Islamic Texts in the Indigenous Languages of Pakistan

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Introduction

The language of the original and classical texts of Islam is Arabic. Thus the bulk of the texts used in the religious seminaries (madrasabs) of South Asia were, and still are, in Arabic. However, as Persian was the language of administration and high culture in medieval India, the explanation of these texts was often, and sometimes still is, in Persian. However, both Arabic and Persian were not understood by the common people. Even literate people, it would appear, were not so well versed in these classical languages as to benefit fully from the classical religious lore.

On the other hand, the mystics (Sufis) who wanted to appeal directly to the people, wrote their verses in the indigenous mother tongues of the common people. The orthodox apparently kept writing in the elitist classical Islamic languages for quite some time. However, from the 18th century onwards — indeed earlier in some instances — there also seems to have been a movement by the orthodox 'ulama' to produce religious literature for the common people in their own languages. It was not an orchestrated, conscious or centrally directed movement. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that in all cases, or even in most cases, the writers who contributed to this movement knew each other or thought that they were promoting a common cause. However, they have left behind religious texts which were probably read out by literate people to their illiterate neighbours and acquaintances.

This article describes some of these texts. It should be pointed out at this juncture that this is not an article on either manuscripts or printed texts as


such. Hence only a very few, representative specimens have been described. The purpose of this brief description is to illustrate what kind of reading material was available to people in the indigenous languages of Pakistan before the provision of mass education by the British. It is suggested that the ‘ulamā’ wrote texts on religious themes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries presumably because they wanted to strengthen the Islamic identity among the masses. One way of doing this, it is conjectured, was to make people aware of Islamic doctrines in their mother tongues rather than in the remote and alien classical languages—Arabic and Persian. As works in Urdu have been described by other scholars, and in any case Urdu was not an indigenous language of the area now known as Pakistan during the period under discussion (18th to early 20th centuries), this article focuses on works in Sindhi, Pashto, Panjabi, Balochi and Brahvi. Poetry, whether in the form of romantic tales or other sub-genres, either written by Şūfīs or capable of a mystic interpretation, have also been left out because they have been described and anthologized by many writers.

The printed texts in question have been described as “chapbooks” by Hanaway and Nasir in their excellent chapter on the printing of such works. The term comes from Europe where it is used for books sold by peddlers (called chapmen) to common people from the sixteenth century onwards. During the nineteenth century they came to be called “chapbooks”. The term has been used for printed books in Europe, and for popular books in Pakistan too by Hanaway and Nasir. In this article, however, a number of manuscripts too have been studied. Indeed, the emphasis was on manuscripts rather than on printed material. Some of these manuscript texts were later printed so that there is a thematic continuity between the manuscripts and the printed books. As the manuscripts are hard to find, they have been described much more often than the printed books. In languages in which manuscripts are not available, such as Brahvi and Balochi, printed books have perforce been described. Those who want to read the printed books in these languages can

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6 Ibid., 360–61.
refer to Hanaway and Nasir’s excellent bibliography of chapbooks and benefit from the vast collection of such books in the library of the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage (Islamabad) and other libraries in Pakistan.

Sindhi

In the sixteenth century, by which time much had been written in Sindhi, Makhdum Ja’far of district Dadu published a work called *Nabj al-Ta’allum*, a work probably written in Arabic. It was on education and its Persian abridgement (or digest) was also prepared by the author in 1568. The latter work is available and Nabi Bakhsh Baloch has edited it and prepared a digest of it in 1969. According to this digest, Makhdum Ja’far emphasized the pupil rather than the teacher and the text. One can hardly call this a precursor of the modern pupil-centred teaching methodologies. However, if Baloch is right, it did lead to teaching in the mother-tongue which the pupil could understand. In those days teaching was in Persian though it is hardly conceivable that teachers would not have resorted not to have used Sindhi to explain the Persian alphabet and vocabulary to small children. The basic difference probably is that Sindhi became the recognised auxiliary medium of instruction. Because of this a number of textbooks, generally of a religious character, were written in Sindhi during the last days of the Mughal period and the rule of the Kalhuras and Talpurs (1680–1843).

An important book in this category was ‘Abd al-Rahman’s *Qawaid al-Qur’an* which is said to have been written in the 13th century of the Hijrah (which begins from October 1786) to guide students to read the Qur’an correctly. Muslims have always been concerned with the correct pronunciation of the Qur’an because the meanings of words change if they are pronounced incorrectly. The purpose of the book, therefore, was to preserve the standardized pronunciation of classical Arabic for religious reasons. However, the book is also a treatise, albeit unscientific, on orthoepy and phonetics. The writer is concerned with the place and manner of articulation of Arabic phonemes not found in Sindhi. This makes the book one of the first, possibly even the very first, treatise on phonetics in Sindhi.

*The Catalogue of the Punjabi and Sindhi Manuscripts in the India Office Library*, compiled by Christopher Shackle, records 16 items in Sindhi. Out of them the most well known ones are by Abu’l-Hasan of Thatta (1616–1688). One of them is also mentioned as *Abul Hasan-Ji-Sindhi* by Ellis in his report.

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7 Ibid., 455–615.
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on education in Sindh at the time of the British conquest in 1843. This book has been recently edited by Khadijah Baloch and reprinted. The book, like many others, was meant to explain the basic beliefs, principles and rituals of Islam.

Another such book was by Makhduum iya’ al-Din. Like that of his predecessor, this too is known by his name — Makhduum iuuddin Ji Sindhi. It was written in the 18th century and it explains how five daily prayers (salah) are to be performed. Since it is meant to guide children, it focuses on the rituals of cleanliness, times of congregational and other prayers and other such practical matters. Incidentally, it reveals the state of astronomical beliefs of pre-modern Sindhi Muslims. References to planets, stars and their place in heavens is, indeed, still part of the idiom and worldview of astrologers and palmists who ply their trade of telling the future in the cities of Pakistan and those who visit them in order to avert the coming crises. The purpose of the book, however, is religious so that most of the space is taken up by lessons on rituals.

There are other such books scattered about in various libraries and personal collections in Sindh and abroad. Among them are versions of the Nur Namah, Mi’raj Namah, Munajat Namah, Hasr Namah, Qiyamat Namah and so on. Some of them have been mentioned by Blumhardt. A number of works of this kind have also been collected together recently in Sindhi Boli Jo Agatabo Manzum Zakhir by Nabi Baksh Baloch. These books are all religious and didactic. All the versions of the Nur Namah, not only in Sindhi but also in other languages, are about spiritual radiance and enlightenment which follow from faith. Other books refer to prevalent beliefs about the day of judgment and other such doctrines. The important point, in our context, is the fact that these works were in Sindhi and that they were taught systematically. Richard Burton (1821–1890), the famous English orientalist, translator and explorer who wrote a report on education in Sindh, says:

13 For his biography see Frank Mc. Lynn, Burton: Snow Upon the Desert (London: John Murray, 1990).
He [a boy pupil] probably is nine years old before he proceeds to the next step —
the systematic study of his mother tongue, the Sindhi. The course is as follows:
1st. The Nur-namo, a short and easy religious treatise upon the history of things
in general, before the creation of man. The work was composed by one Abdel
Rehman, and appears to be borrowed from the different Ahadis, or traditional
sayings of the Prophet.....
2nd. The works of Makhdum Hashem, beginning with the Tafsir.
3rd. Tales in verse and prose, such as the adventures of Saiful, Laili-Majano, &c.
The most popular works are the Hikayat-el-Salibin, a translation from the Arabic
by a Sindhi Mulla, Abd el Hakim; the subjects are the lives, adventures, and
remarkable sayings of the most celebrated saints, male and female, of the golden
age of Islam. The Ladano is an account of the Prophet’s death, borrowed from
the Habib el-Siyar, by Miyan Abdullah. The Miraj-Namo is an account of
Mohammed’s night excursion to heaven..... The Sau-Masala, or Hundred
Problems, is a short work by one Ismail, showing how Abd el-Halim, a Fakir,
made the daughter of the Sultan of Rum, after answering the hundred queries
with which this accomplished lady used to perplex her numerous lovers. 14

From the age of nine till the age of twelve or thirteen, roughly about four
years, the student reads these works in his mother tongue. It was only then
that he started studying Persian. In the rest of India, as we know already,
Persian began from infancy though there too the teachers had to explain the
basic vocabulary and the art of spelling and writing informally through the
mother tongue. Indeed, although Burton calls the study of certain books in
Sindhi the study of the Sindhi language itself, it appears more probable that
the objective was not the teaching of the language as such but that of religion.
The idea was that the child would understand religion better in the mother
tongue. Although this idea produced works of this nature in other languages
spoken by the Muslims of north India, they were not taught as systematically
as they were in Sindh.

**Pashtō**

Books of Pashtō probably became available from the sixteenth century
onwards in the Pashtō-speaking areas. I have had access to a number of
manuscripts of Pashtō in the British Library,15 the Pashto Academy, Peshawar
and the library of the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage,

15 See J.F. Blumhardt and D. N. Mackenzie, *Catalogue of Pashto Manuscripts in the Libraries of the
British Isles* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum and Commonwealth Relations Office,
1965).
Islamabad. Unfortunately, I could not have access to the manuscripts in India and other parts of the world. The following brief outline is based on the manuscripts which became available in different archives and libraries.

There are 170 manuscripts in the libraries of the British Isles out of which 69 are in the British Museum and 60 in the Oriental and India Office Collection of the British Library. This is the largest collection seen by the present author, far exceeding the one held by the Pashto Academy and the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage in Pakistan. Some of the books which were studied by individuals on their own or possibly even taught in the madrasabs are as follows:

**Khayr al-Bayān**

The first book of Pashtō which is extant is Bāyāzīd Anšārī’s (932/1526–982/1574) *Khayr al-Bayān*. Bāyāzīd Anšārī is also known as Pir-i Rōshan (The radiant or illuminating guide) by his followers. According to Nīẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad Bakhshi, the author of Taḥaqqāt-i Akbarī, he was not born in Pashtō-speaking areas. This is how he describes Pir-i Rōshan:

> In former times a Hindustani soldier had come among the Afghans, and set up an heretical sect. He induced many foolish people to become his disciples, and he gave himself the title of Pir Roshanāt.  

The Pir’s book, however, is written in the *Nasta’līq* script which itself “began to be recognized as an independent form in the second half of the fourteenth century”. It has been called a textbook by recent writers. It does, indeed, have passages about the rudiments of Islam which may be understood by ordinary people. Thus, there is a strong likelihood that it was part of the curricula of madrasabs. However, Bāyāzīd Anšārī’s opinions were considered

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objectionable, and some even outrightly heretical, by Akhund Darvēzah (d. 1048/1638–39) who countered them in his own book *Makhzan al-Islām*.

*Makhzan al-Islām*

The *Makhzan* (or treasure) is a collection of famous Arabic religious texts in Pashtō translation. Moreover, the language of explication is also Pashtō. The preface, however, is in Persian and the author says that he intends to explain the beliefs of Islam for the Afghans. He further claims that Bāyazed Anṣāri had misled the public and that he was not a “Pīr-i Rōshan” but a “Pīr-i Tārīk”. (*Rōshan* = light; *Tārīk* = dark). After some philosophical discussion pertaining to the reality of the phenomenal world he goes on to discuss Islamic doctrines. Akhund Darvēzah was an Islamic reformist who felt his version of Sunni Islam was under threat by the Rōshaniyyah movement. In another book, *Tadhkirat al-Abrār wa al-Asbār*, “he delineated and critiqued the faults of Afghan Society”

This book is said to have been taught both in the madrasahs and at homes. It was also read out to those who could not read it themselves. It starts in Arabic, switches to Persian, and then to Pashtō. (Located at PA).

*Rashid al-Bayān*

Another book which is said to be part of the curricula, especially for women, is Mullā ‘Abd al-Rashīd’s *Rashid al-Bayān*. This was written in 1124/1712. Rashid’s ancestors are said to have come from Multan and he lived at Langarkot. It was read by women in their homes and was a kind of sermon in verse. The following lines from it will serve as illustration of the whole. The nature of the deity, for instance, is described as follows:

\[
\text{Nah e naqṣ stā pāh dhāt k} \\
\text{Nah e 'a b stā pāh sifāt k}
\]

(Neither has He any defect in His Being nor has He any fault in His qualities). (Located at OIOC).

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PA stands for Pashtō Academy. A complete description of abbreviations used in this article is given at the end of the article (Ed.)
Yet another manuscript is entitled *Fawā‘id al-Shari‘at*. It was written by Akhund Muḥammad Qāsim in 1125/1713 who was a follower of Akhund Darvēzah and lavishes fulsome praise upon him in the first two pages. The subtitles are in red ink in Persian but the text is in Pashtō *naskh*. The special graphemes of Pashtō have been used but not consistently. The book is about Islamic fundamentals and rituals: beliefs, religious law, menstruation, ritual purity, prayers and so on. At places the writing becomes more close and curved and the book ends with verses in Arabic. This suggests that the writer was a person with knowledge of Arabic as well as Persian. (F H).

**Kitāb Bābā Jān**

A compendium of religious instruction written in Pashtō *naskh* in 1174/1760–1761. (OIOC).

**Jannat al-Firdaus**

A book by Ḥāfiz ‘Abd al-Kabīr on the virtues of religious exercises written in *nasta‘līq*. It was written sometime in the 18th century. A copy in the British Museum is dated 1224/1809. (CUL and BM).

**Naṣī‘ al-Muslimīn**

A Ṣūfī treatise in the *mathnawī* form. It contains injunctions relating to asceticism, religious observances and moral control. The author, Shaykh Gadā, considered himself a successor of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bābā. He was alive in 1173/1759–1760. The manuscript in the British Museum is dated 1294/1877. (BM).

**Rabqat al-Islām**

*Rabqat al-Islām* by Maulānā Mu‘izz al-Dīn enjoins upon all readers to begin everything with *Bi Ismi Allāh* (in the name of Allah) as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Har sa kār \ chīb mōmīn \ ka} \\
\text{Bi Ismi Allāh boea \ par \ īānd}
\end{align*}
\]

(Everything the Muslim does / In the Name of Allah he says first). (PA).

**Majmū‘at al-Khuṭab**

It must have been really popular. It is a collection of versified sermons. It is said to have been read out at occasions such as the *Īd al-Fiṭr* (celebrated at the
end of Ramaḍān). Some of the lines commemorating the departed Ramaḍān are:

\( 'Ajab daur vō Ramaḍān, \\
Lab mung tār shō pah vō ān \\
A mōmināb lā zamān \\
Guaraḥ fā ṭal da subḥān. \)

(Strange and wonderful were the days of Ramaḍān which we passed together
O good Muslims everywhere always desire the grace and blessings of the Elevated
and the Praised One [God]).

This book is said to have been especially significant as a textbook in the
Pashtō-speaking areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan.  

The purpose of these books seems to have been a practical one: to make
people behave in a recognisably Islamic way or, at least, to make them aware
of such a code of behaviour. They were written in Pashtō rather than the
elitist Persian in order to spread the message of Islam among the common
people. For instance, the Rashīd al-Bayān says:

\( Pah Pakhtō m din bāyān ka \\
Stā da pārab m āsān ka \)

(I have explained the Faith in Pashtō.
Thus I have made it easy for you).

The romantic tales and other writings enjoyed by the common people are
not part of this article but their existence proves that people enjoyed writings
in their mother tongues.

Besides these chapbooks written from the formal and stricter theological
point of view, there are a large a number of booklets called Nūr Nāmāb, Jang
Nāmāb and Laḥd Nāmāb which may be said to represent popular versions of
folk Islam. The Jang Nāmāb, for instance, represent the well known stories
of Imām Husayn’s martyrdom at Karbalā; the Laḥd Nāmāb are about
common beliefs about the questioning in the grave and so on. These books
were read out loudly both to men and women. There is evidence that even
quite recently literate women, called Bibis, read out such books to gatherings
of women and children. This being so, they must have had great influence on
the common people’s understanding of Islam.

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22 N. Nawāz Tāhir, Da Prāmray Ustāżānū Rabnumā Gā’id, 11.
Panjäbi

As in Sindhi and Pashto, books of a religious nature are also found in Panjäbi. For the purposes of this article books in Sirä’ikī and Hindkō have been included among “Panjäbi” books. The author has seen the manuscripts of these books in the library of the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, the Oriental and India Office Collection at the British Library and the Punjab University (Lahore) libraries. A number of other such books in manuscript form are given in various catalogues in the British Library. Among the 34 manuscripts catalogued by Christopher Shackle, Muḥammad Yār has authored eleven. He lived in Kot Kala in Shahpur (Sargodha district). He calls his language “Jhangī” at places. It is, as to be expected, a mixture of the languages which are called Sirä’ikī and Panjäbi nowadays.

The earliest works of Muḥammad Yār seem to have been written in 1196/1782 while the latest is dated around 1244/1828–29. The books were copied by his grandson Fai Muḥammad in 1271/1854–55. The Pand Nāmah, Afrināsh Nāmah, Tuḥfat al-Fiqh and Binā’ al-Mu’minin are treatises on Islamic rituals and fundamental beliefs while the Nāfi’ al-Salāt is on the benefits of prayers. Among the hagiographical works are those on saints (Si Ḥarfī Ḥa ṭat Pīr and Nāfi’ al-Kaunain) and the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) (Tuḥfat al-Salāk, Tarvīj Nāmah, Si Ḥarfī Ḥa ṭat Rusūl-i Maqībūl). These, as well as other works, are all religious.

Another major writer was Maulvī ‘Abd Allāh ‘Abīdi (d. 1074/1664) who was born in village Malka Hans of the Sahiwal district but lived and died in Lahore. His language too has Multānī (now called Sirā’ikī) forms and it is his work Barā Anvā which is referred to in Ḥr Rājīs written by Wārith Shāh. The importance of ‘Abd Allāh for students is thus described by Shackle:

The comprehensive character of ‘Abīdi’s writings has, however ensured them a uniquely important and influential position as manuals of instruction; and they have been frequently published, usually in collections of twelve treatises entitled Baran Anvā.

Let us now describe Barā Anvā and other works of a religious kind which were read both by students and other Panjäbi Muslims. The following

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 39.
manuscripts, seen by the author, are being mentioned very briefly by way of illustrating this genre of Panjābī writing.

**Bārā Anvār**

This is by ‘Abd Allāh ‘Ābidi Lāhōrī. The manuscript is in nastāʾīq (i.e. the script in which Persian and Urdu are now written) in Panjābī verse. It begins, as usual, with *ḥamid* and *nāʿ* and goes on to describe Islamic rituals: ablutions, prayers, fasting, giving alms and so on. It also discusses the rituals and regulations concerning purity with special reference to women. Thus there are long sections on pregnancy, menstruation, divorce, etc. The second part is full of historical anecdotes with reference to authorities like Masʿūdī. It is a voluminous book and is definitely the one mentioned in *Hīr Rāṇīḥā* by Wārith Shāh. (FH).

**Fiqh Aṣghar**

This is by Faqīr Ḥabīb Darzi ibn Ṭayyib from Gujrat. The manuscript is in naskh (the script of Arabic). It is written in black ink and there are about twelve lines per page. The author explains Islamic rituals and other matters pertaining to faith in Panjābī verse. The sub-titles are in Persian. (FH).

**Muqaddimāt al-Anwār**

It is authored by ‘Abd al-Faqīr. This manuscript is also in naskh. Islamic injunctions pertaining to marriage, inheritance, sartorial propriety, etc., are explained in Panjābī verse while the sub-titles are in Persian. The point of view is very stringent and puritanical. Women, for instance, are forbidden even to use the *dandāsah* — the bark of walnut tree which cleans the teeth and makes the lips red. (FH).

**Dhabh Nāmah**

It is a manuscript in naskh probably written during King Muḥammad Shāh’s reign (1719–48) as a couplet in it suggests. It was copied in 1277/1860–61. It explains Islamic injunctions pertaining to the sacrifice of animals, hunting, and lays down rules as to which meats are *ḥalāl* and which are not. (FH).

**Anwāʿ-i Faqīr**

This a manuscript too is in naskh probably by Faqīr Ḥabīb. The sub-headings are in Persian and it has been copied by someone called Karam al-D in from Jhelum. The date on it is Dhu ’l-Qa’daḥ 1277/May-June 1861. This too deals with faith and the tone is puritanical and reformist. (FH).
Intikhāb al-Kutab: Panjābī Naẓm

The name of the author is probably Kamāl al-Dīn but this particular manuscript was copied in naskh by Nūr Aḥmad of Kolia in 1261/1806–1807. The sub-headings are in Persian. It presents Islamic teachings in verse form on bathing, funeral prayers, burial, congregational prayers, marriage, sacrifice of animals and as to which meat is ḥalāl. (FH).

Miθthī Rōtī

Miθbāb Rōtī by Qādir Bakhsh. This is a printed copy in Panjābī nasta’līq dated 1883. It too describes Islamic injunctions about all aspects of life including coitus. There are many references to Islamic works which suggest that it might have been intended for the use of learned people. (PU).

Nijāt al-Mu’mīnin

This is religious treatise which was written in 1086/1675 by Maulānā ʿAbd al-Karim (1657–1707) of Jhang district. (FH).

Qīṣāḥ Kamād

Written by Ashraf in nasta’līq, this is an allegorical poem on the sugarcane which describes itself as being cut and ground. (OIOC).

Qīṣāḥ ʿUmar Khaṭṭāb

An account in verse of the war of Caliph ʿUmar with the infidel king Tal written by Ḥāfīz Mu’izz al-Dīn of Takht Hazārah in 1176/1762–63. (OIOC).

Raushan Dil

Written by Fard Faqir of Gujrat, Christopher Shackle calls it “one of the best-known of all the many basic treatises on Islam to have been composed in Punjabi verse”.26 (OIOC).

Radd al-Muḥtadi’īn

This is an anonymous treatise in Panjābī verse against disbelief, polytheism and heresy written in 1788/1814. (FH).

26 Ibid., 46.
Anwāʾ Bārak Allāh

Anwāʾ Bārak Allāh by Ḥāfiz Bārak Allāh (d. 1288/1871). It is a printed book in Panjābī verse on law according to the Ḥanāfī school of Islamic jurisprudence. It was probably written in 1254/1838 and printed several times later. (OIOC).

Apart from the above manuscripts and printed books there are many other such chapbooks mentioned by different people scattered in South Asia and other parts of the world. A number of printed books, some of them based on the above-mentioned manuscripts, are also in circulation. Shahbāz Malik, a research scholar on Panjābī, has mentioned them in his bibliography called Panjābī Kitābiyāt.27 Panjābī manuscripts are also mentioned in other bibliographies in Pakistan.28

These books appear to fall into two major categories: those which are meant to make Muslims conscious of or knowledgeable about the rudiments of their faith, and those which are about romantic love. Those in the first category have probably been written by maulvis because they present a very strict and highly puritanical view of the sharī‘ab. Some, such as one version of the Pakkī Rōti, prohibits music, calling it a great sin just as it prohibits sodomy. Those in the second category are tales in which romantic love and sometimes making love and drinking are shown without disapproval.

Brāhvī and Balōchī

The earliest book of Brāhvī which exists today is Khidmat-i Dīn. It is a book on advice and instructions of a religious nature. A work of a hundred pages it was probably written in 1693. After this, we find magical spells and cures in Brāhvī29 till we come to a major work known as Mālik Dād Kālātī’s Tuḥfat al-‘Ajā‘īb. The book is said to have been completed in July 1760 but the manuscript is missing. The printed edition bears the date 1882. It appears that while Balōchī and Brāhvī might have been used as informal media of instruction and explanation for pupils, they were not formal languages of scholarship or religious propagation till the British arrival. The British unwittingly promoted the acquisition of these languages in Balochistan in two ways. First, they made formal arrangements to examine their officers in them. And second, they allowed the missionaries to preach and translate the Bible in

28 See Tafṣili Fihrist-i Makhtuṣṣāt-i Mutafaṣṣirāt (Lahore: Punjab Public Library, 1964); Muḥaṣṣal Fihrist Makhtuṣṣāt, vol. 2 (Lahore: The Lahore Museum, 1971); A Descriptive Catalogue of Persian, Urdu and Punjabi Mss. in the Library of Prof. Dr. Maulvi Muhammad Shafi (Lahore: 1972); Khoj Special Issue on Manuscripts (1982) [Panjābī Biannual from Lahore].
them. This made the ‘ulamā’ apprehensive of losing the Balāch to Christianity and they too started writing in Balāchī and Brāhvī. The ‘ulamā’ who were most active in this enterprise are known as the ‘ulamā’ of the Darkhān school or the Maktabah-’i Darkhānī.

The pioneer of the movement was Maulvi Muḥammad Fā’il (1823–1896) whose village, Darkhan, which is about six miles from Dhadhar, gave its name to it. According to Nadir Qambrani, Fā’il was inspired by Abū’l-Khayr, who was the religious mentor (pīr), of a number of people from Balochistan to Afghanistan. Qambrani’s grandfather himself was his disciple and the following story comes from Qambrani who heard about the events described here as part of family lore. According to the story, Pīr Abū’l-Khayr had come from Delhi, where he normally lived, to pay a visit to his disciples in Afghanistan in the 1870s. For some reason he also came to stay at Quetta. From there he went to Dhadhar, most probably in a tāngah (one-horse carriage), to persuade Muḥammad Fā’il to write Islamic books for the common people in Brāhvī and Balāchī. Fā’il agreed and the Maktabah-’i Darkhānī started getting books written and printed, generally at the Steam Press in Lahore, for publication from Darkhānī.

It is not known whether these books were used as additional reading material in the madrasabs where the core curriculum was based on the Dars-i Niẓāmī. What is certain, however, is that they were read out among the common people. According to Abdullah Jan Jamaldini, one of the foremost pioneers of Balāchī and Brāhvī languages in contemporary times, he used to hear the Dur al-Majdhī in Brāhvī read out in a sing song voice when he was a child. A certain blind man was famous for his recitation in the bāzār. Women, some of whom were literate in the Qur’an, also read it out to others. In short, literacy in Balāchī and Brāhvī was facilitated by the presence of books in these languages. As the people were not formally taught the languages but learned their written versions by personal effort, this was a classical case of voluntary language-learning.

Exactly how many books were published by the Maktabah-’i Darkhānī is not easy to determine. Guesses and a few incomplete lists are all we have to go by. According to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Brāhvī, while about 1000 books were published in Brāhvī only about 60 were published in Balāchī.32 Shahwānī lists

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30 Interview of Dr Nadir Qambrani, Director of Pakistan Studies Centre, University of Balochistan by the present author, 01 July 1999, Quetta.
31 Interview of Professor Abdullah Jan Jamaldini, retired Professor of Balāchī and Brāhvī, University of Balochistan, by the present author, 07 July 1999, Quetta.
32 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Brāhvī, Brāhvī Zubān aur Adab ki Mukhtaṣar Tārikh, 95 and Interview of Dr Abdur Rahman Brahvi, Registrar of Balochistan High Court, by the present author, 08 July 1999, Quetta.
210 books in Brāhvī and 91 in Balōchī.33 The Catalogue of Books in Minor Languages (vol. 2) at the British Library records 8 books in Brāhvī but none in Balōchī. There are scattered lists in different places in Pakistan but none is complete or reliable. While nobody has the definitive list, everyone agrees that more books are available now in Brāhvī than in Balōchī. A large number of books are lost because books were buried when they became torn and worn out.34 This was presumably to save them from desecration. However, even if they were buried one assumes that both Brāhvī and Balōchī books were buried. Thus, the lesser number of Balōchī books cannot be explained unless one assumes that less were published to begin with. Out of the books available now, the present author saw the following:

Brāhvī Books

**Tuḥfat al-ʿAjāʾib**

This is a printed copy of 1888. As mentioned earlier, it was written in 1760 by Mālik Dād Kālātī. It is in Brāhvī verse. It explains the requirements of prayers, ablutions for prayers and other rituals of Islam. (RS).

**Shamāʾil-i Sharīf**

This book, in Brāhvī verse, was printed in 1355/1936–1937. The author is Maulānā ʿAbd Allāh Darkhānī and this copy was printed in Quetta. The book describes the physical appearance, behaviour and qualities of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). The titles are in Arabic. (RS).

**Shahd va Shifa**

This book, in Brāhvī verse, was written by Maulvī ʿAbd al-Majīd of Mastung. It was printed by ʿAbd al-Bāqī at Quetta but all other details are missing. It mentions Shāh Abū’l-Khayr of Delhi who, being the initiator of the Maktabah-ʿi Darkhānī, is praised highly. Most of the book is devoted to describing the Prophet’s marriage and life with his first wife, Khadījah. Brāhvī ghazal, in praise of the Prophet (peace be on him), is also included. (RS).

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33 ʿAbd al-Qādir Shahwānī, “Maktabah Darkhānī” [Brāhvī] *Tawār* (June), 62–76 (For this see p. 63).
Munfa‘at al-‘Awām

This book, probably by Muḥammad ‘Umar, is a naṣīḥat nāmah, a book of advice and admonition. It is specially addressed to those who do not perform their prayers. It was either printed, or reprinted, in 1957 at Mastung. (AQB).

Tuḥfat al-Gharā‘ib

Brāhvi verse by Mullā Nabbō Jān, a prolific author and a leading figure of the Maktabah-‘i Darkhānī, this edition was published at Darkhān in 1888. It too is about the essentials of Islam including prayers. Another edition comprises both Tuḥfat al-Gharā‘ib and Tuḥfat al-‘Ajā‘ib. This is called Nāṣib al-Balāch and Mullā Nabbō Jān has compiled and published it. (AQB and OIOC).

‘Umdat al-Bayān

This book, also by Mullā Nabbō Jān, is in Brāhvi verse. The subtitles, however, are in Persian. The book describes the fundamentals of Islam as well as its rituals. It is also in the tradition of the naṣīḥat nāmahs. The author especially warns people against neglecting prayers and deviating from the rituals of Islam. The date is missing in this typescript. (RS).

Dur al-Majīdī

This book, in Brāhvi verse, is written by Mullā ‘Abd al-Majīd Chōtō‘i (Choto is a place near Mastung). The book has the well-known tale of Yūṣuf and Zulaykhā along with discussions of heavens and hell. Wrongdoers are threatened with dire consequences. According to Abdullah Jan Jamaldini, one of his relatives would threaten him with punishment for not saying the daily prayers by reciting couplets from it. The date of printing is torn out but is probably 1909. (RS).

Mu‘jizāt-i Muṣṭafā

This book, in Brāhvi verse, is by Muḥammad ‘Umar. It was published by ‘Abd al-Ghafūr Darkhānī and the edition available to the author is dated 1958. It contains stories of the conquests of Khālid ibn al-Walid and the martyrdom of famous figures in Islamic history. It also has a narrative about the miʿrāj. (AQB).

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Tuḥfat al-Khalīl

This book, in Brāhvi verse, is written by ‘Abd al-Majīd Chōtō’ī. It is published by ‘Abd al-Ghafūr Ḍarkhānī and printed at the Civil and Military Press at Quetta. It narrates the Qur’ānic tales about Nimrod, Abraham, Ishmael and urges Muslims to follow the path of faith as exemplified by the pious people. (AQB).

Ṣakarāt Nāmah

Written in Brāhvi verse by ‘Abd al-Majīd Chōtō’ī, this book belongs to the sub-genre of admonitory writing about death. It also contains the ghazals of Muḥammad ‘Umar Dīnpūrī. This particular copy is torn so the printing and publication details could not be ascertained. (AQB).

Rāghib al-Mūsālimīn

Written in Brāhvi verse by Muḥammad ‘Umar Dīnpūrī, it falls into the sub-genre of hagiographical writing about the Prophet (peace be on him). Events from the life of the Prophet (peace be on him), the conversion of his admirer Abū Dhar al-Ghifārī and other inspiring stories are given. The first and last pages are missing and so no details of printing and publication are available. ‘Umar Dīnpūrī is also famous as the first translator of the Qur’ān in Brāhvi. He is said to have written 48 books.36 (AQB).

Qaṣaṣ al-Anbīyā’

This book was written in Brāhvi verse by Miyā ‘Abd al-Azīz. The date of printing is 1945 and the publisher is the Maktabāt-ī Ḍarkhānī. It falls into the sub-genre of hagiographical writing about the several prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān. The mi’rāj is also described. In the end there is a Shahīdat Nāmah, narrating the story of martyrdom at Karbalā37 (AQB).

Nūr al-Islām

This is a manuscript in Brāhvi verse written in black ink. The date is 1350 AH which corresponds with 1937–1938 CE. It is a hagiography of the prophets and divine messengers mentioned in the Qur’ān. It ends in a Shahīdat Nāmah. (AQB).

Balochi Books

Ṣad Pand Luqmān Hakīm

This book, written by Miyā  Ḥuʿūr Bakhsh Jatōʿī, is in the Eastern dialect of Balochi. The sub-titles are in Persian. This is a ṇāšīhot nāmah, especially condemning and admonishing those who do not perform five times daily prayers. It was printed at the Balochistan Press in Quetta and published by ‘Abd al-Ghafūr Darkhānī. (RS).

Ḥidāyat al-Muslimīn

This is another book in Balochi verse by the same author. It is a ṇāšīhot nāmah but it condemns the Balōchī for being shameless. There are passages admonishing the Balōch about their lack of manliness — probably references to the compromise with the British rule which most of the chiefs found expedient. (RS).

Radd-i Shīʿah

This is yet another book by the same author also in Balōchī verse. No date is given but the last page has 1355 AH which corresponds to 1936–7 CE. It is a hagiography of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). From page 110 to 146 (the end), the doctrines of the Shīʿah sect are condemned in virulent terms. Indeed, the Shīʿah are even called unbelievers. (SD).

Uṣul-i Šalāt

Yet another book by Huʿūr Bakhsh Jatōʿī; it too is in Balochi verse. This particular copy was printed on 6 February 1944 at the Civil and Military Press in Quetta and published by the Maktabah-i Darkhānī. However, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Brāhvī says that the book was actually written in 1318/1900–1901 and its manuscript is lost. The major themes of the book are the rituals and principles of Islam. Prayers, ablutions, ritual cleaning of the body and such other matters are dwelt upon. (SD).

Khulāṣah-i Kaidānī

This is a translation of an Arabic work in Balōchī. The date of printing is 11 Rabiʿ al-Awwal 1357 which corresponds to May 1938. The Arabic version is given in bold letters and the Balōchī, done by Fāʾil Muḥammad, is given below it. The subjects are beliefs and practices in Islam. (ZS).

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There are other books too which a researcher can discover in the private collections of people. Among the eight books at the British library only one, Nabbō Jān’s Ṭuḥfat al-Ghara‘īb wa Tuhfat al-‘Ajā‘īb, has been mentioned above. Most of the others fall in the broad category of religious books though one contains ghazals and another one is on medicine. An excellent description of books in Brāhvi is available in both ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Brāhvi’s published book and unpublished doctoral thesis. In the latter he also describes some Balōch books. However, even if one does not get the chance of seeing all the books, one can form an idea about their themes and objectives. As we have seen, the themes are religious and the major objective is to give the Balōch an awareness of their Islamic beliefs. These beliefs are strictly Sunnī and the ‘ulamā’ felt that their enforcement alone could save the Balōch from falling prey to heterodox ideas. For the Balōch ‘ulamā’ these came from internal as well as external sources. The internal ones were the ideas of the Zikris (Dhikris) who live in Southern Balochistan and whose ideas are considered heretical by the Sunnī ‘ulamā’. Since the Zikris believe that the obligatory prayers performed by Muslims have been abolished, there is much emphasis on prayers in Balōch and Brāhvi books. The internal threat was taken care of by this emphasis. The external threat, as we have mentioned before, was from the Christian missionaries who wanted to win converts among the Balōch. The Darkhānī movement, therefore, is aimed both at countering the missionaries as well as the Zikris. This movement is the ‘ulamā’s reaction to heterodoxy as well as modernity which appeared to them as a continuation of the crusades when Islam and Christianity battled each other for supremacy.

While there is no proof that these books, or any other books in Balōchī and Brāhvi, were part of the formal curricula of the madrasahs, it is very likely that they were used informally. The existing translations of the Qur’ān in both the languages might have been read by interested students or their teachers. Some books of the Dars-i Niẓāmī were also translated into the languages of the Balōch. For instance, the Risālah of Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ghīyāth al-Dīn (abbreviated to Qārī Quṭb) was translated as Namāz Farā‘īrū in Balōchī by Ḥuṯr Baksh Jatō’ī. Similarly, the famous Mizān al-Ṣarf, one of the best known books of Arabic grammar in the Dars-i Niẓāmī, was translated by Qārī ‘Abd al-Ṣamad Sarbasti into Balōchī. Similar books, such as the Shurūṭ al-Ṣalāt and Kanz al-Muṣalli, also exist in Brāhvi translations. The latter

42 Ibid., 1036.
book, translated by Maulānā ‘Abd Allāh Darkhānī, is a well-known Arabic work on ritual cleanliness and the basics of Islam and is well known to madrasah students.\textsuperscript{43} Books of this kind, already read by madrasah students in Arabic, must have been the models for later works of this kind for the general public. In any case the presence of madrasah texts in translation suggests that the ‘ulamā’ used the mother tongues as informal media of instruction and provided these translations for their students and colleagues.

**The Impact of the Religious Texts on Society**

As the texts we have been discussing in this article were probably read out aloud they must have influenced a large number of illiterate and semi-literate people. We have noted that they fall into several categories. One category, which may be called the sharī‘ah guide books, are about the basic rules of the sharī‘ah — rules pertaining to cleanliness, prayers, fasting, burial, division of property, marriage and other issues of existence. The other category is about the veneration of holy personages such as prophets, pious Muslims of the first generation, saints and so on. This category has elements of popular Islam based on a primitive, magical worldview. Thus the great personages of Islam are all credited with magical powers. Apocryphal tales emphasizing the intrusion of the supernatural into the world of cause and effect are freely intertwined in each narrative. The tales are generally in verse form and sense is often subordinated to sound. In short, the world is presented as a completely super-rational phenomenon where rules, if any exist at all, are subordinate to charisma, miracle and magical intervention.

In a world of this kind salvation as well as the solution of daily problems appears to be less dependent upon following the injunctions of the sharī‘ah and more upon gaining the favour of the spiritually powerful. Hence the common people sought the intercession of living saints and holy men. They went to the tombs of famous religious people for the same purpose and they observed sacred days in prescribed ways.\textsuperscript{44} They also recited some of the popular religious tales in the Nūr Nāmahs, Jang Nāmahs and Wafāt Nāmahs in order to be blessed. The anecdotes in these books were part of daily conversation. As they seemed to suggest that the world operated in inscrutable ways they might have saved the important purpose of reconciling the common people to the arbitrariness, sordidness and misery of their existence. After all, ordinary people lived in villages dominated by capricious feudal lords who exercised power in arbitrary ways. At the highest level, the king and his nobles too

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 292.

\textsuperscript{44} For the influence of the sūfis on Indian Muslim culture see M. Mujeeb, *Indian Muslims* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985), 149–150. This was first published in 1967.
exercised power in the same way. One could not expect governance of an orderly, rational and predictable manner. One could also not expect a weather-dependent agricultural economy to be either predictable or orderly. When it rained at the right time the crops prospered; when it did not, the villagers starved. Life was hard and, above all, it was arbitrary and unpredictable. The ways of the world were inscrutable. Only a miracle could save one; otherwise doom threatened everyone every day.

The popular religious tales reinforced this worldview and provided ‘religious’ support for it. They must have comforted the people providing them with theories about the inevitability of fate, the impossibility of understanding the ultimate reasons for events and the apparent arbitrariness of existence. They also insured the people against mishaps since they were considered sources of blessings (baraka). Moreover, they provided entertainment which was always in short supply. Other sources of entertainment, which have been left out in this article, were the love stories in verse Laylā Mūnū, Hīr Rāṁhā, Sāssī Punnū, Mīrzā Sāhibān, etc) which the Sūfis interpreted in mystical ways but which villagers enjoyed as amorous and mildly erotic fiction. There were, of course, purely ‘secular’ versions of such tales, songs, aphorisms, anecdotes, riddles and other items of entertainment which helped to while away many a long evening in the villages. However, these too are outside the scope of this article.

While the popular religious tales cater to the deference for the magical among the common people, the sharīʿah guidebooks cater for their need to know the basics of their religion. As mentioned earlier, the latter seem to have been written by the ‘ulamā’, and often by the more enterprising village maulavīs, to provide the rules which would otherwise be available only in Arabic and Persian sources. In the preface of some such books the writers have clearly indicated that they were writing in the vernacular so as to guide ordinary people who could not follow the sharīʿah because they had limited access to it.

We have seen that the writing of the sharīʿah guidebooks takes on great impetus during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. This seems to be more than a coincidence. This was precisely the period when the Mughal empire was breaking up and the British were becoming powerful. The ‘ulamā’ must have felt that this lost power could be regained by organizing the Muslim community on the basis of faith. But the ordinary Muslim villager was so culturally influenced by his neighbours, who were Hindus or Sikhs, that he had to be made conscious of his Islamic faith. The obvious way to bring about this religious consciousness, the ‘ulamā’ probably felt, was to teach the fundamental injunctions of the sharīʿah to ordinary Muslims.
Religious Texts in the Present Era

The *shari'ah* guidebooks became an influential source of reform during British rule. The greatest of them, Maulānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawi’s *Bahīṣṭī Z var* (“The Heavenly Ornament”), took the *shari'ah*, or rather a puritanical, Indian Hanafite version of it, to the secluded women of north India and Pakistan. As the printing press became available, Muslim reformers took advantage of it to print thousands of chapbooks to disseminate their understanding of Islam. Indeed, as Francis Robinson argues in his seminal article on the impact of print upon South Asian Muslims, the idea of the Muslim *ummah* was created by the print. In his own words:

> Indeed, there was a symbiotic relationship between the growth of pan-Islamic consciousness and the growth of the press; it bears comparison with the relationship which Benedict Anderson has noted between the march of print capitalism and the emergence of national consciousness in early modern Europe.\(^45\)

It is not that the idea of the *ummah* was not there at all. It was certainly present at a highly abstract theoretical level with which a very small minority was concerned. Moreover, it was a religious idea, the concept of faith being the common denominator of a community. In practice, however, Muslims lived in small, face-to-face communities with little contact with the outside world. The development of the pan-Islamic feeling gave the idea of belonging to one community a new strength and fleshed it out. Moreover, the idea now became political and historical in addition to being religious. Modern means of communication brought news about the fate of Muslims elsewhere in the world and to this at least some part of the Muslim elite could react. The advent of print made this extended consciousness of community and identity possible.

In present-day Pakistan the *shari'ah* guidebook exists but mostly in Urdu. A large number of organizations, such as the Tablīghi Jama'at\(^46\) and al-Hudā, print such guidebooks and, of course, classics like the *Bahīṣṭī Z var* are still found in middle class religious homes.\(^47\)

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Such guidebooks also exist in Sindhi and there may be a few in Panjabi. However, there are several books of this kind in Pashto. Some appear to have been produced quite recently in Afghanistan under the influence of the Taliban. Such books are rare in Panjabi, Siréikî, Balochi and Brâhvi. Some which do exist in the form of printed chapbooks are reprints of the books described earlier. For instance, the University of the Punjab has made Pakki Rōi compulsory reading for students studying Panjabi for the M.A degree. In general, Urdu guidebooks proliferate in the cities of Pakistan.

There are, however, a considerable number of popular religious books (Nûr Nāmâs, Wafât Nāmâs, etc) in circulation in Urdu, Panjabi, Siréikî, Pashto, Sindhi and even in some of the minor languages of Pakistan (i.e those spoken by less than 1 per cent of the population). Out of these languages, Panjabi, Siréikî, Balochi, Brâhvi and the minor languages of the country are taught only as optional languages. Pashto is a medium of instruction but only in some Pashto speaking areas of NWFP at the level of primary schools. Otherwise it is also an optional subject. This means that, despite official neglect or discouragement, people do use their literacy skills in order to read chapbooks in their indigenous mother tongues. This may be because the worldview of the chapbooks is pre-modern and magical which is more in harmony with the people’s own worldview as distinct from the modern worldview which is associated with the alienating world of cities, offices, factories, the bureaucracy, the military and other modern institutions. After all, these institutions were all created during the colonial era and they function in alien languages and alienate the people who are no more than wage slaves in the machinery imposed upon them from above. In short, the popular religious books create an illusion of cultural continuity for the common people. They allow them to link up, at least for brief periods, with a world which is dying but which they find comfortable, familiar and sustaining.

Conclusion

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of weakness and decline of Muslim political power in India. One of the responses to this, perhaps, was the writing of religious books in the indigenous languages of the common people. Those written for instructing the people in the basics of the shari’ah (the guidebooks) were probably authored by the ‘ulama who wanted to raise the religious consciousness of the common people. The popular religious books, containing stories about Islamic personages, were meant to reconcile the people to the arbitrariness and harshness of their life. While the latter genre continues to be written in the indigenous languages of Pakistan, the shari’ah guidebooks are now mostly in Urdu and Sindhi. An understanding
of this phenomenon is useful for shedding light on the role of the indigenous languages in creating the Islamic identity of the people of Pakistan.

List of Abbreviations

These abbreviations refer to the collections where the sources given in this article are located.

AQB  Personal collection of Abdul Qaiyyum Baider, Collector of Brahvi books and TV Producer, Quetta, Pakistan.

BM  British Museum.

CUL  Cambridge University Library.

FH  Library of the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, Islamabad, Pakistan.

OIOC  Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London.

PA  Pashto Academy, University of Peshawar, Pakistan.

RS  Personal Collection of Dr Abdul Razzak Sabir, Balochistan University, Quetta.

SD  Personal Collection of Professor Saba Dashtiari, Department of Islamic Studies, Balochistan University, Quetta.

ZS  Personal Collection of Zeenat Sana, Chairperson of the Department of Balochi, Balochistan University, Quetta.