,¹²³ and even more so his successor *per interim*, Sayyid Mukhtār Husain (see above). The latter’s son Sayyid ‘Aun ‘Alī Shah, *Pīr* from 1951 to 1991, is remembered by the Nurbakhshis for his piety, tolerance, good manners and looks, beautiful voice and style of reciting, but not as a strong personality.¹²⁴ In the 1960s he was nearly helpless against the “invasion” of the unscrupulous impostor Sayyid Manzūr Ḥusain Hamadānī, a Shi‘i from Sargodha (Punjab), who took advantage from his lineage and abilities as a showman to impress thousands of simple-minded Nurbakhshi villagers and declare himself as their *Pīr*.¹²⁵ One element of his success was that he gave the Nurbakhshis an illusion of their importance beyond Baltistan and promised them to convert the whole world to their *madhhab*, another was the help of a charismatic local ‘*Ālim*’ (Sayyid Muḥammad Mukhtār from Thalley) who preached as his *khalīfa* in all Nurbakhshi villages. But during his

¹²² It is the first high-level Nurbakhshi religious school which allows recruiting of full-trained ‘*Ulamā*’ without resorting to Sunni or Shi‘i schools. Its students are being trained as preachers at an early stage and sent for *tablighī* tours to their home areas, following the example of other sects; see *Tibyān-i Nūrbakhshīyya* I (1994) pp. 1–3.

¹²³ *Da‘wat-i itihād*, pp. 97–98; *Kāshif al-haqq*, pp. 21 and 29

¹²⁴ Weekly *Siaḥen* (Islamabad), 28.11.1991, p. 2; *Nawā-i Sūfiyya* IV (1992), pp. 12–14, and IX (1993), pp. 12–14.

¹²⁵ He is said to have been induced to come to Baltistan by a corrupt Political Agent posted in Skardū, and stayed there only after his third visit. He has also published a book, i.e. Aghā Hamadānī Sayyid Muḥammad Manzūr Husain, *Mashaf-i Muḥammad-i Muṣṭafā makhsūs lil-firqa-i nājiyya Muḥammadiyya imāmīyya sūfiyya mashrab-i Hamdāniyya ma‘rūf bi-Nūrbakhshīyya*, Rawalpindi n.d., it is a very casual collection of quotations and statements on scattered questions of doctrine, including a fictitious chain of leaders of the *tarīqa* from a grandson of the Imam Zain al-‘Abidīn to the author and his son, which is completely different from the Nurbakhshi *silsila*, except for the inclusion of Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī (ibid., p. 100).

first visits in Baltistan Sayyid Manzūr Ḥusain could even muster support from Pīr Sayyid ‘Aun ‘Alī and most of the Nurbakhshi ‘*Ulamā*’. He received large contributions of land from his followers called *Hamadānis*, notably in the Shigar valley, and still lives in Skardū, though nowadays with a much reduced status.¹²⁶

If the affair of Sayyid Manzūr Ḥusain does not seem to have left a lasting impact on the Nurbakhshis, it was nevertheless an indicator of their desolate state in the 1960s. Some present-day Nurbakhshi ‘*Ulamā*’ have been quite outspoken in their criticism of their own colleagues, whom they blamed for passivity and opportunism, preferring to enjoy their inherited status of prestige in their home villages to countering the activities of Shi‘is and Sunnis with own *tablīgh* missions.¹²⁷ But nowadays such passivity seems to have been overcome by a new generation of Nurbakhshi ‘*Ulamā*’, most of whom hold college degrees like F.A., B.A. or M.A. besides those from religious schools, and are as eager as their Sunni and Shi‘i colleagues for preaching and founding schools and youth organisations.

A noteworthy role in encouraging a modernist revival among their sect has been played by the *Nadwat-ī Islāmīyya Nurbakhshīyya* which was founded in 1960 as *Jam‘īyyat al-Muta‘allimīn-ī Nurbakhshīyya* by ‘*Ulamā*’ and students.¹²⁸ Since the 1970s it has supervised and financed the publishing of religious literature, notably the Urdu translations of *al-Fiqh al-aḥwat*, *al-Risāla al-ī‘tqādiyya* and *Da‘wat-ī šūfiyya* by Maulana Muḥammad Bashīr.¹²⁹ The latter, who is Friday preacher of the Nurbakhshi *Jāmi‘ Masjīd* in Islamabad since 1975, in 1985 founded a religious journal, *Nawā-ī Sūfiyya*, which ceased publication in 1986, but has reappeared since March 1992 on a regular trimestrial basis, being a multi-faceted and popular “standardbearer for the revival of Sufism”.¹³⁰ Another journal, *Tibyān-ī*

¹²⁶ Interview with Muhammad Yūsuf Husainābādī, Skardū, 8.8.1994.

¹²⁷ *Absār al-basā‘ir*, pp. 34, 36–37, 42–47, 69

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–7, 92–96.

¹²⁹ See above, notes 43 and 48; *Kitāb al-ī‘tqādiyya*, ed. and transl. Muhammad Bashīr, Karachi 1975.

¹³⁰ Thus its slogan on the title of each number since 1992. It is published by the *Anjuman-ī Muḥammadiyya-ī Baltistāniyyān Islāmābād* and supports the “purist” tendency (see below).

Nurbakhshīyya, started its publication from Karachi in March 1994.¹³¹ There is a steady increase of literature produced by Nurbakhshis since the 1970s which shows the vitality of the community despite its modest means.¹³² Although being the most peaceful group among the generally peaceful Baltis¹³³—qualified frequently as “simple-minded” (*sīdhā sādihā*) by their own writers—the Nurbakhshis seem on the way of loosing their inferiority complex towards their Shi‘i and Sunni neighbours.

But internal tussles, notably among their ‘*Ulamā*’ class, continue to plague them. The *Nadwa* has met with much opposition,¹³⁴ partly because it represents a new brand of ‘*Ulamā*’ with less respect for the *Pīr* and the old elite of *Sādāt*,¹³⁵ and more so because its campaigning against the use of the terminus *Imāmīyya* for Nurbakhshi self-definition.¹³⁶ The conflict between the protagonists of *Sūfiyya Imāmīyya Nurbakhshīyya* and the “purists” of *Şūfiyya Nurbakhshīyya*, which started already in the 1940s (see above), has become sharper in recent years and generally reflects opposing influences on Nurbakhshi ‘*Ulamā*’ during their study in either Shi‘i or Sunni religious schools. The advocates of *Sūfiyya Nurbakhshīyya* have strongly criticised those of the *Şūfiyya Imāmīyya Nurbakhshīyya* as Trojan horses of the Shi‘is preparing the way for total absorption,¹³⁷ but could not stop them from gaining influence. *Pīr Sayyid ‘Aun ‘Alī*

¹³¹ It is published by the *Anyuman-ı Falāh-o-behbūd-ı Nurbakhshī Baltistāniyyān* which administrates the *Jāmi‘ Masjid* and the *Dār al-‘Ulūm* in Mahmūdābād, Karachi, representing the *Imāmīyya* tendency (see below).

¹³² See notes 9, 11, 41, 43, 48, 84, 89, 129. In 1993 the Nurbakhshi author Muhammad Ibrāhīm Zā‘ir has published *Ard-ı Baltistān* (Rawalpindi) with contributions of authors from all sects; he has written or edited eight other books before (ibid., p. 79). In 1994 two noteworthy books were in print, an edition and Urdu translation of *Tuhfat al-ahbāb* (see note 3) by Muhammad Ridā Akhundzāda and one *Ta‘rīkh-ı Nurbakhshīyya* written by his brother, the author of *Ta‘rīkh-ı Baltistān* (see note 11).

¹³³ Akhundzāda, op. cit. (note 9), pp. 50–52, quotes from police records to show the extraordinary low crime-rate in Baltistan, which ‘*Ulamā*’ of all sects attribute to their influence on the society.

¹³⁴ That has been amply documented in *Absār al-basā‘ir*, passim.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 25–27, 34–35, 39–40, 47.

¹³⁶ Ibid., passim, denounces the adherents of *Sūfiyya Imāmīyya* as *tarmīm-pasand*, i.e. “liking to make additions”.

¹³⁷ Abū al-‘Irfān (= Muhammad Bashīr), *Hasīntarīn, par par farīb*, in: *Nawā-ı Sūfiyya* III (1985), pp. 38–55.

Shāh, as well as his son and successor, *Pīr* Sayyid Muḥammad Shāh, while trying to present themselves as neutral, have given their blessing to the use of the term *Imāmīyya*.¹³⁸ This can be explained by family relations¹³⁹ as well as being possibly a deliberate policy to win Shiʿi—and more explicitly Iranian¹⁴⁰—support for the Nurbakhshis who cannot compete with the financial and political power of the other groups present in Baltistan and their outside backers. A new edition of the *Daʿwat-ī ṣūfiyya* from May 1992 shows how far the supporters of *Imāmīyya* have gone in their bid to please Shiʿis: on its back-cover it gives a list of 38 instead of 14 “basic slogans” of the Nurbakhshī *madhhab*, the additions being words of praise for each of the twelve Imams and the mentioning of *tawallī* for them and *tabarruʿ* from their enemies.¹⁴¹ During a Nurbakhshī ‘*Ulamāʿ*’ convention in Khaplū in June 1993 it was tried in vain to reconcile the opposing tendencies by forming commissions.¹⁴²

Prospects for the survival of the sect

The closeness of the Nurbakhshīyya even in its form preserved in Baltistan to Twelver Shiʿism is undeniable. Nevertheless, the community until this day still reflects an attitude of the 14th and

¹³⁸ During the first conference of the ‘*Ulamāʿ*’-i *Imāmīyya* in Baltistan (Husainābād, 14.7.1974), in which several Nurbakhshī ‘*Ulamāʿ*’ took part, *Pīr* Sayyid ‘Aun ‘Alī Shāh had qualified Shiʿis and Nurbakhshīs as “one soul and body”, whom no power in the world could separate because of their common love for the *ahl al-bait*; see *Habl al-matīn*, Lahore, I (1974), p. 12. After clashes in Khaplū 1980 because of Nurbakhshī opposition to Shiʿi *Muharram* processions in front of their oldest *Khānqāh*, the *Pīr* has nevertheless spoken out on the differences between the two sects; see *Nawā-ī Sūfiyya* IX (1993), pp. 13–14.

¹³⁹ The present *Pīr* is a disciple and son-in-law of one of the most influential supporters of *Imāmīyya*, Sayyid ‘Alī Shāh “Fakhr al-‘*Ulamāʿ*” from Pharwā (Saltoro). The latter has been also related to his father, Sayyid ‘Aun ‘Alī Shāh, since both have married daughters of the *Pīr* Sayyid Muḥammad Shāh Zain al-Akhyār.

¹⁴⁰ There are rumours that the supporters of *Imāmīyya* receive financial support from Iran, which is, of course, denied by them. The number of Nurbakhshī students in Iran has increased recently, however.

¹⁴¹ See above, note 48. The original “14 slogans” are listed in note 51.

¹⁴² Ghulam Hasan (Suhrawardī) Nurbakhshī gives an account of that convention in *Nawā-ī Sūfiyya* VIII (1993), pp. 21–22, claiming that his suggestion to look for references of the term *Imāmīyya* in the books of the Nurbakhshī elders was not even considered.

15th centuries, when Sufi Shaikhs like Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī and Sayyid Muḥammad Nurbakhsh adopted elements of both Sunni and Shi‘i doctrines motivated by the wish to overcome the main schism of the Muslim *umma*.¹⁴³ From this angle the Balti Nurbakhshis’ claim to be the most authentic heirs of Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī¹⁴⁴—who is universally revered and “reclaimed” by Sunnis and Shi‘is as well¹⁴⁵—is basically true. While capitalizing on the achievements of Hamadānī, the Nurbakhshis can also look back on the longest still preserved Islamic cultural heritage in Pakistan’s “Northern Areas”¹⁴⁶

Ancestral pride and local patriotism are thus important elements of current Nurbakhshi self-assertion. Another factor is a political climate favourable to Sufi-style quietism, since the sectarian zeal of Sunni as well as Shi‘i activists of political Islam has become somewhat discredited in Pakistan, and especially in the “Northern Areas”, because of its intolerance and frequent degeneration into violence. Luckily for the Nurbakhshis they are no longer regarded as heretics by anyone, but rather as “lost sheep” courted by both Sunnis and Shi‘is, and violence against them is rare. If it did occur, then mostly due to claims to possession of their places of worship by other sects.¹⁴⁷

While pressure is still applied on them—nowadays more from Shi‘is than from Sunnis—, the more important threats for the sur-

¹⁴³ Molé, *Kubrawīya* (note 38), *passim*.

¹⁴⁴ Akhundzāda, *op. cit.* (note 9), ends his book with an appeal to members of other sects to preserve the Nurbakhshis, who are the “spiritual legacy” of Hamadānī, together with his visible legacy, namely the *Khānqāhs* and mosques attributed to him (p. 124).

¹⁴⁵ For discussions of the conflicting claims about Hamadānī’s religious affiliation see *ibid.*, pp. 82–90; *Tārīkh-i Baltistān* (note 11), pp. 126–128; Khāwar (note 10), pp. 213–214.

¹⁴⁶ All “monuments of Baltistan” described in Dani, *Architecture* (note 9), pp. 117–149, have been Nurbakhshi places of worship and tombs, except for the palaces of the local Rājās and the tombs of the Tūsi brothers (note 22). There are very few preserved old buildings from the Islamic era in the valleys west of Baltistan.

¹⁴⁷ For the case of Kirīs see above (note 78). In the case of Khaplū 1980 (note 138) not the *Khānqāh* itself, but the alley in front of it was claimed by Shi‘is to perform their processions.

vival of the Nurbakhshiyya as an independent religious community are the material inducements offered to converts by other sects on the one hand and their intellectual challenge to the Nurbakhshis' claim to be followers of a distinct *madhhab* on the other. Nurbakhshi 'Ulamā' since Maulwi Hamza 'Alī (see above) have clearly seen the danger of complete disappearance of their sect and have done their best to stem themselves against the tide. The *Nadwat-ı Islāmiyya Nurbakhshiyya* has made its members swear since the 1970s "to close the gate for those who want to flee from the Nurbakhshi *madhhab*",¹⁴⁸ and a Nurbakhshi convention in Kirīs in May 1982, chaired by Pīr Sayyid 'Aun 'Alī Shāh, passed a collective pledge not to take any recompense from non-Nurbakhshis for becoming "their secret tool".¹⁴⁹

In their bid to become "modern" and catch up with their Shi'ī and Sunni colleagues, Nurbakhshi 'Ulamā' of the younger generation have, however, already adopted much of the former's style and rhetoric, demanding, for example, the protection of Islam and of "the ideological frontiers of Pakistan" from "foreign conspiracies", as well as full implementation of the *shari'ā*, including the abolishment of interest.¹⁵⁰ They are much involved in the "Northern Areas" people's campaigning for full constitutional rights¹⁵¹ and nowadays deal in their sermons and meetings also with international issues of the Muslim world in the same way as Sunni and Shi'ī politicized 'Ulamā' do. Thus they meet a demand of their young co-religionists, many of whom migrate to big cities of Pakistan already during their secondary school education, but at the same time give away part of the Sufi ethos so important for Nurbakhshi self-statement.

Yet the efforts of identity-building by their intellectuals since the last decades may prove fruitful and could stabilize at least the remaining areas of Nurbakhshi presence in Baltistan, although a

¹⁴⁸ *Absār al-basā'ir*, pp. 8–9.

¹⁴⁹ *Nawā-ı Süfiyya* VIII (1993), p. 20. The pledge was signed by 69 'Ulamā' and other leaders of the community

¹⁵⁰ *Absār al-basā'ir*, pp. 5 and 47–48.

¹⁵¹ Both the *Nurbakhshiyya Youth Federation* and the *Baltistan Students Federation* frequently invite Nurbakhshi 'Ulamā' as speakers to their conventions, where the demand for those rights is usually on top of the agenda.

standstill of the conversion movements seems unlikely in the foreseeable future. In the climate of sectarian competition which is nowadays very tangible in the "Northern Areas" of Pakistan—though still less in Baltistan than in the districts around Gilgit—it would be unnatural if an ancient religious community like the Nurbakhshis would not produce an elite amongst its members dedicated to preserve its identity. Such an elite does exist and is still growing, albeit divided into the "purist" and the *Imāmiyya* tendency. It seems that the supporters of the *Imāmiyya* are as eager to preserve the Nurbakhshiyya as a distinct group as are the "purists", although the former are more subject to manipulation by Shi'is than the latter are to manipulation by Sunnis. Considering the high birth-rate in Baltistan, the Nurbakhshis will probably still grow in absolute numbers in the next decades, and other sects will have to take their distinctiveness more seriously than they used to do until recently.