

## 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 historical and archaeological evidence for the presence of Islam in the region before the late fourteenth century CE. 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 briefly discussing its history in Persia and Kashmir. The Nūrbakhshī order retains its centuries-old sectarian identity despite hundred-year massive missionary efforts of both Shī'īs and Sunnis.*

### Keywords

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

### 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 consolidating Islam in the region. According to historical sources

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and archaeological evidences, Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī (d. 1384 CE) was the first who laid firm foundations of Islam in the region in 1379 CE.<sup>1</sup> 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%).<sup>2</sup>

Gilgit-Baltistan<sup>3</sup> is administratively divided into three divisions and ten districts. This region is very diversified in terms of socio-cultural and geophysical aspects. It has an area of 72,496 sq. km.<sup>4</sup> It borders the Chinese Xinjiang to the north, Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir to the east, Pakistan administered Azad Jammu and 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 refers to the existence of the Zoroastrians in the region. Buddhism remained the prominent religion of the region until Muslims came to 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 the Nūrbakhshī order, belonged to the Kubravī-Hamadānī Sufi order, which started and flourished in Persia (modern-day Iran) in the fourteenth and

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<sup>1</sup> For details, see Sayyidah Ashraf Zafar, *Amīr Kabīr Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī* (Lahore: Nadwat al-Muḥannifīn, 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.

<sup>2</sup> Izhar Hunz’ai, “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>.

<sup>3</sup> Gilgit-Baltistan, formerly known as Northern Areas, was known historically with different names as *Dardistān*, *Bulōr*, and Northern Areas. For details, see Ahmad H. Dani, *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 2018) and John Biddulph, *Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh* (Graz: Akademische Druch, 1991). 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.

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

fifteenth centuries CE. As a Sufi reformer, Mīr Nūrbakhsh 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, Mirzā Shāhrukh (d. 1447 CE), the ruler of Persia and Transoxiana, who executed Mīr Nūrbakhsh's 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 Mirzā Shāhrukh, Mīr Nūrbakhsh was able to live independently as a Sufi master. His Sufi order lost its independent character during the Safavid rule over 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. The study explains the reasons for the order's decline in Persia. It 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.<sup>5</sup> Mīr Nūrbakhsh was born in 1393 CE in the Iranian city of Qain in Qahistān province.<sup>6</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> 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 Ḍafar, *Amīr Kabīr Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī*.

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

him) through Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 799 CE).<sup>7</sup> His family migrated from the city of Qatif in Bahrain to Khurāsān to visit the tomb of ‘Alī Raḍā (d. 818 CE). His father did not return to Qatif and settled in the city of Qain.

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 Tajikstan). In 1417 CE, he was initiated in Kubravī-Hamadānī order and became a disciple of Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> When Khavājah Ishāq heard about the dream, he gave Mīr Muḥammad the title of “Nūrbakhsh,” gave him *ijāzah*, ordered his disciples to swear allegiance to him, and became himself a follower of the Mīr.<sup>10</sup> This is a very rare phenomenon in the history of Sufism that a master became 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-Hamadānī lineage was accepted by the hagiographers. However, after his death, the Kubravī-Hamadānī order was split into Nūrbakhshī faction led by Mīr Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh and Dhahabiyyah faction led by ‘Abd Allāh Barzishābādī.<sup>11</sup> The Dhahabiyyah order, after having a Central Asian connection, was later merged into the Iranian Shiism.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ*, iii.

<sup>8</sup> Ghāzī Muḥammad Na‘īm, *Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh aur Maslak-i Nūrbakhshiyyah* (Islamabad: Shah Hamadan Publications, 2000), 16.

<sup>9</sup> Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 45; Na‘īm, *Maslak-i Nūrbakhshiyyah*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> 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‘īm, *Maslak-i Nūrbakhshiyyah*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> DeWeese, “The Eclipse of the Kubraviyyah in Central Asia,” 54.

<sup>12</sup> 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

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 his age.<sup>13</sup> He was against the tyrannous government of Mirzā Shāhrukh (r. 1409-1447) who was the son and successor of Tīmūr (d. 1405 CE). 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 Tīmūr's son Mīrān Shāh in 1394 CE.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> All these movements contributed to the socio-religious ferment of fifteenth-century Persia and struggled for social justice.<sup>17</sup>

Sultan Mirzā 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.<sup>18</sup> His coinage, issued in Herat, included the text *Khallada Allāh khilāfatah* (May Allah make his caliphate everlasting).<sup>19</sup> He saw himself as the *mujaddid* (renewer of Islam) and tried to renew the faith of the Muslim community. When Mīr Nūrbakhsh introduced reforms in such circumstances, which threatened the political and religio-spiritual authority of the Sultan, he came into conflict with Sultan Shāhrukh.<sup>20</sup> The Sultan was afraid of the Mīr's political influence

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Muḥammad Ma'sūm Shīrāzī, *Ṭarā'iq al-Ḥaqā'iq*, ed. Muḥammad Ja'far Maḥjūb (Tehran: Kitābkhānah-i Sanā'ī, 1977).

<sup>13</sup> Riaz, "Mir Sayyid Muhammad Nur Bakhsh," 180.

<sup>14</sup> A. Bausani, "Ḥurūfiyya," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. B. Lewis et al., 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 3:600-01.

<sup>15</sup> P. Luft, "Musha'sha'," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al., 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 7:672-75.

<sup>16</sup> Hamid Algar, "Ni'mat-Allāhiyya," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al., 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 8:44-48.

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-13.

<sup>20</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, "The Ornament of the Saints: The Religious Situation in Iran in Pre-Safavid Times," *Iranian Studies* 7, nos. 1-2 (1974): 88-111, at 109.

and religious authority and considered him a possible threat to his political authority.

Mīr Nūrbakhsh was accused of being a Shī'ī or claiming to be a Mahdī by the Sultan's authorities, which is highly contestable. Most of the authors who made such accusations did not mention any primary or authentic source.<sup>21</sup> 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 not a Shī'ī nor did he claim to be 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 master, 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.<sup>22</sup>

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. In his most important book on beliefs titled *Kitāb al-I'tiqādiyyah*, Mīr Nūrbakhsh 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 *Auliyā'* (the friends of Allah) and Imām Mahdī is 'the Seal of Sainthood' and 'Lord of the Final Age.'"<sup>23</sup>

In his another book, *Insān Nāmāh*, Mīr Nūrbakhsh 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.<sup>24</sup> It can be inferred from his works that the Shī'ī and Sunni scholars were equal for him. He criticized both of them. For instance, in

<sup>21</sup> 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, "Nūrbakhshīya."

<sup>22</sup> Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, *Kashf al-Ḥaqā'iq*, trans. Ghulām Ḥasan (Islamabad: Nadwat al-Islāmiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah, 1988), 19-20.

<sup>23</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *Kitāb al-I'tiqādiyyah*, trans. Muḥammad Bashīr (Islamabad: Nadwat al-Islāmiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah, 1975), 49-52.

<sup>24</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *Insān Nāmāh*, trans. Ghulām Ḥasan (Khaplu: Baraat Library, 2010), 97.

his book *Mi'rājiyyah*, he declared that “the ‘ulamā’ and Shī’ī and Sunni scholars were unable to know the reality of *Mi'rāj*.”<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, in his book, *Silsilat al-Dhahab*, which is about the life of the Prophet (peace be on him) and the Twelve Imāms, Mīr Nūrbakhsh 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.”<sup>26</sup> Finally, in his book, *Ṣaḥīfat al-Awliyā'*, Mīr Nūrbakhsh made some esoteric claims, which he had made in a state of union with Allah.<sup>27</sup>

The *Risālat al-Hudā* is the only book, which is cited as a primary source by those scholars who believe in Mīr Nūrbakhsh's claim of messianism, but the said work is highly controversial. In addition, scholars cited Nūr Allāh Shūstari's *Majālis al-Mu'minīn*, but they ignored that the author was 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-i Ṭāhirah*, *Kitāb-i Nūrbakhshīyyah*, *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 in the Nūrbakhshī order in Persia, Kashmīr, and Baltistan or in the works of Mīr Nūrbakhsh's lineal descendants or spiritual descendants. Therefore, one cannot declare him Shī'ī or a Mahdī only due to his devotion to 'Alī and Twelve Imāms or due to his esoteric claims.

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 Tūrī* in Khuttalān and busy in preaching since 1423 CE.<sup>28</sup> In this clash, approximately eighty Sufis were killed, including two sons of Khavājah Iṣḥāq.<sup>29</sup> The army arrested Khavājah Iṣḥāq 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 pain. His

<sup>25</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *Mi'rājiyyah*, trans. Ghulām Ḥasan (Baltistan: Haroon Books Center, 2012), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *Silsilat al-Dhahab*, trans. Abū 'l-Bāqir Alī (Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1974), 373-75.

<sup>27</sup> For details, see Nūrbakhsh, *Ṣaḥīfat al-Awliyā'* (Khaplu: Baraat Library, 2004), 38.

<sup>28</sup> Na'im, *Maslak-i Nūrbakhshīyyah*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 49.

physician, who was unable to cure him, told him that the ailment was caused by his execution order of spiritually adept Mīr Nūrbakhsh.<sup>30</sup> So, the order of the Mīr was changed to imprisonment, while Khavājah Ishāq was executed in 1424 CE.<sup>31</sup> 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,<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> The Khavājah had resisted Tīmūr's invasion of the area. Thus, he was killed due to his resistance to the Timurids.<sup>34</sup>

Mīr Nūrbakhsh emerged as the leader of the Nūrbakhshiyah 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 Sulṭān (d. 1435 CE) after the captivity of six months.<sup>35</sup> Mīr Nūrbakhsh travelled westwards visiting Shushtar, Basra, Hillah, Baghdad, Kurdistan, Lorestan, and Gilan.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to determine the exact duration of his stay in these regions but he spent more than ten years during 1425 CE and 1436 CE. According to Shūshtarī, the Bakhtiari and some other tribes of Lorestan minted coins and read Friday sermons in his name. The majority of the population in these areas belonged to a sect named *Ahl-i Ḥaqq*. According to oral traditions, the followers of the sect considered the Mīr a mythical figure or an incarnation of Pīr Bābā Yādīgār, buried in Ban Zarda near Zuhāb.<sup>37</sup>

Mīr Nūrbakhsh was again arrested in 1436 CE by the orders of Sultan Shāhrukh.<sup>38</sup> This time, he escaped and after a three-day journey through the snow-covered mountains, he reached Khalkhal. He was arrested

<sup>30</sup> Shushtari, *Majālis al-Mu'minīn*, 305.

<sup>31</sup> DeWeese, "The Eclipse of the Kubraviyyah," 60.

<sup>32</sup> For the details about his life and works, see Zafar, *Amīr Kabīr Sayyid Alī Hamadānī* and Hamadani, "Ethical Philosophy of Sayyid Ali Hamadani."

<sup>33</sup> Elias, "A Second 'Alī,'" 398.

<sup>34</sup> DeWeese, "The Eclipse of the Kubraviyyah," 61.

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

<sup>36</sup> Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*



again by the governor of Khalkhal and was sent to Sultan Shāhrukh. As a punishment, he was thrown in a dark well for fifty-three days.<sup>39</sup> Then he was sent to Herat in manacles and forced to disavow his claims in the grand mosque during Friday prayers. He did this in ambiguous words and recited a 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.'"<sup>40</sup> With this announcement, he was released in 1436 CE from his four-month imprisonment.<sup>41</sup> 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 Nūrbakhsh 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.<sup>42</sup> He, contrary to this instruction, first went to Shirvan and then to Gilan. He stayed in Gilan 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.<sup>43</sup> This is the end of a troubled phase of the Mīr's life, after which he lived 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 master. This phase begins in Gilan, where his last contact with Sultan Shāhrukh took place. In Gilan, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā Lāhījī (d. 1506/07) met him in 1445 and became his most accomplished disciple, after renouncing worldly pleasures, and spent the next sixteen years in the Mīr's company. After the death of Sultan 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.<sup>44</sup> In Sulqan, the first permanent Nūrbakhshī community was established, where he

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<sup>39</sup> Algar, "Nūrbakhshiyya," 8:135.

<sup>40</sup> Qur'ān 7:23.

<sup>41</sup> Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, *Maktūb bih Mirzā Shāhrukh*, cited in Ja'far Ṣadaqiyanlū, *Tahqīq dar Ahvāl-o Āthār-i Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh Avaisī Qahistānī* (Tehran: Maktab-i Avaisī, 1972), 75.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> He wrote letters to 'Alā' al-Daulah, the grandson of Shāhrukh among other notables. Ṣadaqiyanlū, *Tahqīq dar Ahvāl-o Āthār*, 78-82.

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 order<sup>45</sup> is famous for its production of literature both on the *sharīah* 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 *sharīah*. On the very first page, the 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 *Sharīah-i Muḥammadi* 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.”<sup>46</sup>

In this work, he not only avoided to discuss controversial issues among Muslims and give verdicts on them but also proscribed declaring deviant Muslims infidels.<sup>47</sup>

2. *Kitāb al-ʿItiqādiyyah*: In this small treatise, the Mīr explains the basic principles of belief. It is the commentary on the Qurʾānic verse 4:136. Mīr Nūrbakhsh derived from this verse the following five basic principles of Islam: belief in Allah, belief in His angels, belief in His books, belief in His Prophets, and belief in the Day of Judgement.<sup>48</sup> Till today, the Nūrbakhshīyah community believes in these five principles of Islam and consider them their first declaration of faith.

3. *Silsilat al-Dhahab*: This book has two distinct parts. In the first part, which is in Arabic, the 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 Maʿrūf al-Karkhī (d. 815 CE) to Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī, his immediate predecessor.<sup>49</sup>

4. *Risālah-i Nūriyyah*: This small treatise has seven chapters in which Mīr Nūrbakhsh focused on various 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.

<sup>45</sup> See the spiritual genealogy in appendix A.

<sup>46</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ*, 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>48</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *Kitāb al-ʿItiqādiyyah*, ix.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

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. In its last part, Mīr Nūrbakhsh traced his spiritual genealogy from Khavājah Ishāq to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him).<sup>50</sup>
6. *Insān Nāmah*: It deals with human beings. The 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 solutions to various spiritual problems, especially for those who do not have a spiritual guide.
8. *Risālah-i Ma'āsh al-Sālikīn*: In this treatise, the 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 Mī'rājiyyah*: It is a Persian treatise in which the Mīr discussed the incidence of *Mī'rāj* of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). It also presents an esoteric explanation and considers the incidence of *Mī'irāj* 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 the 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*) (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 the Mīr are as under:

10. *Ṣaḥīfat al-Awliyā'*
11. *Risālah-i 'Irfānī*
12. *Risālah-i Talvīḥ-i Ḥadīth-i Nabvī*
13. *Risālah fī Ma'rifat Walī*
14. *Risālah dars Sair-o Sulūk*
15. *Risālah-i Talvīhāt*
16. *Risālah-i Vāridāt*
17. *Risālah-i Vujūd-i Muṭlaq*
18. *Dīvān-i Nūrbakhsh*

The 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.

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<sup>50</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *Kashf al-Ḥaqā'iq*, 19-21.

## 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 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*).<sup>51</sup>

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 (*ṣalah*): The obligatory prayer is offered five times a day at prescribed times. Before offering prayer, ritual ablution (*wuḍū’*) 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 from dawn to sunset. A

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<sup>51</sup> Sayyid ‘Alī Ḥamadānī, *Da’vāt-i Ṣūfiyyah*, trans. Muḥammad Bashīr (Islamabad: Nadwat al-Islāmiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah, 2011), 188.

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 their annual savings to the poor. It not only purifies the donor's wealth but also creates a feeling of detachment from worldly possessions. Moreover, it helps the economic uplift of the poor segments of society.

5. Pilgrimage (*hajj*): 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 their 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 for 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 also called the *Uṣūl-i Dīn*. As discussed earlier, they have been prescribed in a Qur'ānic verse.<sup>52</sup> 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 in the Qur'ān and all the previous scriptures sent by Allah for the guidance of human beings. The Qur'ān is the last and final divine Book of Allah.
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 Judgement. There are two types of the Day of Judgement: (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 Āfāqīyyah* is the real Day of Judgement on which the whole universe will lose its

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<sup>52</sup> Qur'ān 4:136.

discipline and be destroyed. On this day, all the creatures will die and then be resurrected for their judgement.<sup>53</sup>

### **Nūrbakhshī Kalimāt-i Qudsiyyah**

In addition to the above, the Nūrbakhshīs believe in the following fourteen concepts:

1. *Bandah-i Khudā* (the Servent 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 Qurʾān* (the Qurʾān as the Book)
7. *Kaʿbah-i Qiblah* (Kaʿbah as Qiblah)
8. *Mutābaʿat-i Sunnat-i Nabavī* (Conformity to the Practice of the Prophet)
9. *Ḥubb-i ʿAlī* (Love for ʿAlī)
10. *Silsilah-i Dhahab* (the Golden Chain of the First Eight Imāms)
11. *Mashrab-i Hamadāniyyah* (the Legacy of Hamadāniyyah Order)
12. *Madhhab-i Ṣūfiyyah* (the Method of the Sufis)
13. *Ravish-i Nūrbakhshiyah* (the Way of Nūrbakhshiyah)
14. *Murīd-i Murshid* (the Disciple of a Sufi Master)<sup>54</sup>

### **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 claims 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."<sup>55</sup> For him, this jurisprudence was the *Sharīʿat-i Muḥammadī*, which was transferred from the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) to ʿAlī, and then passing through a continuous chain of the spiritual genealogy of Sufi masters after ʿAlī Raḍā, it reached Mīr Nūrbakhsh. He wrote down this book for two basic reasons: first, the Nūrbakhshī community in Sulqan needed practical guidance for their everyday 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

<sup>53</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *Kitāb al-Iʿtiqādiyyah*, 52.

<sup>54</sup> Hamadānī, *Daʿvāt-i Ṣūfiyyah*, 197-98.

<sup>55</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ*, 1.

approach as he forbade people from passing on judgement on controversial issues of religion.

In his jurisprudence, the 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.<sup>56</sup> 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 the 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, 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 the Nūrbakhshī Order in Persia and Kashmir, 1464-1600**

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. Some of the most accomplished disciples of Mīr Nūrbakhsh were Shams al-Dīn Lāhījī and Burhān al-Dīn Baghdādī (d. 1502).

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 in the form of the rise of Safavids, and then in India under the Mughals during the sixteenth and seventeenth

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 52.

centuries. Initially, after the death of Mīr Nūrbakhsh, the order continued to grow and flourish in 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 Gilan. 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 persecution from 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. 1503/04), and Mīr Sa'd al-Ḥaqq (d. 1454/55) and two daughters.<sup>57</sup> Sa'd al-Ḥaqq died at an early age during the lifetime of his father. The Mīr got so depressed on his death that he wrote a eulogy in his praise.<sup>58</sup> Historical works are silent about Sayyid J'afar, the youngest son. He was a poet and left Herat for India via Kabul around 1490.<sup>59</sup>

Shāh Qāsim was the eldest son and successor of Mīr Nūrbakhsh, who praised him for his spiritual qualities and declared him a *walī*.<sup>60</sup> The Mīr indirectly referred to him in his works and prayed for his health and success.<sup>61</sup> Mīr Nūrbakhsh also praised him for his spiritual qualities and

<sup>57</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *Ṣaḥīfat al-Awliyā'*, 25-26.

<sup>58</sup> Na'im, *Maslak-i Nūrbakhshīyyah*, 32.

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

<sup>60</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *Ṣaḥīfat al-Awliyā'*, 25.

<sup>61</sup> Nūrbakhsh, *al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ*, 1; Nurbakhsh, *Kitāb al-I'tiqādiyyah*, 22.



gave him *ijāzah* or *khilāfah* to train and teach his disciples.<sup>62</sup> 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 the 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.<sup>63</sup>

After becoming his father's spiritual successor, Shāh Qāsim spent a few years in Sulqan, 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.<sup>64</sup> 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 medicinal herbs, which the former needed to cure the Sultan. Shāh Qāsim remained in the Sultan'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 Mīrzā 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.<sup>65</sup> After a brief pilgrimage in Mashhad, Shāh Qāsim settled in a village of Durusht and breathed his last in 1513/14.<sup>66</sup>

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.<sup>67</sup> However, their relations later deteriorated.<sup>68</sup>

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

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

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

<sup>65</sup> Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 183.

<sup>66</sup> 'Alī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, 477.

<sup>67</sup> 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.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

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.<sup>69</sup> 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 manner of exalted kings. He could not give satisfactory answers to these questions and was consequently executed.<sup>70</sup>

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.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> 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 Nūrbakhshīyyah had almost disappeared from the Iranian soil.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Riaz, "Mir Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh," 187.

<sup>70</sup> 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.

<sup>71</sup> Khādim Ḥusain, *Aḥvāl-o Āthār-i Shāh Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh* (Karachi: Anjuman-i-Ṣūfiyyah-i Nūrbakhshīyyah, 1987), 56.

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

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

### 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 and 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).<sup>74</sup> He largely improved the social and moral conditions of the people in Kashmir. His political and moral philosophy laid great emphasis on the character-building of rulers. He 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.<sup>75</sup>

After the death of Shāh Qāsim Faizbakhsh the Nūrbakhshī order spread through his spiritual successor Mīr Shams al-Dīn 'Irāqī. Mīr '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.<sup>76</sup> After the death of his father Ibrāhīm, 'Irāqī heard about the death of Mīr Nūrbakhsh. He assigned all matters of the family business 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.<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> He reached Kashmir during the reign of Sultan Ḥasan Shāh (r. 1474-1484), the ruler of Sayyid or Shāh Mīr Dynasty in Kashmir.<sup>79</sup> Sultan Ḥasan 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 eight years from 1484 to 1491.<sup>80</sup> During these years, Mīr

<sup>74</sup> Sufi, *Kashīr*, 1:86-87.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:94.

<sup>76</sup> 'Alī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, 258.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-96.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

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

<sup>80</sup> 'Alī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, 215.

'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 Gilan, 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.<sup>81</sup>

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, Chaudhra, and Chak families became his devotees. Mūsā Rā'inā supported him in building a Nūrbakhshī khānqāh at Zadibal in 1503/4. However, Sayyid Muḥammad Baihaqī (d. 1505), the vizier of Sultan Muḥammad Shāh's second tenure (1493-1505), created problems for Mīr 'Irāqī and persecuted his Nūrbakhshī followers.<sup>82</sup> Finally, Mīr 'Irāqī decided to leave Kashmir and go to Baltistan along with his followers in 1505. He introduced Nūrbakhshī doctrines in Baltistan,<sup>83</sup> 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. The 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 the 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 Zadibal.<sup>84</sup>

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 'Irāqī<sup>85</sup> and received his spiritual training

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 215-17.

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

<sup>83</sup> 'Alī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, 406.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 466.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 352.

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.<sup>86</sup> After the conquest of Kashmir by Mirzā Haidar Dughlat (d. 1551) in 1540, Mīr Dāniyāl I moved to Baltistan. Mirzā Dughlat first occupied Kashmir in 1533 on behalf of Sultan Sa‘īd Khān (d. 1533), the ruler of Kāshghar.<sup>87</sup> He again conquered Kashmir in 1540 as the commander-in-chief of the Mughal Emperor Humāyūn (d. 1556).<sup>88</sup> Later, during the Sūrī interlude, he became the ruler of Kashmir. During his reign in Kashmir (r. 1540-1551), Mirzā Dughlat persecuted Nūrbakhshīs for their beliefs and executed those who refused to accept the Sunni-Hanafī doctrines. He sent a copy of *al-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*.<sup>89</sup> He writes in his *Tārīkh-i Rashīdī*.

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.<sup>90</sup>

Mirzā Dughlat used to refer to Mīr Shams al-Dīn ‘Irāqī as Mīr Shams in a derogatory sense, which means Mīr of Shamsī sect, the sun worshippers.<sup>91</sup> Mīr Dāniyāl I, who was in Baltistan due to Mirzā Dughlat’s intolerance, was brought back and thrown into prison where he was executed in 1550.<sup>92</sup> His only son Sayyid ‘Alī popularly known as Mīr Shams al-Dīn II was also killed at that time.<sup>93</sup> In addition, Mirzā Dughlat burnt the khānqāh of Zadibal and desecrated the tomb of Mīr ‘Irāqī.

Although Mirzā Dughlat 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

<sup>86</sup> Hassan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, 138.

<sup>87</sup> Parmu, *History of Muslim Rule in Kashmir*, 209.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>89</sup> Elias and Ross, *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, 435-36.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 437.

<sup>92</sup> Hassan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, 137.

<sup>93</sup> Sayyid Akbar ‘Alī, *Tadhkirah-i Ṣūfiyā’: Baltistān-Kārgil-Ladākh* (Rawalpindi: Rumail Publishers, 2019), 133.

government in Kashmir in 1554.<sup>94</sup> Under their rule, the Nūrbakhshī order was rehabilitated, the mausoleums of Mīr ‘Irāqī and Mīr Dāniyāl I were 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 (r. 1556-1605) 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.<sup>95</sup>

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 Shīī-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 in Kashmir. 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.<sup>96</sup>

Islam was introduced in Baltistan and Ladakh by a famous Kubravī Sufi master, Amīr Kabīr Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī in 1379 CE.<sup>97</sup> He was the

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

<sup>95</sup> ‘Alī, *Tadhkirah-i Ṣūfiyā*, 147.

<sup>96</sup> 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.

<sup>97</sup> Sufi, *Kashīr*, 1:86.

eighteenth Sufi master of the 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 Buddhists to Islam, especially in Shigar and Khaplu regions. He also converted the Amacha ruler of Shigar named Gori Tham and built the famous khānqāh and Amburiq mosque in Shigar.<sup>98</sup> He also constructed the famous Chaqchan mosque in Khaplu.<sup>99</sup> 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 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 Dāniyāl I also took refuge in Baltistan from 1543-1549 from the persecution of Mirzā Dughlat, the ruler of Kashmir.<sup>100</sup> Due to the missionary activities of Mīr Dāniyāl 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. Ṭūsī brothers Sayyid ‘Alī Ṭūsī (d. 1670), Sayyid Nāṣir Ṭūsī, Sayyid Maḥmūd Ṭūsī (d. 1669), and Sayyid Haidar ‘Alī Ṭūsī visited Baltistan from Chinese Turkestan and actively propagated the Nūrbakhshī order during the seventeenth century. Sayyid ‘Alī Ṭūsī settled in Kuwardu, Sayyid Haidar Ṭūsī in Qumra, Sayyid Nāṣir Ṭūsī in Shigar, and Sayyid Maḥmūd Ṭūsī in Skardu.<sup>101</sup> Sayyid ‘Alī Ṭūsī and Sayyid Nāṣir Ṭūsī built a mosque in

<sup>98</sup> Dani, *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan*, 230.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>100</sup> Hassan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, 137.

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

Thagas in 1603/4.<sup>102</sup> Sayyid Maḥmūd Ṭūsī and Sayyid ‘Alī Ṭūsī were buried in Kushu Bagh (Skardu) and Kuwardu respectively.

In the seventeenth century, the 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 Sa‘īd Sa‘dā’ (d. 1684) and his brother Mīr ‘Arif (d. 1651) from Kashmir.<sup>103</sup> They were the sons of Mīr Dāniyāl II. Mīr ‘Arif settled in Thagas (Ghanche), where he built a mosque. He died in Thagas, where his tomb is still preserved. His brother, Mīr Abū Sa‘īd settled in the Keris region where he built a grand mosque.<sup>104</sup> Mīr Abū Sa‘īd’s two sons, Mīr Mukhtār Akhyār and Mīr Yaḥyā greatly contributed to the further growth of the 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.<sup>105</sup> He was buried near the main khānqāh of central Shigar. His brother Mīr Mukhtār, who was the principal successor of Mīr Abū Sa‘īd, was instrumental in the spread of the Nūrbakhshī order in the whole of Baltistan and Ladakh. He built twenty-two khānqāhs and many mosques in the entire region.<sup>106</sup> The Khānqāh of Gamba, Skardu was also built in his life by his son Sayyid Ibrāhīm.<sup>107</sup> Mīr Mukhtār died in 1722 in Keris.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup> 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.<sup>110</sup> This process quickened in the nineteenth century with the arrival of

<sup>102</sup> Ṣābir Āfāqī, *Jalvah-i Kashmīr* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1980), 107.

<sup>103</sup> Andreas Rieck, “The Nurbakhshis of Baltistan: Crisis and Revival of a Five Centuries Old Community” *Die Welt des Islams* 35, no. 2 (1995): 159-88, at 163-64.

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

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

<sup>106</sup> Ḥasan, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 120; Ḥusainābādī, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 26.

<sup>107</sup> Elias, “A Second ‘Alī,” 404.

<sup>108</sup> Sayyid Ḥusain ‘Arif Naqvī, *Tadhkirah-i ‘Ulamā’-i Imāmiyyah-i Pākistān* (Islamabad: Imāmiyyah Dār al-Tablīgh, 1994), 212; Ḥasan, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 26.

<sup>109</sup> Na‘īm, *Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh*, 193.

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



Sunni and Shī'ī preachers. The Nūrbakhshī Sufi masters failed to protect their community from the influence of modern Sunni and Shī'ī 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 significant 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.<sup>111</sup> John Biddulph and Frederic Drew also referred to the presence of the Nūrbakhshī community in their accounts.<sup>112</sup>

The advent of Nūrbakhshī missionaries in Baltistan and Ladakh was followed by Sunni and Shī'ī 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 Shī'ī religious groups, the Nūrbakhshī population was gradually declining.<sup>113</sup> The first Sunni preacher to arrive in Baltistan was Mullā Ḥusain alias Mullā Peshawari in 1873.<sup>114</sup> 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-'Ulūm in 1891.<sup>115</sup> The Ḥanafī Sunnis built their first

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

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

<sup>113</sup> Aḥmad Rabbānī, *Maqālāt-i Maulavī Muḥammad Shaḥī* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqī-i Adab, 1972), 24-25.

<sup>114</sup> Sayyid 'Alī Mūsavī, *Kāshif al-Ḥaqq*, trans. Muḥammad Ḥasan Najafī (Skardu: Anjuman-i Imāmiyyah Baltistāniyyah, 1992).

<sup>115</sup> Rieck, "Nurbakhshis of Baltistan," 171.

grand mosque in Skardu in 1913.<sup>116</sup> 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 grand mosque. The court gave a verdict in favour of Nūrbakhshīs. Much later, the Ahl-i Ḥadīth preachers built their grand mosque in 1972.<sup>117</sup> They also made an effective step to integrate the Nūrbakhshīs in Ahl-i Ḥadīth population. For this purpose, they allegedly distorted and published many treatises, which were attributed to Mīr Nūrbakhsh like *Ṭabaqāt-i Nūriyyah*.<sup>118</sup>

The Twelver Shī‘ī preachers became more active in the region 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).<sup>119</sup> 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.<sup>120</sup> He was a nephew of the Nūrbakhshī Sufi Sayyid Muḥammad Akbar.<sup>121</sup> 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 a Nūrbakhshī Sufi master after the death of Muḥammad Shāh II (d. 1947/48). He was an *imām* of Friday prayers in the Nūrbakhshī grand mosque of Khaplu. He was successful in converting pro-Shī‘ī Nūrbakhshīs to Shī‘ī faith such as Sayyid Murtaḍā of Kundus (Ghanche) and Sayyid ‘Alī Adīb (the founder of Anvār-i Muṣṭafā Trust, Khaplu).<sup>122</sup> These Shī‘ī missionaries also used literary tactics to propagate Shī‘ī doctrines. They attributed apocryphal books to Mīr Nūrbakhsh,

<sup>116</sup> Ḥusainābādī, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 28.

<sup>117</sup> Muḥammad Amīn, *Da‘vat-i Ittīḥād* (Lahore: Anjuman-i Imāmiyyah-i Baltistāniyyah), 51-53.

<sup>118</sup> Rieck, “Nurbakhshis of Baltistan,” 176.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 169; Ḥusainābādī, *Tārīkh-i Baltistān*, 26.

<sup>120</sup> ‘Alī, *Kāshif al-Ḥaqq*, 17.

<sup>121</sup> 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.

<sup>122</sup> Rieck, “Nurbakhshis of Baltistan,” 172.

which included *Maṣā'ib-i 'Itrat-i Ṭāhirah*, *Raf' al-Ikhtilāf*, and a commentary on *al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ* 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.<sup>123</sup>

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 Maṣā'ir al-'Ulūm, Saharanpur, UP, India, he settled in the Nūrbakhshī colony of Missouri, near Shimla, India.<sup>124</sup> He attempted to defend the Nūrbakhshī order as an independent sect, which was neither a Sunni nor a Shī'ī sub-sect. For this purpose, he wrote *Falāḥ al-Mu'minīn*, an Urdu edition of *Da'vāt-i Ṣūfiyyah*, *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 Nūrbakhshīyah and the Imāmiyyah or Twelver Shiism. He also exposed their differences by circulating a poster titled *Ishtihār Wājib al-Izhār al-Ikhtilāf bayn al-Sūfiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah wa Shī'ah Imāmiyyah*, all over the region in 1941.<sup>125</sup>

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.<sup>126</sup> He founded Madrasah-i Nuṣrat al-Islām Nūrbakhshīyyah and Qāsimī Library in Kharku (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 completed around 1994. Another important institution, which greatly contributed to the Nūrbakhshī revival is Nadwat al-Islāmiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah, Islamabad founded in 1960. It is being supervised by the Nūrbakhshī 'ulamā' and scholars. Its central figure was 'Allāmah

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

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

<sup>126</sup> Naem, *Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh*, 201.

Muḥammad Bashīr (d. 2016). He has translated important Nūrbakhshī literature including *al-Fiqh al-Aḥwaṭ*, *Risālah-i I'tiqādiyyah*, and *Da'vāt-i Ṣūfiyyah* into the Urdu language. He started a magazine, *Navā'-i Ṣūfiyyah* in 1985.<sup>127</sup> In 1994, another journal, *Tibyān-i Nūrbakhshīyyah* started to be published in Karachi.<sup>128</sup>

### 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 the Nūrbakhshī Sufi family, who later became an Ahl-i Ḥadīth and Sayyid 'Alī Kerisi, a descendant of the Nūrbakhshī Sufi family, who later became an Imāmī Shī'ī. As a consequence, the Nūrbakhshī community was sharply divided into two groups: Ṣūfiyyah-Imāmiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah (those who inclined to Shiism) and the purist Ṣūfiyyah-Nūrbakhshīyyah (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 masters 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 a Nūrbakhshī Pīr was seriously questioned ever since the accession of Sayyid 'Aun 'Alī Shāh's son Sayyid Muḥammad Shāh Nūrānī II (b. 1991).<sup>129</sup> He allowed his followers to use the term Imāmiyyah with the name Ṣūfiyyah-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 primary Nūrbakhshī works with the title of "Ṣūfiyyah-Imāmiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah." They have been trying to build their own identity under the patronage of the current

<sup>127</sup> Rieck, "Nurbakhshis of Baltistan," 183.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> 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.

Nūrbakhshī Sufi master Sayyid Muḥammad Shāh Nūrānī II, while the other group, Ṣūfiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah was led by Faqīr Ibrāhīm (d. 2016). After the death of Faqīr Ibrāhīm, his disciple Rustam ‘Alī became the current head of Ṣūfiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah.

At present, these two Nūrbakhshī factions, Ṣūfiyyah-Imāmiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah and Ṣūfiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah, however, have agreed that Nūrbakhshīyyah as a Sufi order is distinct from both Sunnis and Twelver Shī‘īs<sup>130</sup> 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.<sup>131</sup> 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.<sup>132</sup> 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 digitally printed their ritualistic prayers and used 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 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.

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<sup>130</sup> Ghulām Ḥasan Ḥasanū, *Ṣūfiyyah-i Nūrbakhshīyyah* (Khaplu: Tanzīm Khuddām al-Ṣūfiyyah, 1994), 141-66; Muḥammad Ḥasan Nūrī, *al-Ḥujjah al-Bālighah fī Ithbāt al-Imāmiyyah al-Ṣūfiyyah Nūrbakhshīyyah* (Keris: Anjuman-i Ṣūfiyyah-i Imāmiyyah-i Nūrbakhshīyyah, 1997), 138.

<sup>131</sup> Ḥasanū, *Sūfiyyah-i Nūrbakhshīyyah*, 12-28.

<sup>132</sup> Nūrī, *al-Ḥujjah al-Bālighah*, 10-11.

## Conclusion

Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī laid 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 can serve as a vehicle for moderation, religious tolerance, and intera-faith harmony.

Mīr Nūrbakhsh was initiated in the Kubravī-Hamadānī order in 1417 CE 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 Mirzā 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 predecessor, Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī. In the seventeenth century, Ṭūsī brothers and the successors of Mīr ‘Irāqī played an important role in the development of the

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 Shīʿī 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 a hundred-year massive missionary effort of both Sunnis and Shīʿīs.

### Appendix A

#### The Spiritual Genealogy of Mīr Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh<sup>133</sup>

Khavājah Ishāq Khuttalānī  
 ^  
 Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī  
 ^  
 Maḥmūd Mazdaqānī  
 ^  
 Alā’ al-Daulah Simnānī  
 ^  
 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Isfrā’īnī  
 ^  
 Aḥmad Dhākīr Jurjānī  
 ^  
 Raḍī’ l-Dīn ‘Alī b. Lālā Ghaznavī  
 ^  
 Najm al-Dīn Kubrā  
 ^  
 ‘Ammār b. Yāsir Badaisī  
 ^  
 Abū Najīb Suhrawardī  
 ^

<sup>133</sup> Hamadānī, *Da’vāt-i Ṣūfiyyah*, 169-72.

Aḥmad Ghazālī

^

Abū Bakr Nassājī

^

Abū 'l-Qāsim Gurgānī

^

Abū Usmān Maghribī

^

Abū 'Alī Kātibī

^

Abū Dhar Rūdbārī

^

Junayd Baghdādī

^

Sarī Saqṭī

^

Ma'rūf Karkhī

^

'Alī Raḍā

^

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 Nūrbakhsh<sup>134</sup>

- Shāh Qāsim Faizbakhsh  
 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

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 173-74.

v

Sayyid ‘Aun ‘Alī Shāh

v

Sayyid Muḥammad Shāh II

\* \* \*