

## Islamic Reformism, the Modern State and the Reified Chishtī Sufi Shrine Cult of the Punjab

Muhammad Mubeen

COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Islamabad

The Islamic reformism of eighteenth and nineteenth century India deeply affected the shrine culture of the Punjab. Various movements contested the then prevalent phenomenon of saint and shrine veneration – a major trait of the Chishtī Sufism – thus engendering, locally as at a larger scale, fierce religious contestations in and around Sufism. Furthermore, the reformist propensity caused a subtle variation within the Chishtīyya itself, particularly in generating debates around the shrine rituals between the two branches of the order: the Chishtīyya Ṣābriyya and the Chishtīyya Nizāmiyya. The Chishtīyya Ṣābriyya, on the one hand, went under heavy influence from the reformist Sufi discourse of the Naqshbandiyya, which had played a decisive role in the birth and development of Dār al-'Ulūm at Deoband. The Chishtīyya Nizāmiyya, on the other hand, whose Sufi shrines are mainly located in western Punjab, responded to the challenge through an internal revivalism, staying away from the reformist trend and defending its old practice of saint/shrine veneration. In consequence, the Chishtī shrine following of western Punjab was seriously affected by the ideological schism between the two branches of the order. The paper will analyze how, why and by whom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Punjab the Chishtīyya legacy was contested, and how different Chishtī shrines of the Punjab, reifying their positive stance on shrine veneration, went against the reformist current.

**Keywords:** reformism, Chishtī, Sufi Shrine, Bābā Farīd, Punjab, Pakpattan, Chishtīyya Ṣābriyya,

The Islamic reformism of the eighteenth and, specially, the nineteenth century India deeply affected the Sufi shrine culture of the Punjab. Various reformist movements contested the then prevalent saint and shrine veneration – a major trait of Chishtī Sufism – thus engendering, locally as at a larger scale, fierce religious contestations in and around Sufism. The reformist propensity caused a subtle variation within the Chishtīyya itself, particularly in generating debates around the shrine rituals between the two branches of the order: the Chishtīyya Ṣābriyya and the Chishtīyya Nizāmiyya. These sub-*silsilas* were established by Shaiḫ 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī bin Aḥmad Ṣābir of Kalyār (d. 1291) and Shaiḫ Khwāja Nizām al-Dīn Auliya of Delhi (d. 1325) respectively, the two main spiritual disciples of Shaiḫ Farīd al-Dīn Mas'ūd Ganj-i Shakar (d. 1265), in the late-13<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, this paper is intended to analyze the reformist challenges and the pristine contestation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries faced by the Chishtīyya Sufi legacy before and in the wake of the emergence of the modern state in the region.

The accommodating approach of early Sufi masters in the Indian subcontinent brought them into direct contact with local people, leading to a strong personal relation with the local population.

Followers of the other Indian religions gradually became part of the process especially around several *khānqāhs* established by various Sufis and later on their shrines. The phenomenon gave way to the integration, syncretism, and enculturation of both the locals and the sheltering mystics thereby resulting into the emergence of a mystically inclined composite culture of the regions around different Sufi shrines (Chopra, 1999: 2, 48). Both the creeds - Islamic Sufism and the local Hindu traditions – influenced each other in one way or the other, and this resulted in the incorporation of many local practices in the religious-mystical ritualistic patterns followed at different *Chishtī* shrines of the region (Malik, 1990: 70; Ahmad, 1964: 119-190).

During the eighteenth century, the declining Muslim central political authority and the growing influence of Hindu, Sikh, and Maratha powers alarmed some circles of the Muslim religious leadership of the Indian subcontinent. A wide range of responses to the situation, with varied patterns, emerged from different quarters of Muslim clerics. A reformist movement of Islamic renewal emerged when some '*ulamā*', mainly from the reformist Naqshbandiyya Mujaddadiyya and the puritanical Ahl-i Ḥadīs (People of the Prophetic Traditions), challenged the growing religious and social influence of the *Chishtī* Sufi saints in the Punjab.<sup>1</sup> They accredited the responsibility of Muslim political decline to the moral degradation of the Muslim community under the influence of the shrine cult. They attacked the rituals practiced at the Sufi shrines, especially those of the *Chishtīs*. This reformist trend called for the rejection of *bid'a* (innovation) and the return to Quran and *sunna* (the way of life) of the Prophet of Islam. "Accordingly, supporters of these reformist movements sought to replace the shrine as the source of Islamic moral authority with a reassertion of the Book as the only legitimate source. Theatre, in a word, was to be replaced by Scripture" (Eaton, 1984: 334-35).

During the eighteenth century, the Naqshbandiyya Mujaddadiyya posed the most important reformist challenge to popular Sufism, its esoteric doctrines and mystical teachings under the leadership of its renowned reformist saint scholar of the century, *Shāh Valiullāh* (d. 1762). The latter stood for *tajdīd* (reform) in social customs, beliefs, and practices in the Indian Muslims. His lineal and spiritual descendants continued his message after him and this resulted in the growing influence of the *silsila* over other contemporary Sufi brotherhoods. However, this reformist wave was only confined to the urban centers due to the emergence of a retorting revivalist tradition within rural Sufism, which kept countryside under *pīrs'* (Sufi masters) influence (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "*Chishtiyya*"; Ernst & Lawrence, 2002: 14; Siddiqi, 1971: 256-260. Gilmartin, 1979: 488).

In the pre-colonial period, both branches of the *Chishtiyya*, the *Chishtiyya Nizāmiyya* and the *Chishtiyya Šābriyya*, responded to the reformist trends, but in different ways. An important outcome of this reform movement was the emergence of revivalism within the *Chishtī* order, especially the *Chishtiyya Nizāmiyya*. The *Chishtī* revival initially emerged in Delhi around *Shāh Kalīmullāh Chishtī Nizāmī* (d. 1729) who sought to revitalize the *Chishtī* order and infused a new life into the almost defunct *Chishtī* organization by reviving the old traditions. His chief disciple *Shaiḫ Nizām al-Dīn* of Aurangabad (d. 1730) and, afterwards, *Shāh Fakhr al-Dīn* (d. 1785) continued his work and tried to revitalize the order from within through their mystic hospices established at Aurangabad and Delhi respectively (Green, 2006; Nizāmī 1985: 427–59). However, later on, this revivalist trend shifted to the Punjab where it was led by the eminent disciple of *Shāh Fakhr al-Dīn*, *Kh<sup>w</sup>āja Nūr Muḥammad Mahārvi* (d.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Naqshbandiyya Mujaddadiyya started from the prominent 17<sup>th</sup> century Sufi master, *Shaiḫ Aḥmad* of Sirhind (d. 1624), popularly recognized as Mujaddad Alf Šānī. Ahl-i Ḥadīs are a group of Muslims who declare themselves as *ghair-muqallad*, non-follower of any of the four schools of Sunnī *fiqh* and endorse on the strict following of only Quran and *sunna* of the Prophet of Islam.

1791) and was later on propagated by his successors (Gilmartin, 1979: 489-91; Nizāmī, 1985: 510-690; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Āishtiyya”).

Khāja Nūr Muḥammad Mahārvi and his disciples did a lot, in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, to revitalize the Chishtī doctrine in the western Punjab and the upper Sindh province. They attracted a huge following through their personal adherence to the sharī'a (Islamic code of law) as well as revitalizing Chishtī Sufism. Khāja Nūr Muḥammad's most famous spiritual successor, Khāja Muḥammad Sulaimān Taunsvī (d. 1850) was the contemporary and the observer of the famous reformist jihādī movement of Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī (d. 1831) and felt the growing influence of Naqshbandiyya Mujaddadiyya and of Ṭarīqa-yi Muḥammadiyya (“The Way of the Prophet Muhammad”, a more reformed theological assemblage). Under such circumstances, Khāja Sulaimān Taunsvī instructed his disciples to adhere to the strict following of the sharī'a in the light of Quran and sunna. He established a large number of madrasas (schools of religious education) in which more than fifty teachers were teaching sharī'a and Sufism. He saw in the misleading and distorted role of the 'ulamā' the main cause of what he perceived as the shameful situation of the Muslim umma (Muslim nation). Similarly, Khāja Shams al-Dīn Siyālvī (d. 1883), the most favorite khālifa of Khāja Sulaimān Taunsvī, issued strict instructions to his murīds for the adherence to sharī'a rules (Nizāmī 1985: 581-614, 673-76). The remarkable efforts of Khāja Sulaimān Taunsvī and his disciples led to a network of Chishtī revivalist khānqāhs and dargāhs springing up throughout the western areas of the Punjab. In fact, their struggle was focused to alter the Chishtī shrines from centers of devotional Sufism into centers of Islamic piety and learning (Talbot, 1988: 25; Nizāmī, 1985: 510-690; Siddiqi, 1971: 256-260; Gilmartin, 1979: 489-91.).

In contrast to the Chishtī Nizāmīyya, the internal revivalist response in the Chishtī Sābriyya brought the silsila under heavy influence of the Naqshbandiyya Mujaddadiyya and of Ṭarīqa-yi Muḥammadiyya. This phenomenon can be inferred from the fact that Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥīm (d. 1831), a renowned Chishtī Sābrī master of early nineteenth century, was also part of the jihādī movement of Sayyid Aḥmad and died fighting at Balākot. The same trend was followed by his successive Sābrī descendants Mīyāmjī Nūr Muḥammad Sābrī (d. 1843) and Ḥājī Imdādullāh (d. 1899).

Contemporarily, the British East India Company gradually succeeded in colonizing the whole India (1757-1857); however, the 1857 disturbances resulted in transfer of the governance and control from the Company to the British Crown thus establishing the British Government in India. Various historians have shown that after the emergence of the British colonial state in northern India, the reformist trends took more strength in the wake of the state policies towards the Muslim community (Metcalf 1982: 3-15). Following paragraphs will focus on the reification of the shrine cult in the wake of challenges that were posed by the modern state through its policies thereby infusing vibrancy into the existing reformist trends of the northwestern India.

The subsequent study is meant to highlight the reification process of the Chishtī Sufi shrine cult in the Punjab during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that, on the one hand, distanced the Chishtī shrine cult from the main stream Chishtī Sufism because of its nonconformist stance on collaboration with the political authorities, and on the other hand, ultimately led to the emergence of new realities in the religious settings of the western Punjab thereby generating the present religious identities of various sections of the Muslim population of the region. In the end of the discussion, an

example of the shrine custodians of the shrine of Bābā Farīd (Pakpattan - Punjab) is presented who were on the forefront of the reification department of the Chishtī shrine cult of northwestern India. The generalized scenario of the Sufi shrine cult of the region is a diversified reinterpretation of the existing scholarly historical researches relevant to the evolution of the saintly airs of the region through segregating the conventional stance depicting the shrine cult as the clamorous representation of the modern south Asian Sufism. The data pertinent to the custodians of the shrine of Bābā Farīd is collected from the Punjab Archives Lahore and the Auqāf Department offices in Lahore and Pakpattan.

### **The Modern State, Islamic Reformism, and the Chishtiyya Legacy**

The first major challenge to the Indian Muslim community in the post-annexation period came from the British authorities when, in their historiography, the supplanted Muslims (rulers) were depicted as ‘fierce invaders’. Similarly, the revolt of 1857, which was ignited by both Hindu and Muslim communities of northern India, was ‘widely viewed as a product of enduring Muslim animosity’ (Metcalf, 1997: 139-40). The second major challenge to the Muslim religious leadership in the Punjab, during the post-annexation period, was the Christian missionary activities, which grew massively. During the post-1857 decades in northwestern India – and especially the Punjab –, the Christian missionary activities thrived under the patronage of the colonial administration through print and open preaching and resulted in the large scale spreading of the Christianity in the province. During the second half of the nineteenth century, waves of large-scale conversions were launched through ‘mass conversion movements’ by different missionaries in the rural Punjab thereby resulting into the rise of Christian converts from 3,912 in 1881 to 37,980 by 1901, in the province (Harding, 2008: 1; Jones, 2006: 85-121). Similar type of developments also emerged in the Punjab from the reformed Vedic version of Hinduism in the shape of the Arya Samaj launched by Dayananda Saraswati (d. 1883) in 1875 (Harding, 2008: 55).

Elimination of the Muslim political authority, political domination of the foreign power and subsequently imposition of the British colonial rule, new state’s policies in the shape of western secular legal system, and rising politico-religious influence of Hindus and especially of the Christian missionaries in the region under colonial patronage were resented by the religious leaders of the Muslim community. The situation, actually, worried those whose own authority was undermined by such developments as it deprived them not only of their Muslim patrons but also of their position in society and their traditional role as advisers and guides to the ruling classes (Jones, 2006: 87).

Different responses emerged from different sectors of Muslim religious elite, which are well summarized by Ira M. Lapidus in his work (Lapidus, 2002: 621-22). The Muslim religious leadership realized the gravity of the situation and identified the imperfections and weaknesses inside the practice of Islam along with what had gone wrong politically. Therefore, in response to the basic changes introduced into the local Muslim political and cultural life by the British takeover of the region a variety of Islamic reform movements developed in the course of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century. Different reformist groups that remained prominent to revive and safeguard Islamic traditions included the Deobandīs, the Ahl-i Ḥadīṣ, the Barelvis, ‘*ulamā*’ of Nadvat al-‘Ulamā’ of Lucknow, ‘*ulamā*’ of Farangī Maḥall and Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān’s Aligarh Movement. These movements can be arranged on a spectrum from panoramic view concerning their stance towards the rejuvenation of Muslim community in India as well as the phenomenon of saint and shrine veneration during the colonial period. Two major divisions between them were of reformist movements and counter-reformist movements. The reformists can further be categorized into two major groups inferring from their basis for reformist stance. The western influenced modernists of the Aligarh movement as well as the fundamentalist ‘*ulamā*’ of the

Ahl-i Ḥadīṣ took *ijtihād* (personal reasoning) as the core of reform whereas the traditionalist Naqshbandīs-Chiṣhtī Ṣābrīs-Deobandīs remained stuck to the *taqlīd* (submission or following) of the Ḥanafī School of thought in jurisprudence and demanded large scale reforms in shrine culture. The counter-reformist movements comprised the conservative revivalist Sufi masters of the Chishtiyya Nizāmiyya, the '*ulamā*' of Farangī Maḥall who favored the shrine culture and the Barelvī movement that emerged to safeguard the saint and shrine veneration. Now, I would like to briefly describe different attitudes of the reformist movements towards the matter.

Proponents of the dominant modernist discourse of the time looked down upon the popular phenomenon of saint veneration and intercession as being un-Islamic, archaic superstition and backwardness that takes away from the unique worship of one God. Being rationalists, they preferred exoteric legalism to the esoteric mysticism in order to face the confronting challenges to the Muslim community (Malik, 1990: 68). The modernists, predominantly under the leadership of renowned modernist social reformer of the colonial India Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898), sought to eliminate such Sufi practices from Indian Islam by reinterpreting the religious scriptural texts and making the Muslim community of northern India more and more adaptable to the socio-political advancement of the West through western education. The Aligarh Movement of Sir Sayyid exerted a social upsurge amongst the Indian Muslims through rationalized reinterpretation of religion, modern education, and political activism to bring them out of the socio-religious confusion of the time (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. "Aḥmad Khān, Sayyid"). During the latter half of the colonial period, another modernist colonial thinker of the Muslim community, Iqbal (d. 1938), criticized the persianized-pantheistic-*taṣawwuf* of the colonial India and regarded monotheistic approach as an essence of Islam and the Muslim community (Shaikh, 2009: 26-27).

During the nineteenth century, the growing influence of Vahābī movement (the fundamentalist movement in Saudi Arabia under the leadership of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Vahāb – d. 1792) further influenced the Islamic reformism in the Indian soils. After the emergence of the colonial rule, some Ahl-i Ḥadīṣ scholars, inferring inspiration from Shāh Valiullāh, and the Ṭarīqa-yi Muḥammadiyya of Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī and his disciple Shāh Muḥammad Ismā'īl, arose as an organized and most radical reformist group of the colonial India (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. "Ahl-i Ḥadīth"). They regarded themselves as the follower of 'purified' Islam of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions (*ṣaḥāba*), free of Hindu influence and popular custom. Furthermore, they regarded the *taqlīd* (following) of a single *mazhab* (school of law) or a saint to be an 'unlawful innovation' (*bid'a*) of Islam and an aberration (*dalāla*) leading to Hell. These Ahl-i Ḥadīṣ scholars completely rejected not only the saint and shrine veneration but also Sufism as a whole (Metcalfe, 1982: 274). The adherents of the movement, just like the Vahābīs of Saudi Arabia, disapproved of the veneration of shrines associated with early Islam on the ground that only God should be worshipped and that veneration of sites associated with mortals leads to idolatry. They further denounced certain rituals and practices at the shrines of the Sufis as 'un-Islamic' and *bid'a*, and denoted them as a curse, which must be eliminated. They denied the miraculous powers of the Sufi saints and tried to stop shrine cult activities at various shrines (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. "Ahl-i Ḥadīth").

Under such circumstances, alternative tendencies emerged within the Indian Sunnī Islam whose proponents were initiated into all four Sufi *silsilas* prevailing in the colonial India. The Naqshbandiyya stance on Sufi reformism was already very clear in the pre-colonial period and it had

left some imprints on both the branches of the Chishtiyya. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the phenomenon of Islamic reformism caused a substantial variation within the Chishtī Sufi order. An ideological schism appeared in the Chishtiyya that was not only confined to its two branches (Chishtiyya Nizāmiyya and the Chishtiyya Šābriyya) but also within its shrine cult and meditating Sufi masters. Sufi masters of both the branches reacted to the reformist waves in their respective ways taking their separate departments on the phenomenon of shrine veneration whereas the shrine cult, representing custodians of various Chishtī shrines, managed to stay away from the reformist trends by defending shrine veneration.

Although, the Chishtī *pīrs* of the time were initiated into various other *ṭarīqas* (ways, paths, orders of Sufism), the most prominent Sufi master of the Chishtiyya Šābriyyab, Ḥājī Imdādullāh seriously inclined towards the Naqshbandiyya doctrine. His spiritual deputies, the well-known Chishtī Šābrī ‘ulamā’ of the post-1857 British India like Maulānā Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautavī (d. 1880) and Maulānā Raṣḥīd Aḥmad Gangohī (d. 1905), started the Dār al-‘Ulūm (house of religious sciences) of Deoband (1866-67), under the influence of Naqshbandiyya, aiming at training Muslim religious scholars (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “(Ḥādjdjī) Imdād Allāh”; *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Deoband”). Working in the tradition of Shāh Valīullāh (d. 1762) and of Muslim reformism, proponents of the Deobandī Movement sought to renew Islamic spiritual life by teaching early Islamic principles including Sufi doctrines and to strengthen Muslim religious life by improving the practice of Islam. Heterogeneous doctrinal background of the Deobandī *‘ulamā’* gathered the roles of *muftī* (the term referred to an independent *‘ālim* or religious scholar who wrote *fatāvā* or expert opinions in response to questions that arose within the Muslim community) and *shaiḥ* in the same person (Metcalf, 1982: 138-97). The Deobandīs maintained the traditional stress of the Chishtiyya Sufism on refraining collaboration with the political authorities. However, the Chishtī stance towards the *samā’* and saint and shrine veneration was put in the background. They challenged the authority and inspiration of Sufi proponents of shrine veneration as well as the people associated with tombs of medieval saints. They encouraged the meditational practices such as *taṣavvur-i shaiḥ* (conceiving of the *shaiḥ’s* image as an incentive for spiritual concentration), distributed amulets, and were credited with *karāmāt* (spiritual powers) but opposed the lavish ceremonies followed at Chishtī shrines, which they considered deviant. In sum, the Deobandīs sought to reconcile the *sharī’a* and *ṭarīqa* by maintaining the Sufi character of the religious learning in the limitations of the Naqshbandiyya tradition in spite of following the ecstatic traditions of the Chishtiyya.

In such a situation, when the Sufis themselves contested the shrine veneration, various counter-reformist Sufi-cum-*‘ulamā’* from different quarters emerged on the scene to defend this popular phenomenon of Indian Islam on scholarly grounds. The three leading groups were of the Sufi masters of the Chishtiyya Nizāmiyya, the *‘ulamā’* of Farangī Maḥall and the Barelvi Movement of Maulānā Aḥmad Rizā Khān Barelvi (of Bareilly - India) (d. 1921), a saint scholar of the Qādiriyya Sufi Order.

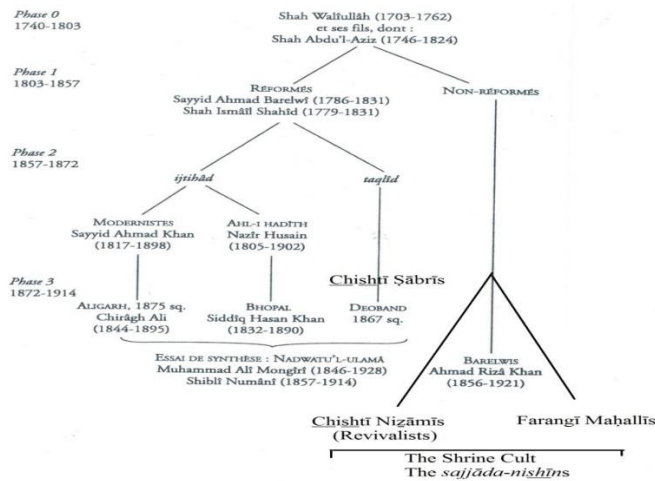
The spiritual disciples of the revivalist Chishtī Nizāmī Sufi masters continued their revivalist mission in the Punjab, during the colonial period, under the leadership of *silsila’s* patron Pīr Mihr ‘Alī Shāh (d. 1937) of Golṛa Sharīf (Jones, 2006: 85-121).<sup>2</sup> He was the chief spiritual successor of Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Siyālvi and was also initiated with Ḥājī Imdādullāh Chishtī Šābrī. Confronted to the reformist discourse the revivalist Nizāmī Chishtīs tried to harmonize *‘ulamā’* and Sufis in order to

---

<sup>2</sup> He is famous for his anti-Aḥmadiyya or anti-Qādiānī stance in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. For details, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. “Aḥmadiyya”.

revitalize the Muslim community and its socio-political prestige while staying away from the reformist trend and defending its old practice of saint/shrine veneration (Siddiqi, 1971: 258).

The ‘Ulamā’ of Farangī Maḥall (Lucknow) remained prominent under the Mughal royal patronage for their efforts towards the traditional Islamic learning of jurisprudence and logic from the eighteenth century to the era of revival and reform until the beginning of the twentieth century. Initiated into different Sufi *silsilas* like Qādiriyya, Chishtiyya Niẓāmiyya, and Chishtiyya Šābriyya, they were not just scholars but clairvoyants stressing Sufi teachings, veneration of Sufi saints and their shrines through the celebration of ‘*urs* (Sufi saints’ death-anniversary ceremonies) at the saints’ tombs (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Farangī Maḥall”). During these centuries, they remained attached to different Sufi shrines and accepted many members of various *sajjāda-nishīn* (hereditary shrine custodian) families into their discipleship for religious-mystical learning thereby enjoying wide range of respect from different Sufi networks (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Farangī Maḥall”; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. “Abd al-Bārī”). In response to the reformist trends and attacks on shrine veneration, the leading scholar from Farangī Maḥall, ‘Abd al-Bārī (d. 1926) remained active for safeguarding the popular shrine culture and fully used his influence in northern India during the early decades of the twentieth century. Concerned much about the future of *taṣawwuf*, he did a lot to impart modernized teachings of the *sharī‘a* and *taṣawwuf* to the old-styled *pīr* families through establishing various madrassas. He took three major steps in this regard. Firstly, in 1905, he established the Madrasa-yi ‘Āliya Niẓāmiyya at Farangī Maḥall in order to equip the children of ‘*ulamā*’ and *pīrs* for modern life along traditional lines through an improved and modernized syllabus of Dars-i Niẓāmī. Secondly, in 1913, he actively participated in the formation of the Anjuman-i Khuddām-i Ka‘ba aimed at organizing an India-wide movement to protect the holy places of Islam (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. “Anjuman-i Khuddām-i Ka‘ba”; Robinson, 2007: 208). Thirdly, in 1916, he played a leading role in establishing the Bazm-i Šūfiya-yi Hind at the ‘*urs* of Shaiḫh Kh<sup>w</sup>āja Mu‘īn al-Dīn Chishtī of Ajmer, an organization aimed at reviving and reforming Indian Sufism (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. “Abd al-Bārī”).



Picture: Categorization of Reformist Movements of the late Nineteenth Century India

Source: Marc Gaborieau. 2007. *Un autre islam: Inde, Pakistan, Bangladesh*. Paris: Albin Michel. (Tableau 2: *Généalogie du réformisme indien – p. 142*) – (Modified)

In the 1880s, when the Chishtī Sufism and its shrine ritualism were under attack from different reformist movements, another movement emerged in northern India under an eloquent *muftī*, Aḥmad Rizā Khān Barelvī (d. 1921). The Barelvīs (after Aḥmad Rizā's patronymic name), being the followers of various Sufi *silsilas*, predominantly of the Qādiriyya, engaged regularly in Sufi-related rites, the most important of which were the annual 'urs held at the burial places of various medieval Sufi saints. Aḥmad Rizā advocated, through his *fatvā*-writing, the importance of observing the *sharī'a* at all times through revivalist notions of 'individual responsibility' and 'self-consciousness of belief and practice' along with his affirmative approach towards the devotional practices for the saint and shrine veneration, thereby attempting at reducing the dichotomy between Sufism and Reformist Islam (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. "Barelwīs"; Sanyal, 1996: 57, 73–6, 97–110).

Therefore, the phenomenon of saint and shrine veneration became an issue of hot scholarly debates between different schools of thought of Indian Islam, and especially between the Deobandīs, the Barelvīs, and the Ahl-i Ḥadīṣ. However, the Deobandīs played a crucial role in bringing a huge portion of the Sufi discourse nearer to the *sharī'a*, thereby causing a substantial decrease in the extent of the shrines' following and the prestige of the shrine cult.

This reformist wave further left deep imprints on the Indian Chishtīyya legacy by creating a petty schism between the meditational Chishtī Sufi masters and the hereditary custodians of different Chishtī shrines of the region – representing the Chishtī shrine cult. Until the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, a network of influential shrines had been established in the western parts of the Punjab, mainly of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> revivalist Chishtī Nizāmī Sufis. These shrines, like the early Chishtī shrines, also came under the control of their respective *sajjāda-nishīn* families. These shrine custodians did not take up the revivalist attitude of their Chishtī Nizāmī ancestors. While the 'ulamā' of the Deoband, the Farangī Maḥall, the Barelvī Movement and the Sufi masters of the Chishtīyya Nizāmīyya, were working to revive and reform Sufi Islam with their respective approaches on the shrine veneration, most of the Chishtī shrines of the Punjab, reifying their positive stance on shrine veneration, went against the reformist current. The *sajjāda-nishīns* of different Chishtī shrines, realizing the gravity of the hour – when their socio-religious authorities based on the shrine-veneration came under threat from the modernist as well as reformist trends, took a number of steps to retain and sustain the status-quo so far as the culture and practice of shrines and their own identity was concerned.

The first step headed for the reification of the shrine cult towards the shrine veneration and the challenge to reformism was manifested by the *sajjāda-nishīns* when they used their spiritual authority as a political tool. They organized and portrayed the *dargāhs* (shrines) in their custody as the core religious centers of the Punjabi Muslim community thereby using them as the tool to exert their political prestige in the colonial settings. Actually, the loss of pre-colonial economic and political power of various shrine authorities made them dependable over the traditional means of religious authority (Gilmartin, 1979: 491-92). Therefore, the "*pouvoir de la tombe*" was structured through networks of holiness coupled with the royal-type ceremonial set-up of coronation (*dastār-bandī*) and front drum-marchers (Boivin, 2002: Book review).

Then, the social influence of the *sajjāda-nishīns* through their vast following enabled them to team-up with locally powerful *zamīndārs* (landowners), thereby leading to the emergence and strengthening of a strong and lasting *pīr-zamīndār* feudal nexus in the Punjab (Aziz, 2001: 50).



In line with this re-boosting of their socio-religious influence in the colonial context, the *Chishtī sajjāda-nishīns* adopted a policy of collaboration with the British government when the official administrators were looking for local intermediaries. They acted as intermediaries in the colonial power structure, as patrons for the masses who needed leaders to negotiate on their behalf with the colonial state (Gilmartin, 1979: 491; Siddiqi, 1971: 409). The *sajjāda-nishīns* of the newly established Chishtī shrines also joined hands with the custodians of the old pre-Mughal Chishtī shrines. The collaboration with the socially and religiously influential *sajjāda-nishīns* also helped the colonial state to legitimize its rule as well as to counter the insurgent radicalized *sharī'a*-inspired notion of Islamic reformism in the British colonies (Shaikh, 2009: 28).

In the present scenario, the Barelwīs form one of the dominant religious groups in Pakistani Punjab. Members of the Barelwī School adhere to the contemporary shrine authorities thereby engendering the religious authority of the shrine cult and the cult of saints (*pīrs*) (Malik, 1990: 72). In the current Pakistani Punjab, the phenomenon of shrine worship and of the *pīr's* or *sajjāda-nishīn's* role of intercessory communication with the Divine remains a topic of criticism from the reformist circles as being the representative of obscure polytheistic (*shirk*) deviation, a leftover from the Punjab's superstitious past (Ballard, 2006: 166; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. "Barelwīs"). The reformist organizations like that of Ahl-i Ḥadīṣ, Deoband, and Tablīghī Jamā't, which continued their activities in the post-Partition state of Pakistan, have left long lasting effects on Islam and the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent and influenced the state policies (Ewing, 1983: 266-67).

#### **The Case Study of the Shrine of Bābā Farīd (Pakpattan)**

In this pre-colonial scenario, while the spiritual descendants of Bābā Farīd were struggling for the revival of the Chishtīyya in different mystic centers of the Punjab, the *jamā'at-khāna* established by Bābā Farīd in Pakpattan disappeared from his shrine and its successive *sajjāda-nishīns* were struggling for their political and economic hold in the region. Nonetheless, the shrine of Bābā Farīd in Pakpattan, the most important as well as the oldest Chishtī shrine in the western Punjab, was still enjoying an influential spiritual status in the Chishtīyya ranks being the lasting aura of Bābā Farīd. Various renowned Chishtī masters of the time used to attend regularly the shrine of Bābā Farīd and valued it as a point of meeting (Green, 2006: 94, 113).

There is no substantial evidence that the reform movements of 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries had any considerable influence over the practices of this shrine. However, this institution can be seen through the active prism of the Chishtī Sufism as well as network of its daughter Chishtī shrines scattered in different parts of the Punjab. Both the sub-*silsilas* of the Chishtīyya, which came into being from the *khānqāh* Farīdiyya of Ajūdhan (old name of Pakpattan) and were, in a way, source of regional religious and Sufistic prestige of the shrine of Bābā Farīd, were heavily affected by the reformist trends.

The response of the shrine authorities to the modernist and puritanical reform movements and the immense impact on the life of Muslims in India casted by them was more or less ambivalent. First, the shrine of Bābā Farīd not only stayed away from reformism by defending its culture of shrine veneration but also claimed to be above all divides in the Chishtīyya and to represent the 'original' Chishtīyya Sufism. But in fact, the shrine of Bābā Farīd wherefrom the Chishtīyya Nizāmiyya and the Chishtīyya Ṣābriyya took birth in the thirteenth century, was affected in one way or the other by the internal split in the Chishtīyya and the contestation on the issue of the shrine veneration. In actual, the

proclaimed neutrality of the shrine of Bābā Farīd was itself a reaction to the divisions among the *Chishtiyya* on the question of shrine veneration.

Second, besides all their efforts to stay away from the reformism, the shrine of Bābā Farīd could not prevent its practices from being criticized by the reformist and puritanical voices within Sufi tradition, though the shrine authorities tried to show that they were open to reform, and that reform could go along with the shrine rituals. The Deoband School's reformist influence and the resulting deprivation of a bulk of the Sufi shrines' following cannot be ignored in the case of the trans-local following of the shrine of Bābā Farīd in Pakpattan, even if no visible presence of Deobandī preachers can be found in the colonial-period-Pakpattan. It is remarked by some interviewees that Dīvān Said Muḥammad (custodianship 1894-1934, d. 1934), the 25<sup>th</sup> *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine, went under the dual influence of the modernists as well as of Deobandī reformists, and of Pīr Mihr 'Alī *Shāh* of Golṛa *Sharīf* to some extent. He was witnessed to be more regular in his prayers and other Sufi ritualistic practices than the preceding and subsequent *sajjāda-nishīns*.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Miles Irving in his 1911 article narrates that in the early years of the twentieth century, Dīvān Said Muḥammad had established a modern Anglo-Vernacular School within shrine premises where both religious and secular education was imparted (Irving, 1911: 76). He also opines that this development was opposed or contested by the contemporary fellow *sajjāda-nishīns* on the grounds that this educational initiative could harm the local hold of the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine of Bābā Farīd (Leigh, 1922: 171; Ali, 1989: 105-06).<sup>4</sup>

Third, besides, the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine of Golṛa *Sharīf*, who is present annually at the shrine of Bābā Farīd during 'urs days and is also a *Chishtī* Nizāmī Sufi master, is critical of the patterns of certain rituals followed at the shrine of Bābā Farīd.<sup>5</sup> But overall, the reformists did not affect much the strong Sufi centers like that of Pakpattan, whose religious set-up is still dominated by the *pīrī-murīdī* (master-disciple relationship of a spiritual nature) culture as well as by the Barelvi school of thought: there are thus many more Barelvi *madrasas* than Deobandī or Ahl-i Ḥadīṣ *madrasas* in the city and its vicinity.

**Table 1**

*Mosques and madrassas in Pakpattan Tehsil*

|             | Sunni Barelvi | Sunni Deobandī | Ahl-i Ḥadīṣ | <i>Shī'a</i> | Total |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------|
| Mosques     | 175           | 20             | 13          | 1            | 209   |
| Madrassas   | 14            | 14             | 4           | --           | 30    |
| Imām Bargāh | --            | --             | --          | 2            | 2     |

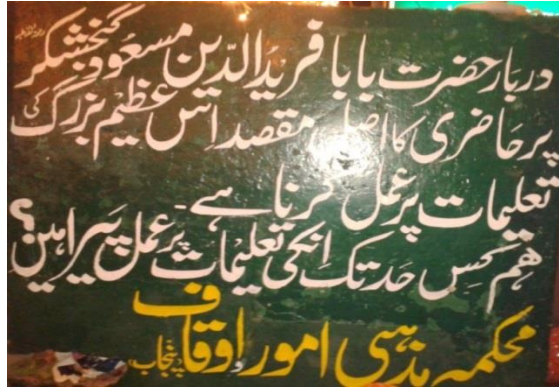
Source: Interview with Pīr *Ghulām Quṭb al-Dīn* (President Jmā't Ahl-i Sunnat, District Pakpattan) on October 23, 2010 (consulted personal collections).

<sup>3</sup> Interviews carried out on December 10, 2009 with Justice (Retd.) Sayyed Afzal Ḥaidar and Dīvān Bakhtiyār Said Muḥammad on November 10, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Dīvān Said Muḥammad enhanced his local prestige by becoming part of the State's collaborative policy. He remained a member of the Divisional as well as Provincial Courts (*List of Divisional Darbārīs* and *List of Provincial Darbārīs*, 1873, 1912, 1919-33). The British Government also rewarded him with many villages for war services as well as some other loyal services.

<sup>5</sup> It was observed that during the annual 'urs of December 2010, the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine of Golṛa *Sharīf* criticized the mixing-up of males and females in the courtyard of the shrine during the performance of certain rituals, which is a normal thing for the other *sajjāda-nishīns* and the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine of Bābā Farīd.

As for the official policy of the post-colonial state, it becomes clear when the official management depicts Bābā Farīd as only a pious religious teacher, and not as an ecstatic Sufi master, on the basis of his *sharī'a*-oriented sayings (Ewing, 1997: 77). The process started in 1960s-70s and continues nowadays through instruction boards established in and around the shrine premises by the Auqāf Department, in order to educate and guide the pilgrims. The teachings of these boards seem nearer to the reformed Sufism of the Deoband School as is evident from the picture given below.



Picture: Instruction Board, near one of the entry of the shrine of Bābā Farīd, says (tr.) “The real purpose to visit the Darbār Ḥaẓrat Bābā Farīd al-Dīn Mas’ūd Ganj-i Shakar is to follow the teachings of this great saint. To which extent are we following his teachings?” - Department of Religious Affairs and Auqāf (Punjab).

### Conclusion

In sum, the 18<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Islamic reformism deeply affected the well-developed Sufi shrine culture in the Punjab. In the pre-colonial context, Chishtī Sufism was considered to be a single entity, though its two main Sufi branches were there. However, the reformist trend of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century created a divide between the traditional Chishtī Sufi masters of its two sub-branches on the one hand, and the custodians of the major Chishtī shrines on the other hand. The growing Islamic reformist and modernist critiques against Sufi cult practices led to an increasing self-consciousness among Sufi adherents, and to the emergence of reformist Sufi doctrines, which denigrated some of the remaining traditional Sufi shrine practices. On the one hand, the reformist wave took the prominent Ṣābrī Chishtīs of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century India away from the popular devotional Chishtīsm and brought them under the influence of the restrained Sufi discourse of the Naqshbandiyya, giving birth to the Dār al-‘Ulūm in Deoband. On the other hand, the Chishtīyya Nizāmiyya responded to the challenge through its internal revivalism. Likewise, reformism and especially its contestation of saint and shrine veneration further dichotomized the meditational and ritualistic currents of Chishtī Sufism; distancing the Sufi masters of the Chishtīyya Ṣābriyya (Deobandīs) from the Chishtī shrine cult, whose social, political, and religious influence took anti-Chishtīyya stance of state-oriented political collaboration. The custodians of the shrine of Bābā Farīd stood as vanguard of such an inclination. Nonetheless, the Chishtī Nizāmī Sufi masters remained partisans of saints’ veneration and continued to remain with the shrine custodians. The active role of the Barelvi Movement to safeguard the shrine practices brought the Chishtī shrine cult under its umbrella, and nowadays, most of the Chishtī shrines are venerated by the Barelvi following. Therefore, it can be concluded that this reinterpretation of the Chishtī shrine cult evolution gives a clear cut idea

of the impact of the reformism and the appearance of the modern state on the Chishtī shrine cult of the Punjab that emerged as a divergent group from the Chishtiyā conformism of distancing from political circles. Similarly, the Chishtī Sufi shrines of the Punjab emerge as focal points of the Qādiriyya/Barelwī symbolism at large.

### References

- ʿAbd al-Bārī. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.
- Ahl-i Ḥadīth. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.
- Ahmad, A. (1964). *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Aḥmad Khān, Sayyid. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.
- Aḥmadiyya. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.
- Ali, I. (1989). *The Punjab under Imperialism: 1885-1947*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Anjuman-i Khuddām-i Ka'ba. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.
- Aziz, K. K. (2001). *Religion, land and politics in Pakistan: A study of Piri-Muridi*. Lahore: Vanguard.
- Ballard, R. (2006). Popular Islam in Northern Pakistan and its Reconstruction in Urban Britain. In Malik, J. M. & Hinnells, J. R. (Eds.), *Sufism in the West* (pp. 160-86). London: Routledge.
- Barelwīs. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.
- Boivin, M. (2001). Review of *Religion, land and politics in Pakistan: A study of Piri-Muridi* of Khursheed Kamal Aziz.
- Chopra, R. M. (1999). *Great Sufi Poets of the Punjab*. Calcutta: Iran Society.
- Čishtiyā. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- Deoband. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- Eaton, R. M. (1984). The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Bābā Farīd. In Metcalf, B.D. (Ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (pp. 333-56). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ernst, C. W. & Lawrence, B. B. (2002). *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishtī Order in South Asia and Beyond*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ewing, K. P. (1983). The Politics of Sufism: Redefining the Saints of Pakistan. *The Journal of Asian Studies* XLII (2):251-268.
- — —. (1997). *Arguing sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis and Islam*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University press.
- Faiḻ M. F. A. & Moḥyīuddīn, S. Ḡ. (1973). *Mehr-e-Munīr* (Urdu): Golra.
- Farangī Maḥall. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- Gilmartin, D. (1979). Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement in the Punjab. *Modern Asian Studies* 13 (3):485-517.
- Green, N. (2006). *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan*. London: Routledge.
- (Ḥādjdjī) Imdād Allāh. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- Harding, C. (2008). *Religious Transformation in South Asia: The Meanings of Conversion in Colonial Punjab*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Irving, M. (1911). The Shrine of Baba Farid Shakarganj at Pakpattan. *Journal of the Punjab Historical Society* (1):70-76.
- Jones, K. W. (2006). *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India. Vol. III - 1, The New Cambridge History of India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lapidus, I. M. (2002). *A History of Islamic Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leigh, M. S. (1922). *The Punjab and the War*. Lahore: The Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab.

*List of Divisional Darbārīs and List of Provincial Darbārīs*, 1873, 1912, 1919-33.

Malik, J. (1990). Waqf in Pakistan: Change in Traditional Institutions. *Die Welt des Islams* 30 (1/4):63-97.

Metcalf, B. D. (1982). *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Metcalf, T. R. (1997). *Ideologies of the Raj. Vol. 3, The New Cambridge History of India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nizāmī, K. A. (1953). *Tārīkh-i Mashā'ikh-i Chishtī*. (Urdu) Dillī: Nadvatulmuşannifin-i Urdū Bāzār. Republished many times by different publishers: Idārah-yi Adabiyāt-i Dillī (Dillī) – 1985, Mushtaq Book Corner (Lahore) – 1985.

Robinson, F. (2007). *Islam, South Asia, and the West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sanyal, U. (1996). *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and his Movement, 1870-1920*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Shaikh, F. (2009). *Making Sense of Pakistan*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Siddiqi, M. Z. (1971). The Reurgence of the Chishti Silsilah in the Punjab in the 18th Century. *The Punjab Past and Present* vol. V Part II (Serial No. 10): 256-60.

Talbot, I. (1988) *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947*. New Delhi: Manohar Pub.

Received: August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Revisions Received: March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017