

9 Popular Islam in northern Pakistan and its reconstruction in urban Britain

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An awareness of the presence of Allah pervades the lives of rural Punjabi Muslims. In addition to the way in which invocations such as *bismillah*, *mash'allah*, *insh'allah* and *shukr hamdul'illah* pepper every conversation, everyone's personal name articulates one or other of the ninety-nine qualities of Allah. Although there can be no doubt whatsoever that all those who behave in this way are followers of Islam, just how can we best specify what 'being a Muslim' actually entails in this specific local context?

Two dimensions of Islam

Although Punjabi Muslims experience their faith as a seamless whole, closer examination of the actual content of rural practice reveals that popular interpretations of the Prophet's *Sunna* are grounded in two analytically distinguishable, although closely interwoven, components. The logical foundations of this distinction - which is in no way unique to the Punjab - are easy enough to specify. Starting from the proposition that Allah created but one *al-insan al-kamil*, the Prophet Muhammad, as an exemplary vehicle through which to transmit his' expectations to the world which he had created, the Prophet's status as an exemplar is held to have two complementary dimensions. On the one hand the Prophet's behaviour, as observed by his associates, is regarded as providing a template of behavioural righteousness around which Muslims should consequently seek to organize every aspect of their own everyday behaviour. On the other hand the Prophet's spiritual capacities - whose strength and sophistication were of such intensity that he was capable of being vouchsafed the Qur'an - are seen as providing an equally inspirational set of spiritual signposts. Hence whilst the Prophet's behavioural *Sunna* is a necessary starting point for all Muslims, those who are prepared to delve deeper by exploring the more spiritual dimensions of that *Sunna* can begin to gain access to levels of gnostic experience which are similar in kind, although by definition never so intense, as those experienced by Allah's *al-insan al-kamil*.

Although analytically distinguishable, these two dimensions of Islam are comprehensively interrelated in practice. Just as neither is fully meaningful in the absence of the other, so neither can be reduced to the other. In the absence of respect for the organizational and behavioural imperatives which underpin Allah's created order, gnostic understanding of its hidden significance is inaccessible; and in the absence of at least

some degree of awareness of that gnostic dimension, behavioural righteousness - no matter how exemplary - is reduced to an empty and hypocritical gesture. Hence mere external conformity with formal principles of the *shari'a*, especially when deployed to justify the self-interested enjoyment of wealth and power, is popularly regarded as the very antithesis of what Islam is all about. For everyday believers the true test of commitment to Allah is not so much behavioural conformity, but rather of what goes on 'within the heart'.

The resulting distinction of the worldly sphere of *zahir* and the internal, and hence 'hidden' sphere of *batin* can usefully be mapped onto a socio-political disjunction which runs through every Islamic society: that between the world of the '*ulama*, the scholarly guardians of the behavioural orthodoxy which is spelled out in such detail in the *shari'a*, and the world of the *shaykh* and *pir*, the charismatic articulators of the spiritual and gnostic experience. Whilst both dimensions are equally Islamic, since both offer authoritative interpretations of how the Prophet's *Sunna* can best be followed, the road-maps which each sets out differ radically. Whilst '*ulama* are lawyers who ground their advice in their scholarly knowledge of the Qur'an, the *Hadith* and the *shari'a*, *shaykhs* and *pirs* provide inspiration and advice for their followers on the basis of the *experiential* authority which they have gained as a result of intensity of their own personal spiritual practice.

Yet despite the depth of these differences, and the bitter arguments which can so easily erupt between those who interpret the implications of the Prophet's *Sunna* in contradictory ways, these two tracks are far from being mutually exclusive, most especially in terms of popular practice. Nevertheless the balance between the two can vary so enormously as between differing contexts. Hence, for example, it is far from unusual for '*ulama* who ground their commitment to meticulous behavioural orthodoxy in close study of the prescriptions of the *shari'a* to become members of a Sufi *silsila* - although it is invariably one which fosters a thoroughly sober path to spiritual awareness, and in which gnostic passion is never allowed to compromise behavioural correctness. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, Sufi masters whose personal path towards gnosis is much more ecstatic in character regularly insist that their less spiritually sophisticated followers should in normal circumstances take a far less transgressive approach to the limitations of external conformity.

Why, though, should transgressive activities and experiences be a necessary component of spiritual progress? From a Sufi perspective the answer is quite straightforward. Not only does gnostic experience 'shake up' one's very being, but anyone who seeks to gain access to such experience must allow themselves to be 'shaken up' before they can begin to step along the path towards it. Strong measures are therefore required to break through the veils of everyday (mis)apprehension which conceal the hidden significance of the existent world. It follows that those who wish to step beyond the external *zahiri* dimensions of the Prophet's *Sunna* such that they can begin to experience its more hidden spiritual possibilities face an extremely challenging task. The results are plain to see. Extreme forms of ascetic discipline - assisted where appropriate by such intoxicating involvement in the rhythm of poetry, music and dance - are a routine component of Sufi practice in all parts of the Islamic world.

Providing a means whereby all sense of personal egotism can be swept away, ecstatic experiences which are ever more overwhelming in their impact provide convenient stepping stones towards *lana* and *baqa*, such that the devotee can ultimately begin to gain access to the bitter-sweet experience of *'ishq*. Popular allegory represents this process in graphic terms by suggesting that just as ecstatic moths lose control of their very being as they dance ever more passionately around the flame which is about to absorb them, so the stern behavioural prescriptions of the *'ulama* fade into ever greater insignificance the further the Sufi adept is pulled ever further down the path towards the irresistible illumination of - and extinction within - gnostic experience. The pursuit of this goal may be as difficult as it is dangerous, but there can be no dispute about the basic principle: that the experience of gnosis reduces all other priorities to insignificance.

Nor are such matters solely of theological and philosophical concern. As Ibn Khaldun argued long ago, the interaction between these two complementary streams of thought and behaviour have long played a key role in the dynamics of the Islamic social order. Indeed with his model in mind it would be quite feasible to set about placing all Islamic religious practices, as well as all the ritual specialists who oversee them, along a continuum running between these two extremes. However, that is not a task which I intend to undertake here. Instead my aim in this context is simply to use this distinction as the foundation of a conceptual framework within which to make sense of the wide range of ideas, beliefs, and practices routinely used by the rural Muslims living in the Potohar region of Pakistani Punjab, as well as by those deployed by their kinsfolk who have by now settled in the UK.

As such, my viewpoint is firmly 'from below'. Whilst those with whose beliefs and practices I am concerned here routinely interact with Islamic 'specialists' of one kind or another - whether in the form of the *maulwis* who lead prayers in local mosques, or of the *pirs* to whom they turn in times of trouble - I have certainly not turned to such specialists as my primary source of entry into the logic of popular understandings as to just what it means to be a Muslim in rural Punjab. To be sure, the Islam with which I am concerned has evolved in the course of many generations of creative interchange between popular ideas and understandings and the teaching and preaching of such specialists; but if the interchange has indeed long been mutual, the automatic prioritization of such expert prescriptions can be deeply misleading, for it all too easily leads to the presentation of popular practice as a pale and deviant shadow. It is with precisely with such considerations in mind that I have taken everyday popular conceptualizations, rather than formally prepared texts, as my analytical starting point.'

Being a Muslim

Being a Muslim is a normative experience in contemporary Pakistan: with the exception of a small minority of converts to Christianity and an even smaller number of Ahmadiyyas (followers of what the Pakistani State has relatively recently declared to be the anti-Islamic teachings of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad), everyone else whom one encounters in Pakistan is presumptively a Muslim, no matter how he or she may

behave. To be sure, those who never perform *namaz*, nor even visit the Mosque at *Id*, let alone those who consume forbidden substances such as pork and alcohol, attract adverse critical comment. However, only the bigoted few would ever suggest that such behaviour is so deviant as to place such backsliders outside the fold of Islam. Other than the Prophet himself, who can claim perfection?

Nevertheless it would be quite wrong to assume that nothing is sacred. Whilst deviance from behavioural expectations associated with Islam may attract critical comments, any utterance which casts doubt on Allah's cosmic capabilities, precipitates a much more active response. Even if the remark was not deliberately intended, it will nevertheless swiftly elicit horrified - but prophylactic - cries of *Tawbah, tawbah!* Likewise even those whose personal outlook may appear to be comprehensively secular regularly qualify their plans for future activity with the cautionary epithet *insb'allah*; in the same vein any suggestion - no matter how inadvertent - which appears to predict the future course of life and death amongst one's nearest and dearest invariably attracts even stronger precautionary invocations. The reason for so doing are quite clear: failure to acknowledge the inscrutable powers of the Almighty puts one in danger of being reminded just who is *reaffy* in charge. Similarly, any utterance which casts doubt on the honour of the Prophet (or of his immediate companions) is regarded as profoundly sacrilegious - as Salman Rushdie learned to his cost.

Whilst Rushdie touched a raw nerve, the specific character of his offence is worth noting. It was certainly not one of blasphemy in the Christian sense. For Muslims, the Prophet is emphatically not divine: he is human. Nor did Rushdie contravene the provisions of the *shari'a* in any direct sense. Instead, popular objections focused on his unashamed mockery of the core component of Islam's spiritual and cosmological vision: the status of the Prophet as *al-insan al-kamif*, and his unique relationship with the Creator.

It is above all through an appreciation of the significance the relationship between the Creator and his creation that Islam pervades lives of rural Punjabis. As the inscrutable source of all existence, Allah Mian is regarded as being as immanent as he is transcendent, and is consequently held to be present and active in every nook and cranny of His created universe. It is therefore incumbent on all created beings, and most especially of *insan* (mankind), to pay homage to the comprehensiveness of the Creator's powers, as the phrases cited at the outset of this chapter serve to underline, since everyday discourse ensures that verbal acknowledgement of those powers is constantly on everyone's lips. Not only does everyone thereby give thanks for that which has been delivered to them, but they also seek Allah's blessings before embarking on any enterprise. Failure to observe such basic courtesies invites the prospect of being taught a severe lesson about the consequences of contempt.

Yet however respectful Muslims may be of Allah's awesome powers, personal mishaps still occur. That comes as no surprise. If Allah's will is entirely inscrutable, mere humans can never hope to comprehend the cosmologically oriented purposes of the Almighty. Hence whilst all events within the created world have a purpose, just what those purposes are will by definition be well beyond the purview of humankind. Hence believers must accept rather than query whatever outcomes the Creator may have prescribed for them. No matter harsh all this may seem to those schooled in

more rationalist modes of thought, it can nevertheless bring positive reassurance to those who take such a cosmology for granted. Hence, for example, the grieving mother of a still-born child put a positive gloss on her distress from the thought that Allah Mian must have recalled her dead baby's soul as a result of finding another yet more significant purpose for his tiny being to fulfil. Such an acceptance of *qismat* is not, however, a recipe for fatalism. Whilst effort, *mainat*, cannot in itself guarantee success (Allah alone can do that), those who make no effort to make the most of whatever has fallen to their lot stand much less chance of receiving Allah's blessings than those who actively seek to help themselves. Even so, nothing is certain: some believers find themselves burdened, like Job, with endless misfortune. But just as the biblical story insists, such an uncalled-for plight can positively be reconstrued as a test of faith.

Mazars, Pirs and intercession

Yet acquiescence is by no means the end of the matter: popular belief provides many further explanations of the causes of unexpected misfortune, and an equally diverse range of strategies by means of which relief can be sought from its consequences. Hence those who find themselves suffering from Job-like misfortune do have a further option: a direct appeal for mercy to the Almighty. But how and where should such an appeal be lodged? Given Allah Mian's transcendence, it is wholly infeasible for everyday believers to make such an appeal on their own account. Not only do they lack capacity to frame such a petition in appropriate terms, but their spiritual status is manifestly wholly insufficient for them to be able to gain direct access to the Throne. So just as one engages an advocate to present one's case in a court of law, so one should likewise seek out an intercessor with a right of audience in the highest Court of all.

The first step in so doing is to offer prayers at the shrine (and tomb) of a deceased *pir*, beseeching him to intercede with the Merciful One on the supplicant's behalf. With the *pir's* recommendation attached, such pleas have a far better prospect of being heard - and answered. These practices have a straightforward theological justification. Since the *pir* in his tomb is present on an earthly plane, he is accessible to ordinary believers in a way which the Transcendent One is not; but precisely because the *pir* has achieved his *'urs* (union with his Beloved, the ultimate goal of Sufi gnostic experience), he is in far closer communion with Allah than a living person could ever hope to be. Hence his capacity to act as an intercessor.

In a Punjabi context this understanding of saintly intercession is by no means unique to the Islamic tradition. Hindu Sadhus and Sikh Sants are regarded as having a communicative relationship with the Ultimate that is similar to Muslim *pirs*. As a result all those who have achieved intense gnostic insight attract the title of Baba. In much the same vein their shrines - *mazars* and *dargahs* for *pirs*, *sthans* and *samadhs* for Yogis, and *gurudwaras* for Sants - are held to open similarly structured intercessory doors to the Ultimate. Such shrines are a commonplace feature of the Punjabi rural landscape.

Whilst most such shrines are more or less clearly constituted as Muslim, Sikh, or Hindu, closer inspection of their sacred symbolism invariably reveals a significant degree of hybridity: indeed this condition of hybridity is sometimes so great as to

render it impossible to assign the shrine to anyone of these traditions.' This lack of boundedness is further underlined when one explores the *qaumi* background of the pilgrims seeking intercessory assistance from such shrines, for it soon becomes clear that in the Punjab - as in most of the rest of South Asia - supplicants in no way feel restricted to seeking assistance from shrines associated with a specific *panthic* tradition. This was brought forcibly to my attention when conducting fieldwork recently in the Jullundur Doab. Although virtually all the indigenous Muslim population of the Doab fled west to Pakistan over half a century ago, careful inspection revealed that a significant number of rural shrines were those of *pirs*, since the shrouds covering such well-tended tombs and the flags which flew over them were green - the colour of Islam.⁴ The largest of these shrines became hives of activity on each *juma'raat* (the evening preceding the Islamic day of prayer on Friday) and positively burst with energy at their annual *'urs* of the saintly *pir* entombed within it - even though the local Muslim population had long since disappeared. It follows that virtually all those making use of the shrine belonged to local Hindu or Sikh families.

From a popular Punjabi perspective, there is nothing contradictory about such behaviour. The pilgrims who flock to such *dargahs*, *sthans* and *gurudwaras* - no matter whether they identify themselves as Muslims or Hindus or Sikhs - all do so with a similar *qismatic* purpose: to beseech its saintly founder to intercede with the Ultimate on their behalf. Shrines of all kinds - whether they be one of the innumerable memorials to local saints found outside every village in rural Punjab, or the tombs of major historical figures such as Datta Ganj Baksh in Lahore, Baba Farid Shakarganj in Pak Pattan, or Golra Sharif near Rawalpindi - consequently remain the focus of intense devotional activity. At each such *Durbar*, pilgrims direct their pleas towards the *pir* who lies within with passionate intensity; and in witness of their silent vows to bring offerings to the shrine should their pleas be heard, pilgrims tie strips of cloth in the branches of nearby trees as an overt reminder of both their plea and pledge. It would be grossly discourteous - and indeed asking for trouble - to fail to fulfil such a pledge. Hence innumerable strips of cloth flutter from the branches of trees surrounding popular shrines, whilst many of the pilgrims making return visits bring expensive offerings in thanks for the blessings they have received.

Living *pirs*, who are routinely regarded as having acquired occult powers as a result of the intensity of their spiritual commitments, are likewise much consulted by those in distress. In the first place they are credited with the capacity to diagnose the causative source of any given affliction, and secondly with the ability to provide a remedy with which to hold that precipitating cause at bay. In making their diagnoses, rural *pirs* utilize an explanatory framework which includes - whilst also looking far beyond - the model of Allah's over-arching powers which has so far been outlined. Plugging into popular cosmological understandings at a rather less theologically rarefied level, *pirs* most usually suggest that the afflictions complained of are either a consequence of unconscious jealousy, *nazar*, or of the activities of malevolent kinsfolk who have used *jadoo* or *tuna* to harm the unfortunate victim, or the outcome of the victim having been possessed from within by a *jinn*, a *bhut*, a *pret* or a *churaif* - malevolent spirits who have been banished to the fringes of the social order. Once diagnosis has been achieved, *pirs* most usually prepare a *ta'wiz* (an amulet containing Qur'anic

verses) with which to counter the malevolent influences so detected, or to more extreme cases conduct an exorcism in which the possessing spirit is first confronted, then placated, and finally expunged from its unfortunate victim."

Living *pirs*, no less than the shrines of their long-dead predecessors, attract a huge clientele. When faced with severe and apparently irremediable difficulties few families fail to explore the utility of such remedies as they make increasingly desperate efforts to resolve their problems. Lack of success is no deterrent. If any given source of occult assistance fails to precipitate the desired result, it is easy enough to conclude either that their own supplicatory commitment was too weak, or that the source consulted had insufficient intercessory powers, or that the condition for which a remedy was sought fell outside its specialist competence. Hence the hunt continues, such that families make ever more distant pilgrimages (and personal sacrifices) in an effort find a *pir* with the capacity to remedy their distress.

Popular practice and its critics: are Punjabi Muslims really Muslims?

In my experience very few Punjabis - no matter how 'orthodox' their religious commitment may be, and no matter whether they are Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims - fail to explore such remedies when faced with severe and otherwise irresolvable personal difficulties. Nevertheless public criticism of such practices is now increasingly widespread, in the first place from Maulwis, who regularly argue that 'shrine-worship' - and most especially the belief that *pirs* can facilitate intercessory communications with Allah - constitutes a polytheistic deviation from Islam's commitment to the absolute unity and uniqueness of God. In the second, secularly minded urban intellectuals are equally critical of such 'superstitious' practices, arguing that they simply provide a convenient means through which to exploit the credulous and irrational beliefs of the uneducated and illiterate masses. Finally, both streams of criticism are brought together by revivalist groups such as the *Jama'at-i Islami*, who not only argue that such practices are as much a manifestation of *shirk* (polytheism), but also that they are an unfortunate leftover from the Punjab's superstitious Hindu past.

Within this conspectus traditionalists and modernists have found plenty of opportunities to develop common ground. Arguing that such practices can find no justification in either the Qur'an or the *shari'a*, they insist that all those who credit *pirs* with occult powers, and especially those turn away from mosques with their Mecca-oriented *mihrabs* to offer prayers to a shrine tomb are committing wholly unacceptable *shirk*. This critique has radical consequences. If sound, it follows that a large part of the everyday practices of Punjabi Muslims, as well as the ideas and ideologies which underpin them, are not Muslim at all, but relics of their benighted past. Hence if Muslims are to be true to the essence of their faith, there is an urgent need for reform: only by implementing a thorough process of 'Islamization' can the last remnants of Hindu polytheism finally be extirpated from popular practice, so enabling all believers to "enfold themselves at long last into the universalistic *umma* of pure Qur'anic Islam."

Islam as prescription and Islam as practice

Many pious Punjabi Muslims find such arguments extremely bewildering. Can it really be that their everyday practice is really so comprehensively misguided as to require them to undergo a comprehensive programme of religious re-education? Such demands seem to be as unnecessary as they are insulting. As Sunni Muslims, their everyday practices represent their best efforts to emulate the Prophet's *Sunna*. To be sure, their efforts are imperfect: how could it be otherwise? But to suggest that they are so misguided as to require comprehensive 'Islamization' seems absurd. Mosques are just as much a feature of the rural landscape as are shrines. Each attracts a substantial (male) congregation for Friday prayers, and even more on feast-days such as 'Id. Nor is the saying of *namaz* limited solely to the mosque: men, and even more so women, regularly perform *namaz* at home in response to the *azan* which their Maulvi calls five times a day. Likewise the fast is regularly kept during Ramzan, meat is only eaten if it is *halal*, and the Maulwi is regularly called in to officiate at the life-crisis rituals associated with birth, marriage and death. Hence it is only a *dimension* of popular belief and practice - almost exclusively that associated with *pirs* and shrines - of which the neo-revivalists are so critical.

This state of affairs - which is by no means unique to the Punjab" - throws up a major challenge for all students of Islam. Just what should we mean by Islam, and how should we set about identifying it? Should we prioritize the prescriptive injunctions generated by generations of legalistic analysis of the Qur'an and the *Hadith*, which both modernistic neo-revivalists and the more traditionalist Maulwis insist is the only way forward? Or should we, to the contrary, focus on the ideas and practices which generations of believers have developed in the course of their efforts to access the illumination available with the Prophet's *Sunna*?

For those seeking clear-cut guidance on such matters a textualist approach appears at first sight to have much to recommend it. Firstly, careful analysis of authoritative texts should at least in principle provide a clear set of prescriptive guidelines as to what is, and what is not, legitimately Islamic - always provided that agreement can be reached over just how the texts in question should be read and interpreted." Secondly, such a textually derived approach is congruent with classical European approaches to scholarship in the field of religious studies. And last but not least, the construction of a clearly defined and behaviourally prescriptive sense of what 'being a Muslim' entails provides a highly effective foundation around which to erect a powerful sense of socio-political solidarity amongst those who so identify themselves. For those with political objectives in mind, the more that Muslims can thereby consolidate themselves within a supra-national *umma*, the better equipped they will be to defend their collective interests.

Be that as it may, the consequence of adopting a purely textualist approach to the study of religion has several glaring deficiencies. Besides suggesting that all interpretations (and the practices derived from them) which deviate from what has come to be identified as the prescribed ideal should simply be dismissed as misguided, it also implies that all arguments about the legitimacy of such prescribed interpretations can only be properly resolved by yet more detailed textual analysis. If so, it follows

that the empirical study of *Islam as practised* is rendered wholly unnecessary: the study of texts becomes the sole legitimate source of religious illumination.

If, however, one treats Islam as a living religion which deserves - and indeed demands - detailed empirical exploration, just what sort of theoretical and analytical framework is best deployed if one is to do justice to everyday believers' own expressions of their faith? From their perspective any suggestion that their everyday beliefs and practices are mistaken, contradictory and above all 'un-Islamic' is quite absurd. They also have a ready response to such critiques: that it is their neo-revivalist critics who are mistaken, since their constant concern with behavioural conformity overlooks the key feature of living Islam: that it is above all the outcome of heart-felt experience of the immanent presence of Allah in all facets of the created world.

But if this is so, how can and should such a faith-based analytical perspective best be pursued? Must the study of 'popular religion' in this sense be placed in an entirely different category from Islamic orthodoxy? Or is there, to the contrary, a vision of Islam which is at much at ease with the spiritual and emotional vitality of popular practice as it is with the behavioural prescriptions of the legalists? To put it another way, are the ideas and practices to which contemporary revivalists take such exception really as deviant as their rhetoric suggests, or are they better regarded as the manifestation a stream of spiritual experience whose origins can be traced right back to the Prophet himself?

In a volume such as this, that question has a very obvious answer: Sufi spiritualism is as intrinsic to the Islamic tradition as is the legalism of the '*ulama*. Nevertheless simply to describe popular practice as 'Sufi' is seriously misleading, not least because that not a term which most Pakistani Muslims would normally use to identify either themselves or their practices. As far as they are concerned the term is best reserved for use as a means of identifying those spiritual adepts who are wholeheartedly committed to intense levels of spiritual practice. Hence in their view those buried beneath shrines are certainly Sufis; so too are living *pirs*, as well as their most dedicated followers. However, in no way are Sufis and their practices viewed as external to Islam: on the contrary, such figures are regarded as amongst the best of its exemplars. Nor do everyday rural Muslims see themselves as doing anything unusual - let alone contradictory - in offering prayers in shrines as well as mosques: all such activities are viewed as equally important components of a single Islamic whole.

However, in contemporary Pakistan, neo-revivalists - the majority of whom are associated with the Deobandi movement" - are making ever-more active efforts to discredit the 'Sufi' dimensions of popular practice. And if only because the two schools of thought have been in vigorous contest with one another in the plains of Hindustan to the east of Delhi for well over a century, the activists who begun to defend popular forms of Punjabi belief and practice of which the Deobandis are so critical are frequently described as Barelwi!" But whilst that appellation is now coming into increasingly widespread use, my own experience suggests that the great majority of those to whom the label is applied have very little knowledge of the teachings of Ahmad Riza Khan, or an active connection with the *Ahl-i-Sunnat* which he founded. To be sure, there is a great deal of congruence between the ideological framework which underpins Reza Khan's teachings and that around which everyday

practice in rural Punjab is constructed; but if the second is not a direct consequence of the first - and there is little evidence to support that view - it is analytically misleading to use the term 'Barelwi' to identify the roots of popular Islamic practice in rural Punjab.

The rise of Islam in the Punjab: the role of the Chishtiyya

If we are to set contemporary Islamic practice in the Punjab within an appropriate historical context, little is to be gained by confining our attention to movements which erupted in the late nineteenth century, and which only began to have a significant impact in the Punjab following Pakistan's partition from India in 1947. Islam's local roots in the Punjab have a very much longer history. As Eaton¹³ has shown in very considerable detail, the slow conversion of the region's population was largely the outcome of the proselytizing efforts of members of the Chishtiyya *silsila*, and most especially to the decision of Shaykh Farid ai-Din Ganj-i-Shakar (d. 1265 C.E.) to set up a *khanaqah* at Pakpattan on the banks of the river Ravi some distance south of Lahore early in the thirteenth century. Prior to this, Muslims were a tiny minority amongst the population at large. To be sure, military adventurers from Afghanistan and Central Asia had by then gained political control of the greater part of northern India, but at this early stage Islam was viewed as the cult of the conquerors, no less by the new rulers than by their subjects. In South Asia, no less than the remainder of the Islamic world, conversion of the broad mass of the population followed much more slowly in processes which often took several centuries to complete.

Yet before we can explore just how these processes worked out in a Punjabi context, we must first take cognizance of the region's religious character prior to the irruption of Islam. Whilst the Punjab may have been the birthplace of Indic civilization during the second millennium before the birth of Christ, the centre of gravity of the emergent Hindu tradition slipped steadily south westwards in the centuries that followed. Hence from 300 BCE onwards religious activity in the Punjab was much more Buddhist than Hindu in character. Indeed from the beginning of the Christian era right through to the period immediately prior to the arrival of Islam, the Punjab was better understood as the most easterly component of a Buddhist civilization which stretched west and north through Afghanistan to Bactria than of a Hindu civilization which was by then rapidly expanding southwards through the Deccan. Although the Punjab's Buddhist tradition does not appear (at least on the face of things) to have survived the rise of Islam, it is known to have had close links with the Tibetan form of Mahayana, and as such to be strongly 'Ianic and Sahajiyā in character'" and as Das Gupta has shown, the cosmological and gnostic assumptions around which Hindu and Buddhist forms of Sahajiyā practice were constructed were extremely similar. Hence there are good reasons for suggesting that prior to their conversion Islam the great majority of Punjab is were primarily inspired by mystically and ecstatically oriented Sahajiyā cults of one kind or another, as opposed to the more hierarchical and ritually oriented approach of the Brahminical tradition.

However, the process of conversion to Islam was far from instant: rather, it took place over the course of several generations. ¹³ Like most of the other Sufi *silsila* which

played a major role in the conversion of the inhabitants of Hindustan to Islam." the Chishtiyya movement emerged in the cities of Balkh and Samarkand - themselves still in the midst of conversion to Islam - in the eleventh century CE. Hence it was from central Asia that Gharib Nawaz set off on a life of pilgrimage and preaching which took him to Baghdad and Damascus before settling in the town of Ajmer, deep in the Rajasthan desert on the road between Delhi and Mulran, where he died in 1236 CE. However, his spiritual teachings brought him immense fame and a new title, Shaykh Mu'in ai-din Chisti; his shrine in Ajmer remains one of India's most important pilgrimage centres to this day. The Shaykh's grandson Baba Farid Ganj-i-Shakar of Pakpattan and his grandson Nizam-al-din Aulia of Delhi proved to be just as influential as their illustrious ancestor: the shrines of all three continue to attract a huge number of devotees, including a significant number of Hindus in amongst the Muslim majority.

Yet just what was it about the Chishtiyya approach that proved so attractive to Punjabi converts? That the three great Shaykhs were men of immense spiritual charisma is beyond doubt, but that, in itself, does not provide a sufficient answer. Perhaps the most significant feature of the Chishtiyya approach was their routine use of vernacular forms of expression to make allegorical interpretations of everyday experience - of farming and cattle herding, of weaving and spinning and of the trials and tribulations of family life - around which to weave their spiritual and gnostic vision.' It is also worth noting that their approach to spiritual inspiration would have been far from unfamiliar to those whom they were preaching. The Chishtiyya approach to proselytization was entirely congruent with the local Sahajiya tradition's emphasis on the profound spiritual insights which could be gained from a gnostic appreciation of the significance of participation in the natural world, and hence in the pleasures and pain of everyday being!"

Yet just how Islamic were Chishtiyya teachings? To set the whole process in context, it is worth remembering that this mission to South Asia took off shortly after the death of Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240 CE), whose richly illuminating theological and gnostic explorations have been a key source of inspiration to mystically minded Muslims ever since. Not only was Mu'in ad-din a contemporary of Ibn 'Arabi, but it is very reasonable to suppose that he encountered the Master directly during the course of the visit he made to Damascus immediately prior to settling in South Asia. What is beyond question, however, is that right from the outset Ibn 'Arabi's immensely influential cosmological doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* provided a key element of Chishtiyya teaching. Lapidus sums up the complexities of this doctrinal vision with accuracy and economy:

Everything which exists is God. The divine reality transcends all manifestations, but the manifestations are encompassed by and plunged in God. While God is transcendent the manifested world is identical with him in essence. A hadith says: 'I was a hidden treasure and I longed to be known so I created the world that I might be known'. All manifestations which reveal God are but .ohe veils which conceal him. The reality of the universe is manifested on several planes; the lower planes being symbols of the higher. The highest is the absolute essence

of God; there follow in the hierarchy of being the attributes and names of God, the actions and the presence of lordship, the world of spiritual existences, archetypes and forms, and finally, the world of senses and sensible experience."

This theosophical vision of the structure of the cosmos has immediate consequences for the pursuit of gnostic experience, for as Lapidus goes on to indicate, it also follows that:

By contemplating the cosmos, we become one with the universe. Thus human beings occupy a privileged place in creation, for they are capable of rising above their place in the material world to return to their true home in the presence of God ... the sensible world is but a dream, and must be interpreted to reveal the divine reality to which it points. Everything in nature is a symbol of *haqq*, the divine reality.

This return to God is motivated by love; it is driven by prayer and worship God is the mirror in which man contemplates his own reality, and man is the mirror in which God knows his essence. Man needs God to exist, and God needs the world to know him!"

When confronted with complexity and sophistication of Ibn 'Arabi's theological vision, it is easy for those whose experience of philosophical debate has been confined to the arena of post-enlightenment secular rationalism to conclude that ideas of such complexity would fly straight over the heads of unlettered peasants. Such a conclusion could not be more erroneous. Not only was the indigenous population of the Punjab already familiar with the broad outlines of Sahajiya thought, but they would consequently have been familiar with the equally complex theology of *viraha bhakti*,¹⁹ in both its *saguna* and *nirguna* formats," which was popularly espoused through the *Gita Gouinda*" and the *Bhagavad Purana*."

To those who expect religious traditions to remain neatly confined to separate boxes, poetic discourses which simultaneously articulate accounts of the ecstatic experience of *isbq* derived from Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*, Tantric Buddhist accounts of the way in which the path of *sahaj* can be used as a means of experiencing the entire gamut of cosmic processes within oneself, and which then top everything off with celebrations of the bitter-sweet experiences of *viraha* (a key feature of the Hindu devotional tradition) might seem to give rise to an impossibly tangled jumble of mixed metaphors. Yet despite the superficial diversity of these apparently disjointed perspectives, there are three critical points at which in which all three share a congruent set of assumptions. First that the macrocosm, the cosmos itself is structured on exactly the same basis as are all its microcosmic parts, most especially ourselves as human beings; secondly, and consequently, that what is true of the macrocosm is also true of the microcosm; and thirdly that the unqualified Source from which all existence sprang is replicated on a microcosmic scale in every nook and cranny of created existence, and most especially at the heart of human beings.

The presence of such congruence has had many consequences: in the first place it made for an easy exchange of ideas and understandings, and hence of mutual inspiration as between traditions which less-knowledgeable observers have frequently assumed were wholly discrepant; secondly, it actively facilitated the use of spiritual charisma as

a means of proselytization, as the huge impact of the Chishtiyya Shaykhs and their teachings on the indigenous population of Hindustan very clearly demonstrates; thirdly and more generally, it provided fertile ground for the emergence of a highly distinctive Indo-Islamic cultural synthesis, no less in terms of art and architecture, poetry, music, dance and religion, which reached a peak of magnificence during the Mughal period.

The historical roots of popular Punjabi culture

By now some readers may be feeling bemused: having begun by indicating that the central objective of this chapter was to explore the logic of popular religious practice in rural Punjab, an exploration of its historical roots has taken us in quite the opposite direction. Not only has it required us to take note of what many may regard as arcane dimensions of Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu cosmology, but has eventually led us to take note of the high levels of artistic and intellectual creativity achieved during the Mughal period: the 'high culture' of a 'great tradition' if ever there was one.

It goes without saying that the Indo-Islamic cultural conventions which emerged in rural Punjab were far from being wholly congruent with those which by members of the Mughal Empire's aristocratic elite so carefully cultivated amongst themselves. Nevertheless I would argue that the common assumption that local traditions such as those found in rural Punjab were nothing but pale (and hence inferior) copies of superior ways of the urban elite is as patronizing as it is misleading, especially in the light of philosophical outlook which both the Sufis and the Sahajiyas went out of their way to articulate. Not only did India's most respected Sufis actively reject the pleasures and temptations of royal courts in favour of the opportunities for peaceful contemplation in the jungle, but as Das Gupta also indicates:

The poets of the Sahajiya school laid the whole emphasis on their protest against the formalities of life and religion [They] were averse to the elaborate formalities of religion and concentrated their attention on the attainment of blissful ultimate nature as the highest truth, for which they took help of the natural propensities of man Deepest was their hatred towards those recondite scholars who would try to know the truth through discursive reason The truth which can fully be realized only by the self can never be known by the scholars, for what comes within the scope of our mind can never be the absolute truth."

Having thus rejected the sophisticated formalism of both the aristocratic and the scholarly elite, those pursuing this strand of practice sought inspiration - as did Guru Nanak" - in the ever-deeper appreciation of the everyday world. Hence for them it was through the gnostic experience of the rhythms of nature rather than of abstract philosophy, of sexual activity rather than sexual abstinence, and above all of everyday domestic and agricultural activities rather than through participation in the ritual of royal courts that the route to *sahaj* could best be opened up.

The profound difference between these two approaches can immediately be appreciated if one compares Manjhan's aristocratically oriented tale of the mutual devotion of Manohar and Madhurnalati" with Waris Shah's much more rurally oriented tale of the

life and love of Hir and Ranjha" Both poems are similarly structured: there is a strong sense in which both radically extended versions of Jayadeva's Gita Govinda. As such they present elaborately allegorical (and hence gnostically inspirational) accounts of two lovers' experience of ecstatic union and equally painful separation, thereby establishing a multi-dimensional space within which to conduct an exploration of the trials and tribulations - as well as the brief ecstatic pleasures encountered by those who throw themselves body and soul into the experience '*isbq, rasa, viraha, sahaj, lana, baqa* and so forth. In doing so the symbolic logic of each story undermines all conventional distinctions between the Hindu and the Islamic traditions: in a graphic illustration of creative power of Indo-Islamic religious and cultural syntheses, both tales make equal sense from either perspective. Nevertheless there are huge differences in the way in which the two approach their goal. The first is written in courtly Hindawi, the second in common Punjabi; the first tells of aristocratic princes and princesses, whilst in the second the protagonists' lifestyles are comprehensively congruent with those of everyday Punjabi villagers; and whilst the first flaunts its 'cleverness' by incorporating all manner of oblique literary, scholarly and philosophical references, the second carefully avoids such overt scholarly pretentiousness. Indeed, apart from few explicit statements which appear in the opening and closing sections of his text, Waris Shah's rendition of the tale of Hir Ranjha makes few direct efforts to underline the multiple allegorical images which run right through it. This apparent parsimony is wholly in keeping with the Sahajiya view that if the Ultimate is embedded in everyday existence, it follows that any kind of intellectual artifice is more of an obstacle than a signpost towards an appreciation of the Truth. Hence if those without eyes to see or ears to hear describe the story as 'a Punjabi Romeo and Juliet' - as they not infrequently do - then so be it. If the experience of hearing it is sufficiently entertaining, perhaps the channels of understanding will open a little wider next time round, and yet more still after each successive hearing.

Not only does folk wisdom in rural Punjab strongly support this latter view, but a careful reading the poem's invocation and epilogue provides clear directions as to how its secrets can be unlocked - although characteristically enough in the context of a Sahajiya-inspired text, the instructions have to be read from back to front. As the epilogue puts it:

The story of true lovers is like the scent of a rose in a garden. He who reads it with love in his heart will be able to separate the true from the false. I have written a poem of much pith even as a string of royal pearls. I have written it at length and embellished it with various beautiful things. I have written it as a parable. It is as beautiful as a necklace of rubies ...

Oh wise man, you should note that there is a secret under the guise of my words. I have written this Hir with care and meditation. Young people read it with pleasure. I have planted a flower to give a sweet savour ...

Meanwhile in the invocation we find Waris explaining:

In truth it is meet and proper to praise God and invoke the help of Saints and Prophets before essaying this story of Love. My friends came to me and said,

'Write for us afresh the forgotten story of the Love of Hir'. So we have written it right cunningly and plucked a new rose in the Garden of Poetry. Even as a sweet smell cometh out of musk so is the fragrance of love distilled from the beauty of our verse. We have bridled the steed of genius, set Love on his back, and let him loose on the field.

But just what is the Love of which the poem sings? The opening words of the poem make that quite clear:

Praise be to God who made love the foundation of the world; God Himself was the first lover for He loved the Prophet Muhammad.

In other words the subject of the poem is *'ishq* - the route which devotees must take if they are to follow the Prophet's *Sunna* as the beloved of Allah.

This kind of approach to spiritual and gnostic exegesis remains very familiar to contemporary Punjabis, not so much as a result of a familiarity of the entire corpus of Waris' text, but rather as a result of frequent references to episodes and epigrams to the tale in everyday speech. In recent years this powerful undercurrent of popular culture has been powerfully reinforced by the immense popularity of the *qawwalis*²⁷ of the late Nusrat Fateh 'Ali Khan. Drawn from a long lineage of devotional *qawwali* singers, his lyrics are grounded as much in the poetry of Bulleh Shah as they in the imagery of Hir Ranjha; and in multifariously celebrating the bitter-sweet experience of *'ishq* his *qawwalis* not only inspire those audiences fortunate enough to be able to attend a live performance, but thanks to the widespread reproduction of his songs on CD, his inspirational interpretations now eagerly circulate around a global Punjabi community. In consequence Nusrat Fateh 'Ali's celebration of the spiritual and gnostic insights which underpin the Punjabi religious tradition find almost as ready an audience amongst Hindus and Sikhs as they do amongst Muslims.

It goes without saying that neo-conservative purists invariably view the ongoing popularity of *qawwali* with alarm: in the light of their understanding of the Prophet's *Sunna*, such interpretations of Islam are wholly misguided. However, my reason for highlighting their criticism here is to not open a judgemental debate about the rightness or wrongness of any given interpretation of the Prophet's message. Rather it is to make an empirical observation: that the popular culture of the Punjab, and most especially the spiritually oriented dimensions remain to this day one of the central vehicles through which popular religious understandings are experienced, transmitted and expressed - no less in the diaspora than in the Punjab itself. But just as in every other corner of *Dar ai-Islam*, these processes are far from uniform. Each has taken place in a specific local context, whose historical specificities remain an intrinsic component of the final product. Hence Hir, no less than in Madhumalati, is a richly elaborated hybrid. Popular religion, no less than popular culture, is the product of creative interweaving of a range of traditions whose many components comprehensively interpenetrate - and hence mutually illuminate - eoe another. Are the resulting interpretations 'uri-Islamic'? That is not a question for me to resolve. All I would note is that if the answer is 'yes', it follows that the same judgement must also

be made of the teachings of Sufi luminaries such Ibn 'Arabi and the Chishtiyya *pirs*,²⁸ whose philosophical, theological and cosmological insights underpin Nusrat Fateh Ali's contemporary *qawwalis* just as comprehensively as they do Waris Shah's Hir.

The reconstruction of popular Punjabi Islam in Britain

So far I have deliberately restricted my discussion of the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of Islamic practice in the Punjab to developments in its indigenous home base. However, during the course of the past half century an ever-growing number of Punjabi Muslims have set off overseas as labour migrants, and have by now established thriving ethnic colonies in the Middle East, the United States, in Germany and Denmark, and last but not least in the UK: Britain's Pakistani Muslim population is now rather more than three quarters of a million strong. The more firmly such migrants - as well as their overseas-born offspring - have established themselves in their new homes, the more comprehensively they have begun to reconstitute almost every aspects of their social, cultural and religious heritage. The results are now plain to see: a multitude of self-sustaining ethnic colonies have by now sprung to life within the heart of most British cities.

With such considerations in mind the remainder of this chapter focuses on three main themes: firstly, on the ways in which settlers have set about re-establishing the most significant features of their own familiar religious universe in urban and largely post-Christian contexts; secondly, on the changes and transformations precipitated during the course of these processes of reconstruction; and thirdly, on the increasingly vocal challenges to their parents' heritage which their British-born offspring are now beginning to articulate. In parallel to developments elsewhere in the Islamic world, many of Britain's upwardly mobile and educationally successful young Muslims find themselves strongly attracted to scripturally inspired neo-revivalist movements such as the *jama'at-i Islami*, the *'abligh-i-jama'ar* and *Hizb ut-Tahrir*. Besides providing them with a ready means of challenging the anti-Islamism which has become such a salient feature of contemporary British society, such movements also provide them with a ready means of distancing themselves from their parents' beliefs and practices on the grounds that they are irrational, illegitimate and most critically of all, that they are 'Hindu' rather than 'Islamic' in character.

The early pioneers

It goes without saying the dynamics of these developments which have precipitated these outcomes need to be set within their specific socio-historical context. The Punjabi Muslim presence in Britain can be traced back to arrival of ex-seamen and ex-soldiers during the course of the Second World War, many of whom were promptly recruited to provide additional manpower for labour-starved munitions factories. Those pioneers who stayed on into the post-war period provided a bridgehead for further settlement. Hence when Britain's labour-intensive foundries and textile mills ran acutely short of unskilled labour with the onset of the post-war boom, each of these bridgeheads became the focus of ever-escalating inflows of chain migration, most of which

were directed towards industrial cities in the Midlands and the Pennine region. Conditions were hard. Restricted to jobs which no-one else wanted because they were hot, hard, unpleasant and anti-social in character, Pakistani Muslims found themselves standing right at the bottom of the British social order. Not that they cared very much. Although constantly on the look out for jobs which offered marginally better pay and conditions, few of the early pioneers regarded themselves as anything other than temporary sojourners in a wholly alien environment. Hence they were prepared to work all the hours God gave for six or even seven days a week, to pare down their living expenses to the lowest possible level, and to defer almost all forms of personal gratification to speed the day when they could leave the hell-hole of urban Britain behind them. Their goal was clear: the greater the extent of their personal sacrifice, the more swiftly they could take their new wealth back to the ease and comfort of their real homes."

In such circumstances, sojourners made little effort to maintain the niceties of civilized life. Any effort that they might make to do so seemed as pointless as it was unrealistic. Not only were the necessary physical resources largely unavailable, but the very pursuit of such goals contradicted the central purpose of their whole enterprise: to earn and save as much money as possible as quickly as possible. Given all this, conformity to the formal behavioural principles of Islam largely went by the board. Collective prayer was virtually non-existent, and even the personal performance of *namaz* was rare. To be sure, the consumption of pork was usually avoided, but little else. Pubs offered the only site for a little relaxation, whilst prostitutes were occasionally hired to satisfy what these hard-working men regarded as their necessary physical needs. Otherwise they lived a life of endless labour. In the midst of all this many sojourners may well have turned to poetry and music - or in other words to the resources of the popular traditions outlined earlier - no less as a source of psychological succour than of spiritual inspiration. Whilst I can offer little concrete evidence that this was so in the case amongst the earliest of Punjabi Muslim sojourners, Joginder Shams her provides extensive evidence of the richness of these developments amongst their Sikh counterparts:."

Desh Pardesh: the reconstruction of a social, cultural and religious universe

This pioneering phase of comprehensive social and cultural abnegation could not, however, be sustained for ever. Contrary to their initial expectations, most sojourners found the passage to Britain was an entrepreneurial exercise with long-term consequences. Hence whilst almost everyone eventually took their longed-for furlough in Pakistan, during the course of which their savings provided them with an opportunity to savour all the pleasures for which they had sacrificed so much, their trip to paradise could not last for ever. As the returnees' savings were steadily depleted, few could resist the temptation to yet further boost their assets by return to the treadmill for a further spell of wealth-generation.

Nor were they alone in doing so. Since the material benefits of migration 'Were as massive as they were self-evident, every returnee found himself besieged by friends and kinsfolk seeking advice and assistance as to how best to follow in their footsteps.

Hence from the 1960s onwards the scale of the South Asian presence in Britain began to follow a pattern of almost exponential growth. With this the footholds which the sojourners had initially carved out for themselves were gradually opened up into ever more substantial niches, which in turn began to develop into more fully fledged ethnic colonies. Once that transformation had occurred, those involved began to make ever more intensive efforts to reconstruct all the major social, cultural and religious institutions of their homelands."

Whilst this switch from temporary sojourner to more firmly rooted settler is commonplace enough, the Pakistani Muslims who made their way to Britain - and most especially the Mirpuris from Azad Kashmir who made up well over half their number - moved much more tardily towards reuniting their families (the ultimate sign of colony-construction) than did any other group of South Asian origin other than the Bangladeshis.³² As a result Britain's Mirpuri population was still overwhelmingly composed of adult males until well into the 1970s. Nevertheless, by then processes of more active religious reconstruction had gradually begun to take off. Groups of men who had taken up residence in a single locality, and especially those linked by ties of common kinship began to pool their resources to buy small terraced houses which could be used as mosques, and to recruit Maulwis to lead them in their prayers. When the congregations began to overwhelm such premises they went on to buy larger houses, disused churches and even mills and office blocks to serve the same purpose. Islamic Britain was beginning to crystallize."

Mosques and their organization

Mosques in Britain soon began to fulfil a wider set of functions than do their counterparts in rural Punjab. Especially in the early days, the mosque was the only arena in which sojourners-turning-settlers could gather collectively on their own terms. Hence besides providing an arena for the collective performance of *namaz*, they also became gathering points in which lonely men could meet, socialize and exchange information - a function which they retain to this day. Moreover, when settlers were joined by their wives and children from the mid-1970s onwards, mosques gained a more explicit educational function. The Maulwis' duties were expanded to include teaching children to read, recite and memorize the Qur'an in classes which were normally held every afternoon after the close of school. Mosques became increasingly busy places.

In the early 1980s the settlers' commitment to religious activities received a boost from an unexpected source: a major industrial recession to which many Pakistani Muslim communities found themselves disproportionately vulnerable. Although textile mills and iron foundries had long provided them with a stable, if relatively ill-paid, source of employment, the sector of the labour market on which they had come to rely suddenly collapsed. The consequences for middle-aged Pakistani men living and working in the Pennine region were devastating. Most had very limited fluency in English, few transferable skills and were also in the midst of reuniting their families. Suddenly reliant on unemployment benefits which were usually rendered relatively generous as a result of the size of their families, they also found themselves with unlimited time on their hands. What were they now to do with themselves?

Whilst many younger men took to taxi-driving or opened rakes; the elders found themselves faced with a narrower range of options. Some opened shops, or assisted their kinsmen in the businesses in which they were already engaged; others took allotments, and began to grow vegetables; however, large numbers of men more 'elderly' men (many of whom were no older than their early forties) gravitated to the mosque, where a new-found enthusiasm for prayer provided them with a means of restoring at least some degree of meaning and purpose to their lives. Congregations began to grow by leaps and bounds, existing mosques began to be refurbished and repainted, and ever more efforts began to be made to raise the funds for the construction of purpose-built mosques whose domes have now begun to pepper the skyline of many British industrial cities.) Moreover, these new mosques are hives of activity. In addition to hosting regular daily prayers - and huge congregations at midday prayers on Fridays - most also support an after-school *madrasa*, and have very often successfully gained access to substantial local authority and urban regeneration funding to support 'community centres' of one kind or another." All this has served to support the rapid reconstruction of the behaviourally oriented dimensions of religious practice within each of Britain's multiplicity of Pakistani Muslim ethnic colonies.

Nevertheless the passage to Britain has begun to precipitate significant transformations in everyday practice. Given the need to register themselves as charities, as well as to conform to local safety and planning regulations, each mosque had to give itself an acceptable organizational structure, such that power and financial responsibility was assigned to a formally constituted management committee. Whilst this posed no great problem in principle, since such committees simply replicated the more informal structures utilized back home in the Punjab, their greater degree of administrative formality concentrated a great deal of power in the hands of the Chairman of the Management Committee. Hence ferocious factional struggles frequently erupted for control of this office, especially when it also provided effective control over the spending of substantial amounts of Local Authority regeneration funding. It is also worth noting that in keeping with Pakistani traditions, the Chairman and his fellow committee members kept the closest of tabs on the Maulvis whom they chose to employ. Whilst Maulvis may have been treated with respect, power remained firmly in the hands of the laity, just as it does in rural Punjab, where Mullahs and Maulwis are firmly regarded as *kammi*, village servants. Hence the Bradford Council of Mosques, a body which was explicitly formed as a means of articulating the local Muslim community's collective interests, has always been composed of members of its constituent mosques' management committees."

Pirs and their re-emergence

In contrast to formally constituted mosques, the more spiritual and occult dimensions of popular belief and practice have much less formal organizational roots. Hence whilst the organization and construction of mosques still provides the most overt manifestation of an Islamic presence in Britain, just as images of congregational prayers within them provide a clear indication of the re-emergence of behavioural orthodoxy, it would be quite wrong to conclude that the paucity of overt indications of the re-establishment

of the more spiritual and occult forms of popular practice means that this dimension of Punjabi Islam has fallen into abeyance in the UK. Far from it: from its early roots as source of inspiration to the early sojourners, activities in this sphere were powerfully reinforced as family reunion began to take off from the mid-1970s onwards. That it should have done so should be a cause of no surprise: just as they did back in the Punjab, settlers who found themselves facing intractable personal difficulties turned to this dimension of their tradition for succour and support.

. But whilst recourse to the more spiritual and occult dimensions of popular practice has become increasingly frequent in every ethnic colony in the UK, it has also become a focus of considerable contention, not least because women tend to be much more avid consumers of the *pirs'* services than men. Could it be that this is the result (as many male critics suggest) of women's inherent tendency to be 'more emotional', 'less well informed' and 'more superstitious' than men? In my view such arguments should be regarded as wholly specious, since a much more illuminating perspective on the rationale behind women's use of such resources can be gained in the light of a consideration of the nature and extent of their responsibilities within the domestic group. However much formal authority men may claim over the affairs of their extended families, it is quite clear that whenever serious trouble erupts in the domestic sphere - be it the illness of a child, troubled marital relationships, a daughter-in-law's failure to produce offspring or of a teenager going off the rails - it is the women of the household who are expected (and who indeed expect) to sort these matters out. Hence family reunion in Britain presented settlers' wives with two parallel sets of challenges: on the one hand, to find some means of resolving these only too familiar forms of personal and interpersonal difficulties in a largely alien context, and on the other, to find some means of coping with all the novel challenges precipitated by residence in urban Britain. How and when should one wean a child when fresh vegetables and milk from the farm are unavailable? What remedies should one use for everyday aches and pains in the new circumstances? How should children be fed and dressed in an environment which is much colder, much wetter, and so much more bleakly urban than anything than they had hitherto experienced? How should daughters be prepared for the perils of sexuality in the midst of society which appeared to lack any sense of shame or personal modesty? The list could be extended indefinitely through the whole life cycle. Nor were these issues themselves the only challenges. A much more profound set of queries came to the fore when things went wrong: when illness, accidents and other kinds of disasters struck.

To be sure, settlers could now make use of all sorts of public services - most especially in the field of health care - which were largely unavailable back home. But however welcome access to such facilities that might be in principle, it turned to be far from easy to make full use of them. Communication proved to be a huge problem: few doctors or nurses spoke Urdu or Punjabi, and most assumed that it was their patients' responsibility to learn English if they wanted to gain access to treatment. Moreover, even if settlers managed to overcome such barriers to communication - which relatively few of the first generation of women did with any speed, given that they were tied down by so many more pressing domestic responsibilities - they immediately encountered an even more serious hurdle. Given that staff responsible for the delivery of

public services - whether in medical, psychological, social or educational contexts - for the most part lacked the requisite degree of cultural competence, they all too often misdiagnosed the precise character of the difficulties faced by their minority clients. Hence whilst public services displayed a welcome capacity to respond to financial adversity with benefit payments, and to remedy the more physical aspects of personal distress (such as setting broken bones, diagnosing strokes and heart attacks, and identifying childhood abnormalities as being of genetic origin), they were much less well equipped to respond to the more qualitative and metaphysical dimensions of their Pakistani clients' concerns. Answers to such pressing questions as to just *why* misfortune should have struck just then, there, and have been directed that particular victim went unanswered, as did their equally pressing concerns about the precise steps that should be taken to ensure that the malevolent forces which had precipitated the difficulties in question would not strike again.

All this stood in marked contrast to settlers' experience back home in rural Pakistan. Precisely because services with which to remedy the physical dimensions of personal problems are so limited - and so expensive - in that context, villagers routinely turn to *pirs* and their shrines in an effort to resolve the worst of the spiritual and psychological difficulties they encounter in the course of their everyday life. Hence it should come as no surprise that they have continued to look to such sources of succour in the aftermath of their passage to Britain, and that as the years have passed, increasingly sophisticated responses to those needs have begun to emerge.

At the outset those responses were wholly *ad hoc*. Insightful individuals, and especially those who had some experience of such activities back in the Punjab, began to do their best to assist their fellow migrants, and if their interventions proved successful it was not long before they began to attract an ever-increasing number of clients. But if local practitioners were unable to provide a remedy and the affliction became steadily more serious, those in distress often concluded that the most appropriate course was to make a pilgrimage back to Pakistan to seek the assistance from better-established *pirs* and shrines. Yet although such pilgrimages continue to be made, the need to do so is steadily diminishing: as ethnic colonies in Britain expanded rapidly expanded in both scale and sophistication, not only have more or less full-time *pirs* begun to emerge in the UK, but following their deaths (of which there have been relatively few so far) their devotees have begun to transform their tombs into ever more fully-fledged shrines. Slowly but surely, the whole panoply of popular practice in rural Punjab is steadily being recreated in Britain. To my knowledge, no detailed ethnographic study of these developments in the UK has yet been conducted. What I can confirm, however, is that when families of rural origin run into serious difficulties in Britain - and in the course of my professional practice as a consultant anthropologist I very frequently come into contact with families in this position - I invariably find that they have visited a succession of *pirs* and shrines (certainly in Britain, and very often in Pakistan as well) in an effort to resolve their problems.

Similar processes of imaginative reconstruction have also taken place at all sorts of other levels. Hence, for example, most villagers would have had few opportunities to absorb the significance of lyrics of *qawwalis*, unless they made regular pilgrimages to the *urs* of major shrines, where such performances are a central item on the spiritual

agenda. In Britain, however, tape-recorders and then CD players were widely available. And it was not just film songs from Bollywood to which settlers listened: recordings of numerous performances by maestros such as Nusrat Fateh 'Ali Khan are sold in huge numbers in the UK, whilst large and ecstatic audiences attended all his live performances. In other words the first generation of Punjabi settlers in Britain - most of whom still have many years of active life before them - have by now actively reconstructed most aspects of the religious world within the context of which they grew up around themselves. However, it would be a great mistake to conclude that this process is the outcome of simple unthinking traditionalism: it is precisely because of the depth and complexity of the challenges with which settlers have found themselves confronted that they have turned with such enthusiasm to the sources of psychological and spiritual succour which the popular religious traditions of the Punjab so readily supply.

The British born and raised second generation

Once we move on to consider the response of the British-born second generation to these challenges the picture becomes a great deal more complex. Most Anglo-Asian Muslims are fiercely proud of their religious heritage, not least as a result of their constant exposure to racial and ethnic exclusionism. But although they are consequently strongly committed to presenting themselves as Muslims, many have by now become deeply critical of their parents' interpretations of the Islamic tradition, with the result that they have begun to add all sorts of additional dimensions to the process of religious reconstruction in the UK. However, the dynamics of these processes have now become exceedingly complex: not only are the younger people beginning to follow an ever more diverse range of adaptive trajectories, but whatever the course they choose, most are just as eager to distance themselves from the attitudes and conventions of their parents as they are from those preferred by the English majority.

In making sense of these responses, two points are crucial. In the first place it is essential to remember that just because someone is comprehensively familiar with English linguistic and behavioural conventions, it certainly does not follow that the person in question is necessarily 'English' in any existential sense. Most young Anglo-Asians have now become sophisticated cross-cultural navigators, such that they can manoeuvre their way with just as much ease through arenas structured in terms of their parents' cultural conventions as they do in those where they are expected to conform with those deployed by members of the dominant majority.¹ Yet despite their development of extensive navigational skills, which also include those which they deploy in their own self-constructed Anglo-Asian arenas, it is now becoming increasingly clear that relatively few of those who were both born and brought up in Britain still use Punjabi or Urdu as their principle vehicle for communication. English has become their first language, most especially amongst the ever-increasing proportion of young people who are achieving educational and professional success. As a result an ever-increasing proportion of Anglo-Asians have no adequate means of comprehending, and hence lack access to, the conceptual universe

within which their parents operate. Hence while most are familiar with behavioural dimensions of the popular practices outlined in this chapter, the conceptual logic around which those practices are constructed are quite literally beyond their ken.

The outcome of these developments is now plain to see. In intellectual terms there is a strong sense in which the rising generation of Pakistanis are comprehensively anglicized. Not only has the greater part of their educational development taken place within an English linguistic universe, with all its attendant cultural and conceptual assumptions, but they have rarely if ever been provided with an opportunity to explore the distinctive aspects of their religious and cultural heritage in its own terms. The consequent dilemmas are huge: despite their intense commitment to Islam as a means of flagging their own personal self-identification, many aspects of their parents' interpretation of that tradition - and most those of its dimensions which appear to be as irrational as they are superstitious - leave them with feeling of deep intellectual and conceptual unease.

But despite their ever-growing concern to distance themselves from those aspects of their parents' heritage which they consequently identify as 'backward', 'primitive' and 'obscurantist', only a small minority find the prospect of identifying themselves as 'English' either meaningful or attractive: the strength of majority devaluations of Pakistanis in general and of Muslims in particular rules out any such possibility. In these circumstances the issue of identity has become increasingly problematic for young Anglo-Asians. If the preferred lifestyles of their parents leave them feeling almost as uneasy as those deployed by the native English, just how should they identify themselves? And around what sorts of ideas and values should they seek to organize their personal lives?

For many, 'pure' Islam now provides an attractive answer all such questions, not least because it provides them with a means of simultaneously confronting both horns of their underlying dilemma. Turning to Islam very publicly is undoubtedly an extremely attractive option in the face of ever-rising levels of ethno-religious exclusionism. Not only does Islam explicitly identify itself as the culmination of the Abrahamic tradition, but its long historical role as Christianity's *bete noir* makes it a wonderful instrument with which to challenge white, European and post-Christian denigration. However, this does not in itself provide a solution to the second horn of their dilemma: their feelings of shame about what they have to come to view as the inherent 'backwardness' of many aspects of their parents' lifestyles, let alone the manifestly 'superstitious' character of so many of their religious beliefs and practices. Hence it is precisely because they actively reject all these dimensions of popular practice that neo-revivalist movements such as the Tabligh-i-jama'at, the Jama'at-i Islami and the Hizb ut-Tahrir have found such a ready audience amongst the younger generation: they provide an extremely effective and intellectually coherent means of addressing both arms of their dilemma.

The precise reasons why this is so are worth reviewing. On the domestic front, neo-revivalism provides young people with a highly effective means of taking the moral high ground *vis-a-vis* established dimensions of popular practice. Above all it legitimates the rejection of all those aspects of their parents' priorities which they find unacceptable - including making pilgrimages to shrines, the use of *ta'wiz*, the view

that higher education is unsuitable for girls, and above all to the expectation that parent have a duty to arrange their children's marriages - as erroneous, un-Islamic and worse still, 'Hindu'. Meanwhile it also provides an equally effective foundation around which to construct defensive arguments against external critics. In the face of negative comments about the inherent 'backwardness' of custom and practice in local Muslim communities, they now have a ready answer to hand: that everything so criticized is not really Islamic at all, but an unfortunate accretion which has led some Muslims into making some misguided deviations from the straight path.

However, the adoption of neo-orthodox perspectives provides much more than a means of keeping such negative forces at bay: it also fosters positively inspirational, and indeed millenarian, outlook of a kind which student idealists have always found attractive. To be sure, Islam may be under attack, whether in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Kashmir, Palestine and indeed, the streets of Bradford. However, this only draws the response that Islam is now the world's fastest growing religion, and that despite the intensity of the forces bearing down on Muslims everywhere, Khilafat will come! Against this background, groups such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir conceive of themselves as forming an elite vanguard, whose structure and appeal is closely congruent with those which underpin many Trotskyite groups on the far left. Adopting dedicated and austere lifestyles grounded in a sense of ideological purity, they see themselves as the emergent leadership of a future Islamic (as opposed to socialist) uprising.

Whether or not one sympathizes with such a goal, or indeed whether or not its achievement is in any way realistic, the adoption of such an outlook brings clear benefits, at least in the short term. Partying, the most favoured leisure activity amongst young people drawn from the ethnic majority, is left firmly to one side. Instead austerity, uprightness, dedication and above all hard work - the central characteristics of the protestant ethic - are very much the order of the day amongst the faithful. Neo-revivalism is far from being incompatible with academic and commercial success. On the contrary, the two tend to be self-reinforcing: given the scale of the exclusionary obstacles which people of colour so regularly encounter, and the extent to which they must of necessity look to their own resources if they are ever to overcome them, neo-revivalist behavioural strategies tend to precipitate positive material benefits.

Nevertheless it is now becoming increasingly clear that these developments also have a serious downside, not just amongst the students who are the most enthusiastic proponents of such perspectives, but also within Britain's Muslim communities at large. Like so many other politically driven ideologies, and most especially those which are defensively conceived, neo-revivalism is a highly effective recruiting sergeant; but by just the same token it one which finds it difficult to retain such recruits over the longer term. It is easy to see why. Despite its capacity to provide ideologically grounded solutions to the dilemmas with which young Anglo-Asians so frequently find themselves confronted, the lifestyles which it predicates are austere in the extreme. According to its protagonists almost all forms of pleasurable relaxation - from music and dance through to watching films and television - should be foresworn by pious Muslims. In the same vein, neo-revivalism is equally dismissive of any kind of reflective

engagement with Islamic history, or indeed with the richness of the creative hybridity which underpins every dimension of the Indo-Islamic religious, linguistic and cultural synthesis.

To be sure, those who take their stand on prescriptive and essentialist interpretations of Islam provide themselves with an excellent means of keeping pestilential Western enquirers at bay behind a wall of absolutism. But whilst the adoption of full-scale *hijab* by many young women (for example) provides a very effective means of doing just that, it is well worth remembering that there is no necessary correlation between the strictness with which a person maintains behavioural orthodoxy and the depth of their religious knowledge. Most devotees of neo-revivalism have far clearer notions of that which they reject than that which inspires them. Behavioural orthodoxy may indeed provide an excellent platform for political mobilization; but given that it offers so little in the way of intellectual and spiritual succour and its insistence that all forms of leisure and pleasure should be discarded, it should come as no surprise that that support for this vision rarely lasts much longer than its exponents' student years.

Conclusion: Prospects for the future

In Britain, as in Pakistan and indeed in almost every part of the Islamic world, support for neo-revivalism is currently growing apace, most particularly amongst the young and disadvantaged. But if current developments in Britain are anything to go by, the swing of the pendulum towards the behavioural end of the spectrum may well have reached its limits, and that as the more extreme forms of revivalism turn out to be unsustainable, at least in personal terms, in anything more than the short run the more spiritual and gnostic dimensions of the tradition as a whole may well begin to reassert themselves. And if that is indeed the case, future generations of Anglo-Asian will begin to make much more determined efforts by members of the younger generation to make much more creative use of all the resources of their religious, linguistic and cultural heritage, rather than the tiny section of that rich spectrum on which the neo-revivalists exclusively rely. If so, the neo-revivalists' current heroic efforts to reconstruct the lifestyles of seventh-century Hijaz could usefully be tempered by a much more positive appreciation of the totality of the resources bound up in their ancestral heritage.

Notes

- It goes without saying that in Islamic terms Allah is a phenomenon which stands beyond all discrete qualities, and therefore has no gender. Unfortunately English, unlike Arabic, lacks non-gender specific pronouns.
- 2 This chapter is the product of a series of fieldwork visits to Indian and Pakistani Punjab, most of which were supported by grants from the ESRC, supplemented by further fieldwork within Mirpuri and Jullunduri ethnic colonies in the UK. Further visual material which graphically illustrates the arguments developed here can be found at <http://www.art.man.ac.uk/CASAS/presentations/teaching/teaching.htm>.

- 3 This Pfoinkis particularly clearly articulated in Harjot Oberoi's extended discussion of the *Ujran* of *Harjot Sarwar* (1994), 147 ff. Although written very firmly from the perspective of arms, *istrer* officer, Aubrey O'Brien's account of 'The Mohammedan Saints of Western Punjab (~911) contains a wealth of ethnographic detail and an excellent ethnographic account of these practices in early modern Punjab.
- 4 Shrines in the Punjab have a clear colour coding: green for Islam; blue and/or yellow for the Sikh tradition; orange for Hindus; and red for Ravidasis, Valmikis, and Ad Dharmis.
- 5 c; ~nll other words the shrines established by Dalits, the Punjab's former 'untouchables'.
- 6 u er account of these procedures, and of the logic which underpins them can be found in Roger Ballard (1999).
- 6 Numerous revivalist groups now articulate this view. The resultant policy of Islamization was explicitly encouraged by the Pakistani state, whilst General Zia ul Haq was in power and has intermittently been supported by various regimes since then.
- 7 Michael Gilson (1990) addresses just the same issues as those confronted here in his still unsurpassed analysis *Recognising Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Middle East*.
- 8 As Mr Justice Munir emphasized in his still immensely illuminating report (Munir and Kayani 1954), this is much more difficult than is commonly appreciated. When it comes to matters of *fiqh* drawn from different schools of law invariably find much more about which to disagree than to agree.
- 9 B. D. Metcalf, (1982).
- 10 Usha Sanyal, (1996a).
- 11 Richard Eaton, (2000), Chapters 8, 9 and 10.
- 12 Tantric and Sahajiyā developments in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions on north India are masterfully discussed by Shashibhushan Das Gupta (1969).
- 13 Eaton, *ibid.* 222.
- 14 It is worth remembering that Hindustan has long been primarily a *geographical* rather than a religious identifier. It was used to refer to all the territories to the West and South of the River Indus, together with their inhabitants.
- 15 Eaton (2000), Chapter 8, and Annemarie Schimmel, (2001).
- 16 Das Gupta, *ibid.*
- 17 Ira Lapidus, 1988, pp. 213-214.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 215.
- 19 Friedhelm Hardy, (1983).
- 20 John Hawley, (1988).
- 21 Barbara Stoler Miller, (1977).
- 22 David Pockock, (1986).
- 23 Das Gupta 1969, pp. 51-53).
- 24 Khushwant Singh, (1991).
- 25 Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman, (2000).
- 26 Frederick Osborne, (1973).
- 27 *Qawwali* are the devotional songs in praise of both Allah and his Prophet, and then going to explore the complexities of *ishq* in the midst of *wahdat-al-wujud* which were traditionally sung to celebrate the *urs* of every buried *pir*.
- 28 ~n a later exposition, Desiderio Pinto (1995) shows just how comprehensively Ibn Arabi's theological and cosmological vision still underpins contemporary teaching and practice in Delhi's most important Chishtiya shrine.
- 29 Abdullah Hussein provides a wryly graphic of the trials and tribulations of these early pioneers in his novel *Emigre Journeys* (2000).
- 30 Joginder Shamsher, (1989).
- 31 Detailed accounts of these processes can be found in Roger Ballard (1994).
- 32 Roger Ballard, (1990).
- 33 Philip Lewis (1994) gives an excellent account of these developments in Bradford.
- 34 See Virinder Kalra, (2000).

- 35 Thanks to planning objections, minarets are much more rarely to be seen than domes: and ~h~ domes which are actually constructed are usually very much smaller than the architect originally proposed. It goes without saying that the towers and spires of Christ~n churches do not attract similar objections, but are regarded as a welcome addition to the urban skyline. Indeed planners usually make every effort to ensure that other buildings do not obscure them.
- 36 A detailed account of activities with such a local mosque can be found in McLoughlin (2004).
- 37 Philip Lewis, (1997).
- 38 R. Ballard, (1994, pp. 30-34).

Glossary

- Adab Proper behaviour, good manners
- Adab islami works Islamic literature
- Ahl-i Hadith 'The followers of the Prophetic tradition'
- Ahl al-Sunna Sunnites
- Ahl-i Sunnat wa-jama'ar The people of the tradition of the Prophet and the Community
- Ahl al-tasawwuf Sufis, Islamic mystics
- Ahl-i khidmat Serving dervishes
- Ahwal Mystical states
- 'Aid-i fitr End of Ramadan
- Al-insan al-kamil The perfect being
- 'Amal Practical worship
- 'Aqida Belief, faith
- Ashram A Hindu hermitage, college
- Awliya Holy men, 'friends of God'; pl. of wali
- Baqa Persistence in the divinely bestowed attributes
- Baraka The power to blessing
- Barelwi Group called after its founder Ahmad Riza Khan from Bareilly/India
- Batin Inner meaning, internal
- (giving) Bay'a Act by which the authority of the *shaykh* is recognized
- Bid'a Innovation in religious practice or doctrine
- Cemaat See jama'at
- Dar al-Islam 'The land of Islam's house of Islam'
- Dargah Dervish convent
- Da'wa Call or invitation (to Islam)
- Deobandi/Deoband school Group called after the seminary in Deoband/India
- Dhikr 'Remembering' God, reciting the names of God
- Du'a Optional prayer
- Faiz Divine grace
- Fana Being lost in God; *Jana fi Allah* (annihilation in God, the complete merging with God)
- Fata Socially free and unbound man
- Fatwa Legal opinion, legal decision