

The Development of the Nūrbakhshī Sufi Order in Gilgit-Baltistan: A Historical Account

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Abstract

Islam came to Gilgit-Baltistan with various invaders and missionaries from adjacent neighbouring regions but there is a lack of tangible historical and archaeological evidence to find out an exact date. The Kubravī-Hamadānī Sufi order laid the foundation of Islam in Gilgit-Baltistan. This legacy was further carried on by the Nūrbakhshī Sufi order, which is the focus of the present study. This Sufi order, independent of Shī'īs and Sunnis, was founded in the fifteenth century by Mīr Nūrbakhsh, who tried to overcome the schism of the Muslim community by reconciling the teachings of Sunnis and Shī'īs. The paper examines the origin and development of the Nūrbakhshī order through centuries in Gilgit-Baltistan, after giving its reflections in Persia and Kashmir. The Nūrbakhshī order retains its centuries-old sectarian identity despite a hundred years of massive missionary efforts from both Shī'īs and Sunnis.

Keywords

Gilgit-Baltistan, Mīr Nūrbakhsh, Kubravī, Hamadānī, Sufi order, Sufism.

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Introduction

The origin of Islam in Gilgit-Baltistan can be traced to the advent of Islam in the neighbouring regions. Muslim rule in Central Asia and India around the eighth century CE also marked the region for Islamic influence. Hence, until the late fourteenth century CE, various preachers and invaders came to Gilgit-Baltistan but failed to play any significant role in the region. According to historical sources and archaeological evidences, Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī (d. 1384 CE) was the first who laid firm foundations of Islam in the region in 1379 CE.¹ The total population of Gilgit-Baltistan is over 1.49 million having four prominent Muslim sects, with an approximate population of Twelver Shī‘īs (39%), Sunnis (27%), Ismā‘īlīs (18%), and Nūrbakhshīs (16%).²

Gilgit-Baltistan³ is administratively divided into three divisions and ten districts. It has very diversified geography in terms of socio-cultural and geophysical aspects. It has an area of 72,496 sq. km.⁴ It borders the Chinese Xinjiang to the north, Indian administered Jammu & Kashmir to the east, Pakistan administered Azad Jammu & Kashmir to the south and Afghanistan and Central Asia, through the Wakhan corridor to the west.

Archaeological evidence is not sufficient for a complete account of the pre-Islamic religions. Some evidence of around the second century BCE provides some information about the Zoroastrians. Buddhism remained the prominent religion of the region until Muslims came to

¹ For details, see Sayyidah Ashraf Zafar, *Amīr Kabīr Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī* (Lahore: Nadwat al-Muṣannifīn, 1972); G. M. D. Sufi, *Kashīr: Being a History of Kashmīr from the Earliest Times to Our Own*, 2 vols. (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 1948); Devin DeWeese, “The Eclipse of the Kubraviyyah in Central Asia,” *Iranian Studies* 21, nos. 1-2 (1988): 45-83; and Agha Hussain Hamadani, “Ethical Philosophy of Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani,” *Islamic Studies*, 27, no. 4 (1988): 305-15.

² Izhar Hunz’āī, “Conflict Dynamics in Gilgit-Baltistan,” Special Report 321 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, January 2013), 2, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/SR321.pdf>.

³ Gilgit-Baltistan, formerly known as Northern Areas, was known historically with different names as *Dardistān*, *Polūlō*, *Bolōr*, and Northern Areas. For details, see Ahmad H. Dani, *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 2018); John Biddulph, *Tribes of the Hindoo Kush* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2001). It was given the name of Gilgit-Baltistan in 2009. Skardu, Ghanche, Shigar, and Kharmang districts are in Baltistan Division. The Gilgit division has Gilgit, Hunza, Nagar, and Ghizer districts. Diamer and Astore are located in the Diamer division.

⁴ “Gilgit-Baltistan at a Glance,” Special Report (Gilgit-Baltistan: Planning and Development Department, Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, 2020).

Central Asia around the eighth century CE. The archaeological evidence primarily depends on rock arts but some monumental remains like gravestones, grave excavations, and cultural materials also provide some information. The stupas of Buddha and Kharoshthi inscriptions of Buddhism still exist.

Mīr Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (1393-1464 CE), the founder of Nūrbakhshī order, belonged to the Kubravī-Hamadānī Sufi order. It started and flourished in Persia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries CE. As a Sufi reformer, he tried to eliminate the sectarian conflicts between the Muslims by giving them a new Sufi identity. His reformist efforts led to his confrontation with the Timurid Sultan, Mīrzā Shāhrukh (d. 1447 CE), the ruler of Persia and Transoxiana, who executed his spiritual preceptor, Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī, the Kubravī Sufi master in 1424 CE. Mīr Nūrbakhsh also spent most of his next twenty years in imprisonment and exile. During these years, he continued his preaching activities. After the death of Mīrzā Shāhrukh, Mīr Nūrbakhsh was able to live independently as a Sufi master. The order lost its independent character during the times of Safavids in Persia, but it established itself in Kashmir and then in Baltistan and Ladakh during the sixteenth century.

The article studies the history and development of the Nūrbakhshī Sufi order in Gilgit-Baltistan. It reveals that the Nūrbakhshī order was a branch of Kubravī-Hamadāniyyah order and that it was not a Shī'ī or Sunnī sub-sect. It also examines the concept of messianism in the light of the teachings and works of Mīr Nūrbakhsh. There is a need to study Mīr Nūrbakhsh's works and teachings and the Nūrbakhshī order as a distinct sect of Islam. It investigates major doctrines and principles of the Nūrbakhshī order along with its distinct jurisprudence. It explains the reasons for the order's decline in Persia. The study also examines the spread of the Nūrbakhshī order in Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and Ladakh regions. It further analyses the causes of the decline of the order in Kashmir and the rise of schism among its followers during the late nineteenth century. It finally discusses the contemporary challenges faced by the Nūrbakhshī community in Pakistan.

Mīr Nūrbakhsh: A Biographical Sketch

The Nūrbakhshī order took its name from Mīr Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh. Nūrbakhsh was his title, which means "the light giver," bestowed upon

him by his spiritual master Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī.⁵ Mīr Nūrbakhsh was born in 1393 CE in the Iranian city of Qain in Qahistān province.⁶ His father's name was Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh (d. 1399 CE), who traced his line of descent from the family of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) through Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 799 CE).⁷ His family migrated from the city of Qtif in Bahrain to Khurāsān to visit the tomb of 'Alī Raḍā (d. 818 CE). His father did not return to Qātif and settled in the city of Qā'in. Mīr Nūrbakhsh memorized the Qur'ān at the age of seven. He acquired the knowledge of religious and worldly subjects and became a master of Persian and Arabic languages. His studies took him to Herat. On the proposition of Ibrāhīm Khuttalānī, a spiritual successor of Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī, Mīr Nūrbakhsh moved to Kubravī khānqāh (hospice) in Khuttalān (present-day Kolab, in Tajikistan). In 1417 CE, he was initiated in Kubravī-Hamadānī order and become a disciple of Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī.⁸ He vigorously participated in spiritual exercises and soon achieved perfection. In 1423 CE, one of his associates named Khalīl saw a dream in which light from the sky descended upon Mīr Nūrbakhsh and through him dispersed to others on the earth.⁹ When Khavājah Ishāq heard about the dream, he gave him the title of "Nūrbakhsh," gave him *ijāzah*, ordered his disciples to swear allegiance to him, and become himself a follower of Mīr.¹⁰ This is a very rare phenomenon in the history of Sufism that a master becomes the disciple of his novice. However, Mīr Nūrbakhsh still considered Khavājah Ishāq his master.

Sayyid 'Abd Allāh Barzishābādī (d. 1468) was the only disciple of Khavājah Ishāq, who did not agree with his master and established his own Sufi order Dhahabiyyah. This was a major split in the Kubravī-Hamadānī order. Before the death of Khavājah Ishāq, the Kubravī-

⁵ Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī was a prominent Sufi master of Kubravī-Hamadānī order. He was the disciple and son-in-law of Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī. For details, see Zafar, *Amīr Kabīr Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī*.

⁶ Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, *al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ*, trans. Muḥammad Bashīr (Skardu: Madrasah-i Shāh-i Hamadān, Ṣūfiyyah Nūrbakhshiyyah, 2013), ii. Shahzad Bashir mentioned 1392 CE in *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nurbakhshiyya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 42.

⁷ Nūrbakhsh, *al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ*, iii.

⁸ Ghāzī Muḥammad Na'im, *Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh aur Maslak-i Nūrbakhshiyyah* (Islamabad: Shah Hamadan Publications, 2000), 16.

⁹ Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 45 and Na'im, *Maslak-i Nūrbakhshiyyah*, 16.

¹⁰ Muhammad Riaz, "Mir Sayyid Muhammad Nur Bakhsh," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 17, no. 3 (1969): 177-90, at 179; Hamid Algar, "Nūrbakhshiyya," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. C.E. Bosworth et al., 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 8:134-36, at 134; and Na'im, *Maslak-i Nūrbakhshiyyah*, 17.

Hamadānī lineage was accepted by the hagiographers. However, after his death, the Kubravī-Hamadānī order was split into Nūrbakhshī faction led by Mīr Muhammad Nūrbakhsh and Dhahabiyyah faction led by ‘Abd Allāh Barzishābādī.¹¹ The Dhahabiyyah order, after having a Central Asian connection, was later merged into the Iranian Shiism.¹²

Mīr Nūrbakhsh continued teaching and guiding in his master’s *khānqāh* in Khuttalān. His personality was so charismatic that a large group of disciples soon gathered around him. This made him one of the most influential men of that age.¹³ He was against the tyrannous government of Mīrza Shāhrukh who was the son and successor of Timūr (d. 1405 CE), the ruler of Persia from 1409 to 1447. His reign was marked by the spread of Sufism and Shī‘ī movements. The Ḥurūfiyyah movement was founded by Faḍl Allāh Ḥurūfī (d. 1394 CE) during the late fourteenth century CE. He was believed to be a Mahdī, who would enforce justice and peace, the Seal of Saints and the Perfect Man. He was finally executed by Timūr’s son Mīrān Shāh in 1394 CE.¹⁴ The Musha‘sha‘iyyah movement was founded by Muḥammad b. Falāḥ Musha‘sha‘ (d. 1465-66). It was a militaristic Shī‘ī movement of the fifteenth century, which found support from the Twelver Shī‘īs in Southern Persia.¹⁵ Ni‘mat Allāhiyyah was another Sufi order founded by Shāh Ni‘mat Allāh (d. 1430-31 CE). It originated in Persia during the fifteenth century.¹⁶ All these movements contributed to the socio-religious ferment of fifteenth-century Persia and struggled for social justice.¹⁷

¹¹ DeWeese, “The Eclipse of the Kubraviyyah in Central Asia,” 54.

¹² Jamal J. Elias, “A Second ‘Alī: The Making of Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī in Popular Imagination,” *Muslim World* 90, no. 3-4 (2000): 395-419, at 402. For ‘Abd Allāh Barzishābādī and his Sufi order, see Ḥusain Karbalā‘ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān wa Jannāt al-Janān* ed. Ja‘far Sulṭān, 2 vols. (Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjumah-o Nashr-i Kitāb, 1979) and Muḥammad Ma‘šūm Shīrāzī, *Ṭarā‘iq al-Ḥaqā‘iq*, ed. Muḥammad Ja‘far Maḥjūb (Tehran: Kitabkhanah-i Sanā‘ī, 1977).

¹³ Riaz, “Mir Sayyid Muhammad Nur Bakhsh,” 180.

¹⁴ A. Bausani, “Ḥurūfiyya,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. B. Lewis et al., 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 3:600-01.

¹⁵ Hamid Algar, “Musha‘sha‘,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al., 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 7:672-75.

¹⁶ Hamid Algar, “Ni‘mat-Allāhiyya,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al., 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 8:44-48.

¹⁷ Maria Eva Subtelny and Anas B. Khalidov, “The Curriculum of Islamic Higher Learning in Timurid Iran in the Light of the Sunni Revival under Shāh-Rukh,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 2 (1995): 210-36, at 211.

Sultan Mīrzā Shāhrukh revived strict Sunni orthodoxy to maintain the political status quo. For this purpose, he built a madrasah/khānqāh in Herat in 1410-11 CE.¹⁸ His coinage, issued in Herat, included the text *Khallada Allāh khilāfatah* (May Allah make his caliphate everlasting).¹⁹ He saw himself as the *mujaddid* (renewer of Islam) and he tried to renew the faith of the Muslim community. When Mīr Nūrbakhsh tried to introduce reforms in such circumstances, which threatened the political and religio-spiritual authority of the Sultan, he came into conflict with Sultan Shāhrukh.²⁰ The Sultan was afraid of Mīr's political influence and religious authority and considered him a possible threat to his political authority.

Mīr Nūrbakhsh was accused of being a Shī'ī or Mahdī by the Sultan's authorities, which are highly contestable. Most of the authors, while accusing him did not mention any primarily or authentic source.²¹ These authors lacked access to any of the extant works of Mīr Nūrbakhsh. Consequently, they had to rely on secondary sources, which were deficient and meant for propaganda purposes. Mīr Nūrbakhsh was neither a Shī'ī nor a Mahdī. However, he tried to remove the sectarian differences among varied Muslim sects by adopting a way of moderation. He was also a Sufi Shaykh, who was initiated in the Kubravī-Hamadānī order in 1417 CE. In his book, *Kashf-al-Ḥaqā'iq*, he gave a complete genealogy of his Sufi predecessors, which starts from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (601-661 CE) and reaches him through Khavājah Ishāq.²²

The expression of devotion to 'Alī and the Twelve Imāms is a compulsory part of Nūrbakhshī belief. However, this is not a yardstick for Shiism alone. Mīr Nūrbakhsh, in his most important book on beliefs titled *Kitāb al-I'tiqādiyyah*, said, "It is compulsory to believe that *Imamate* is of two types, i.e., real leadership (*imāmat-i ḥaqīqī*) and relative leadership (*imāmat-i izāfī*). . . . Ḥaḍrat 'Alī is the only one who fulfils the characteristics of actual leadership. . . . Ḥaḍrat 'Alī is the 'father of Auliya'

¹⁸ Ibid., 212.

¹⁹ Ibid., 212-13.

²⁰ Annemarie Schimmel, "The Ornament of the Saints: The Religious Situation in Iran in Pre-Safavid Times," *Iranian Studies* 7, no. 1-2 (Winter-Spring, 1974): 88-111, at 109.

²¹ For details, see N. Elias ed. and E. Denison Ross, trans., *The Tarikh-i-Rashidi of Mirza Muḥammad Haidar Dughlāt: A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia* (Lahore: Mustafa Waheed Traders, 1895); Qāḍī Nūr Allāh Shūstārī, *Majālis al-Mu'minīn*, ed. Sayyid Aḥmad (Tehran: Kitāb Furōsh-i Islāmiyyah, 1975); Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*; and Algar, "Nūrbakhshiyya."

²² Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, *Kashf al-Ḥaqā'iq*, trans. Ghulām Ḥasan (Islamabad: Nadwat al-Islamiyyah Nūrbakhshiyyah, 1988), 19-20.

(the friends of Allah) and Imām Mahdī is ‘the Seal of Sainthood’ and ‘Lord of the Final Age.’”²³

Mīr Nūrbakhsh in his another book, *Insān Nāmāh*, praised the Prophets, including Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him), along with Abū Bakr (573-634 CE), ‘Umar (584-644 CE), ‘Uthmān (576-656 CE) and ‘Alī, who as perfect *auliyā’* (friends of Allah) effectively ruled the people for their welfare.²⁴ From his works, it can be inferred that to him, the Shī‘ī and Sunni scholars were equal, and he criticized both of them. For instance, in his book *Mī‘rājiyyah*, he declared that “the ‘ulamā’ and Shī‘ī and Sunni scholars were unable to know the reality of *Mī‘rāj*.”²⁵

Moreover, Mīr Nūrbakhsh in his book, *Silsilat al-Dhahab*, which is about the life of the Prophet (peace be on him) and the Twelve Imāms, clearly wrote about Qā‘im al-Mahdī that “Muḥammad b. Ḥasan ‘Askarī was in occultation (*ghaybah*). He was born in 869. . . . His titles were *Hādī* and *Mahdī*. He had gone into occultation in 879 when he was around eleven years old. . . . He was the only awaited hidden Imām and his coming is a sign of the Day of Judgement.”²⁶ Finally, Nūrbakhsh in his book, *Ṣaḥīfat al-Awliyā’* made some esoteric claims, which he had made in a state of union with Allah.²⁷

The *Risālat al-Hudā* is the only book, which is cited as a primary source by those scholars who believe in Mīr Nūrbakhsh’s messianism, but the said work is highly controversial. In addition, scholars cited Nūr Allāh Shūstarī’s *Majālis al-Mu‘minīn*, but they forgot that the author was himself a Shī‘ī and tended to distort historical facts in favour of his sect. In addition to *Risālat al-Hudā*, many apocryphal works (e.g., *Risālah-i Nafs Shanāsī*, *Maṣā‘ib-i ‘Itrat Ṭāhirah*, *Kitāb-i Nūrbakhshiyyah*, *Raf’ al-Ikhtilāf*, *Ṭabqāt-i Nūriyyah*) were discovered in Baltistan during the twentieth century, which portrayed Mīr Nūrbakhsh as a Shī‘ī or a Mahdī. There is no trace of such claims of Mīr Nūrbakhsh’s being a Shī‘ī or Mahdī, either in the Nūrbakhshī order in Persia, Kashmīr and Baltistan or in the works of Mīr Nūrbakhsh’s lineal descendants or spiritual descendants. So, only

²³ Nūrbakhsh, *Kitāb al-‘Itiqādiyyah*, trans. Muḥammad Bashīr (Islamabad: Nadwat al-Islāmiyyah Nūrbakhshiyyah, 1975), 49-52.

²⁴ Nūrbakhsh, *Insān Nāmāh*, trans. Ghulām Ḥasan (Khaplu: Barat Library, 2010), 97.

²⁵ Nūrbakhsh, *Mī‘rājiyyah*, trans. Ghulām Ḥasan (Baltistan: Haroon Books Center, 2012), 4.

²⁶ Nūrbakhsh, *Silsilat al-Dhahab*, trans. Abū ‘l-Bāqir Alī (Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1974), 373-75.

²⁷ For details, see Nūrbakhsh, *Ṣaḥīfat al-Awliyā’* (Khaplu: Baraat Library, 2004), 38.

due to his devotion to ‘Alī or Twelve Imāms, or due to his esoteric claims, one cannot declare him a Shī‘ī or a Mahdī.

Sultan Shāhrukh, owing to Mīr Nūrbakhsh’s political and religious authority, considered him a possible threat to his authority. Therefore, he sent his forces under Sultan Bāyazīd, the ruler of Khuttalān. At that time, Mīr Nūrbakhsh along with his followers was staying at the fort of *Kōh-i Tīrī* in Khuttalān and busy in preaching since 1423 CE.²⁸ In this clash, approximately eighty Sufis were killed, including two sons of Khavājah Ishāq.²⁹ The army arrested Khavājah Ishāq and Mīr Nūrbakhsh and sent them to the court of Sultan Shāhrukh in Herat. The Sultan ordered their execution; however, he was restricted by severe stomach ache. His physician, who was unable to cure him, told him that the ailment was caused by his execution order of spiritually adept Mīr Nūrbakhsh.³⁰ So, the order of the Mīr was altered to imprisonment, while Khavājah Ishāq was executed in 1424 CE.³¹ One of the major factors of the execution of the Khavājah was his political alignment with the opponents of Tīmūr and his son, Shāhrukh. The Kubravī-Hamadānī order, to which Khavājah Ishāq belonged, was always considered a threat to Timurids. It must be noted that some scholars are of the view that the founder of Kubravī-Hamadānī order, Sayyid Hamadānī,³² whose successor was Khavājah Ishāq, had emigrated to Kashmir along with seven hundred Sufis due to Amīr Tīmūr’s invasion of Persia in 1383 CE.³³ The Khavājah had resisted Tīmūr his conquest of the area. So, the Khavājah was killed due to his resistance to the Tīmūrids.³⁴

Mīr Nūrbakhsh emerged as the leader of the Nūrbakhshiyyah faction of the Kubravī-Hamadānī order. He was, however, imprisoned in the fort of *Ikhtiyār al-Dīn* located in Herat for eighteen days, and later sent to Shiraz and Behbahan. He was released from Behbahan on the orders of Ibrāhīm Sultan (d. 1435 CE) after the captivity of six months.³⁵

²⁸ Na‘īm, *Maslak-i Nūrbakhshiyyah*, 18.

²⁹ Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 49.

³⁰ Shushtari, *Majālis al-Mu‘minīn*, 305.

³¹ DeWeese, “The Eclipse of the Kubraviyyah,” 60.

³² For the details about his life and works, see Zāfar, *Amīr Kabīr Sayyid Alī Hamadānī* and Hamadani, “Ethical Philosophy of Sayyid Ali Hamadani.”

³³ Elias, “A Second ‘Alī,” 398.

³⁴ DeWeese, “The Eclipse of the Kubraviyyah,” 61.

³⁵ Ibrāhīm Sultan was the second son of Sultan Shāhrukh. He was the ruler of Shiraz from 1414 to 1435 CE. R. M. Savory, “Ibrāhīm B. Shāhrukh,” in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. B. Lewis et al. 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 3:989.

Mīr Nūrbakhsh travelled westwards visiting Shushtar, Basra, Hillī, Baghdad, Kurdistan, Lūristān, and Gīlān.³⁶ It is difficult to determine the exact duration of his stay in these regions but he spent more than ten years during 1425 and 1436 CE. According to Shūshtarī, the Bakhtiয়ারī and some other tribes of Lūristān struck coins and read Friday sermons in his name. The majority of the population in these areas belonged to a sect named *Ahl-i Haqq*. According to oral traditions, the followers of the sect considered Mīr a mythical figure or an incarnation of Pīr Bābā Yādigār, buried in Ban Zarda near Zuhāb.³⁷

Mīr Nūrbakhsh was again arrested in 1436 CE by the orders of Sultan Shāhrukh.³⁸ This time, he escaped and after a three-day journey through the snow-covered mountains, he reached Khalkhāl. He was arrested again by the governor of Khalkhāl and was sent to Sultan Shāhrukh. As a punishment, he was thrown in a dark well for fifty-three days.³⁹ Then he was sent to Herat in manacles and forced to disavow his claims in the jāmī' mosque during Friday prayers. He did this in ambiguous words and recited the verse of the Qur'ān as well. He said, "They relate certain things from this wretch, whether I said them or not. 'O Lord, we have wronged ourselves; if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will certainly be among the losers.'" ⁴⁰ With this announcement, he was released in 1436 CE from his four-month imprisonment.⁴¹ At this time, he was given instructions to teach only conventional religious sciences and debarred from wearing a traditional black turban or associating with the public at large. Mīr could not follow these restrictions and was again arrested in 1437 CE. This time, he was sent to Tabriz and after two months of imprisonment, he was released and instructed to proceed to Anatolia.⁴² He, contrary to this instruction, first went to Shīrvān and then to Gīlān. He stayed in Gīlān for ten years (1437-1447). Here, his last contact with Sultan Shāhrukh was through a famous but controversial letter written in 1443 CE. In this letter, he reminded the Sultan of his duty to protect the *Sādāt*. He also predicted the end of Shāhrukh's rule.⁴³

³⁶ Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 56.

³⁷ Ibid., 22.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Algar, "Nūrbakhshiyya," 8:135.

⁴⁰ Qur'ān 7:23.

⁴¹ Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, *Maktūb bih Mīrzā Shāhrukh*, cited in Ja'far Ṣadaqiyyānlū, *Tahqīq dar Ahvāl-o Āthār-i Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh Avaisī Qahistānī* (Tehran: Maktab-i Avaisī, 1972), 75.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

This is the end of a troubled phase of Mīr's life, after which he started a peaceful life as a Sufi master.

The last phase of Mīr Nūrbakhsh's life was the beginning of another phase of his life, that is, his role as a Sufi Shaykh. This phase begins in Gīlān, where his last contact with Sultan Shāhrukh took place. In Gīlān, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā Lāhījī (d. 1506/7) met him in 1445 and became his most accomplished disciple, after renouncing worldly pleasures, and spent the next sixteen years in Mīr's company. After the death of Sultan Mīrzā Shāhrukh, Mīr Nūrbakhsh moved to Sulqan, a village near Ray and lived there for the next nineteen years (1447-1464) until his death. During these years, he led a peaceful life as a Sufi Master. However, he had some interaction with political authorities.⁴⁴ In Sūliqān, the first permanent Nūrbakhshī community was established, where he busied himself in educating and training his disciples. Mīr Nūrbakhsh breathed his last in Sulqan on November 15, 1464.

Major Works of Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh

The Nūrbakhshī order⁴⁵ is famous for its production of literature both on the *sharī'ah* and *ṭarīqah*. Mīr Nūrbakhsh wrote several treatises on different aspects of Islam. Following are his major works as well the works generally attributed to him:

1. *Al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ*: It is a comprehensive book on *fiqh*. It covers all the key issues of the *sharī'ah*. On the very first page, Mīr explains the importance and aim of his unifying mission. He said,

Allah has assigned me the duty that first I remove the legal disagreement existing in this community (of believers) and elucidate the *Sharī'ah-i Muḥammadī* in its original without any increase or decrease and then remove the disparity regarding the legal principles among all communities and people in the world.⁴⁶

In this work, he not only resisted the temptation to discuss controversial issues among Muslims and give verdicts on them but also proscribed declaring deviant Muslims idolaters.⁴⁷

2. *Kitāb al-I'tiqādiyyah*: In this small treatise Mīr explains the basic principles of belief. It is the commentary on the Qur'ānic 4:136. Mīr Nūrbakhsh derived from this verse the following five basic principles of

⁴⁴ He wrote letters to 'Alā' al-Daulah, the grandson of Shāhrukh among other notables. Ṣadaqiyyānlū, *Tahqīq dar Aḥvāl-o Āthār*, 78-82.

⁴⁵ See the spiritual genealogy in appendix-A.

⁴⁶ Nūrbakhsh, *al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ*, 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 211.

Islam: belief in Allah, belief in His angels, belief in His books, belief in His prophets, and belief in the Day of Judgement.⁴⁸ Till today, the Nūrbakhshīyyah community believes in these five principles of Islam and consider them their first declaration of faith.

3. *Silsilat al-Dhhab*: This book has two distinct parts. In the first part, which is in Arabic, Mīr discusses in detail the life of the Prophet (peace be on him), and Twelve *Imāms* with more focus on the first eight *Imāms*, who are known as the golden chain (*silsilat al-Dhahab*). The second part, which is in Persian, discusses the lives of his spiritual predecessors, from Ma'rūf al-Karkhī (d. 815 CE) to Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī, his immediate predecessor.⁴⁹

4. *Risālah-i Nūriyyah*: This small treatise has seven chapters in which Mīr Nūrbakhsh focused on varied themes including good ethics, divine light, self, and intuition. He also discussed the concepts like observation (*mushāhadah*), spirit or soul, sustenance, and reunion with Allah.

5. *Risālah-i Kashf al-Ḥaqā'iq*: It briefly deals with some aspects of Sufism like spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifat*) and characteristics of a true Sufi or *durvēsh*. In its last part, Mīr Nūrbakhsh traced his spiritual genealogy from Khavājah Ishāq to the Prophet of Islam.⁵⁰

6. *Insān Nāmah*: It deals with human beings. Mīr divided this book into two chapters. The first chapter discusses the external and physical appearance and form of the human body, while the second chapter explains the inner qualities and essence of human beings.

7. *Risālah-i Makārim al-Akhlāq*: This treatise discusses noble ethics and proposes the solution to various spiritual problems, especially for those who do not have a spiritual guide.

8. *Risālah-i Ma'āsh al-Sālikīn*: In this treatise, Mīr discussed the means of livelihood. According to him, one should prevent himself from dishonest means of earning and only earn his living from lawful sources. One should prefer Allah instead of worldly joys since He is the giver of all the blessings.

9. *Risālah-i Mi'rājīyyah*: It is a Persian treatise in which Mīr discussed the incidence of *Mi'rāj* of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). It also presents an esoteric explanation and considers the incidence of *Mi'rāj* as an advancement of spiritual qualities. Therefore, he emphasizes noble deeds which enhance one's spiritual power.

10. *Risālah-i Aqsām-i Dil*: It is a small Persian treatise, in which Mīr discussed the different types and conditions of the heart. He divided the heart into three kinds: (a) heart which is pure and clean (*Qalb-i Muzakkā*)

⁴⁸ Nūrbakhsh, *Kitāb al-I'tiqādiyyah*, ix.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Nūrbakhsh, *Kashf al-Ḥaqā'iq*, 19-21.

(b) heart of the companions of the right hand (*Qalb-i Aṣḥāb-i Yamīn*), and (c) heart of the companions of the left hand (*Qalb-i Aṣḥāb-i Shimāl*).

Some other treatises of Mīr are as under:

1. *Ṣaḥīfat al-Awliyā'*
2. *Risālah-i 'Irfānī*
3. *Risālah-i Talvīḥ-i Ḥadīth-i Nabvī*
4. *Risālah fī Ma'rifat Walī*
5. *Risālah dars Sair-o Sulūk*
6. *Risālah-i Talvīḥāt*
7. *Risālah-i Vāridāt*
8. *Risālah-i Vujūd-i Muṭlaq*
9. *Dīvān-i Nūrbakhsh*

Mīr also wrote many letters to his disciples and different political authorities. The main purpose of these letters was to give instructions for the spiritual life and explain different key concepts of Sufism.

Major Doctrines of Nūrbakhshīs

The origin of the doctrines of Nūrbakhshīs, which are primarily mystical, can be traced to the primary sources of Islam. These doctrines, particularly the esoteric ones, were transmitted from the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) to 'Alī and then through the continuous chain of spiritual genealogy, they reached Mīr Nūrbakhsh, who wrote them down in the books and treatises. He was the sole heir of the Kubravī-Hamadānī order. He was influenced by Persian Sufism as well as the teachings of the renowned Spanish Sufi philosopher, Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240 CE). The teachings of Ibn al-'Arabī and Sayyid Hamadānī were combined in Mīr Nūrbakhsh and his views synthesized them. Mīr Nūrbakhsh had a unique intermediary approach to bring peace and harmony to the followers of different sects of Islam. Relying on the Qur'ān, he laid down the basic Nūrbakhshī principles of faith. He was a religious reformer, who was in favour of the unity of Muslim *ummah*. He strictly prohibited his followers from calling fellow Muslims *kāfir* or infidels due to their beliefs.

The Basic Teachings of Islam according to Nūrbakhshīs

There are five basic teachings of Islam in the Nūrbakhshī order, which are also referred to as *Furū'-i Dīn*. These include testimony (*shahādah*), prayer (*ṣalah*), fasting in Ramaḍān (*Ṣawm Ramaḍān*), alms-giving (*zakāt al-māl*) and pilgrimage (*ḥajj al-Bayt*).⁵¹

1. Testimony (*shahādah*): According to this teaching, "There is no deity except Allah, and Muḥammad is His messenger." Allah is One; He is the Self-existing one, Who has no parallel, no parents, no offspring, and no associate. The second part of the *shahādah* attests that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) is the messenger of Allah. He is the last prophet and the Qur'ān is the last divine Book, which was sent to him. He is a human being, who led a normal human life like others and performed all the rights and duties of a human being.
2. Prayer (*ṣalāh*): The obligatory prayer is offered five times a day at prescribed times. Before offering prayer, ritual ablution (*wūḍū'*) is compulsory. Prayer is offered by facing towards the direction of Ka'bah in Mecca.
3. Fasting (*ṣawm*): Fasting is obligatory in the month of Ramaḍān, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. In this month, one abstains from all intakes of food and drink as well as sexual relations between dawn and sunset. A pre-fast meal is taken before the dawn and after sunset fasting is broken with any edibles.
4. Alms-giving (*zakāh*): *Zakāh* is the fourth basic teaching of Islam among Nūrbakhshīs. A rich (*ghani*) Muslim must give a specific amount (2.5%) of his/her annual savings to the poor. It not only purifies the donor's wealth but also creates a feeling of non-attachment to worldly possessions. Moreover, it also helps the economic uplift of the poor segments of society.
5. Pilgrimage (*ḥajj*): The pilgrimage to Mecca is the fifth basic teaching of Islam among Nūrbakhshīs. It is obligatory for every person, who can afford it, to perform pilgrimage once in his/her life. It is performed in *Dhū 'l-Ḥijjah*, the twelfth month of the Muslim calendar. It has many components but the inner purpose is the submission of the human will to the will of Allah, complete repentance of past deeds, and sacrifice of worldly desires.

The Principles of Faith in the Nūrbakhshī Order

Mīr Nūrbakhsh elaborates upon the five basic principles of faith in his most important book *Kitāb al-I'tiqādiyyah*. These principles of faith are

⁵¹ Sayyid 'Alī Ḥamadānī, *Da'vat-i Ṣūfiyyah*, trans. Muḥammad Bashīr (Islamabad: Nadwat al-Islāmiyyah Nūrbakhshiyyah, 2011), 188.

also called the *Uṣūl-i Dīn*. As discussed earlier, they have been prescribed in a Qur'ānic verse.⁵² These principles are the following:

1. Belief in Allah: It is compulsory to believe that Allah is the Ubiquitous, the Everlasting, the Omnipotent, the Knower, and the Hearer. He is the Creator of the whole universe. He is singular in His essence, attributes, and qualities.
2. Belief in Angels: It is important to believe that angels are Allah's creatures. They are in heaven and earth and obey His commands. They do not have male and female gender. They are only predestined to obey Allah and His commands.
3. Belief in Scriptures: It is compulsory to believe that the Qur'ān and all the previous scriptures are divine books sent by Allah for the guidance of human beings. The Qur'ān is the last and final divine Book to follow.
4. Belief in Prophets: It is mandatory to believe in all the Prophets. They are the Messengers of Allah sent to the people. Besides, it is compulsory to believe in the finality of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). He enjoys a special status among all the Prophets and represents the highest ideal for human conduct.
5. Belief in the Day of Judgement: It is obligatory to believe in the Day of Judgment. There are two types of the Day of Judgment: (a) *Qiyāmat-i Anfusiyyah* refers to the control over the *nafs* (self). It entails complete annihilation in Allah and then sustenance in Him. (b) *Qiyāmat-i Āfāqiyyah* is the real Day of Judgement on which the whole universe will lose its discipline, and be destroyed. On this day, all the creatures will die and then be resurrected for their judgement.⁵³

Nūrbakhshī *Kalimāt-i-Qudsiyyah*

In addition to the above, the Nūrbakhshīs believe in the following fourteen concepts⁵⁴

1. *Bandah-i Khudā* (the Servant of Allah)
2. *Dhurriyyat-i Ādam* (the Progeny of Adam)
3. *Millat-i Ibrāhīm* (the Nation of Ibrāhīm)
4. *Ummat-i Muḥammad* (the Community of the Prophet Muḥammad peace be on him)
5. *Dīn-i Islām* (Islam as a Way of Life)
6. *Kitāb-i Qur'ān* (the Qur'ān as the Book)
7. *Ka'bah-i Qiblah* (Ka'bah as Qiblah)
8. *Mutāba'at-i Sunnat-i Nabavī* (Conformity to the practice of the Prophet)
9. *Hubb-i 'Alī* (Love for 'Alī)
10. *Silsilah-i Dhahab* (the Golden Chain of the first eight *Imāms*)

⁵² Qur'ān 4:136.

⁵³ Nūrbakhsh, *Kitāb al-I'tiqādiyyah*, 52.

⁵⁴ Hamadānī, *Da'vat-i Ṣūfiyyah*, 197-98.

11. *Mashrab-i Hamadāniyyah* (the Legacy of Hamadāniyyah order)
12. *Madhhab-i Šūfiyyah* (the Method of the Sufis)
13. *Ravish-i Nūrbakhshiyyah* (the Way of Nūrbakhshiyyah)
14. *Murīd-i Murshid* (the Disciple of a Sufi master)

The Jurisprudence of the Nūrbakhshīs

Al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ is Mīr Nūrbakhsh's only book that deals with jurisprudence. It has fifty-three chapters. Mīr Nūrbakhsh himself claimed in the beginning that "Allah has appointed him to settle the differences of different Muslim sects and promulgate the true religion practised during the Prophet Muḥammad's (peace be on him) time."⁵⁵ For him, this jurisprudence was the *Sharī'at-i Muḥammadī*, which was transferred from the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) to 'Alī, and then passing through a continuous chain of the spiritual genealogy of Sufi masters after 'Alī Raḍā, it reached Mīr Nūrbakhsh. He wrote down this book for two basic reasons: first, the Nūrbakhshī community in Sūliqān needed practical guidance for their day to day affairs, and secondly, to preserve the unique teachings, which dated back to the Prophet Muḥammad's (peace be on him) era. It guides on the issues of worship and interpersonal relations. In this book, Mīr Nūrbakhsh adopted the middle approach as he forbade people from passing on judgement on controversial issues of religion.

In his jurisprudence, Mīr provided a unique synthesis of Sunni and Shī'ī thought, which is a hybrid and independent legal school that transcends them both. For instance, Mīr Nūrbakhsh allowed offering prayer in Sunni and Shī'ī manners. In summer, it is better to offer prayer in a Shī'ī way without folding the arms, and in winter, it is better to offer prayer in a Sunni way by folding one's arms.⁵⁶ Similarly, in the case of ablution, the Sunni manner washing of feet with water is preferred in case of dirt or any similar circumstances. Otherwise, mere wiping of feet with wet hands in a Shī'ī manner is acceptable.

Mīr Nūrbakhsh's mystical system is based on moderation. His life aimed to settle the disagreements among the contesting Muslim sects. His personality and thought bore a stamp of the legacy of the Kubravī-Hamadānī order. His thought gave Nūrbakhshī order an independent identity. He laid down the Nūrbakhshī principles of Islam and faith, which are almost similar to the faith and beliefs of mainstream Muslims. The concept of Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), as discussed by him,

⁵⁵ Nūrbakhsh, *al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ*, 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

is similar to that of Ibn al-‘Arabī. His cosmology was based on a multi-tiered structure in which each tier had its independent divine realities. For him, the *Nūr* or Light is an important aspect of Divine Being, which is present in all existing beings. He not only laid down the foundation of the Nūrbakhshī community but also left behind comprehensive *fiqh* for addressing the practical aspects of the members of the Nūrbakhshī community, which is a culmination of his mission. His *fiqh* gave a message to the members of both the Sunnis and Shī‘īs that they both should consider each other correct and should not condemn each other.

The Growth and Development of Nūrbakhshī Order in Persia and Kashmir, 1464-1600

After the demise of Mīr Nūrbakhsh, the Nūrbakhshī order suffered from the malaise of religious extremism. The religious zealotry found its expression first in Persia (modern-day Iran) in the form of the rise of Safavids, and then in India under the Mughals during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Initially, after the death of Mīr Nūrbakhsh, the order continued to grow and flourish through the whole of Persia. Mīr Nūrbakhsh’s successors were instrumental in the growth of the movement not only in Iran but also in Kashmir. His spiritual heirs (*khulafā’*) were active in their respective regions like Cairo, Baghdad, Samarqand, Shiraz, Tabriz, and Gīlān. Although he also nominated his *khulafā’* in Multan and Kashmir, the permanent Nūrbakhshī community was established in Kashmir during the sixteenth century. The Nūrbakhshī order under Shāh Qāsim Faizbakhsh (d. 1513/14), the son and successor of Mīr Nūrbakhsh, enjoyed cordial relations with the Timurid rulers but did not enjoy a cordial and friendly relationship with the Safavid rulers of Persia. After the murder of the son and grandson of Shāh Qāsim by the Safavids in Persia, the Nūrbakhshī order started to decline in Persia and later merged into the Twelver Shiism, which was the official or state religion of the Safavids. In Kashmir, however, the order was established by Mīr Shams al-Dīn ‘Irāqī (d. 1526), who was sent to Kashmir as an ambassador of Timurid Sultan. After two decades of Mīr ‘Irāqī’s death, the order started to disintegrate in the region and faced the Sunni orthodoxy espoused by the Mughal rulers of India. This finally caused their extinction from Kashmir. However, they revived themselves in Baltistan.

The Development of the Nūrbakhshī Order under the Lineal Descendants of Mīr Nūrbakhsh

Mīr Nūrbakhsh had three sons, namely Shāh Qāsim, Sayyid Ja'far (d. 1503/4), and Mīr Sa'd al-Ḥaqq (d. 1454/55) and two daughters.⁵⁷ Sa'd al-Ḥaqq died at an early age during the lifetime of his father. Mīr got so depressed on his death that he wrote a eulogy in his praise.⁵⁸ Historical works are silent about Sayyid J'afar, the youngest son. He was a poet and left Herat for India via Kabul around 1490.⁵⁹

Shāh Qāsim was the eldest son and successor of Mīr Nūrbakhsh, who praised his son for his spiritual qualities and declared him a *walī*.⁶⁰ Mīr indirectly referred to him in his works and prayed for his health and success.⁶¹ Mīr Nūrbakhsh also praised him for his spiritual qualities and gave him *ijāzah* or *khilāfah* to train and teach his disciples.⁶² After the death of Mīr Nūrbakhsh, Shāh Qāsim shifted to his family town of Durusht, where he was declared a successor through a formal process of selection in the presence of Mīr's disciples. He at first asked Muḥammad Alvāndī, known as Pīr-i-Hamadān (Mīr Nūrbakhsh's earliest and most accomplished disciple) to take the charge but Muḥammad Alvāndī declined the offer and said that Shāh Qāsim was spiritually more accomplished.⁶³

After becoming his father's spiritual successor, Shāh Qāsim spent a few years in Sūliqān, and then he moved to Herat on the invitation of Timurid ruler, Sultan Ḥusain Bāyqarā (d. 1506). Sultan Bāyqarā was the last Timurid Sultan who ruled Khurasan from 1469 to 1506.⁶⁴ The Sultan was continuously ill despite repeated treatments so he invited Shāh Qāsim, who was also a famous physician. The Sultan was cured by his treatment, after which the Sultan became his devotee. As a reward, the Sultan awarded him lands in the Semnan region. This royal attention instigated dissensions among other scholars including the renowned Persian Sufi poet, Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492) and Sayf al-Dīn Aḥmad Taftāzānī (d. 1510/11). *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb* (the biography of Mīr 'Irāqī) mentions a series of disputes between Jāmī and Shāh Qāsim. Meanwhile, Shāh Qāsim sent Mīr 'Irāqī to Kashmir to collect some

⁵⁷ Nūrbakhsh, *Ṣaḥīfat al-Awliyā'*, 25-26.

⁵⁸ Na'im, *Maslak-i Nūrbakhshiyyah*, 32.

⁵⁹ Muḥammad 'Alī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, trans. Muḥammad Raḍā (Khaplu: Baraat Library, 1997), 340.

⁶⁰ Nūrbakhsh, *Ṣaḥīfat al-Awliyā'*, 25.

⁶¹ Nūrbakhsh, *al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ*, 1 and Nurbakhsh, *Kitāb al-I'tiqādiyyah*, 22.

⁶² For the text of the *ijāzah*, see 'Alī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, 102.

⁶³ Ibid., 132.

⁶⁴ David Nicolle, *The Age of Tamerlane* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Limited, 1990), 23.

medicinal herbs, which the former needed to cure the Sultan. Shāh Qāsim remained in the Sultān's court but kept him engaged in different mystical activities, which popularized the Nūrbakhshī Sufi order, rivalling the Naqshbandī Sufi order. Besides Sultan Bāyqarā himself, his vizier Mirzā Kīchik (d. 1484/85) was also Shāh Qāsim's chief patron at the court. On the death of the vizier in 1484/85, Shāh Qāsim left Herat for good.⁶⁵ After a brief pilgrimage in Mashhad, Shāh Qāsim settled in a village of Durusht and breathed his last in 1513/14.⁶⁶

There is little information about Shāh Qāsim's relations with the Safavid rulers of Persia. Initially, Shāh Ismā'īl Ṣafavī (d. 1524) showed great respect for him and assigned him fiefs in Ray.⁶⁷ However, their relations later deteriorated.⁶⁸

Shāh Qāsim had three sons: Shāh Shams al-Dīn, Shāh Bahā' al-Dīn, and Shāh Abū 'l-Ma'ālī (d. 1480). Shāh Abū 'l-Ma'ālī was the youngest son. He accompanied his father to the court of Sultan Bāyqarā, where he died at an early age. Shāh Bahā' al-Dīn also lived with his father in Herat. He was later killed during the lifetime of his father by the Safavids in 1509/10. Shāh Shams al-Dīn was the eldest son. The lineal growth of the Nūrbakhshī order was continued through him. Shāh Qāsim sent him in the company of Mīr 'Irāqī, who was responsible to teach him the principles of the *ṭarīqah*. He also died probably during the lifetime of his father. After the death of Shāh Qāsim, the main responsibility to lead the order fell on his grandson, Shāh Qiwām al-Dīn, the son of Shāh Shams al-Dīn. He had a younger brother named Shāh Ṣafī 'l-Dīn, who lived an ascetic life. Shāh Qiwām al-Dīn further consolidated the Nūrbakhshī order in his native region of Ray. Initially, he enjoyed good terms with Shah Tahmasp I (r. 1524-1576) but soon the former was imprisoned in the fort of Qazvin and then put to death in 1537.⁶⁹ Historians mentioned different explanations for his execution. Most historians hold that he constructed a fortress. He was interrogated by the political authorities for overstepping the boundaries of dervish-hood and behaving in the

⁶⁵ Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 183.

⁶⁶ 'Alī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, 477.

⁶⁷ Said Amir Arjomand, "Religious Extremism, Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran: 1501-1722," *Journal of Asian History* 15, no. 1 (1981): 1-35, at 14.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁹ Riaz, "Mir Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh," 187.

manner of exalted kings. He could not give satisfactory answers to these questions and was consequently executed.⁷⁰

The lineal succession of Mīr Nūrbakhsh was passed on from Shāh Qiwām al-Dīn to his son, Shāh Qāsim II, then to his grandson, Sayyid Muḥammad II, then to his great-grandson, Shāh Ḥussām al-Dīn, and so on.⁷¹ Thus, the Nūrbakhshī order survived as an independent Sufi order only for a few decades in the early years of Safavid rule in Persia, and then due to the anti-Sufi policies of the Safavids, the order lost its former glory.⁷² The Safavids made the life of the Sufis difficult due to which by the end of their rule, different Sufi orders like the Naqshbandiyyah, Ni'mat Allāhiyyah, Khalvatiyyah, and Nūrbakhshiyyah had almost disappeared from the Iranian soil.⁷³

Mīr Nūrbakhsh's charismatic personality attracted a lot of followers in the Timurid Empire. He sent his spiritual disciples to different regions for the propagation of Nūrbakhshī ideas. Among the large array of *khulafā'*, some of the most accomplished disciples of Mīr Nūrbakhsh were Shams al-Dīn Lāhijī (d. 1506/07) and Burhān al-Dīn Baghdādī (d. 1502).

The Spread of the Nūrbakhshī Order in Kashmir

Muslim influence started to be felt on Kashmiri society from the beginning of the fourteenth century. Although the conversion of the first Ladakhi-born King of Kashmir, Rinchana (r. 1320-1323 CE) to Islam took place in 1320 CE, this process was intensified in the Shāh Mīr dynasty. This process reached its acme when a Kubravī Shaykh and founder of Kubravī-Hamadānī order, Sayyid Hamadānī visited Kashmir in 1372 CE. He again visited Kashmir in 1379 CE and 1383 CE. He died at Pakhlī (near modern-day Abbottabad, Pakistan) in 1384 CE but was buried in Khuttalān (in modern-day Tajikistan).⁷⁴ He largely improved the social and moral conditions of the people in Kashmir. His political and moral philosophy laid great emphasis on the characters of rulers. He

⁷⁰ Lloyd Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-Futuwwat in Iran* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 125; Arjomand, "Religious Extremism, Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran," 15.

⁷¹ Khādim Ḥusain, *Aḥvāl-o Āthār-i Shāh Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh* (Karachi: Anjuman-e-Ṣūfiyyah-i Nūrbakhshiyyah, 1987), 56.

⁷² Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, eds., *The Heritage of Sufism: Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750)* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000), 3:76.

⁷³ Hossein Nasr, "Religion in Safavid Persia," *Iranian Studies* 7, nos. 1-2 (1974): 271-86, at 279.

⁷⁴ Sufi, *Kashīr*, 1:86-87.

was succeeded by his son Mīr Muḥammad Hamadānī, who stayed in Kashmir for twenty-two years and then returned to Khuttalān, where he died in 1450.⁷⁵

After the death of Mīr Nūrbakhsh, his son Shāh Qāsim Faizbakhsh was made his successor. After his demise, the Nūrbakhshī order spread through his spiritual successor Mīr ‘Irāqī.

Mīr Shams al-Dīn ‘Irāqī was born in Kundala near Sulqan in 1426 CE. His father Ibrāhīm, was a Sufi who had spent his whole life in the company of Mīr Nūrbakhsh. Mīr ‘Irāqī dedicated his life to the family business and occasionally visited Mīr Nūrbakhsh.⁷⁶ After the death of his father Ibrāhīm, ‘Irāqī heard about the death of Mīr Nūrbakhsh. He assigned all matters of the family to his brother and devoted the rest of his life to the Nūrbakhshī order. After living eighteen years in the company of different *khulafā’* of Mīr Nūrbakhsh, he finally joined the company of Shāh Qāsim.⁷⁷ He stayed with him about two years and when Sultan Bāyqarā invited Shāh Qāsim, Mīr ‘Irāqī accompanied the latter to Herat. During his journey to Kashmir in 1483/84, he married a Sayyid lady in 1484.⁷⁸ He reached Kashmir during the reign of Sultan Hasan Shāh (r. 1474-1484), the ruler of Sayyid or Shāh Mīr Dynasty in Kashmir.⁷⁹ Sultan Hasan Shāh had succeeded his father Sultan Haidar Shāh (r. 1470-1472). Mīr ‘Irāqī was warmly received by the Sultan due to his ambassadorial title. He stayed in Kashmir for approximately eight years from 1484 to 1491.⁸⁰ During these years, Mīr ‘Irāqī did not openly preach Nūrbakhshī teachings because of his ambassadorial title but he converted nobles like Shaikh Ismā‘īl and Bābā ‘Alī Najjār to Nūrbakhshī creed, who became his devoted disciples. He left Kashmir in 1491 nominating Shaikh Ismā‘īl as a temporary head of the community. After visiting Kabul, Khuttalan, Balkh, Samarqand, and Gīlān, Mīr ‘Irāqī reached Durusht and rejoined Shāh Qāsim. Later, Mīr ‘Irāqī knew that Shaikh Ismā‘īl was deviating from his path. On the advice of Shāh Qāsim, Mīr ‘Irāqī went back to Kashmir in 1502.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1:94.

⁷⁶ ‘Alī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, 258.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 49-96.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 195.

⁷⁹ R. K. Parmu, *A History of Muslim Rule in Kashmir: 1320-1819* (Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1969), 196.

⁸⁰ ‘Alī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, 215.

⁸¹ Ibid., 215-17.

Mīr ‘Irāqī spent his next twenty-three years (1503-1526) in Kashmir until his death. During these years, he not only established a permanent Nūrbakhshī community but also achieved political success. The rulers and nobles of Rā’inā, Chaudhrā, and Chak families became his devotees. Mūsā Rā’inā supported him in building Nūrbakhshī khānqāh at Zadiāl in 1503/4. However, Sayyid Muḥammad Baihaqī (d. 1505), the vizier of Sultan Muḥammad Shāh’s second tenure (1493-1505), continuously created problems for Mīr ‘Irāqī and persecuted his Nūrbakhshī followers.⁸² Finally, Mīr ‘Irāqī decided to leave Kashmir and go to Baltistan along with his followers in 1505. He introduced Nūrbakhshī doctrines in Baltistan,⁸³ where the majority of the population was Buddhist. After a few months, the rule of Sayyid Muḥammad Baihaqī ended and Fatih Shāh became the Sultan for a second time (1505-1514). When Mūsā Rā’inā replaced Shams Chak as the vizier of Fatih Shāh, Mīr ‘Irāqī returned to Kashmir once again on the invitation of Mūsā Rā’nā.

From the late fifteenth century onwards, Kashmiri society became a battleground for different Muslim sects trying to gain converts. Nūrbakhshī order under Mīr ‘Irāqī played an important role in society. He was the custodian of Khānqāh-i Mu‘allā (Srinagar), established by Sayyid Hamadānī. He continued initiating disciples in Nūrbakhshī order and propagating Nūrbakhshī teachings. It was due to his effective leadership that the Nūrbakhshī community was not only established in Kashmir but also made tremendous growth and achieved political successes. He was buried in Khānqāh at Zadibāl.⁸⁴

Mīr Dāniyāl-I was the son and principal successor of Mīr ‘Irāqī. He was born in 1495 when Mīr ‘Irāqī was in the company of Shāh Qāsim after visiting Kashmir for the first time. Shāh Qāsim named him Dāniyāl. He was the only son of Mīr ‘Irāqī⁸⁵ and received his spiritual training from his father. Mīr ‘Irāqī gave him *ijāzah* or *khilāfah*, and all *khulafā’* were asked to take an oath of allegiance at his hand. After Mīr ‘Irāqī’s death, Mīr Dāniyāl-I was a pious and respected man.⁸⁶ After the conquest of Kashmir by Mirzā Haidar Dughlat (d. 1551) in 1540, Mīr Dāniyāl-I moved to Baltistan. Mirzā Haidar Dughlat, the author of *Tārīkh-i Rashīdī*, first occupied Kashmir in 1533 on behalf of Sultan Sa‘īd Khān (d. 1533),

⁸² Mohibbul Hassan, *Kashmir under the Sultans* (Calcutta: Little Flower Press, 1959), 286.

⁸³ ‘Alī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, 406.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 466.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 352.

⁸⁶ Hassan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, 138.

the ruler of Kāshghar.⁸⁷ He again conquered Kashmir in 1540 as the commander-in-chief of the Mughal Emperor Humāyūn (1508-1556).⁸⁸ Later, during the Sūrī interlude, he became the ruler of Kashmir. During his reign in Kashmir (r. 1540-1551), Mīrzā Haidar persecuted Nūrbakhshīs for their beliefs and executed those who refused to accept the Sunni-Ḥanafī doctrines. He sent a copy of *Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ* to different religious scholars of India and got a *fatwā* against the Nūrbakhshīs as a false and heretical sect, whose teachings were against the Qur'ān and the *sunnah*.⁸⁹ He writes,

Thank God no one in Kashmir presently dares profess this faith openly. All deny it and give themselves out as good Sunnis. They are aware of my severity towards them and know that if any one of this sect appears, he will not escape the punishment of death. I hope and trust that through the intervention of Allah and my efforts, the land will gradually be delivered entirely from this misfortune and that all will become, as they now profess to be, Muslims from the bottom of their hearts. Amen! Oh Lord of the Worlds.⁹⁰

Mīrzā Dūghlat used to refer to Mīr Shams al-Dīn 'Irāqī as Mīr Shams in a derogatory manner, which means Mīr of Shamsī sect, the sun worshippers.⁹¹ Mīr Dāniyāl I, who was in Baltistan due to Mīrzā Dughlat's intolerance, was brought back and thrown into prison where he was executed in 1550.⁹² His only son Sayyid 'Alī popularly known as Mīr Shams al-Dīn II was also killed at that time.⁹³ In addition, Mīrzā Dughlat burnt the khānqāh of Zadibal and desecrated the tomb of Mīr 'Irāqī.

Although Mīrzā Dūghlat was killed in 1551, his reign of terror was a severe blow to the Nūrbakhshī order in Kashmir. After his death, the pro-Nūrbakhshī family of Chaks established their government under a nominal ruler, Nāzuk Shāh. The Chaks made their independent government in Kashmir in 1554.⁹⁴ Under their rule, the Nūrbakhshī order was rehabilitated, the mausoleums of Mīr 'Irāqī and Mīr Dāniyāl-I were

⁸⁷ Parmu, *History of Muslim Rule in Kashmir*, 209.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 217.

⁸⁹ Elias and Ross, *The Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, 435-36.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 436.

⁹¹ Ibid., 437.

⁹² Hassan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, 137.

⁹³ Sayyid Akbar 'Alī, *Tadhkirah-i Ṣūfiyā': Baltistān-Kārgil-Ladākh* (Rawalpindi: Rumail Publishers, 2019), 133.

⁹⁴ Nizamuddin Wani, *Muslim Rule in Kashmir: 1554-1586* (New Delhi: Anmol Publishers, 1993), 41.

rebuilt, khānqāhs were restored, and the Nūrbakhshīs were allowed to regularly perform Friday prayers in their mosques. In 1588, the Chak dynasty fell to Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) and remained under the direct Mughal rule until 1857. Due to persecution by Mughals, Mīr Ḥasan Rahnumā (d. ca. 1600), the son and successor of Mīr Shams al-Dīn II fled to India. He died and was buried in Lahore. Mīr Dāniyāl II, the son and successor of Mīr Ḥasan, renewed his activities in Kashmir. He died in 1638.⁹⁵

During the seventeenth century, the Nūrbakhshī identity in Kashmir was merged into either Sunnism or Shiism because the religious environment was characterized by conflict between the Sunni-oriented Mughals, Ottomans, and Uzbeks, on one hand, and the Shīʿī-oriented Safavids in Iran, on the other hand. Under these circumstances, the Nūrbakhshī order not only disintegrated but also was eliminated from Kashmir. The Nūrbakhshī sources are silent about Nūrbakhshī order during the next centuries. Under such conditions, the Nūrbakhshī order only survived in Baltistan and Ladakh regions, whose mighty mountains were a haven for it.

The Nūrbakhshī Order in Baltistan and Ladakh

The Baltistan and Ladakh were historically known as the Little Tibet and the Great Tibet respectively. These regions were divided into three contiguous linguistic zones with distinct cultures, namely Ladakh, Kargil, and Baltistan. Historically, all these areas were divided into small independent principalities with separate ruling dynasties. It was only in 1840 that these areas were annexed by the state of Kashmir, ruled by the Dogra family. In 1947, the people of Baltistan started their war of independence along with Gilgit against Dogras and got their independence in August 1948 and voluntarily became a part of Pakistan.⁹⁶

Islam was introduced in Baltistan and Ladakh by a famous Kubravī Sufi master, Amīr Kabīr Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī in 1379 CE.⁹⁷ He was the eighteenth Sufi Shaykh of the Nūrbakhshī Sufi order starting from the disciple of ‘Alī Raḍā, Shaykh Ma’rūf Karkhī. Sayyid Hamadānī was the father-in-law of Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī. He converted many

⁹⁵ ‘Alī, *Tadhkirah-i Ṣūfiyā*, 147.

⁹⁶ Banat Gul Afridi, *Baltistan in History* (Peshawar: Emjay Books International, 1988), 232. The Baltistan region got independence on August 14, 1948, while the Gilgit region had become independent on November 1, 1947.

⁹⁷ Sufi, *Kashīr*, 1:86.

Buddhists to Islam, especially in Shigar and Khaplu regions. He also converted the 'Amācha ruler of Shigar named Gōrī Tham and built the famous khānqāh and mosque at Ambūriq.⁹⁸ He also constructed the famous Chaqchan mosque in Khaplu.⁹⁹ The khānqāhs constructed by Sayyid Hamadānī are still preserved and functioning under the Nūrbakhshīs. The main Nūrbakhshī centre of learning in Gilgit-Baltistan is Madrasah-i Shāh-i Hamadān, Skardu.

After Sayyid Hamadānī, some missionaries came into these regions and spread the teachings of various sects, including Nūrbakhshīs, Twelver Shī'īs, Ahl-i Ḥadīth, and Ismā'īlīs, etc. Sayyid Hamadānī's mission was further carried on by Mīr 'Irāqī who along with his followers visited Baltistan from Kashmir during his brief exile in 1505. Nūrbakhshīs survived in Baltistan and Ladakh because of difficult geographical and cultural barriers. The road accesses and passes i.e., Deosai plans, Zoji La, Muztagh, and Saltoro Passes are generally closed in winters due to snowfall. Mīr 'Irāqī was successful in converting a large number of people to the Nūrbakhshī faith. Some scholars and local historians believed that he preached Shī'ī doctrine in Kashmir and Baltistan but it is not true because of many reasons as discussed earlier. After Mīr 'Irāqī, his son and successor, Mīr Dānīyāl-I also took refuge in Baltistan from 1543-1549 from the persecutions of Mirzā Haidar Dughlat, the ruler of Kashmir.¹⁰⁰ Due to the missionary activities of Mīr Dānīyāl I, most of the local population embraced the Nūrbakhshī order.

Historical sources provide some information about the dynastic politics in Baltistan and Ladakh during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but they do not discuss sufficiently the religious environment. Tūsī brothers Sayyid 'Alī Tūsī (d. 1670), Sayyid Nāṣir Tūsī, Sayyid Maḥmūd Tūsī (d. 1669), and Sayyid Haidar 'Alī Tūsī visited Baltistan from Chinese Turkestan and actively propagated Nūrbakhshī order during the seventeenth century. Sayyid 'Alī Tūsī settled in Kuwardu, Sayyid Haidar Tūsī in Qumra, Sayyid Nāṣir Tūsī in Shigar, and Sayyid Maḥmūd Tūsī in Skardu.¹⁰¹ Sayyid 'Alī Tūsī and Sayyid Nāṣir Tūsī built a mosque in Thagas in 1603/4.¹⁰² Sayyid Maḥmūd Tūsī and Sayyid 'Alī Tūsī were buried in Kushu Bagh, Skardu and Kuwardu respectively.

⁹⁸ Dani, *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan*, 230.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 233.

¹⁰⁰ Hassan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, 137.

¹⁰¹ Muḥammad Yūsuf Ḥusainabādī, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān* (Skardu: Baltistan Book Depot, 2009), 25; Dani, *History of Northern Areas*, 230.

¹⁰² Ṣābir Afāqī, *Jalvah-i Kashmīr* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1980), 107.

In the seventeenth century, Nūrbakhshī order was revived in Baltistan and Ladakh by the arrival of its thirty-fourth Sufi master and the seventh successor of Mīr Nūrbakhsh, named Mīr Abū Saʿīd Saʿdāʾ (d. 1684) and his brother Mīr ʿĀrif (d. 1651) from Kashmir.¹⁰³ Both were the sons of Mīr Dāniyāl II. Mīr ʿĀrif settled in Thagas (Ghanche), where he built a mosque. He died in Thagas, where his tomb is still preserved. His brother, Mīr Abū Saʿīd settled in the Keris region and built a jāmīʾ mosque there.¹⁰⁴ Mīr Abū Saʿīd's two sons, Mīr Mukhtār Akhyār and Mīr Yaḥyā greatly contributed to the further growth of Nūrbakhshī order in Baltistan and Ladakh. They both went to Shigar. After some years, Mīr Mukhtār Akhyār returned to Keris. Mīr Yaḥyā built seven khānqāhs and fourteen mosques in the whole Shigar region.¹⁰⁵ He was buried near the main khānqāh of central Shigar. His brother Mīr Mukhtār, who was the principal successor of Mīr Abū Saʿīd, stayed in and was instrumental in the spread of Nūrbakhshī order in the whole of Baltistan and Ladakh. He built twenty-two khānqāhs and many mosques in the entire region.¹⁰⁶ The Khānqāh of Gamba, Skardu was also built in his life by his son Sayyid Ibrāhīm.¹⁰⁷ Mīr Mukhtār died in 1722 in Keris.¹⁰⁸ He was succeeded by his son Mīr Jalāl al-Dīn who was killed during the life of his father. Mīr Mukhtār then nominated Jalāl al-Dīn's son, Mīr Najm al-Dīn Thāqib as a successor and sent him to guide the Nūrbakhshī community of Shigar. After the death of his grandfather, Mīr Thāqib settled in Keris and breathed his last in 1750.¹⁰⁹ Mīr Thāqib was succeeded by his son Mīr Muḥammad Shāh Nūrānī-I who settled in Keris, spent his whole life teaching and guiding the Nūrbakhshī community, and died in 1773/74.

All of the Nūrbakhshī leaders had charismatic personalities, but the charisma of Nūrbakhshī Sufi masters faded away after Najm al-Thāqib.¹¹⁰ This process quickened in the nineteenth century with the arrival of Sunni and Shīʿī preachers. The Nūrbakhshī Sufi master failed to protect

¹⁰³ Andreas Rieck, "The Nurbakhshis of Baltistan: Crisis and Revival of a Five Centuries Old Community" *Die Welt des Islams* 35, no. 2 (1995): 159-188, at 163-64.

¹⁰⁴ Afridi, *Baltistan in History*, 123; Ḥusainābādī, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Ghulām Ḥasan, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān* (Mirpur: Vairi Nag Publication, 1992), 120; Ḥusainābādī, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 26.

¹⁰⁶ Ḥasan, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 120; Ḥusainābādī, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 26.

¹⁰⁷ Elias, "A Second 'Alī,'" 404.

¹⁰⁸ Sayyid Ḥusain ʿĀrif Naqvī, *Tadhkirah-I ʿUlamāʾ-i Imāmiyyah-i Pākistān* (Islamabad: Imāmiyyah Dār al-Tablīgh, 1994), 212; Ḥasan, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 26.

¹⁰⁹ Naʿīm, *Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh*, 193.

¹¹⁰ For the complete chain of succession after Najm al-Dīn Thāqib, see appendix-B.

their community from the influence of modern Sunni and Shīʿī religious movements.

The British officers and Dogra rulers of Jammu and Kashmir started some educational activities in Baltistan and Ladakh from the nineteenth century onwards. The Dogras bought these regions along with Kashmir from the British in 1840. In this period, the Nūrbakhshī community formed a bulk of the population in Baltistan and Ladakh. They were mentioned by different British officers in their narratives. Godfrey Thomas Vigne, an English traveller mentioned the Nūrbakhshīs in derogatory terms as Keluncheh, probably meaning the sickle in the local language. He also referred to the Nūrbakhshī rule in Skardu during the mid-eighteenth century.¹¹¹ John Biddulph and Frederic Drew also referred to the presence of the Nūrbakhshī community in their accounts.¹¹²

The advent of Nūrbakhshī missionaries in Baltistan and Ladakh was followed by Sunni and Shīʿī rivals. These regions had connections with Mughal India (1526-1858) between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This provided an environment, which was conducive to different orders. The annexation of these regions to the Dogra rule further integrated these regions into South Asian culture and political structure. As a consequence, the Census of India, 1911 showed that due to the missionary activities of both Sunni and Shīʿī religious groups, the Nūrbakhshī population was gradually declining.¹¹³ The first Sunni preacher to arrive in Baltistan was Mullā Ḥusain alias Mullā Peshawari in 1873.¹¹⁴ After gaining the trust of the Nūrbakhshī Sufi masters, he started educating illiterate students with the help of Sunni textbooks. He motivated the students to seek further education in the famous madrasahs of India. These students later became instrumental in converting the Nūrbakhshī students to the Ahl-i Ḥadīth sect. They first acquired a foothold in the village of Ghawari, District Ghanche, where they founded a Dār al-ʿUlūm in 1891.¹¹⁵ The Ḥanafī Sunnis built their first

¹¹¹ G. T. Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak and Iskardu* (London: Henry Colburn Publisher, 1842), 253-54.

¹¹² John Biddulph, *Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh* (Graz: Akademische Druck, 1991), 123-25; Frederic Drew, *The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories: A Geographical Account* (Graz: Akademische Druck, 1976), 359.

¹¹³ Aḥmad Rabbānī, *Maqālāt-i Maulavī Muḥammad Shafī* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqī-i Adab, 1972), 24-25.

¹¹⁴ Sayyid ʿAlī Mūsavī, *Kāshif al-Ḥaqq*, trans. Muḥammad Ḥasan Najafī (Skardu: Anjuman-i Imāmiyyah Baltistāniyyah, 1992).

¹¹⁵ Rieck, "The Nurbakhshis of Baltistan," 171.

jāmi' mosque in Skardu in 1913.¹¹⁶ They also produced polemical literature. In 1946, Maulavī 'Abd al-Ḥaqq wrote a book titled, *Tuḥfah-i Tibat*, which strongly condemned the Nūrbakhshī beliefs and rituals. In 1931, Sayyid Abū 'l-Ḥasan filed a case in a law court to take possession of Khānqāh-i Mu'allā of Keris to convert it into the jāmi' mosque. The court gave a verdict in favour of Nūrbakhshīs. Much later, the Ahl-i Ḥadīth preachers built their jāmi' mosque in 1972.¹¹⁷ They also made an effective step to integrate the Nūrbakhshīs in Ahl-i Ḥadīth population. For this purpose, they allegedly distorted and published many treaties, which were attributed to Mīr Nūrbakhsh like *Ṭabaqāt-i Nūriyyah*.¹¹⁸

The Twelver Shī'ī preachers became more active since the early twentieth century. They were in a considerable number in the Baltistan region due to the influence of neighbouring regions. The earliest local Twelver missionaries, who were active in the early twentieth century were Shaikh Javād b. 'Alī (d. 1936) and Sayyid 'Abbās Mūsavī (d. 1928).¹¹⁹ Sayyid 'Abbās motivated many Nūrbakhshīs to follow a living *mujtahid* and converted many people in the Ladakh region to Twelver Shiism. However, in the history of Shiism in Baltistan, the most important missionary was Sayyid 'Alī Mūsavī, also known as Sayyid 'Alī Kerisi. He was born in 1891/92 in a Nūrbakhshī Sufi family.¹²⁰ He was a nephew of Nūrbakhshī Sufi Sayyid Muḥammad Akbar.¹²¹ Sayyid 'Alī Kerisi believed that Mīr Nūrbakhsh had pragmatically concealed his Shiism to escape persecution at the hands of the Sunni rulers and secretly preached Shī'ī tenets to the Nūrbakhshīs. Sayyid 'Alī Kerisi later declared his conversion to Shiism but his brother Sayyid Mukhtār Ḥusain (d. 1952/53) concealed his conversion until his death. Sayyid Mukhtār became Nūrbakhshī Sufi master after the death of Muḥammad Shāh II (d. 1947/48). He was an *imām* of Friday prayers in the Nūrbakhshī jāmi' mosque of Khaplu. He was successful in converting pro-Shī'ī Nūrbakhshīs to Shī'ī faith such as Sayyid Murtaḍā of Kundūs (Ghanche) and Sayyid 'Alī Adīb (the founder of Anvār-i Muṣṭafā Trust, Khaplu).¹²²

¹¹⁶ Ḥusainābādī, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 28.

¹¹⁷ Muḥammad Amīn, *Da'vat-i Ittīhād* (Lahore: Anjuman-i Imāmiyyah-i Baltistāniyyah), 51-53.

¹¹⁸ Rieck, "The Nurbakhshis of Baltistan," 176.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 169; Ḥusainābādī, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 26.

¹²⁰ 'Alī, *Kāshif al-Ḥaqq*, 17.

¹²¹ Pīr Muḥammad Shāh II was the son and successor of Sayyid Muḥammad Akbar. He was succeeded by his son-in-law, Sayyid 'Aun Alī Shāh II (d. 1991) in 1952/53.

¹²² Rieck, "The Nurbakhshis of Baltistan," 172.

These Shī'ī missionaries also used literary tactics to propagate Shī'ī doctrines. They attributed apocryphal books to Mīr Nūrbakhsh, which included *Masā'il-i 'Itrat al-Tadhkirah*, *Raf' al-Ikhtilāf*, and a commentary on *Fiqh al-Aḥwāṭ* called *Tanwīr al-Sirāj*. As a result of all these activities, the Nūrbakhshī population was gradually converted to either Twelver Shiism or Sunni faith. About twenty-five per cent of the population in Baltistan was comprised of Nūrbakhshīs in 1992-1994.¹²³

The Sunni and Shī'ī missionary activities significantly affected the Nūrbakhshī population in Baltistan and threatened its communal identity. Consequently, the Nūrbakhshīs began to reassert their identity. The first significant step was taken by a Nūrbakhshī scholar Maulavī Ḥamzah 'Alī from Khaplu. After studying at Madrasah-i Maẓhir al-'Ulūm, Saharanpur, UP, India, he settled in the Nūrbakhshī colony of Missouri, near Shimla, India.¹²⁴ He attempted to defend Nūrbakhshī order as an independent sect, neither a Sunni nor a Shī'ī sub-sect. For this purpose, he wrote *Falāḥ al-Mu'minīn*, an Urdu edition of *Da'vat-i Sūfiyyah*, *Qā'im al-Ḥaqq*, *'Aqā'id al-Mu'minīn*, and *Nūr al-Mu'minīn: Kashf al-Tafāwut*. His work, *Nūr al-Mūminīn* is an explanation of doctrinal differences between the Nūrbakhshiyyah and the Imāmiyyah or Twelver Shī'īs. He also exposed their differences by circulating a poster titled *Ishtihār Wājib al-Iẓhār al-Ikhtilāf bayn al-Sūfiyyah Nūrbakhshiyyah wa Shī'ah Imāmiyyah*, all over the region in 1941.¹²⁵

Another such personality was Sayyid Qāsim Shāh Kharkūvī (d. 1977). He went to Lucknow for higher studies and returned to Baltistan. He translated Mīr Nūrbakhsh's important book, *Kitāb al-I'tiqādiyyah* from Arabic into the Persian language. He also published his book, *Tuḥfah-i Qāsimī* in 1940-41.¹²⁶ He founded Madrasah-i Nuṣrat al-Islām Nūrbakhshiyyah and Qāsimī Library in Kharkū (Ghanche).

The Nūrbakhshīs like their Sunni and Shī'ī rivals also started to build their madrasahs and mosques. After the independence of Gilgit-Baltistan from Dogra Raj in 1947, the Nūrbakhshīs started constructing their mosques in big cities of Pakistan like Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Quetta, and Gilgit. Today, there are two major Nūrbakhshī madrasahs, one in Karachi, which was completed in 1990, and the second one is Madrasah-i Shāh-i Hamadān, Skardu, which was

¹²³ Ibid., 160.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 180.

¹²⁵ Ḥamzah 'Alī, *Nūr al-Mu'minīn: Kashf al-Tafāwut* (Rawalpindi: Hamdard Press, 1950), 4.

¹²⁶ Naeem, *Mīr Sayyid Muhammad Nūrbakhsh*, 201.

completed around 1994. Another important institution, which greatly helped the Nūrbakhshī revival is Nadwat al-Islāmiyyah Nūrbakhshiyyah, Islamabad founded in 1960. It is being supervised by the Nūrbakhshī ‘ulamā’ and scholars. Its central figure was ‘Allāmah Muḥammad Bashīr (d. 2016). He has translated important Nūrbakhshī literature including *Fiqh al-Aḥwāṭ*, *Risālah al-I’tiqādiyyah*, and *Da’vāt-i Ṣūfiyyah* into the Urdu language. He started a magazine, *Navā-i Ṣūfiyyah* in 1985.¹²⁷ In 1994, another journal, *Tibyān-i Nūrbakhshiyyah* started to be published in Karachi.¹²⁸

Sectarian Conflict within Nūrbakhshīs: Ṣūfiyyah versus Imāmiyyah

The seed of sectarian conflict within Nūrbakhshīs was allegedly sown by the Sunni and Shī’ī missionaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They tried to win converts among the Nūrbakhshīs. Their mission was further carried on by their Nūrbakhshī-turned Sunni and Shī’ī disciples. The most prominent of them were Sayyid Abū ‘l Ḥasan, a descendant of Nūrbakhshī Sufi family, who later became an Ahl-i Ḥadīth and Sayyid ‘Alī Kerisi, a descendant of Nūrbakhshī Sufi family, who later became an Imāmī Shī’ī. As a consequence, the Nūrbakhshī community was sharply divided into two groups: Ṣūfiyyah-Imāmiyyah Nūrbakhshiyyah (those who inclined to Shiism) and the purist Ṣūfiyyah-Nūrbakhshiyyah (those who claim to be a distinct sect). This issue became serious with a change in the political environment of Pakistan since the 1980s.

After the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and President General Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamization policy in Pakistan, these areas were also severely affected by repeated Sunni and Shī’ī confrontations. Both Sunni and Shī’ī organizations started investing heavily in civic and educational sectors to win over converts in the Nūrbakhshī community. The charisma of the Nūrbakhshī Sufi master had already faded. Sayyid ‘Aun ‘Alī II (d. 1991), who was the thirty-ninth Nūrbakhshī Pīr from 1951 to 1991, played some role but he was only a participant in the entire debate. The authority of the institution of Nūrbakhshī Pīr was seriously questioned ever since the accession of Sayyid ‘Aun ‘Alī Shāh’s son, Shams al-Dīn Sayyid Muḥammad Shāh Nūrānī II (b. 1991).¹²⁹ He allowed his followers to use

¹²⁷ Rieck, “The Nurbakhshis of Baltistan,” 183.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Sayyid Muḥammad Shāh Nūrānī II is the current Nūrbakhshī Sufi master. He succeeded his father in 1991. He is also of the view that the Nūrbakhshīs are members of an independent sect, not a sub-branch of Sunnis or Shī’īs.

the term Imāmiyyah with the name Şūfiyyah-Nūrbakhshīyyah. This change in the title of the community reflected a Shī'ī tilt. As a result, the pro-Shī'ī group of Nūrbakhshīs started to republish all basic Nūrbakhshī works with the title of “Şūfiyyah-Imāmiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah.” They have been trying to build their own identity under the patronage of the current Nūrbakhshī Sufi master, Sayyid Muḥammad Shāh Nūrānī II, while the other group, Şūfiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah was led by Faqīr Ibrāhīm (d. 2016). After the death of Faqīr Ibrāhīm, his disciple Rustam ‘Alī became the current head of Şūfiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah.

At present, these two Nūrbakhshī factions, Şūfiyyah-Imāmiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah and Şūfiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah, however, have agreed that Nūrbakhshīyyah as a Sufi order is distinct from both Sunnis and Twelver Shī'īs¹³⁰ and that they are two branches of a single sect, the Nūrbakhshīyyah. Moreover, the Nūrbakhshī community tried to resolve this matter by holding two major conventions of Nūrbakhshī scholars from both groups. The first convention was held in Keris in 1982, in which the Keris Agreement was conceded. The second was held in Khaplu on June 3, 1993, in which the famous Chaqchan Agreement was conceded.¹³¹ According to these agreements, the leaders of both groups agreed on the sect's name as Sūfiyyah-Nūrbakhshīyyah and united for the future well-being of the Nūrbakhshī community.¹³² However, later, both parties again developed disagreements. Consequently, these conventions could not have a lasting effect.

The Nūrbakhshī order has changed its outlook in the twenty-first century. It has made considerable progress in utilizing different tools of modernization. The printing of traditional books with Urdu translation and journalistic activities have greatly created awareness among its people. Some of their scholars have made a collective effort to promote education and literacy. They have digitalized their ritualistic prayers, and also use the Internet for the dissemination of their teachings. Some of the members of the Nūrbakhshī community have also won seats in the local elections in 2008, and have become members of the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly. They are consistently lobbying for the support of the government in upgrading schools and colleges run by local

¹³⁰ Ghulām Ḥasan Ḥasanū, *Şūfiyyah-i Nūrbakhshīyyah* (Khaplu: Tanzīm Khuddām al-Şūfiyyah, 1994), 141-66; Muḥammad Ḥasan Nūrī, *al-Ḥujjah al-Bālighah fī Ithbāt al-Imāmiyyah al-Şūfiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah* (Kiris: Anjuman-i Şūfiyyah-i Imāmiyyah-i Nūrbakhshīyyah, 1997), 138.

¹³¹ Ḥasanū, *Sūfiyyah-i Nūrbakhshīyyah*, 12-28.

¹³² Nūrī, *al-Ḥujjah al-Bālighah*, 10-11.

associations. Keeping in view the fact that the Imāmiyyah (Twelver) Shī'īs are in majority in Gilgit-Baltistan, whereas, the Sunnis constitute the majority of the population of Pakistan, the Nūrbakhshīs believe that their revival is the need of the hour. That is why they make their identity as a separate legal school beyond the Sunni-Shī'ī conflicts.

Conclusions

Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī provided a strong foundation for the development of Islam in Gilgit-Baltistan. Later on, his spiritual successors of the Nūrbakhshī order carried on his legacy, which can be seen even today in the prayers and religious rituals of Nūrbakhshīs. The Nūrbakhshī order is a branch of and the sole heir to the Kubravī-Hamadānī order. Today, the Nūrbakhshī community not only owns the historic khānqāhs of Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī in Baltistan but also follows his practices and traditions. It has its jurisprudence, ritual prescriptions, and fourteen *Kalimāt-i Qudsiyyah*, which are its defining principles. The Nūrbakhshī order was the earliest Sufi order in Gilgit-Baltistan, independent of Sunnis and Shī'īs. The most striking feature of this Sufi order is that it provides a middle way between the Sunnis and Shī'īs, and hence becomes a major site of moderation, religious tolerance, and intera-faith harmony.

Mīr Nūrbakhsh was initiated in the Kubravī-Hamadānī order in 1417 by Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī. He soon rose to prominence. Finally, Khavājah Ishāq gave him the title of "Nūrbakhsh" and declared him his spiritual successor. Mīr Nūrbakhsh's relations with Sultan Shāhrukh deteriorated because the latter believed that the former claimed to be a representative of twelfth Shī'ī Imām or the promised Imām, al-Qā'im al-Mahdī. However, the study of the works of Mīr Nūrbakhsh suggests that he never claimed to be a Shī'ī or Mahdī. Nevertheless, the ruling elites were afraid of his religiopolitical authority. They executed his spiritual master, Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī, imprisoned him, and exiled him for almost twenty years. He was finally freed in 1447 after which, he led the life of a Sufi master, teaching and training his disciples and spreading the message of his Sufi order. His spiritual successors played a pivotal role in the development and spread of the Nūrbakhshī order in their respective regions.

The Nūrbakhshī order, which had lost its independent character in Persia by the end of the Safavid rule, succeeded in establishing itself in Kashmir and Baltistan thanks to the efforts of Mīr 'Irāqī. In Kashmir, the Nūrbakhshī order faced religious persecution first by Mīrzā Haidar Dughlat and then by the Mughals.

Baltistan proved a safe haven for the followers of the Nūrbakhshī order. In the history of Muslim rule in Gilgit-Baltistan, the Nūrbakhshī Sufi order was the pioneering order, which firmly established itself in the region. The ground for spreading the Nūrbakhshī order had already been paved by their Kubravī-Hamadānī predecessors, Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī, Mīr ‘Irāqī, and Mīr Dāniyāl I. In the seventeenth century, Tūsī brothers and the successors of Mīr ‘Irāqī played an important role in the development of Nūrbakhshī order in Baltistan. Mīr Mukhtār Akhyār and his brother Mīr Yaḥyā further strengthened it and built Nūrbakhshī khānqāhs and mosques all over the region.

After these charismatic Nūrbakhshī Sufi masters, however, the Nūrbakhshī order started to decline and faced serious challenges from the Sunni and Shī‘ī missionaries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though these challenges significantly weakened the Nūrbakhshī order, it succeeded in preserving its centuries-old identity. The Nūrbakhshī Sufi order without having support from co-religionists abroad succeeded in maintaining its distinct identity as an independent Sufi order despite hundred years of massive missionary efforts of both Sunnis and Shī‘īs.

Appendix-A

The Spiritual Genealogy of Mīr Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh¹³³

Mīr Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh
 ^
 Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī
 ^
 Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī
 ^
 Maḥmūd Mazdaqānī
 ^
 Alā’ al-Daulah Simnānī
 ^
 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Isfrā’īnī
 ^
 Aḥmad Dhākir Jurjānī
 ^
 Raḍī ‘l-Dīn ‘Alī b. Lālā Ghaznavī
 ^
 Najam al-Dīn Kubrā
 ^
 ‘Ammār b. Yāsir Badaisī
 ^
 Abū Najīb Suhrawardī
 ^
 Aḥmad Ghazālī
 ^
 Abū Bakr Nassājī
 ^
 Abū al-Qāsim Gurgānī
 ^
 Abū Usmān Maghribī
 ^
 Abū ‘Alī Kātibī
 ^
 Abū Dhar Rūdbārī
 ^

¹³³ Hamadānī, *Da‘vāt-i Ṣūfiyyah*, 169-72.

Junaid Baghdādī

^

Sarī Saqtī

^

Ma'rūf Karkhī

^

'Alī Razā

^

Mūsā Kāẓim

^

Ja'far Ṣādiq

^

Muḥammad Bāqir

^

'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn

^

Ḥusayn b. 'Alī

^

Ḥasan b. 'Alī

^

'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib

^

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him)

Appendix-B

The Spiritual Successors of Mīr Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh¹³⁴

Shāh Qāsim Faiẓbakhsh
 v
 Mīr Shams al-Dīn ‘Irāqī
 v
 Mīr Dāniyāl Shahīd
 v
 Mīr Shams al-Dīn Rashīd
 v
 Mīr Ḥasan Rāhnumā
 v
 Mīr Dāniyāl Dānā
 v
 Mīr Abū Sa‘īd Sa‘dā’
 v
 Mīr Mukhtār Akhyār I
 v
 Mīr Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ma‘ṣūm
 v
 Mīr Najm al-Dīn Thāqīb
 v
 Mīr Muḥammad Shāh Nūrānī I
 v
 Mīr Muḥammad Shāh Makhdūm al-Fuqarā’
 v
 Mīr Shāh Jalāl
 v
 Mīr Khānah-i ‘Ulūm
 v
 Mīr Muḥammad Akbar
 v
 Mīr Muḥammad Shāh Zain al-Akhyār
 v
 Sayyid ‘Aun ‘Alī Shāh

¹³⁴ Ibid., 173–74.

v

Sayyid Muḥammad Shāh II
