
The Jamaat of Allah's Friends: Maulana Allahyar's Reformist Movement and Sacralising the Space of the Armed Forces of Pakistan



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Abstract

This article discusses a Sufi-inspired reformist movement that was set up in Chakrala (Pakistani Punjab) by Maulana Allahyar during the second half of the twentieth century. Attention is paid to the polemical religious context in which this movement arose, in part linked to the proselytising activities of local Shias and Ahmadis. Allahyar's preaching in the town created sectarian divisions within Chakrala's syncretic religious traditions. His reformist ideas also were articulated through a tablighi jamaat (missionary movement), which penetrated the armed forces of Pakistan during the military rule of Ayub Khan. Against this backdrop, the article also discusses the interface between Islam and the army, as this relationship played out in Indian prisoner-of-war camps holding captured Pakistani soldiers in the wake of the 1971 war, and so points to ways in which the mutual performance of mystical practices by Allahyar's Jamaat created a cohesive moral community.

Keywords: Maulana Allahyar Chakralwi; the Jamaat of Allah's friends; *halqa-e-dhikr*; Pakistan military; Gaya prisoner-of-war camp

In an era of religious and political transition dating back to the eighteenth century, Muslim South Asia has witnessed the emergence of reform movements that have called for the revival of a pristine Islam. Religion in what became an era of colonial modernity was predicated on the text; hence, Islam came to be 're-invented' by a wave of reformers in the light of new epistemic realities.¹ This version of Islam not only sustained itself but gained strength within the region over the course of the first half of the twentieth century. Textual Islam was considerably further entrenched after Pakistan was established in 1947. Religious discourse as

¹Francis Robinson, 'Islamic Reform and Modernities in South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies* 42, 2/3 (2008), p. 2. Also see Francis Robinson, 'Other- Worldly and This-Worldly Islam and the Islamic Revival', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 14, 1 (April 2004), pp. 47–58.

well as the kind of religious practice that took root in Pakistan at the time of its birth had a tangible tilt towards ‘puritanism’, emphasising particular performative aspects of Islam.² Maulana Allahyar, a reformist with Deobandi leanings whose impact is the focus of this article, infused this religious practice with a spiritual dimension without reducing its ritualistic aspect. Accordingly, a modernist version of Islam combined with traditional spirituality proved to be the hallmark of his movement, which emerged and attracted adherents during the second half of the twentieth century.

But before exploring Allahyar’s movement more closely, it needs to be located within the wider attempt at Islamic reform and revival that was taking place in different Muslim societies at the same time. Islam as a complete system of governance and its compatibility with modernity was being highlighted by thinkers and activists such as Hasan al-Banna, founder of Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ikhwan-al-Muslimun), and Syed Qutab in Egypt, Hasan al-Turabi in Sudan, and Rashid al-Ghannoushi in Tunisia. Al-Ikhwan-al-Muslimun, founded in 1928, for instance, had quickly spread its influence beyond Egypt’s borders. Hasan al-Banna played a major role in shaping the movement’s discourse in Sudan, which secured its independence in 1956 when the two largest Muslim religio-political organisations there, Khatmiyyah Tariqa and Ansar, came to power.³ Meanwhile, Libya was established as an independent state and the head of Sanusiyyah Sufi order became its king,⁴ while Wahabi Islam dominated the Arabian Peninsula after the Saud dynasty—ardent followers of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab—had been established there. And in South Asia Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, the founder of the Jamaat-i-Islami in India in 1941,⁵ achieved prominence through his publications, which in due course came to be viewed by many as the testament of political Islam. Hence, Islam operated as an identity marker and symbol of cohesion among otherwise diverse groupings of Muslims in different parts of the world. Indeed, the period of decolonisation following the Second World War provided added impetus to an ideology that was fast becoming popular among sections of the Muslim literati.

The establishment of Pakistan has been projected in some quarters as an Islamic project. Certainly, the Muslim League mobilised mass support for an independent Muslim state in which religion would play a decisive role in its future political development. During the initial phase of Pakistan’s history, however, its ‘westernised’ ruling groups and its religious ‘clergy’, steeped in tradition, seemed to draw apart.⁶ By 1949, the political elite had accepted a political role for Islamic forces within the country, even though this meant compromising their original conception of Pakistan as a secular state. But the aim of producing, and professing, a singular Islam was confronted in practice by conflicting reformist religious articulations. In this process of re-identification, the concept of ‘Islam’ came to be redefined by

²Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy war and Unholy Terror* (New York, 2003), also see his *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago, 1990).

³Mustafa A. Abdel Wahid, ‘The Rise of the Islamic movement in Sudan 1945–1989’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Auburn, 2008).

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵John L. Esposito and John L. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York, 1996), p. 6.

⁶Farzana Shaikh argues that contradictory expectations in Pakistan gave rise to ambiguities. One idea was of a universal Islamic community, the other stressed a Muslim ‘nation’ whose so-called ‘communal’ political and economic interests were territorially bounded. This ambiguous relationship between Islam and territorial nationalism, propounded by Muslim intellectuals like Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) and Hussain Ahmed Madani (1879–1958), was generated problems. See Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (London, 2009), pp. 3–5.

many Pakistanis to exclude all supposedly 'deviant' and, according to them, un-Islamic elements. In this context, the passage of the Objectives Resolution in 1949 with its exclusionary logic as far as the country's religious minorities were concerned is viewed by many as the first step that divided Pakistani citizens into 'Muslims' and 'non-Muslims'.⁷ The issue of the relationship between religion and national identity emerged more strongly still in constitutional debates in 1953. The anti-Ahmadiyya protests of that year pushed Pakistan decisively in the direction becoming a nation-state based on what the majority deemed to be Islamic principles of governance. Indeed, it was because of the 1953 anti-Ahmadiyya agitation that religious exclusion arguably became the central plank within Pakistani nationalism.⁸ The search for 'correct' ways to define 'Islam' and 'Muslim' in the context of Pakistan then led to the development of exclusionary political discourses, which, in turn, further excluded minority groups, particularly Ahmadis and sometimes Shias too, who were denounced as *kafrs* (non-believers) with impunity.

It is against this broader backdrop that the following discussion focuses on a Sufi-inspired reformist movement that emerged in Pakistan during this period in response to the preaching and proselytising activities of Shia and Ahmadi missionaries. The movement in question was spearheaded by Maulana Allahyar Chakralwi⁹ (1904–84) in Chakrala,¹⁰ a small town in Mianwali district, located in the south-west of Pakistan's Punjab province, during 1950s and 1960s. Allahyar's puritanical Deobandi approach generated religious conflict, which took the form of sectarian antagonism capped by theological debate. Ironically, the movement, which espoused the congruence of *sharia* (religious law) and *tariqa* (Sufi order) had the exclusion of minority groups (Shias and Ahmadis) as its defining feature, something that

⁷The passage of the Objectives Resolution in 1949 was an important event which Pakistani *ulama* have celebrated as a significant milestone in the history of Pakistan. Its importance was considerably enhanced when, in subsequent years, the Objectives Resolution was made the preamble of the Pakistani constitution. See Dieter Conrad, 'Conflicting Legitimacies in Pakistan: The Changing Role of the Objectives Resolution (1949) in the Constitution', in *Legitimacy and Conflict in South Asia*, (eds.) Subrata K. Mitra and Dietmar Rothermund (Delhi, 1998), p. 127. Also see Leonard Binder, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963).

⁸The Munir Report refers to the Report of the Court of Inquiry. Also see Mariam Abu Zhab, 'The Shia Sunni Conflict in Jhang (Pakistan)', in *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation and Conflict*, (eds.) Imtiaz Ahmed and Helmut Reifeld (New Delhi, 2004), pp. 135–148. See also Vali Reza Nasr, 'The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan: The Changing Role of Islamism and the Ulema in Society and Politics', *Modern Asian Studies* 34, 1 (2000), pp. 139–180; Qasim Zaman, 'Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shii and Sunni Identities', *Modern Asian Studies* 32, 3 (1998), pp. 689–716; Vali Reza Nasr, *Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the Making of State Power* (New York, 2001), pp. 146–147; and Ali Usman Qasmi, *The Ahmadis and the Politics of Religious exclusion in Pakistan* (London, 2014).

⁹Maulana Allahyar was born into an affluent landowning Awan tribe, known as Sarjaal Awan, that migrated into Chakrala from Kalabagh. He studied Hadith at the Ameenia Delhi madrasa, under the tutelage of Mufti Kifayat Ullah, the madrasa's patron, Anwar Shah Kashmiri, and Maulana Khalil Ahmed Anbethwi. After completing his studies, he received training in *unani tibb* from Hakim Ajmal Khan in Delhi and returned to Chakrala in 1935 where he started his teaching career from Jamia Masjid (Chitti Masjid) Chakrala. In 1942 he entered the path of *suluk* (spiritual training) in the Naqshbandia Awaisia order through the spirit of the Sheikh of the order, Sultan ul-Arifin Khawaja Allah Din Madni, buried in Langar Mukhdum (district Sargodha) four hundred years previously. Maulana Allahyar was introduced to the spirit of Sultan-ul-Arifin by a Sufi belonging to the Naqshbandia Mujaddadia order, Maulana Abdur Raheem. He then completed the *suluk* training until *salik-e-majzubi* at the grave of Sultan-ul-Arifin in three years, and was appointed *sahib-e-majaz* by him in 1945. He then received training in the next stages of *suluk* from the spirits of various Sufis through a spiritual connection with the *mashaikh* in Barzakh, who included Lal Shah Hamadani, Ghaus Bahawal Haq, Abdul Qadir Jillani and Moin ud-Din Chishti Ajmeri. See Abul Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba* (Chakwal, 2005).

¹⁰Chakrala is a small town belonging to Mianwali District, in the south-west of the Punjab, located some ten miles from the Mianwala-Talagang road. The area is mostly inhabited by members of the Awan tribe.

represented a key contradiction. This exclusion set in motion a process of ‘othering’, creating new sectarian divisions within Chakrala’s longstanding syncretic religious ethos. In many ways, this pattern replicated the wider Pakistani national narrative, in which emphasis on *sharia*-oriented Islam led to increased religiosity by hardening religious boundaries, and syncretic hybrid traditions came to be replaced by exclusionary tendencies based on sectarian differences.

Maulana Allahyar’s reformist movement carried out its preaching through the medium of Sufi circles or *halqa-e-dhikr* (lit. Circle of Divine Remembrance)¹¹ together with the establishment of a *tablighi jamaat* (missionary movement). Moreover, the expansion of Allahyar’s following within the Pakistani armed forces under General Ayub Khan (1958–69) represented an important dimension of his proselytising endeavours. The resulting interface between army and Islam, which arguably found its clearest expression in the Gaya prisoner-of-war camp (Bihar, India) in 1971, will also be explored here.

Maulana Allahyar Chakralwi and his Jamaat seemed to draw inspiration from the broader Pakistani environment in which religious/sectarian exclusion operated as the most widely circulated discourse. With regard to the growth of sectarianism, most scholars connect the increased radicalisation of sectarian identities to General Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamisation programme, the conflict in Afghanistan, the proliferation of Deobandi *madaris* (pl. *madrasah*), and the 1979 Iranian Revolution.¹² Vali Nasr, for instance, has argued that the increased participation of *ulama* (pl. of *alim*, Islamic scholars) in society and politics together with the changing role of religious education sparked an increase in sectarianism. Qasim Zaman has shown how, in the second half of the twentieth century, the configuration of social, political and religious factors at national and transnational levels articulated religious identities.¹³ Other scholars have explored the relationship between the military and politics and likewise the military’s dominant role in decision-making within the post-colonial Pakistani state structure. Ayesha Jalal, Stephen Cohen and Aqil Shah, for instance, have discussed how the military acquired such a dominant role in decision making in Pakistan: both Jalal and Cohen have analysed the military’s intervention in relation to how the interplay of regional and international factors influenced domestic politics and the economy, distorting relations between the centre and the provinces and likewise the dialectic between state construction and political processes,¹⁴ while Shah has argued that geo-political insecurity constructed the military’s ideas regarding political intervention and its authoritarian role in state and society.¹⁵ Ayesha Siddiqi too has investigated the political economy of military influence, how military capital has been used for the personal benefit of the officer cadre and the ways in which the armed forces have been used as a tool for institutional and personal economic influence.¹⁶

¹¹A circle or group of followers who assemble at one place and perform *dhikr*.

¹²Nasr, ‘The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan’.

¹³Zaman, ‘Sectarianism in Pakistan’; also see Ashok K. Behuria, ‘Sunni-Shia Relations in Pakistan: The Widening Divide’, *Strategic Analysis* 28, 1 (2004), pp. 157–176.

¹⁴Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: the origins of Pakistan’s political economy of defence* (Lahore, 1991). See also Stephen Cohen, *The Pakistan Army* (Berkeley, 1984).

¹⁵Aqil Shah, *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan* (Cambridge, 2014).

¹⁶Ayesha Siddiqi, *Military Inc: Inside Pakistan’s military economy* (Karachi, 2007); Shah, *The Army and Democracy*.

While none of these aforementioned scholars have focused on the army's role and patronage with respect to religion and the interface between Islam and the army, the army's use of Islam has been of interest to others, spawning multiple perspectives and interpretations. Katherine Ewing, Yasmin Saikia, Vali Nasser and Hussain Haqqani, among others, highlight the extent to which General Ayub Khan deployed Islam as a tool for nation building. Ewing and Nasser likewise demonstrate that when Ayub was unable to extricate Islam from politics, he decided instead to make religion compatible with his national goals of development and modernisation, seeking to incorporate Islam within state discourses on socio-political change at the same time as restricting the role of Islam in the country's broader political process. To generate a more 'liberal' vision of Islam, Ayub wanted religion to be controlled and guided by the military rather than by clerics.¹⁷ But, as Saikia argues, Ayub's state version of Pakistani identity based on a singular homogenised Islamic identity together with the army's image as the "true protector" of religion and nationalism lost ground with the dismemberment of Pakistan and the establishment of the separate state of Bangladesh.¹⁸ Haqqani further proposes that after the 1971 war, Islam acquired greater significance in creating national cohesion between Pakistan's remaining diverse ethnic and linguistic groups, but that 'Islam' became militant as a result of an alliance between 'mosque' and 'military'.¹⁹ Farzana Shaikh, meanwhile, has introduced a different perspective by arguing that the military looked to Islam to strengthen the 'communal' narrative that defined Pakistan's identity in opposition to India, and kept this alive by extending Pakistan's regional interests in Kashmir and Afghanistan.²⁰

This article accordingly seeks to contribute to these ongoing debates by highlighting the religious proselytisation taking place within the Pakistani armed forces during Ayub Khan's era thanks to the activities of Allahyar's *jamaat* of *dhakirin* (lit. 'those who remember Allah'). In particular, it underlines the extent to which the influential military constituency constructed by Allahyar helped to anchor his religious authority. While his Jamaat found its strongest expression in the form of *halqa-e-dhiker* in a post-1971 prisoner-of-war camp in India, this article suggests that the shared performance of mystical practices created a sense of solidarity and cohesive moral community among Pakistani prisoners there. The research that underpins it is based on vernacular sources, including previously unused hagiographical literature, such as *Dalail-ul-Saluk*, a detailed account of the Naqshbandia Awaisia *silsila* (Sufi order), a biographical account of Allahyar Ahmed-ud-Din's *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, and Major Ghulam Muhammad's *Murshid Jaisa Na Dekha Koi* that provides detailed information about how Allahyar's Jamaat penetrated the Pakistani armed forces. In addition,

¹⁷Sanctioned by the West Pakistan *Waqf* (Endowment) Properties Ordinance of 1959, Ayub Khan established control over key Islamic institutions, many of which had previously been administered by Sufi guardians. Ayub envisaged Sufi saints as propagators of Islam and Sufism in congruence with the *sharia*; in contrast, the customary shrine-oriented Islam represented by *sajjada nishins* was seen as embedded in heterogeneous traditions. Sufism was viewed as a rigorous spiritual discipline transmitted from spiritual mentor (Sufi) to the disciple. What suited Ayub was the concept within Sufi traditions that delinked spiritual authority from political leadership, whereas the *pir* or *sajjada nishin* had to act as spiritual mediator between man and God. See Katherine P. Ewing, 'The politics of Sufism; Redefining the Saints of Pakistan', *Journal of Asian Studies* 42, 2 (February 1983), p. 267. Also see Vali Nasr, *Islamic Leviathan*.

¹⁸Yasmin Saikia, 'Ayub Khan and Modern Islam: Transforming Citizens and the nation in Pakistan', *Journal of South Asian Studies* 37, 2 (2004), p. 298.

¹⁹Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan: between Mosque and Military* (Washington DC, 2005).

²⁰Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan*.

Halat-i-Aseeri Main Ahl-e-Allah Ki Suhbat together with a collection of letters provide valuable insights into the Gaya prisoner-of-war camp. However, these sources do have limitations. Most of them are memory based, compiled and published much more recently, with missing chronologies and a limited range of perceptions and comprehension; as such they generally reflect the frailty of their authors. Furthermore, these sources are inevitably moulded by the opinions, prejudices and cultural standpoints of their authors and so lack objectivity. However, traditional archives and academic writings on the Pakistan armed forces with respect to the 1971 war only provide details of the conflict and accounts of the traumatic experience of being imprisoned. Hence, this article's exploration of the process of Islam penetrating an extensive disciple constituency present within the Pakistani military, and the formation of *halqa-e-dhikr* and religious practices in a prisoner-of-war camp, contributes new insights to what is an significant period in Pakistan's history.

Contextualising Chakrala as a site of sectarian difference

Prior to Partition in 1947, the small town of Chakrala presented a 'mosaic' wherein ethnic, tribal and religious groups existed as independent cultural units. Chakrala—the oldest (and largest) urban settlement in the district—had many inhabitants belonging to Punjab's Hindu community, called 'Chikar' (surname Chakraborty). As secondary sources are not available on Chakrala's history, however, we must rely on primary sources, but even so these only provide very scanty information about its religious landscape. Chakrala's first encounter with Islam seems to have taken place in the thirteenth century, when it was conquered by local Muslims with the help of tribesmen from the North West.²¹ But Islam in Chakrala was popularised and sustained by Sufi *pirs*, whose shrines in time became important sites of religious veneration in the locality. Indeed, the local spread of Islam was largely a result of long-term interaction between Sufis professing Islam, pre-existing religious beliefs steeped in ideas about evil spirits, multifarious methods of dispelling the effect of such evil influences, witchcraft and magic, and the immediate environment. An ordinary Muslim's understanding of Islam was usually mediated through the agency of a Sufi or *pir*.²² But while Hindus and Muslims may have existed as distinct religious groups in Chakrala, they also tended to mingle at the same shrines. A large number of non-Muslim devotees, both Hindus and Sikhs, for instance, were initiated into the Chishtia and Naqshbandia Sufi orders, and visited local shrines without converting to Islam.²³ Thus, shrines symbolised plurality, and Islam in Chakrala was closely associated with the syncretic socio-religious values embodied in the shrine-based culture of the region.

From a demographic perspective, Chakrala was populated predominantly by Awan tribes, who were landowners and exercised considerable influence in the town.²⁴ The essentially 'tribal' profile of the region meant that animosities between tribes often led to conflicts,

²¹ *Gazetteer, Mianwali District 1915* (Lahore, 1994), p. 29.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Members of the Awan tribe live predominantly in northern, central, and western parts of Pakistani Punjab with significant numbers also residing in *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*, *Azad Kashmir* and to a lesser extent in *Sindh* and *Balochistan*. Historians describe them as brave warriors and farmers who established their ascendancy over their close kin the Janjuas in parts of the Salt Range. They set up large colonies all along the River Indus to

rivalries and killings. In Chakrala and surrounding regions of Potwar and the valley of Saun Skesar, Shias and Ahmadis lived as affluent minority groups as compared with Chakrala's Sunnis. They too were landowners and extended patronage as chiefs of their tribes.²⁵ Local Ahmadis seem to have aimed at making Puchnad (a centrally-placed town in Chakrala district) into an Ahmadi base from which to secure a foothold in the surrounding districts of Attok, Chakwal, Talagang, Mianwali and Khushab.²⁶ For this purpose, some Ahmadis purchased agricultural lands in the vicinity of towns of Thamey Aali and Puchnad, and from there embarked upon their missionary activities, which were organised and financed with the backing of rich landowners who had converted to the Ahmadi faith. Indeed, these new converts extended moral and financial support by establishing a school, a charity hospital and separate training centres for men and women.

Religious controversies between Ahmadis and Sunnis, or more often between Sunnis and Shias, were played out through theological disputation or *munazaras*. These *munazaras* were arranged and funded by local Shia zamindars on an annual basis, and became occasions on which Shia *dhakirs* (preachers) were invited from surrounding areas including Talagang, Chakrala, Sargodha, Toba Tek Singh, Chakwal and Ali Pur Chattha.²⁷ According to Shia sources, thousands of Sunnis were supposedly converted to Shi'ism as a result of *munazaras* held the Punjab in the period up to the late 1950s.²⁸ *Munazaras* also involved the prestige of contesting tribes, and during them large numbers of people from surrounding villages assembled to support their tribal representatives.²⁹ Thus, religion was closely entwined with tribal, social and political relations and accompanying internecine conflicts.³⁰ The same interplay of tribal, social structures and regional economic imperatives, however, helped in the development of Shi'ism.³¹

Hence, in this spatial context, Allahyar's focus was primarily directed towards the local Shia minority, whom he denounced as the greatest enemy of Islam. He conducted debates in remote smaller towns, such as Khandway and Kot Miana, as well as in the bigger cities of Multan, Jhelum and Sargodha, and his efforts also took him to the borders of Sindh and Kashmir. He challenged Shias in *munazaras* when, in his view, they sought to assert their authority by allegedly mis-representing tradition as well as the Quranic verses. Allahyar, thus, used the ritual sphere as a domain for exercising authority by regulating and controlling

Sindh, with a densely populated centre close to Lahore. See Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *A History of Pakistan and its origins* (London, 2004), p. 205.

²⁵A *munazura* held in the town of Bagar Sargana was conducted on a controversial religious issue over which members of the Sargana tribe were divided in their point of views. Presidents were nominated for each contestant. Maulana Allahyar represented the *Sunni munazir* while the Shia contestant was represented by Maulvi Amir Muhammad Taunsvi. Along with them the tribal leaders of both the groups were also present. See Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 221.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 122–124.

²⁸Naqvi, Tazkira, Persian edition of biographical notices on Shia ulama, cited in Andreas Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan: An Assertive and Beleaguered Minority* (New York, 2015), p. 12; also see Zaman, 'Sectarianism in Pakistan', p. 697.

²⁹Annual *munazaras* were held between Shias and Sunnis in a small Qasba Pidhrar on the Chakwal-Khushab road. People used to come from far off places to support their contestants. See Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 219.

³⁰Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, 2000), p. 52.

³¹Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam* (New York, 2002), p. 11.

access to it. He instructed Shias and Sunnis to hold their *majlis* and assemblies separately during the month of Muharram, advising them to contest *tabarra*³² by reciting *madh-e-sahaba* (praise of the first three Caliphs). Action was likewise taken to deter Sunnis from joining Muharram processions despite the fact that these processions held significance for them.³³ Sunni bids to restrict *azadari* (mourning processions) and *tabarra* agitation orchestrated by Shias sparked conflict, creating a general atmosphere of social estrangement between the two communities in the town. This sectarian antagonism could manifest itself in violent clashes when freedom to observe their rituals was restricted.

In 1956 Allahyar established a training institution, the Dar-ul-Mubalighin, following the model of the Sunni school set up for the training of *mubaligh* and *munazir* in Lucknow in the early 1930s.³⁴ To produce and distribute Sunni-Shia polemical tracts, treatises and literature against *azadari* on a wider scale, he also set up a publishing house at the Dar-ul-Huda Cho-keera Madrassah (in Sargodha district) in the same year under the patronage of Syed Ahmed Shah Bokhari.³⁵ Separate pamphlets and other forms of polemical literature helped to construct exclusivist sectarian identities (emphasising differences between Shias and Sunnis). Indeed, Sunnism was defined in terms of anti-Shi'ism.

Sectarianism, thus, emerged in and around Chakwal as a manifestation of fractured identities, caused by the efforts of people belonging to the majority Sunni community who sought to establish their religious authority over local Shias through tribal pressure or by using force.³⁶ With this marginalisation of Shias, an aggressive Sunni identity was forged in the countryside of this part of Pakistani Punjab, and identity came to be embedded in a literalist version of the *sharia* that, in turn, crystallised a sectarian exclusionary discourse. It was in this context that Shia proselytisation so alarmed Allahyar that he founded a reform movement with a tangible Sufi orientation.

The Jamaat of Allah's friends: Maulana Allahyar's reformist movement

Theologically Allahyar with his Deobandi leanings maintained strict adherence to the Quran and the Hadith. His reforming streak was demonstrated in the denigration of hereditary Sufi leaders, the *sajjada nishins*, and he opposed prostration at tombs, the kindling of lamps to predict future, ecstasy, dance, trance, music and the holding of 'urs. Instead, his reformist Sufi orientation grew out of deep concerns for identity and normative Islam shared by other twentieth-century Muslim reformers. Like them he stressed the importance of individual Muslim conduct, the need to purify Muslim society of *bida* (innovation from the path of

³²*Tabarra* is a doctrine that refers to the obligation of disassociation with those who oppose God and those who caused harm to and were the enemies of the Islamic prophet Muhammad or his family.

³³Meerten B. Ter Borg and Jan William van Henten (eds.), *Powers: religion as social and spiritual force* (New York, 2010).

³⁴Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 134. Following the establishment of the Madrasatul Waizeen in Lucknow in 1919, the Dar al-Mubalighin was set up in the same city in 1931–2 in order to train *munazirs* who were then sent on preaching tours. Abdul Shakoor Farooqi became the principal of this school. See Justin Jones, *Shi'i Islam in colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (New York, 2012). Also see Rieck, *Shias of Pakistan*, pp. 12–13

³⁵Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 129.

³⁶Maulana Allahyar belonged to the most dominant Sarjaal tribe of Awans. At times he used to win over his rival by threats and physical manhandling. When a Shia *munazir* refused to accept a Quranic verse, the Maulana is said to have attacked him with kicks and punches, and when his supporters tried to come to his rescue, the Maulana's bodyguard Surkhu Khan reportedly fired shots into air to deter them. See Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*.

Muhammad), and the urgency of constructing a true Islamic community.³⁷ But in a Barelwi-dominated region, Allahyar also had to take *tasawwuf* (Sufi mysticism) into account in order to propagate his reformist ideas. He influenced people by communicating a firm belief in *karamat* (miracles), and cultivated his image as a charismatic figure, in direct communication to God and the Prophet. At the heart of his order lay its most distinctive feature, namely spiritual conversation with *mashaikh* (saints) in the *barzakh* (celestial world) and seeking guidance from them.³⁸ This transcendental dimension of Allahyar's cult, which was defined by the power to contact the sacred, cemented his religious authority and endowed it with an exclusive identity among his followers.

His order was organised internally in the form of *halqa-e-dhikr*, in which Allahyar shared his personal experience with the power of the sacred with his followers. The *halqa-e-dhikr* was concerned with the mutual power relationship between a group of *dhakirin*³⁹ and the larger society to which it belonged. In this way, a link was formed between sacred experience and the daily problems of his disciples. Their belief in Allahyar's miraculous powers gave them security and empowerment. In 1960 these *halqa-e-dhikr*s took a formal shape as a *jamaat* of *dhakirin*, named the Jamaat Akhuwat-ul Salikeen. From then onwards, this format became the main instrument for the dissemination of his reformist ideas,⁴⁰ often in response to Shia missionary activities. It was quite similar to the better-known Tablighi Jamaat launched by Maulana Ilyas (1885–1944) in the wake of Shuddhi movement in 1920.⁴¹ However, Allahyar asserted that he was motivated by the guidance of divinely inspired dreams and visions.⁴² It was a belief in the Naqshbandia Awaisia *silsila*⁴³ that all decisions were made in the *barzakh* by the Prophet Muhammad and the *mashaikh*. The preaching (*tabligh*) and the organisation of his *jamaat* of *dhakirin* was, therefore, portrayed as a divine inspiration, with Allahyar claiming that the Prophet had instructed him to form it. Hence, he also called it a Jamaat of Allah's friends—indeed, the last *jamaat* of *Auliya* (Allah's blessed people)—and he claimed that the people belonging to it would continue to exist until the time of the Imam Mehdi.⁴⁴ This idea of millennialism, his order's consistent interest in the end of

³⁷He believed the community's fortune depended on strict observance of the sharia and complete submission to Prophet. See letters of Maulana Allahyar to Colonel Matloob, 27 August 1971, in *Makhtubaat* (Chakwal, 1989).

³⁸*Barzakh* is the celestial world, the other spiritual world where souls reside in the living form. See J. Spencer Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York, 1998).

³⁹*Dhakirin* is the plural of *dhikri* (one who performs *dhikr*).

⁴⁰Maulana Allahyar was deeply indebted to his Naqshbandia Awaisia predecessors. His discourses record encounters with frequent visions of the Prophet, and likewise with Sirhindi, Jilani and Chishti luminaries such as Moeen-ud-Din Chishti. He sought guidance in worldly matters from *mashaikh* in the *barzakh* through his personal experiences, claiming that terrestrial affairs as well as affairs of the celestial world were revealed to them. His was an attempt to bridge the two worlds, and the source of his charisma was said to be this unique and extraordinary quality. See Allahyar, *Dalail-ul-Suluk* (Murshadabad, 1992).

⁴¹Maulana Ilyas's Tablighi Jamaat was a voluntary mass movement founded in 1927 in the Mewat region around Delhi in northern India. After the British rule ended in India, *tablighis* spread to all South Asian countries, devoted themselves to preaching, and were organised in the form of travelling preachers. See Yoginder Sikand, *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi-Jama'at (1920–2000): a cross-country comparative study* (New Delhi, 2002) pp. 4–5.

⁴²Pnina Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love: the anthropology of a global Sufi cult* (Karachi, 2003), p. 61.

⁴³The core ideology of the Naqshbandia Awaisia was predicated on the theory of deriving beneficence from the spirit, both in terms of reception and transmission, and termed the 'Awaisia' method. Anyone who develops an intense connection with the spirit of the Prophet and the saint and derives benefit from his spirit is called an 'Awaisi'. The Awaisia *silsila* traces its spiritual lineage from the Prophet Muhammad, see www.salkeen.org (accessed 26 August 2016).

⁴⁴Major Ghulam Muhammad, *Murshid Jaisa Na Dekha Koi* (Chakwal, 2014), p. 12.

this world, the Mehdi and the ‘sign of the hour’ are closely associated with the Awaisia *silsila*.⁴⁵ In doctrinal terms Allahyar’s Jamaat (like that of Maulana Ilyas) represented Hanafi Sunni Islam; however, it was open to all schools of *fiqh* (jurisprudence). It propagated the same message of puritan reformist Islam as the Darul-Ulum Deoband, along with *tasawwuf* rituals. As Reetz has argued, “Barelwis aggressively deny the *tablighis*, their Sufi antecedents and brand them as Deobandi or even Wahhabi outfits”.⁴⁶ He goes on to maintain that *tablighi* leaders in Pakistan, acting as *shaikhs*, initiated their disciples in their favourite *silsila* (order).⁴⁷

Unlike Ilyas’s Tablighi Jamaat, Allahyar identified himself with the Naqshbandia Awaisia *silsila*, but he never gave a mass *baiat*⁴⁸ in the congregation; only a selected few were to swear allegiance before the Prophet in this way.⁴⁹ Nor, unlike other *tablighi* activists, did his Jamaat perform *gasht* or patrolling (exhorting people to join the *tablighi* project). Rather the idea that was unique to his Jamaat’s teaching programme was its organisation of small groups of followers to establish *halqa-e-dhikr*. Sufi discipline was enforced in the Jamaat through *halqa-e-dhikr* rather than in a Sufi hospice, which was something that he never maintained. Allahyar himself believed *dhikr* to be “the most effective source of guidance”.⁵⁰ Just as Chakrala’s Ahmadi and Shia missionaries had particularly targetted local women folk, these preaching groups included female sections for the instruction of rural women in the proper modes of Muslim religious practice.

Allahyar’s Jamaat, thus, marked the formal expansion of the Naqshbandia Awaisia *silsila*, with *halqa-e-dhikr* emerging across the country, linked to the original centre founded at Manara (Jhelum district) in 1960.⁵¹ The first *halqa-e-dhikr* was established in Chakwal district and Manara, and the first women’s *halqa-e-dhikr*—composed of one hundred female *dhakir*—was set up in Mohra Kor Chashm in Chakrala in 1962–3.⁵² The Jamaat’s constituency was mainly professionals, including religious teachers in *madaris*, *imams* and *qaris* in mosques, professors in local colleges, and *ulama*. Hafiz Abdul Razzaq, Maulvi Suleiman, Maulvi Fazal Hussain and Buniyad Hussain Shah were some of the prominent ideologues associated with the Jamaat in its initial stages, when its support base remained limited.⁵³ The order then spread out as far afield as Baluchistan, mainly through *khateeb* (the person who delivers

⁴⁵David, W. Damrel, ‘Aspects of Naqshbandi Haqqani in North America’, in *Sufism in the West*, (eds.) Jamal Malik and John Hinnells (London, 2006), p. 126.

⁴⁶Dietrich Reetz, ‘Sufi spirituality fires reformist zeal: Tablighi Jama’at in today’s India and Pakistan’, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 135 (juillet-septembre 2006), p. 34.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁸A vow of allegiance to a sheikh as his disciple or *murid*.

⁴⁹According to Allahyar, it was only after taking approval from Prophet that he initiated the tradition of mass *bai’at*. In the Naqshbandia Awaisia order, spiritual *baiat* was taken at the Holy Prophet’s hands after a seeker had covered the initial stages of the path. What was important in this process was that seeker should see for himself his spirit (*nuli*) negotiating the initial stages of the path into the audience of the Prophet and accepting *bai’at* at his sacred hands. *Zikr* and *sulhat* were cornerstone of the Awaisia order. See Allahyar, *Dalail-ul-Suluk*, p. 23.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵¹The Naqshbandia Awaisia *silsila* was restored by Maulana Allahyar after a lapse of some 500 years after the death of Maulana Abdur Rehman Jami. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁵²Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 255.

⁵³Maulvi Suleiman was teacher of Arabic in a local school, Hafiz Abdul Razzaq and Bunyad Hussain Shah worked as lecturers in Islamic Studies at Government Degree College, Chakwal, and Government Degree College, Jhelum, respectively. He believed the community’s fortune depended on strict observance of Sharia and complete submission to Prophet. See Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*.

the *khutbah* or sermon) and *imam* (prayer leader) networks. Maulana Abdul Qadir Dairvi and Qari Yar Muhammad, for instance, established the first *halqa-e-dhikr* in their respective mosques—Chiltan Market Mosque in Quetta and Dairy Farm Mosque—in 1966.⁵⁴ The Jamaat further expanded with *halqa-e-dhikr* being set up in Mardan, Peshawar, Gilgit and Azad Kashmir. However, it was unable to ensure active participation from among the rural masses. When a disciple and main financier of the Jamaat Akram Awan donated land in Manara (Jhelum district), the centre of its activities shifted there from Chakrala, and by 1977 Manara contained a permanent base, the Dar-ul-Irfan, for its proselytising activities.⁵⁵ The Jamaat with meager economic resources of its own, however, continued to rely mainly on the financial support of disciples who would pay their *zakat* (obligatory charity payments) and *sadqat* (non-obligatory charity donations) into the Jamaat's fund. Importantly, Allahyar refused to accept donations from anyone outside the movement on the grounds that their source of income was not known.⁵⁶ *Dhakinin* and the female members of their households also provided their services to the Jamaat. In many ways, the entire Jamaat was the manifestation of what Victor Turner has called "communitas", providing an arena of close brotherhood in a common spiritual quest.⁵⁷

One consequence of the growing popularity of Allahyar's movement was increased awareness not just among *ulama* but also ordinary people of the need to strive for Islamic reform through *halqa-e-dhikr*. Efforts at systematic preaching and *halqa-e-dhikr* owed their immediate origins to the fallout from proselytising activities. The year 1964 proved to be the turning point in the Jamaat's missionary work, which expanded exponentially when Allahyar's book *Dalail-ul-Suluk* on *tasawwuf* was published and became an instant success. Translated into English in 1967 under the title 'An Objective Appraisal of the sublime Sufi path',⁵⁸ it developed into a significant means of attracting adherents in the Pakistan armed forces to the Naqshbandia Awaisia *silsila*.⁵⁹ Reformed Sufism, it would seem, held a tremendous appeal for educated senior officers and subalterns alike.

Allahyar's *silsila* and *halqa-e-dhikr* penetrate the armed forces

The religiosity preached by Allahyar, which stressed the protection provided by his miraculous powers, underpinned his relationship with members of the armed forces. He claimed to have access to an esoteric knowledge of the divine through *muraqaba* and to be able to access God through intercession provided by the Prophet and Sufi saints (*mashaikh*). This knowledge was believed by his *murids* (followers) to give him spiritual authority and proximity to

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 313. The centre would be coupled with regional nodes, working in connection with the central Dar-ul-Irfan. A department of press and publication was set up, responsible for dealing with correspondence and the publishing of a monthly *risala* (journal), *Al-Murshid*. The publication committee comprised Hafiz Razzaq, Col. Matloob, Professor Buniad Hussain, Professor Baagh Hussain Kamal, Fazal Akbar, Haji Altaf Ahmed and Muhammad Hamid. See Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 313.

⁵⁶Maulana Allahyar never accepted the donations from any person whose source of earning was not legal (*halal*). See Major Ahsan Baig, *Shukr-e-Naimat* (Chakwal, 2015); also see www.salkeen.org, p. 23 (accessed 26 August 2016).

⁵⁷Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London and New Brunswick, 2008).

⁵⁸Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 282.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 324.

God, enabling him to intercede on their behalf. His followers in return gave him their unquestioning loyalty.⁶⁰ Indeed, it was in recognition of this reciprocity that the social ties linking him with his followers were formed.

Allahyar's *silsila* first took root within the Pakistani armed forces in 1962, during the period of Ayub Khan's military rule. His vision of a Sufi as an *alim* who guides his adherents regarding the tenets of Islam in conformity with the *sharia* was very much in line with Ayub's own identification with Sufism. As Yasmin Saikia maintains, "Ayub Khan wanted to transform men in the barracks into heroes, who upheld Islamic identity, so imbuing the army with an unquestionable legitimacy".⁶¹ The influence of religious authorities (*ulama* who were also Sufis) was considerably enhanced by their growing connection with Pakistan's most powerful state institution, the military. The development and expansion of Allahyar's military-based constituency was, therefore, one outcome of the state's policy towards religion. Under Ayub the government sought to control Islam through the military, and by introducing a 'modern' vision of Islam in the barracks it was helped to spread more widely among the ranks of the armed forces. This institutional support from above linked Allahyar's *silsila* to the main centre of power within Pakistan.

At the same time, there were also developments taking place 'from below'. Chakrala is situated in the Pothwar region and adjacent to the Salt Range, a belt comprising districts whose terrain and climate have proved conducive to the production of eligible military recruits.⁶² For decades, agricultural underdevelopment combined with abject poverty had drawn the people of this area to military service. At the same time, the rough and tumble of military life combined with problems at the personal, familial and societal level, meant that these men turned towards Sufism for the spiritual resolution of their problems.

Initially Allahyar's *silsila* was introduced among non-commissioned officers from towns such as Chakrala and Talagang, and their surroundings. Hafiz Ghulam Qadri from Chakwal was the first non-commissioned officer to join the *halqa-e-dhikr*, established the Pakistan army's first *halqa-e-dhikr* in the mosque belonging to 502 Workshop at Rawalpindi. *Dhakin* in the armed forces, together with *halqa-e-dhikr*, thus spread from one cantonment to another. *Dhakin* from 502 Workshop, for instance, were posted to Karachi, where they established centres that extended the *halqa-e-dhikr* to various cities in Sindh, including Badin, helping to widen the constituency of disciples, among whom Hawaldar Muhammad Saddiq and Sher Ali were prominent. Later on, they established *halqa-e-dhikr* at the Infantry School in Quetta in 1968.⁶³ Allahyar gave sermons at *Juma* (Friday congregational) prayers at the mosque of PNS Himalaya during his visit to Karachi, and established the first *halqa-e-dhikr* in the Pakistan navy. With a considerable number of officers from East Pakistan were also included in this *halqa-e-dhikr*, Allahyar appointed as his *khalifa* an officer Muzamil Haq

⁶⁰Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell, *Sufism and the Modern in Islam*, (London, 2007), p. 31.

⁶¹Saikia, 'Ayub Khan and Modern Islam', p. 298. Also see for the same argument, Stephen Cohen, *The Pakistani Army* (Berkeley, 1984); Haqqani, *Pakistan between Mosque and Military*. For detailed analysis of Pakistan army, see Siddiq, *Military Inc.*, Hassan Askari Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan* (Lahore, 2003), and Mohammad Waseem, *Politics and the State in Pakistan* (Islamabad, 2007). Also see Cara Cilano, *National Identities in Pakistan: The 1971 War in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction* (London, 2011), p. 54.

⁶²Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947* (New Delhi, 1988), p. 44.

⁶³Muhammad, *Murshid Jaisa Na Dekha Koi*, p. 23.

who later moved to Bangladesh in 1972.⁶⁴ Furthermore, while the integration of people from rural and urban locations became possible once officers had been initiated in the *silsila*, it was through rural soldiers (mostly non-commissioned) that Allahyar's textual and reformist version of Islam reached the countryside. Nile Green has identified the challenges faced by colonial-era Indian soldiers often rooted in the rural world of customary Islam and miracles as they adapted a more urban military life.⁶⁵ As opposed to this, in the town of Chakrala, soldiers, whose background was in rural customary Islam, accepted Allahyar's Sufi-inspired reformist message in large part because it was compatible with the then military government's agenda of reformulating a composite identity.⁶⁶ For army personnel under Ayub, class, ethnicity, clan affiliation, education and personal connections had a marked significance for career development.⁶⁷ Their association with the *silsila* and the miracle-working Sufi transformed their lives, which became structured around the reading and discussion circles of *Hadith*, *dhikr* and the invocation of divine names, rather than being focused on material things. Disciplining the self was now the primary concern, and so through these rituals the self of the devotee was being disciplined.

The network of military cantonments played a vital role in the dissemination of reformist ideas within the army, air force and navy alike. Allahyar's *silsila* extended deeper into the officer class thanks to the work of Lt. Ahsan Baig and Captain Muhammad Hanif, who first joined the *halqa-e-dhikr* in 1968. Both officers were posted to Risalpur the following year, where they established *halqa-e-dhikr* in the Pakistan air force. Allahyar's influence was particularly strong among younger officers; a few of those who joined in the early stages were Hadi Hussain Shah, Major Zain-ul-Abideen (East Pakistan), Lt. Ghulam Muhammad, Captain Muhammad Ghaus, Captain Muhammad Rafique and Captain Muhammad Umer. Through them *halqa-e-dhikr* were established in cantonments in Kakul, Bhimber and Kharlian, Gujranwala, Okara and Jehlum.⁶⁸ Allahyar personally visited and stayed in these cantonments, held *majalis* (sittings) there and addressed *Juma* prayers.⁶⁹ His fame as Sufi consequently extended far and wide through his military clientele whose periodic redeployment took it to different cantonments within Pakistan. And, hence, the stories of miraculous rescues and unexpected fortune broadcast by his followers gained currency through that same military network.

Moral community and social solidarity: *halqa-e-dhikr* in the 1971 Gaya war camp

In 1971 the Pakistani army was engaged in fighting during the Bangladesh liberation war. After the fall of Dhaka, some 93,000 Pakistani soldiers were famously imprisoned in Indian prisoner-of-war camps, one of which was Camp No. 93 in Gaya (Bihar).⁷⁰ The camp was guarded by Indian soldiers belonging to Hindu Jat, Sikh and Gorkha regiments. Available

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.78. Also see Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 357.

⁶⁵ Nile Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India: Sepoy religion in the service of Empire* (New Delhi, 2009), p. 13.

⁶⁶ Saikia, 'Ayub Khan and Modern Islam', p. 295.

⁶⁷ Baig, *Shukr-e-Naimat*, p. 9, available at www.salkeen.org (accessed 6 September 2017).

⁶⁸ Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 358.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Gaya is one of the 38 districts in Bihar state, India. It was officially established in 1865. The district has a common boundary with the state of Jharkhand to the south. Gaya was the first and last centre of preaching of Sharfud-Din Yahya Maneri.

sources do not provide much information on how many prisoners of war were housed in the Gaya camp, nor how was it managed. Clearly, however, prisoners kept there remained traumatised by the Pakistani army's recent humiliating defeat and the loss of East Pakistan, something that is clearly reflected in existing hagiographic narratives. Since many Pakistani soldiers in Gaya were already followers of Allahyar, he nominated one of his *khalifas*, Major Ahsan Baig (b. 1944),⁷¹ as their mentor and spiritual leader, responsible for organising *dhikr* sessions in the camp.⁷² Accordingly, a *halqa-e-dhikr* consisting of both officials and rank-and-file soldiers was established in Camp No. 93. Allahyar termed this *halqa-e-dhikr* as '*jamaat Akhuwat-ul-salkeen*', intended to forge brotherhood among its members in their hour of distress.⁷³ He maintained a connection with his imprisoned disciples through letters and other correspondence, and assured them that only *dhikr* and training in *suluk* and *muraqaba* (spiritual communion) could provide them with salvation. As a result, the lives of these soldiers in the camp came to be structured around prayers, intensive ascetic exercise through *dhikr* and *muraqaba*, and invoking the memory of earlier pious personalities. *Dhikr majalis* (sittings) also helped these traumatised soldiers to mitigate the harshness of their tough and boring camp life, not to mention the recent unpleasant experience of war itself.⁷⁴ Put another way, a symbiosis took place between the physical training of a soldier and that of an ascetic; the former generated outer powers through making muscles and body, while the latter cultivated inner powers through enervating the flesh. It was this fusion of inner and outer that united an ascetic and a soldier.⁷⁵

The interface between army and religion, thus, found its expression among soldiers in the prisoner-of-war camp at Gaya. Allahyar's Sufi order with its centre in Chakrala (Pakistan) was now extended to Gaya (India). Initially spiritual practices in the *halqa-e-dhikr* were resisted by the camp's Indian guards: the camp commander Lt. Col. K.D. Parbhakar, for instance, declared it a violation of the Geneva Convention to assemble near the barbed wired area for *dhikr*. Later, soldiers moved their *dhikr* session inside the camp, where—considering it to be a harmless religious activity—the camp commander allowed them to continue it.⁷⁶ This activity, however, was not without its problems for the devotees. One was the paradoxical situation that emerged in the camp with respect to Ahsan Baig's religious authority as mentor. Some senior officers questioned his *walay* (spiritual status) and balked at accepting his religious authority as he was junior to them. Allahyar in response in his letters made it clear that they "should not entertain any doubt in the perfection of spiritual authority of a person, who had the ability to make you visit the *barzakh* and present you in the court of Prophet through spiritual communion [*muraqaba*]"⁷⁷ His instruction that,

⁷¹Major Ahsan Baig was born on 10 August 1944. He was initiated into the Naqshbandia Awaisia order in 1968, and was the first person from the officer cadre of the Pakistan Army to join Allahyar's *jamaat*. See *Ta'aruf Hazrat Jee Baig Sahib*, available at www.salkeen.org (accessed 12 September 2017).

⁷²Interestingly, Ahsan Baig was not among the prisoners of war. Rather he disguised himself as a prisoner of war and boarded the last ship going to India, sent there by Maulana Allahyar for the spiritual training of the sepoy and officials in the prisoner-of-war camps. See Rashid Ahmed Jillani, *Halaat-e-Aseeri mein Ahl-e-Allah ki suhbat* (Bahawalnagar, 1990), p. 23.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁷⁴Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India*, p. 43.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷⁶Jillani, *Halaat-e-Aseeri mein Ahl-e-Allah ki suhbat*, p. 23.

⁷⁷In a letter to Col. Matloob, Allahyar stated that "from a soldier to a colonel, all are equal to me, all are my spiritual progeny, only with exception to Ahsan Baig, who is my *khalifa majaz* [one who has been ordained the status

irrespective of military status, they had to accept the superiority of those who were spiritually elevated, indicated that Allahyar gave precedence to religiously-based spiritual authority over the worldly hierarchy associated with a soldier's rank. The question that arose was about the defining new standards for the exercise of the religious authority over material hierarchy of ranks in military.

To reconcile religious authority (which Ahsan Baig derived from his status as *khalifa* in the local religious context) with the hierarchical ranks of military became quite vexed, and when his religious authority manifested itself within the camp, the question of defining his suitability for religious leadership emerged. Spiritual transformation demands submission and the elimination of vanity and pride, which Muhammad Ajmal has termed as "defensive armour of the ego".⁷⁸ Allahyar's message was to abstain from material desires such as rank and position, and he referred to practicing chastity and refraining from anything that was in contradiction to the *sharia*. He looked upon worldly engagements with considerable distaste, and did not consider *din* (religion) and *dunya* (worldly concerns) mutually exclusive, making the spiritual as well as this-worldly life in accordance with the laws of *din*.⁷⁹ In this sense, what he was proposing was a dualistic sociological model of 'renouncer' versus 'man in the world'.⁸⁰

This approach clearly underlined how far the characteristics of Islam in this context were patronal and hierarchical. The Gaya prisoner-of-war camp was not a world of men who were equal among themselves but rather a hierarchical and segmented social unit in which religious authority took precedence over military sub-divisions of regiments and ranks. The main characteristic that emerged from this military environment, and which proved vital in shaping Islam in the camp, was vertical in character with patronage dispersed both up and down a clear chain of authority.⁸¹ At another level, however, the Jamaat's spiritual activities under the mentorship of Major Ahsan Baig created a basis for solidarity and organisation among its members, since it presented a wholly different hierarchy and logic for unity and cohesion to that derived from membership and rank in the Pakistan Army. After all, Ayub Khan's perception of the army as the true protector of Islam and the nation, and the upholder of Islamic identity, had been badly damaged by defeat in the 1971 war since this exposed the failure of religion to construct an homogenised 'Pakistani' identity within pre-1971 Pakistan. In the wake of these developments, the idea of a singular Islamic identity was replaced by a renewed commitment to create a humanistic moral community of Pakistanis,⁸² something that was also reflected in the prisoner-of-war camp. A mutual sense of loss and grief in combination with shared mystical practices helped prisoners there to forge a moral community based on social solidarity that transcended official military hierarchies.

of *khalifa* by his *shaykh*] for your guidance". He described Baig as "heart" of his Jamaat. See Maulana Allahyar's letter to Colonel Matloob, 11 July 1973, in *Maktubaat* (Chakwal, 1989).

⁷⁸It is an armour that fights both against the self of the vain person and against other people. Without eliminating pride and vanity, the spiritual transformation is not possible, which is the defensive armour of ego. See Muhammad Ajmal, 'A note on Adab in the Murshid-Murid Relationship', in *Moral Conduct and Authority: the place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, (ed.) Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley, 1984), p. 246.

⁷⁹Sikand, *The Origins and the Development of the Tabligh-i-Jamaat*, p. 85.

⁸⁰William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (London, 2006), p. 748.

⁸¹Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India*, p. 14.

⁸²Saikia, 'Ayub Khan and Modern Islam', p. 295.

The sepoy world, however, was a limited social environment, with soldiers restricted to their barracks or, in this case, a prisoner-of-war camp. Their inclination to Islam under these circumstances was not externally triggered. Instead, it stemmed largely from their own insecurities and anxieties at their imprisonment. Soldiers would communicate to Allahyar their stress and apprehensions at the uncertain length of imprisonment that faced them. In return, he tried to reassure his followers that he could mediate between the divine and the earthly realms, claiming that he had been guaranteed by (*Sultan-ul-Hind*) Moin-ud-din Chishti Ajmeri that “the entire *jamaat* was his own and would remain under his protection; also the *jamaat* of *mashaikh* in *barzakh* would pray for the safety of the soldiers”.⁸³ This Islam, which promised miraculous aid to soldiers via their holy men, helped to address apprehensions. Religion, it would seem, allowed soldiers to endure ‘situations of emotional stress’ and provided them with a spiritual escape from their predicament.

The sacralising of space and supernatural protection

It could be argued, therefore, that the Chakrala Sufi order spread within the Gaya camp as part of a process termed by Werbner as religious spatial “conquest”; it achieved this by sacralising the space, transforming the camp into the space of Allah.⁸⁴ This idea of the sacralisation of space (earth or land) is an essential element within Sufi cosmology and, hence, an integral feature of Sufi practices. Sufis, in effect, sacralise the space when they arrive in a new place, establish their lodges there, and perform *dhikr*. Through a process of enchantment, in effect, they not only purify their own heart and soul, but also sacralise and ‘Islamicise’ the land. Accordingly, Sufi Islam is not simply a journey within the body towards God but also a journey through space. The divine blessings of the Sufi purify his surroundings (spatial dominion), and this is regarded as an act of human empowerment on the part of a Sufi. In this process, Sufis create new centres, linked to the founding centre and establish new regional cults.⁸⁵

In the case of the Gaya camp, prisoners of war there derived religious identity from their connection to a chain of saints whom they accessed through Ahsan Baig and Allahyar, and as a result they were located in a sacred spatial network that stretched all the way from Chakrala to Gaya. Ahsan Baig’s own religious authority also came to be embedded in this sacralised space; he too was regarded as blessed with *baraka* (charisma) and the capacity to change the order of nature as well as human society. Muslims (both officers and soldiers) rooted their religious identity in a new and hostile locality and embodied the moral right of their community to be ‘in’ this new environment. Though a saint retained the unquestioning devotion of his closest disciples, in the end it was the demonstration of his miraculous qualities that embodied his saintliness for them.⁸⁶ The *halqa-e-dhikr* established in the Gaya camp was also attended by some Hindu and Sikh guards (appointed on duty), enabling Baig to spread his reputation as Allahyar’s representative among non-Muslims, operating as a spiritual

⁸³Maulana Allahyar’s letters to his disciples, Captain Khalid Hassan (19 October 1972) and Captain Hashim Jaan (11 January 1973), in *Maktubaat* (Chakwal, 1989).

⁸⁴Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love*, p. 57.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 61.

guide and worker of miracles who could mysteriously cure the sick and supernaturally ward off demons.

Non-Muslim soldiers and local civilian residents—both Hindus and Sikhs—who searched for the solution to their multiple problems in the form of protective *taweez* (amulets) or *dum* (exhalation of breath on water to transfer *baraka*) and the offering of *wazaif* (prayers), flocked to the perimeters of the camp.⁸⁷ Bachan Lal, a Hindu guard commander, for instance, had lost his money along with his pay book, and was afraid of being penalised. Baig through *muraqaba* informed him that his belongings were buried behind his tent, from where he duly recovered them. Prem Das, a section commander in a Jat regiment, had lost the blanket officially issued to him by his unit. Baig, again through *muraqaba*, revealed the name and the army number of the thief.⁸⁸ Inside the *halqa-e-dhiker*, the religious practices occurred within the framework of the *sharia*, whereas outside it his miracle-making holy man's image benefitted all, and blurred the religious distinctions between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Baig translated his spiritual ability in to a practical power to help people; hence, the resulting relationship was based on the cognitive framework of illness and healing.⁸⁹ Farina Mir has termed the drawing of a mutual beneficence from a Sufi by Muslims and non-Muslims as "shared piety".⁹⁰ As she has argued, this "shared piety" did not conflict with the individual's distinctive religious identities but rather constructed a religious domain cutting across religious divisions.⁹¹ Tulsi Ram, an Indian border security *naik*, got his wives cured of their ailments by taking water 'breathed upon' by Baig. Ruldu, a Hindu soldier belonging to a Jat regiment, requested Baig to drive evil away from his wife and children. Gopal Singh, a soldier from a Sikh regiment, was said to have embraced Islam as he was impressed by how Baig's amulets (containing Quranic verses) had resolved a protracted conflict between his wife and mother.⁹²

Some of these claims may now seem far-fetched, but what was important was that at the time Allahyar's followers believed them. In effect, the supernatural protection on offer became a marketable service. The relationship between the Sufi and his devotees—whether rural peasants, soldiers or local townfolk—was so widespread that it not only reached extended families but spanned the generations. From the prisoner-of-war camp, his spiritual power moved into the domestic sphere of the soldiers' women folk, and from there spread widely through networks of relatives, responsible for the maintenance of female and family life.⁹³ Ahsan Baig acted also as a guarantor of material prosperity and proved himself to be a crucial mediator in terms of social relations. This further reinforced his social prominence in

⁸⁷For the use of amulets, see Mikkel Rytter, "Transnational Sufism from below: Charismatic counseling and the quest for well-being", *South Asian Diaspora* 6, 1 (2014), p. 24.

⁸⁸Jillani, *Halaat-e-Aseeri mein Ahl-e-Allah ki suhbat*, p. 87.

⁸⁹Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago, 1994), p. 176.

⁹⁰Farina Mir has defined the term "shared piety" as a form of piety in which all Punjabis could participate. This "shared piety" did not conflict with an individual's nominative religious identity but formed a sphere of religiosity that transcended the boundaries that distinguished the Punjab's major religious traditions. See Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley, 2010), p. 175. For more discussion of the same concept of shared piety in the Punjab, see Ian Talbot and Tahir Kamran, *Lahore in the Time of the Raj* (Haryana, 2016).

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²Jillani, *Halaat-e-Aseeri mein Ahl-e-Allah ki suhbat*, p. 56.

⁹³Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India*, p. 55.

the camp, which in turn reconfigured the Sufi-disciple relationship, with a concomitant transformative effect on the social life of surrounding villages. Hence, the regional cult cut across boundaries—it created its own sacred topography by sacralising a new centre linked to the founding centre, and in the process reinforced and expanded its temporal coordinates.⁹⁴

Relationship with the military clientele

The relationship between a devotee and Sufi, like other relationships, is based on a pragmatic model of reciprocity and exchange.⁹⁵ With his links to a customary Islam of miracle working holy-men and to the saintly networks of Sufi affiliation that surrounded them, it is important to explain the nature of the ‘service industry’ that Allahyar controlled and the character of his relationship with the soldiers. Patron-client bonds assured the spread of Sufi affiliations. After all, as Pnina Werbner has underlined, the Sufi was looked upon as a practical person, someone whose saintly charisma meant that he got mundane things done.⁹⁶ On the other hand, a soldier’s life required his religion to protect him from dangers of travel, safeguarding him on long route marches, ensuring career promotion, satisfying his desire for children, and assuaging any fears of losing his job. All this was central in shaping the Sufi ‘service industry’.⁹⁷ Allahyar’s visit to Quetta during the Staff College course held in 1975 and likewise the tactics course at the Infantry School proved very significant since many of his disciples there turned to him for miraculous intervention to help them pass competitive examinations that were essential for promotion. After the hectic routine of the day, they held *halqa-e-dhikr* at night. His assurance that they were successful because they were the members of a *jamaat* comprised of pious people made them confident of victory.⁹⁸ In one case, a follower of Allahyar, Squadron Leader Mohsin Khan, faced having to land his aircraft on the runway without the landing gear extended. The wheels had failed to come out because of a technical fault. His best chance of rescue, he had believed, was to call upon his Sufi protector; having done so, Khan safely landed with his help. The aircraft, filled with fuel, did not explode, despite grinding along the length of the runway.⁹⁹ Such ‘miracles’ pointed to the Sufi’s ability to protect his disciples from a distance, something that Shahzad Bashir has termed as the “hyper corporeality of Sufi body”, according to which the Sufi’s body could extend itself beyond the confines of his skin and spread through time and space.¹⁰⁰ A substantial number of officers belonging to the Pakistan Navy, particularly those in East Pakistan, were members of Allahyar’s *Jamaat*. The most prominent were Saeed Bangali and Captain Zain-ul-Abideen. Allahyar promised naval officers that they would receive miraculous support against cannon fire in war if they recited ‘*dua-e-hizb-ul-bahr*’ (a prayer to solve all problems).¹⁰¹

⁹⁴Pnina Werbner, ‘Stamping the earth with the name of Allah; Zikr and the Sacralizing of Space among British Muslims’, *Cultural Anthropology* 11, 3 (1996), p. 311.

⁹⁵Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love*, p. 25.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹⁷Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India*, p. 2.

⁹⁸Baig, *Shukr-e-Naimat*, p. 51.

⁹⁹Muhammad, *Murshid Jaisa Na Dekha Koi*, p.160. While the Pakistan Navy dominated the *Jamaat*, some of the prominent members included airforce personnel such as Group Captain Sarfraz, Group Captain Arif Kazmi, Wing Commander Muzamil Jibrán, and (the above-mentioned) Squadron Leader Mohsin Khan.

¹⁰⁰Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York, 2011), p. 189.

¹⁰¹Ghulam Muhammad, *The Journey from Murshid abad to Makli Thatta* (Murshidabad, 2014), p. 34.

Following the 1971 Pakistan–India war, many soldiers were concerned about the possibility of future conflict. In 1975, Allahyar made startling predictions about the future 1979 Soviet–Afghanistan war and also the disintegration of Soviet Union when visiting the Staff College at Quetta. In *muraqaba* he saw two armed horsemen heading towards Pakistan from the right and left of Prophet's pulpit (*minbar*). Suddenly a wall was erected between Pakistan and Afghanistan, against which Russian tanks collided and retreated. Allahyar accordingly predicted the Prophet's spiritual help and Pakistan's victory. On hearing this, Major Ghaus put up a big poster in the Staff College, with the following statement: "Third World War 1979 Russia takes over Afghanistan, World unites to fight Russia, Russia Breaks". American and British officers were amused at seeing this, curious about how he knew about a future war. Allahyar provided further news of future victory to his soldier disciples when he referred to a forthcoming *Ghazwa-e-Hind* (battle with India), which he predicted would be the biggest war since that of 1971. According to him, the Pakistan army would defeat India, Kashmir and Delhi would then be conquered, but the general leading the Pakistani forces would not live to see his victory.¹⁰² Some over-excited officers then formed an armed wing of soldiers known as Al-Ikhwan, led by Major Dr. Azmat Iqbal Butter, whose purpose was to prepare young men for this impending clash. Al-Ikhwan was initially registered under the Political Parties Act, but thanks to its misuse by politicians it was subsequently dissolved.¹⁰³

Well-respected, well-paid and well-fed soldiers constituted an influential Muslim religious group and a prestigious clientele. The devotion of soldiers and officers combined with their social standing could elevate the status of a saint,¹⁰⁴ with the army serving as an influential institution that brokered exchange between soldiers (disciples) and their Sufi patron.¹⁰⁵ The military had also long offered a source of employment, pride, prestige and identity for people, and a regular salary that shaped the lives of many of its dependents.¹⁰⁶ Military influence and privileges were also channelled into Allahyar's *khanqah*. Substantial sums of money provided by military personnel in the form of *zakat* and *sadqat* were donated for the construction of madrassahs and to cover other financial aspects of the Jamaat's activities. When he was unwell, Allahyar was helped by his military followers, who flew him from his native town to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in a military helicopter.¹⁰⁷ By using their influence his officer disciples also arranged sea voyages and air travel to Saudi Arab when he undertook *Hajj*.

Conclusion

This article has explored the unfolding of a reform movement that moved from its original immediate surroundings to encompass a following that stretched very widely. Maulana

¹⁰²Muhammad, *Murshid Jaisa na dekha koi*, p. 67

¹⁰³Muhammad, *The Journey from Murshid abad to Makli Thatta*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁴Nile Green, 'The Faqir and the Subalterns: Mapping the Holyman in Colonial South Asia', *Journal of Asian History* 41, 1 (2007), p. 68.

¹⁰⁵Nile Green, 'Jack Sepoy and the Dervishes: Islam and the Indian Soldier in Princely India', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 18, 1 (2008), p. 34.

¹⁰⁶Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India*, pp. 2–3.

¹⁰⁷Ahmed-ud-Din, *Hayat-e-Tayaba*, p. 345.

Allahyar, a product of Deoband, was initially stirred into action in response to proselytisation carried out by Shias and Ahmadis in the locality of Chakrala. But Deobandis entertained an exclusionary streak from the very outset, with both Shias and Ahmadis the subject(s) of their condemnation. Allahyar's Dar-ul-Irfan at Manara in time, therefore, became an epicentre of scriptural Islam, which incorporated spiritual practices that attracted local Sunnis into its fold. The primacy of *sharia* was ardently professed, and no practices or actions were permitted that contravened *sharia* edicts. A strict division between Muslim and non-Muslim exacerbated the sectarian tendency, which was the main outcome of Allahyar's reformism thanks to his rejection of the ideologies and epistemologies of other religious groups, within which Shias were the most prominent. The *tablighi jamaat* launched by Allahyar attained ascendancy during the regime of Ayub Khan who was himself keen to cultivate Islamic identity among the ranks of the Pakistan Army. Ayub sought to portray Islam as a progressive force and used it to justify his socio-economic development programme. The military's construction of singular homogenised Islamic identity, with the army as its main protector and upholder, helped Islam to penetrate the world of the barracks. With the army as an influential client community, Allahyar's *silsila* was linked to existing power structures in Pakistan. His Jamaat's message reached military districts such as Chakwal, Jhelum and Mianwali. Army men from the martial belt (Allahyar's own home region) were influenced by it and helped to expand its influence in cantonments across Pakistan. The *halqa-i-dhikr* was the most prominent of the *silsila*'s performative acts, and, through it, the influence of his movement grew enormously.

At the same time, however, the secession of East Pakistan in 1971 dealt a blow to the notion of singular Islamic identity that could be imposed on the country's diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. The *halqa-e-dhikr* spread to the Gaya prisoner-of-war through the efforts of Major Ahsan Baig, where religious practices in these religious gatherings helped soldiers to recuperate from the traumatic experience of war and loss and consolidated them into a symbiotic coterie. The Jamaat then continued to thrive in post-1971 Pakistan as Islam assumed an increasingly central place in the process of national (re-)integration.

But though the synthesis of *sharia* and *tariqa* marked the distinctive feature of Allahyar's movement, we cannot overlook the fact that the context in which his Jamaat emerged was deeply antagonistic. The local missionary milieu wherein his activities took shape proved crucial; the social fallout of his movement undoubtedly drove a new sectarian wedge into a society that previously had been largely syncretic in its character. Since syncretism usually challenged existing religious leadership,¹⁰⁸ Allahyar sought to eradicate all symptoms of plurality and difference within the broader Muslim community. His goal, in other words, was to draw a clear 'frontier' or zone of demarcation between Islam and its constitutive 'other'. This mixture of missionary style, mystical substance and exclusionary emphasis made his movement complex, if not contradictory, since its appeal to ordinary Muslims was often based on its Sufi ethos, at the same time as generating a discourse that excluded others. This said, Allahyar—whether in small towns in south-west Punjab, in the Gaya prisoner-of-war camp or in military cantonments located across Pakistan—positioned

¹⁰⁸Farish A. Noor, *Islam on the Move: the Tablighi Jama'at in south east Asia* (Amsterdam, 2012), p. 85.

Sufism's cultural sensitivity and pluralism against essentialist and purifying logics of Islamic reformism, and in the process built a *jamaat* of devoted followers.¹⁰⁹

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¹⁰⁹It is hoped that this study may provide future avenues of research which could include comparative examination of other preaching movement in the Pakistan Army during the Ayub era. It might also prompt additional assessment of the impact of Ahmadi and Shia missionary activities in 1950s Pakistan. A comparative study of use of Islam by the army during the Ayub and Zia eras could also usefully be made.