

Informal Religious Leadership in a Bangladeshi Village.

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I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me
and does not represent the work of any other person.

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Knowledge given by me to my students, and the way I have written, is a theory of knowledge, which I have written about in my book, 'The Collection of New Data'. Accordingly, my work is due to those Khattakias who helped me to struggle with the complexity of spiritual, practical and social, anthropological, who maintained the idea of a new way of writing, with an interesting authority. For each group the destination of my work is a sequence of details, at least a willingness to explore the theoretical boundaries of knowledge. Overall, thanks are given to my primary supervisor, Dr. Sheikh Hossain, not only for her learned oversight, but more importantly for example of the very scholarship, unwilling to rest with the known, but instead encouraging my writer, that the relatively unexplored area of Bengali Islam. Thanks are also in order for my secondary supervisors, Dr. Jibon Khatun, whose anthropological fervor was very helpful in sharpening my focus. Dr. Yashu Datta also give very valuable comments regarding Islamic legal issues while Mr. R. Thomas helped with the Arabic translation and Mr. Khatun in Edinburgh with understanding some of the Bengali culture. Jibon Khatun of Dhaka was extremely knowledgeable regarding the realities of Bengali faith rather than the idealized versions others were more comfortable discussing, and also very willing to open their work with me.

Thanks are also due to my family who has spent the previous 30 years of living alongside me, and indulging the occasional obsession a PhD sometimes occurs in. Most thanks however are due to those in Bangladesh, in particular and Rajshahi village in particular who have embraced me over the past decade. Many times I went to see people around with a notebook and pen in hand, only to spend an entire afternoon talking about crops, family matters, or local events rather than capturing the particular concerns used to gain spiritual power, or to gain a better understanding of respect. Yet each (usually) disorganized discussion was not only heartwarming, it often proved essential to the wider research since it helped to be by the reality of apparently 'backward' conversations that vital facts, usually ignored. Although there were some cases where in Rajshahi would not discuss the exact details used to heal, for every 10 they did spend an hour with me, they believed.

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Knowledge grows by the collection of data until a point is reached to form a theory; ignorance takes hold when such theories either stifle or radically skew the collection of new data. Acknowledgement and thanks are due to those Islamicists who helped me to grapple with the centrality of localised practice and those anthropologists who entertained the idea of a text wielding such overarching authority. For each group this demanded, if not a suspension of disbelief, at least a willingness to explore the theoretical boundaries of knowledge. Overall thanks are given to my primary supervisor, Dr Carole Hillenbrand, not only for her learned oversight but more importantly her example of tireless scholarship, unwilling to rest with the known but instead encouraging my venture into the relatively unresearched area of Bengali Islam. Thanks are also in order for my secondary supervisor, Dr Iris Jean-Kline, whose anthropological fervour was very helpful in sharpening my focus. Dr Yasin Dutton also give very valuable comments regarding Islamic legal matters while Mr E Thomas helped with the Arabic transliteration and Mr Rahim in Edinburgh with understanding some of the Bengali songs. Jalath de Souza, in Dhaka was extremely knowledgeable regarding the realities of Bengali faith rather than the idealized versions others were more comfortable discussing, and also very willing to spent time with me.

Thanks are also due to my family who discovered the dubious joys of living alongside someone undergoing the sanctioned obsession a PhD sometimes equates to. Most thanks however are due to those in Bangladesh in general and Rosulpur village in particular who have befriended me over the past decade. Many times I went to see people armed with a notebook and hidden agenda, only to spend an entire afternoon talking about crops, family matters, or local events rather than exploring the particular exercises used to gain spiritual power, or reasons a known leader engendered respect. Yet such (usually disinterested) friendship was not only heart-warming, it often proved essential to the wider research since it tended to be in the middle of apparently 'irrelevant' conversations that vital facts suddenly emerged. Although there were some topics those in Rosulpur would not discuss (the exact formulae used to heal, for example) they did entrust me with much of what they believed.

Such faith could not be quickly grown, and in Rosulpur I merely inherited the trust Father Douglas Venne has spent years nurturing. Indeed, my sojourns in the village were a quirky mixture of village gossip, anthropological research, and spiritual retreat, wondering how pirs inspired those around me as I was inspired daily by Father Doug. Others in and around the village who I also would like to specifically thank include Govinda, Mintu, Haru, Aziz, Abul and his family, and Kalo Meya.

Abstract

This thesis examines concepts of Islamic informal religious leadership, focusing on one particular village in Bangladesh and suggesting a framework within in further research could usefully be conducted. After reviewing the entry of Islam (both in terms of political rule and infiltration of ideas) into the region, and examining the concept of 'formality/informality' as it pertains to localised religious leadership, such leaders in Rosulpur are reviewed. A classification of leadership, based on apparent rôles, is suggested. Some parallels between the Bengali village practice of Islam and foundational ideas of the faith are then detailed. Such parallels are not made by the villagers themselves, despite it being theoretically possible and it therefore seems that villagers' sense of identity does not rest on what are supposedly foundational Islamic beliefs and practices (such as ritual prayer). It is suggested that informal leaders, including singers, healers and (perhaps most importantly) *pirs*, are ceded leadership partly because they tacitly validate common practices and beliefs as being acceptable forms of Islam.

Because leadership is such a key concept throughout the thesis, three appendices review this topic. The 'Mirrors of Princes' genre of literature was an attempt to merge theory and practice in the exercise of power by several Islamic dynasties. A more contemporary and descriptive glimpse of Islamic leadership is given with the varied functions of the sheikh in various societies. The need to acknowledge unseen beings (such as *jinn*) and varied means of doing this in the wider Indian subcontinent is finally examined.

Transliteration

The transliteration table used for Bengali is based on that approved by the Library of Congress and the American Library Association.¹ Because of the plethora of combined letters, this system can not cover all situations, but it does suffice for almost all the Bengali used in this thesis. Although Bengali does not have higher and lower case letters when transliterating book titles and names higher case letters have generally been used. Common words such as 'Dhaka' are spelt in the English manner.

Vowels and Diphthongs

অ	a	ঐ	rī
আ	ā	ও	rī
ই	i	এ	e
ঈ	ī	ঐ	ai
উ	u	ও	o
ঊ	ū	ঔ	au
ঋ	r̄		

Consonants

Gutturals		Palatals		Cerebrals		Dentals	
ক	ka	চ	ca	ট	ṭa	ত	ta
খ	kha	ছ	cha	ঠ	ṭha	ৎ	ṭa
গ	ga	জ	ja	ড	ḍa	থ	tha
ঘ	gha	ঝ	jha	ড়	ṛa	দ	da
ঙ	ṅa	ঞ	ña	ঢ	ḍha	ধ	dha
				ঢ়	ṛha	ন	na
				ণ	ṇa		
Labials		Semivowels		Sibilants		Aspirate	
প	pa	য	ya	শ	śa	হ	ha
ফ	pha	য়	yā	ষ	sha		
ব	ba	র	ra	স	sa		
ভ	bha	ল	la				
ম	ma	ব	ba				

Anusvara	Bisarga	Candrabindu	Abagraha
ং ṁ	ঃ ḥ	ঃ ṅ, ṁ	ঽ ’

¹ See R Barry, Ala-lc Romanisation Tables Transliteration Schemes for non-Roman Scripts, Washington, 1991, 20.

Arabic Transliteration

Arabic place and personal names, as well as those words in common English usage (such as hadith², caliphate, mahdi, Umayyad or Abbasid) have not been transliterated while other author's words, when cited, have not usually been re-transliteration (as is also the case with Bengali). In those (few) cases where words (such as Qur'an, al-Shafi'i) appear to have passed into English with the inclusion of an apostrophe, common practice has been followed.

Consonants

ب	b	ز	z	ف	f
ت	t	س	s	ق	q
ث	th	ش	sh	ك	k
ج	j	ص	ṣ	ل	l
ح	ḥ	ض	ḍ	م	m
خ	kh	ط	ṭ	ن	n
د	d	ظ	ẓ	ه	h
ذ	dh	ع	ʿ	و	w
ر	r	غ	gh	ي	y

Vowels

Short

	a
	i
و	u

Long

ā and ع	ā
ي	ī
و	ū

² (but omitted at the start of a word).

ṣ Transliterated as /h/.

² Following common usage, the word can be either singular or plural.

Introduction

This thesis as a whole examines the tensions between formal and informal Islamic leadership patterns, focusing on the latter in one Bangladeshi village. It recognises that ambiguity surrounds each type of leadership because terms such as ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ elude precise definition; and because the two leadership forms can interact with the other in a manner ranging from confrontation to accommodation. This introductory chapter notes the uncertainty Islamic leadership has always been surrounded by³ and shows how the lack of research in Bangladeshi Islam augments such uncertainty. A review of this research moreover suggests that it is within the less scholarly publications, the texts of popular songs in particular, that most clues of informal leadership are found since these allude to specific knowledge that unifies many Bangladeshi Muslims.

Leadership for Muslims has always been centred in Qur’anic and hadith guidance with the dichotomy between formal/informal, or orthodox/unorthodox, forms of leadership generally being made according to how the leader relates to these core texts. Moreover, every grouping of people inevitably has a leader or leaders but the absolute ideal of leadership remains, for Muslims, embodied in the person of Mohammed. From these fundamentals, however, uncovering daily truths by which people could live and able leaders capable of guidance has proved elusive. Institutions such as the caliphate were founded on textual injunctions, but they governed with varying righteousness. Concepts such as the *Shari‘ah*, designed to unify all Muslims into a common code of conduct, sometimes caused conflict instead. From the inception of Islam, Muslims lived with the tension of believing in a discoverable truth that lay just beyond apprehension.⁴

³ A more detailed discussion of Islamic leadership follows in chapter one.

⁴ As such they perhaps resemble modern Europeans who grapple with the apparent paradox that gathering ever more facts does not produce a greater sense of certainty. While it is simplistic to attribute too much to too few, this can be traced at least in part to the work of Darwin, Heisenburg and Einstein who respectively questioned the origins of the human species, the limits of defining a new discovery, and the nature of time itself. Collectively, they emphasized the degree of uncertainty that surrounds knowledge.

The eventual aim of this current study is Rosulpur village in Bangladesh. It is in some ways very removed from first/seventh century Arabian peninsular realities, yet Muslims in Rosulpur village also hold fast to apparently mutual exclusives. Islam centres their sense of identity, yet very few adhere closely to central tenets of the faith such as the injunction to pray five times a day. This study aims to explore who these people rely on when negotiating the apparent paradox of believing fully in something that is only partially followed. It shares with social sciences the tacit assumption that, although there is not necessarily a 'right' way to interact, there is a 'usual' way and that rules governing these interactions could be formulated (although formulation arguably needs language that is itself too bulky to describe the details of communication). Discerning these rules, it has increasingly been acknowledged, entails time-and-place dislocations, observer-observed interactions, and uncertain assumptions which collectively question the accuracy of carefully made observations.

Not that a plethora of 'carefully made observations' have been made of Bangladeshi Islam; Akter lists only four such studies at the start of her thesis⁵ of which Haq's work is perhaps the standard account of Sufism in the same way that Sarkar's is of the political history of Bengal.⁶ This is partly because information was, and remains, largely held in an oral rather than written form and the pervasive regional humidity rots materials such as paper quickly.⁷ Moreover, most writings concerning Bengal, whether contemporary and written in English⁸ or historical and in various languages,

⁵ See B Akter, Islam in Contemporary Bangladesh, unpublished PhD, London, 1988, 12). The four theses Akter cites are E Haq, A History of Sufi-ism in Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1975; A Roy, The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal, Dhaka, 1983; MA Khan, History of the Faraidi Movement, and R Ahmed, The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity, {hereafter referred to as The Bengal Muslims}, Delhi, 1988.

⁶ See [ed.] J Sarkar, The History of Bengal Volume II, Muslim Period 1200-1757, Dhaka, 1976; Akter does not cite this as one of her four major sources despite the fact that the first third of her thesis concerns the historical development of Islam in Bengal.

⁷ Even buildings 'in an age when cement was unknown and in a climate where 92 inches of rain fall every year (mostly concentrated in three months) and the summer heat is excessive' tended not to last long (see [ed.] J Sarkar, op. cit., 387-388).

⁸ Of the 3605 articles noted in one bibliography of publications regarding Bangladesh only fifteen concern Islam (agriculture, in contrast, has 543 entries) while Razzaque's

do not centre on religion in general⁹ and Bengali saints¹⁰ in particular. While Akter's thesis did centre on the nature of Bengali Islamic faith, she relied on a questionnaire format, a method that perhaps gives 'statements of intent' rather than descriptions of reality. For example, her finding that around one half of Bangladeshi Muslims

bibliography has a similar bias. The one bibliography that does concentrate on religious topics is Zanini's Bengali publication (see J Rahim and E Rahim, Bangladesh, A Select Bibliography of English Language Periodical Literature 1971-1986, Dhaka, nd; M Razzaque, Bangladesh: A Select General Bibliography, Rajshahi, 1987; and F Zanini, Bānglā Bhashayā Islāmi Pustaker Bhālika, Dhaka, 1977).

⁹ See A Karim, Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to AD 1538), Dhaka, 1959, 6. Both Ivanow's catalogues of Persian manuscripts held by the Asiatic Society of Bengal suggest history and Sufism were the major subjects documented but the latter rarely concerned Bengali saints. Sufi studies centred on the Deccan region and the Chistiya Order. There is some Persian material of Badi ud-Din Shah, founder of the Madari Order, written in 1053/1644 and of Miyan Mir. Latif has a brief review of extant writings (see W Ivanow, Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, {hereafter referred to as Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts}, Calcutta, 1924, 110-111; and W Ivanow, Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Curzon Collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, {hereafter referred to as The Curzon Collection}, Calcutta, 1926, 77; and S Latif, The Muslim Mystical Movement in Bengal 1301-1550 AD, Calcutta, 1993, 4-7).

¹⁰ 'Saint' covers a multitude of terms and will be the term generally used except when detailing the precise rôles of individuals in Rosulpur. This is consistent with authors such as Gaffney who refers only to 'saints' and 'preachers' in his examination of the Upper Egyptian shrine of al-Fuli, although Gellner uses the local, Berber, word *agurram* to describe those who have *barakah*, magical powers, are generous, pious, pacific, descended from Muhammed and who are 'simply ... held to be one' (ie those who in other studies might be described as a saint or a sheikh). In Bengal, 'saint' can equate to *wali* (a friend of God who may not have any worldly status), *murshid*, (a spiritual guide who usually operates within a Sufi context), *darvish* (or 'ecstatic' Sufi); *marabout* (a local Sufi leader probably with some political power); or *pir*. Currie and Roy both explore the ambiguity of terms related to saintship very fully (for discussion of terminology see D Gaffney, 'Shaykh, Khutba and Masjid: The Rôle of the Local Islamic Preacher in Upper Egypt,' an unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Chicago, 1982; E Gellner, 'Doctor and Saint' in Scholars Saints and Sufis Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East Since 1500, [ed.] N Keddie, California, 1972, 307-324; E Gellner, Saints of the Atlas, London, 1969, 74; S Mills, An Anthropological Account of Islamic Holy Men in Bangladesh, unpublished PhD, London, 1992, 13; P Currie, The Shrine and Cult of Mu'in al-Din Chist of Ajmer, New Delhi, 1992, 1-14; and A Roy, The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal, Dhaka, 1983, 50; specifically Bengali saints are the subject of A Ra'îd, Āmader Sūphī-Sādhak, Dhaka, 1984, 7).

observed 'high religious practice'¹¹ varies from this author's observation of events, if such practice is assumed to include a full month of fasting throughout Ramadan.¹² Similar wistfulness surrounds her presentation of communal harmony¹³ which is at odds to events listed by Taslimā Nāsrin.¹⁴ Whereas both Akter and Nāsrin were

¹¹ The other half being 'medium' with a negligible number who admitted to low observance of the religious rituals. There was a slight degree of slippage in piety from the rural to the urban situations (see Akter, *op. cit.*, 191-205).

¹² The present author would estimate that five-to-ten percent, rather than the fifty Akter suggests, to be closer to actuality based on both discussion and observation such as the pre-dawn urban skyline which shows far fewer than half of the kitchens to be lit at a time when *sehri* food would be under preparation. Moreover, watching whether food or water is consumed first at the end of the fasting day (*iftar*) when Ramadan falls in the hot season indicates those who have drunk in the previous hours. For those who have not, food has minimal attraction; but again it would seem that nearer to a tenth than a half have actually drunk nothing throughout the prescribed hours. Many people do fast for the first few days, and the day preceding 'The Night of Blessing'. Most of my informants were men however and they often conceded that women were more devout. Moreover, even in 1986 when a full day's work by a malnourished and fasting body was likely to lead to collapse some did fast, as brutally shown by the sight of rickshaw-wallahs prostrated on the ground panting for breath.

¹³ With statements like 'there have not been any Muslim-Hindu riots in Bangladesh since 1971' (see Akter, *op. cit.*, 226).

¹⁴ 'Lajja' by Taslimā Nāsrin concerns anti-Hindu violence. It is less a novel than reportage by fictional characters of actual events centred by the 1992 anti-Hindu riots with mention being made of earlier communal incidents (which precede Akter's work). The book caused such an outcry that Nāsrin herself was forced into exile after being confined to her house for her own safety amid regular marches and calls for her execution. Any suggestion that minorities are mistreated or disadvantaged (whether it be tribals in the Chittagong Hills, land seizure from Garos around Haluaghat following the 1965 war with India, or destruction of Hindu temples in the wake of the Babri Mosque incident) is censored out of Bangladeshi news reportage. As a resident in Bangladesh from 1986 this writer heard Hindus from that time onwards express doubts about their prospects because of what they perceived as an anti-Hindu climate. They clearly felt there were constraints and pressures on them at the very time two-thirds of Akter's interviewees were apparently affirming that Hindus should be part of Bangladesh. Evidently Hindus did not sense this affirmation or Akter's questionnaire methodology did not successfully uncover an underlying hostility. This is not to suggest that a state of constant anti-Hindu oppression prevails either. Many Muslims regularly attended the week-long *pūja* ceremony at the temple in Kalibari Road, Tangail (contrary to Akter's suggestion that eighty percent would shun such events) because they enjoyed the music. Coccari reinforces the idea of such shared pleasures when she mentions how Muslim musicians played at Hindu *pūjas* for local spiritual beings known as *birs*; and an historical (eleventh/seventeenth century) perspective of Bengali religious tolerance is given by a quirky story related by Eaton. In this a Christian, dressed as a Muslim, and his Muslim companions are punished in a Muslim court for violations of Hindu religious sensibilities despite the Christian's appeal to

writing prior to the 1991 AD census and so could not predict that Hindus would total only ten and a half percent of the population, only Nāsrin's writing suggests why this fall might have happened.¹⁵

Akter does note one of the few recent studies of Bengali saints, that of the elderly Atrosi *pir*.¹⁶ He is actually named Muhammed Hashmatullah and has lived the small village of Atrosi in Faridpur since he arrived at the then-forested area¹⁷ in 1367-68/1948. Akter published her thesis prior to Latif's very pertinent 'The Muslim Mystic Movement in Bengal 1301-1550' but not before equally important works by Mohar Ali, Abdul Karim, and Aziz Ahmad.¹⁸ There are also important Bengali materials relevant to our topic, some of which are neither recent nor widely available. Indeed, it is one aim of this current study to bring to wider notice some of these

Islamic theology (see T Nāsrin, Lajja, Dhaka, 1993, 15-16; Guardian newspaper report, London, 10/12/1993, 11; Akter, op. cit., 218, 226; D Coccari, The Bir Babas of Banares: An Analysis of a Folk Deity in North Indian Hinduism, an unpublished PhD thesis, Wisconsin, 1986, 54 and R Eaton, The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204-1760 {hereafter referred to as The Rise of Islam}, California, 1993, 179-183).

¹⁵ There has been a consistent fall in the Hindu population in East Bengal and then Bangladesh since the formation of Pakistan in 1366-67/1947. The total Bangladeshi population in 1981 was 89912000, 86.6% of which was Muslim and 12.1% Hindu. The corresponding 1991 figures were; population 106314992, 88.3% of which was Muslim and 10.5 Hindu. Had the proportions remained the same there would have been 12864114 Hindus in Bangladesh rather than the actual figure of 11178866, a shortfall that equates to approximately three thousand two hundred 'missing' Hindus per week (presumably explained by migration into India; see A Rabbani *et al*, Bangladesh Population Census 1981 Analytical Findings and National Tables, Dhaka, 1984, 22, 75; W Islam *et al*, 1996 Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, 17th Edition, Dhaka, 1997, 32; and Nāsrin, op. cit., 15-16).

¹⁶ *Pir* is a Persian word that originally meant old man or teacher but as early as the mid eleventh/fifth century it had come to mean spiritual director. Because the word is not unknown in English it is written without diacritical markings despite the fact that in Bengali it has a long medial /i/ [tr.] R Nicholson, Kashf al Mahjub by Ali bun Uthman al-Hujwirir {hereafter referred to as Kashf al Mahjub}, Delhi, 1991, 17).

¹⁷ The association of religious piety and land clearance is a historically recurring one, as is land ownership with power.

¹⁸ These respectively are M Ali, History of the Muslims of Bengal (Volumes 1A and 1B), Riyadh, 1985; A Karim, op. cit.; A Ahmad, Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment {hereafter referred to as Studies in Islamic Culture}, Oxford, 1964.

materials¹⁹ that, although neither manuscripts or original sources, are valuable nonetheless. A brief review of some of these will now be given, and they will be referred to in following sections.

‘Bānge Sūphī Prabhāb’ by E Haq²⁰ is a reworked version of ‘The History of Sufi-ism in Bengal’²¹ although it is not merely a translation since there are some minor variations (he reports the fourteen Sufī groups that had been noted in the ‘Ain al-Akbar’ in differing orders, for example,²² and structuring is dissimilar). It is divided into an introduction and has seven more sections covering the origins and brief history of Sufi doctrines, the importance of Bengali Sufism in the Indian Subcontinental situation, the entry of Bengali Sufi customs, several historical Sufis, the result of Bengali Sufi influence, the condition and result from the mixing of Sufis in Bengal, and the origins of the customary practice of Islam in Bengal. This book (in either language) is perhaps the standard work on the subject.²³

‘Bāmlādeṣer Sūphī-Sādḥak’ by G Sākalāyēn is largely taken up with accounts of known Sufis on a regional basis (including Bengali areas within India, such as Hoogli and Twenty-Four Purganas²⁴). Under ‘Mymensingh’²⁵ for example, the author mentions Muhammad Sultan Rumi, Shah Jamal, Shah Kamal, Baba Adam Kashmiri,

¹⁹ These were primarily gathered from Dhaka University Library, National Seminary Library (Banani), Asiatic Society, Bangla Academy, Nilkhet Bazaar and Bangla Bazaar.

²⁰ Because Haq has publications in English as well as Bengali, the English version of his name rather than the transliterated version will be used throughout. Bānge Sūphī Prabhāb was originally published in 1935.

²¹ See Razzaque, *op. cit.*, 54.

²² See Haq, A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal, 37-38 and E Haq, Bānge Sūphī Prabhāb, (in Racanabālī, Dhaka, 1991, 77-78).

²³ Cited, for example by Latif in his material concerning the Mathari order, and acknowledged by Sākalāyēn (see Latif, *op. cit.*, 53; and G Sākalāyēn, Bāmlādeṣer Sūphī-Sādḥak, Dhaka, 1993, introduction to first edition).

²⁴ The section regarding Indian areas is only to be found (from pages 194-257) in an earlier (undated and rebound) edition of Bāmlādeṣer Sūphī-Sādḥak that was purchased from Nilkhet Market (which specialises in second hand books). This would appear to be the first edition to the book since it lacks the footnotes of editions one to five that the later copy has and is the copy generally referred to throughout this thesis.

²⁵ Cited because it is the area listed closest to Tangail (see Sākalāyēn, *op. cit.*, 192-198).

Baba Shah, Shah Nimay, Shah Khoyaj Ali Teg Borhan and Abdul Khalik Borkhari. The book is an updated version of the 'Pūrba Pakistan Sūphī-Sādḥak' that Zanini mentions in his bibliography of Bengali materials relevant to this subject.²⁶ 'Bāmlādeṣer Sūphī-Sādḥak' covers the introduction of Sufism into Bengal, and along with Haq's publication (in either English or Bengali) it could serve as the standard text on the subject. It gives a reasonably wide coverage of the Sufis involved and goes beyond mere hagiography in its coverage. Nonetheless, it does not analyse the specific practices and actions, or their precise results, of those Sufis mentioned. Instead there are oft-repeated generalisations of 'preaching Islam' and 'examples of piety' that won over the indigenous population to Islam.

'Sūphī Darśan' by F Raṣīd²⁷ repeats the account of how Sufism began and was carried to the Indian Subcontinent that adds little to other publications but it does then list specifically Bengali saints from the third/ninth century.²⁸ This includes some names that are absent in other books and is therefore valuable despite the brevity of biographic information and the more-enthusiastic-than-scholarly tone that emerges at times.²⁹ There is a very full list of Indian Sufi groups (*ṭariqas*) as well, although only the major ones include details, which generally repeat what is written elsewhere. The inclusion of literally dozens of the minor *ṭariqas* is, however, very useful.³⁰

'Āmader Sūphī-Sādḥak' by ANM Raṣīd gives perhaps the fullest and widest individual accounts of sixteen Bengali Sufis (as well as some from India and Pakistan). It is interesting that while this number approximates the 'Twelve' that is often mentioned as the number of Saints that first brought mystical Islam to Bengal, there is little overlap between these names and those told to this author during research in the Tangail region. That Shah Jalal of Sylhet figures in both is unsurprising since he is the best known saint in Bengal. His reputation is such that

²⁶ This very useful book was recommended by various knowledgeable people in Dhaka. Zanini gives a different date of publication (see Zanini, *op. cit.*, 146).

²⁷ F Raṣīd, *Sūphī Darśan*, Sylhet, 1986.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 69-77.

²⁹ For example the bland assurance that early Sufis' character, faith and sweetness meant their preaching prompted Hindus to accept the 'cooling shadowed protection' of Islam (*Ibid.*, 68).

when a Bangladeshi Biman aeroplane crash-landed in December 1997 while approaching Sylhet airport the lack of any injuries (let alone fatalities) was widely attributed to his influence.³¹ Sultan Jalal Rumi and Shah Jamal are also common to Raṣīd's list and general knowledge in the village of Rosulpur where research was carried out, although in the latter case Raṣīd places Shah Jamal in 'Sylhet and north-east Bengal' whereas this author was general told that he was from Dinajpur (in the north-west of Bangladesh).³²

'Āmader Sūphī Kiram' by D Caidhurī³³ largely repeats information found in other publications but first arranges it by regions, then by name. It also has a section of non-Bengali Sufis such as Abdul Qadir Jilani and Data Ganj Baksh. Another similar book is 'Bāṃlādeṣer Soṃgrāmī Olāmā Pīr Māsāyēk' by J Kismaṭī³⁴ which has details of many Sufis of Bengal. But none of the above publications talks in detail about the specific beliefs and practices of individual Sufis, or the groups they belonged to. 'Mārephāter Gaupan Rahaśa' by M Rahmān promises, by contrast, to reveal the secret knowledge of the Sufis.³⁵ This is not a scholarly book; it was bought at a street market in Tangail in 1997 and so caters to public rather than specialist interest. However, it does little to dispel the 'those who know do not say and those who say do not know' air which surrounds the subject of informal Islamic faith in Bangladesh (and Sufism in general). The book reiterates principles such as the individual soul having to answer to God on Judgement Day, and a *pir*'s assistance now being vital for success then. It also mentions exercises such as *dhikr*³⁶ and attitudes such as the non-attachment to worldly things that are needed for spiritual progress³⁷ but does not go beyond such generalities. Indeed, it is

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 205-241.

³¹ Only Shah Jalal appears to be the subject of a full, recent biography (that of D Caidhurī *Hajrat Śahjālāl*, Dhaka, 1995).

³² See A Raṣīd, *op. cit.*, 24.

³³ Published in Dhaka, 1995.

³⁴ Published in Dhaka, 1988.

³⁵ See M Rahmān, *Mārephāter Gaupan Rahaśa*, Dhaka, nd. The title means 'The Secret Mysteries of the 'Marefotis' (the practitioners of mystical Islam).

³⁶ Which Bengali pronunciation renders nearer to *jikir*.

³⁷ See, for example, M Rahmān, *op. cit.*, 30, 33.

unlikely to reveal secrets such as the specific *mantras* needed to counter particular situations when their efficacy is said to rely on their secrecy.³⁸

Arguably the best written glimpses of informal Islamic belief in Bangladesh is given by the collections of songs by Lalon Fakir³⁹ (in particular) and other well known poets such as Hālim, Hāsan Rājā, and Dayāl Darbāre.⁴⁰ They contain references to common oral traditions such as the congruence of the cosmos, and the Qur'an, with the body,⁴¹ the need for devotion to one's *pir*,⁴² the importance of Muhammed⁴³ and even the idea that to know Muhammed is (in some way) to know God.⁴⁴ They also reiterate the religious imagery that is more commonly heard amongst the illiterate than read in religious discussions, such as the image of crossing to heaven on a narrow bridge (*pul serāt*). It is beyond the scope of this particular study to examine the content or meaning of such songs in detail, but they appear to contain more (albeit oblique) references to mystical practices and beliefs than either histories of the Saints or supposed accounts of their secrets.

The text is central to Islam⁴⁵ but the textual references to the faith briefly reviewed above suggest that songs are too layered to clearly give meaning while remaining too popular to ignore. Ethnographic studies, it has been shown, are too few to suggest

³⁸ Intriguingly, there is no such reticence regarding the written formulations that are put into amulets, and roadside bookstalls often sell books with lists of such formulae (see, for example, A Sāttār, *Ruhānī Tābijāt*, Dhaka, 1992).

³⁹ Unless quoting from Bengali works (in which case his name is transliterated as Lālan Phaker) his name is written in the English form throughout this thesis.

⁴⁰ He was a Maijbhandi. This group grew when Amadullah separated from the Chistiya order around a century ago, and incorporated music and dance as a way to worship God. His nephew was Baba Bandari who established the group and reinforced the focus on music.

⁴¹ The human body mirrors the Qur'an because of the inclusion of Arabic letters in the body's make-up (see M Hālim, *Maijbhandarī Gān*, Dhaka, 1993, 10, 14 [songs 13 and 21]; and S Āli, *Jana Priyo Lālan Gītir Āsar*, Dhaka, nd, 17.

⁴² See na, *Lālan Sāiyer Gān*, Dhaka, 1994, 22 {song number 46}.

⁴³ See Hālim, *op. cit.*, 13 (song 19, this refers to the light of Muhammed).

⁴⁴ 'Rāsulke cenle pāre khoda cena jāy' (after knowing Muhammed it is possible to know God) in Lalon Fakir's words (see na, *Lālan Sāiyer Gān*, 16 {song number 32}).

⁴⁵ With the Qur'an, of course being the central text with self-attestation of its Foundational position (the 'Mother of the Book' in the words of surah Zukhruf, 43:4; see also surah al-Burūj, 85: 21-22).

that a general understanding of Bengali Islam prevails. The historical entry of Islam into Bengal is better documented and, because both the form of political control and of belief involved directly influence the contemporary practice of faith, the next chapter will detail this historical aspect.

(1) Chapter One: The Introduction Of Islam Into The Region

(1:i) Introduction.

While this study centres on the practice of contemporary Islam in one rural setting in Bangladesh, some historical background is needed to chronologically situate the research and, more importantly, to suggest how the particular character of Bengali Islam came about. Other than God's sovereign act of creation⁴⁶ everything proceeds out of something. Informal Islamic leadership in Rosulpur village is no exception and there are several forces that have fashioned the particular style of authority structures within rural Bangladeshi society. Of these, the textual (Qur'anic and hadith) injunctions regarding leadership are obviously important⁴⁷ but the manner Islamic government extended over the region and the fact that it was primarily a Sufi-tinged faith involved, are also vital. Bengal was always at the fringe of various empires, (Asoka's, the Mughal, the British) and Bengalis therefore enjoyed the freedom to pioneer while suffering the neglect that peripheries always have. This autonomy allowed syncretistic practices culled from localised, Buddhist and Hindu ideas to grow and flourish whereas had central control been stronger they might well have been curtailed.

(1:ii) The Nature of Sufism.

As well as indigenous beliefs, part of the shadowy nature of Bengali Islam derives from the fact that it was largely Sufis who carried the faith to Bengal and, although the historical development of Sufism can be delineated,⁴⁸ the central experience of being a

⁴⁶ 'To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth; when He decreeth a matter He saith to it "Be" and it is' (surah al-Baqarah, 2:117).

⁴⁷ And are thus briefly reviewed in the next chapter. How these textual injunctions were negotiated by various ruling dynasties is the theme of the 'Mirrors of Princes' writings, which are therefore briefly reviewed in the appendices.

⁴⁸ This historical approach is, for example, taken by Trimingham throughout The Sufi Orders in Islam, Oxford, 1971.

Sufi remains ambiguously ephemeral and indefinable.⁴⁹ Historically, Sufis were one of the main groups who contested for leadership after Muhammed's death. Pious individuals (such as Hasan al-Basri⁵⁰) who reacted to scholars' obtuseness and rulers' impiety⁵¹ with asceticism and single-minded devotion to God gave way, in time, to organised Sufi 'schools' (*tariqa*⁵²). Sociologically, it has been said that Sufism appeals to three specific groups⁵³ but it could be more generally suggested that it attracts because it fulfills two important social functions. Firstly, it centralises one aspect of Islamic faith (love, of God, by God, and between people⁵⁴) and thus provides a rationale for not following the *Shari'ah* in all its details while remaining within the commonly accepted boundaries of Islam. Secondly, Sufism arguably postulates an achievable way of being righteous before God on the Day of Judgement. The reality of this event is a

⁴⁹ Indeed 'truth without form' was Ibn al-Jalla's definition of Sufism while other accounts identify Sufism as 'the esoteric or inward (*bātin*) aspect of Islam (which) is to be distinguished from 'exoteric' (*zāhir*) Islam just as direct contemplation of spiritual of divine realities is distinguishable from the fulfilling of the laws which translate them' (see [tr.] Nicholson, *Kashf al Mahjub*, 37, pages 36-41 contain several other such definitions; and T Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, Lahore, 1963, 3).

⁵⁰ Born in 643 AD, died in 728 AD, Hasan al-Basri was one of the earliest Sufis, known as much for his asceticism as his inspired teachings (see M Smith, *The Way of the Mystics*, London, 1976, 174-175)

⁵¹ Ewing, for example, comments that general disenchantment at Islamic governments' movement away from the *Shari'ah*-led Shi'ites to focus their hopes on a 'Hidden Imam' while Sunnis turned to 'preserving' saints who maintained global order and localised saints who could be consulted at times of need. Subhan suggests that early believers withdrew in disgust from the 'tyrannical and impious role of the 'Umayyad *khalifas*' and dates the rise in speculative thoughts to Ma'mun's leadership (198/813-218/833). The first person to actually be recorded as a 'Sufi' was the Kufan, Abu Hashim, who died in 767 AD (see K Ewing, *The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1980, 27; J Subhan, *Sufism Its Saints and Shrines*, Lucknow, 1938, 10; and Elwell-Sutton, 'Sufism and Pseudo-Sufism', in [eds.] MacEoin and al-Shahi, *op. cit.*, 50).

⁵² Each *tariqa* was marked by its own spiritual exercises, although more generally there was a shared format whereby seven stages had to be consecutively negotiated. These were repentance, fear of God, renunciation, poverty, patience (or endurance), surrender to (or trust in) God, and contentment ('whatever befalls the traveller is a blessing for him'). Complete devotion to one's spiritual guide was also generally required (see C Rice, *The Persian Sufis*, London, 1969, 32, 35, 39-54).

⁵³ The first is the dispossessed, wanting to escape from their difficult situation; the second is the urban middle class anxious to reconnect to their roots, and the third, those seeking to influence the ruling powers (see M Gilsenan, *Recognising Islam*, New York, 1982, 244-245).

mayor Qur'anic theme yet what criteria will be used for Judgement is far from clear. Sufism promotes the complete reliance on a spiritual guide as a necessity for success on that Day. Because this verges so close to blasphemous ideas of intercession, such thoughts are often blurred by symbolic writing.

One sociological approach that pertains to our current topic sees Sufism as a 'two tiered' system which centres around the degree of centralised organisation⁵⁵ and closeness of saint and devotee.⁵⁶ Whether scholarship is able to explore what has been called 'liminal' situations⁵⁷ at all could, however, be questioned. Many of the aphorisms Sufis themselves have described Sufism by are more reminiscent of Buddhist

⁵⁴ 'The worship of God based on love' is one description of Sufism (see Rice, *op. cit.*, 34).

⁵⁵ Reeves, for example, suggests that the formal organisation of Sufism split into two 'complexes' Sufi sectarianism and popular Islam (itself an ubiquitous term perhaps best defined as 'Islam as it is practised' and counterpoised against 'Normative Islam'). He further demarcates popular Islam into the *sharif* complex (which honoured Muhammed's family) and the *walī* complex (which essentially widened the *sharif* criteria of election from genealogy to emulation of Muhammed; see R Reeves, 'The Sufi Complex at Tanta, Egypt: An Ethnographic Approach to Popular Islam', an unpublished PhD thesis, Kentucky, 1981.

⁵⁶ Whereby devotees are gather rather than ranked around the saint and relationships rather than exercises are the key to spiritual growth. The more intimate sense of this 'walī complex' is given by Reeves' description of it as 'encountered from earliest childhood. Its expressive practices are learned informally by means of empathy and imitation; and sex, like age, is no barrier to full participation. The orthodox tradition has to be formally taught to children after the age of seven, at which time they are being encouraged to identify with future, sexually discriminated, adult roles. The orthodox tradition is learned out of an acceptance of adult responsibilities, as a civic duty; veneration of the saints is learned as a means to express personal desires' (see Reeves, *op. cit.*, 405-406).

⁵⁷ 'Liminal' derives from the Latin word meaning threshold and implies a mid-point in a situation of change. It is sometimes used to express events that straddle the ordinary and extraordinary (see A Betteridge, 'Ziarat: Pilgrimage to the Shrines of Shiraz,' an unpublished PhD, Chicago, 1985, 24-31; and M Buitelaar, Fasting and Feasting in Morocco Women's Participation in Ramadan, Oxford, 1993, 5).

koans (with their sudden, unexpected denouement⁵⁸) or Hindu expansiveness⁵⁹ than academic tomes or legalistic arguments.⁶⁰

Sufism thus remains 'not easy to sum up or define'⁶¹ since it concerns the apprehension rather than the comprehension of God.⁶² While shared sensations and exploration of states can give a sense of certainty (albeit one that can not be coherently discussed⁶³), and solidarity amongst the explorers, it is far from settled whether these searchers are within the bounds of the *Shari'ah*, in contravention of it and thus illegal, or an elect⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Often involving overturned tables or similarly abrupt reactions that startle the acolyte into enlightenment.

⁵⁹ Such as the description of God as *neti neti* (neither this thing nor that thing; nothing, in other words, that the mind can conceive of). This congruity with Buddhist and Hindu ideas facilitated the acceptance of Islam in the Indian Subcontinent.

⁶⁰ This mention of other faiths should not obscure the insistence most Muslim writers have in tracing Sufism to Mohammed rather than extraneous sources such as Greek, Christian, Hindu or Buddhist (see, for example, M Rahmān, *op. cit.*, 64-65).

⁶¹ See Rice, *op. cit.*, 9).

⁶² Shabistari (died circa 720/1320) suggested that Sufism 'is a way beyond the reason by which a man is able to know the secret of reality' while Bulliet writes that 'in very simple terms, Sufis seek the psychological experience of union with or vision of God through a graded series of ritual and meditative exercises, including asceticism and worldly denial' (see G Rasool, *Chisti-Nizami Sufi Order of Bengal*, Delhi, 1990, 3; and R Bulliet, *Islam The View From the Edge*, New York, 1995., 90).

⁶³ In Attar's word's 'in the School of the Secret you will see thousands of men with intellectual knowledge, their lips parted in silence. What is intellectual knowledge here? It stops on the threshold of the door like a blind child'; while Rumi suggests 'you don't understand until you are what you're trying to understand'. Lings adds 'who knoweth God, his tongue flaggeth' (see [tr.] C Nott, *Conference of the Birds by Farid ud-din Attar*, London, 1985, 116; C Barks and I Khan, *The Hand of Poetry*, New York, 1993, 89; and M Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmed al-Alawi*, {hereafter referred to as *A Sufi Saint*}, California, 1971, 43).

⁶⁴ 'The perfect man' (to whom) 'every mouthful and saying is lawful' (in Rumi's words) who follow a purer form of faith and then present a simplified version of it for the many to adhere to in the same way Buddhism is divided into *mahayanan* and *hinayanan* models. This idea is accepted by Reeves and Berger (who writes that 'Sufism ... has its own "high" and "low" forms') but rejected by others. Gardner, for example, cites Eickelman in her assertion that 'there are no "great" and "little" Islams, only local Islams ... it is therefore more useful to envisage all religious praxis as inherently fluid'. A review of the arguments regarding whether Islam is a central faith with regional variants or regional faiths with only theoretical unity is given by Roy (see [tr.] R Nicholson, *The Mathnavi of Jalalu'Uddin Rumi* Delhi, 1992, [vol I and II], 89; Reeves, *op. cit.*, 410; M Berger, *Islam in Egypt Today*, Cambridge, 1970, 76; K Gardner *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, Oxford, 1995, 230; and A Roy, 'Islamization in South Asia with Special Reference to the Bengali-Speaking Region: A Conceptual

unjudgeable by normal standards ('Let the lover be'⁶⁵). While the *Shari'ah* and Sufism tend to avoid potentially divisive challenges to each other's authority, some still question whether Sufism is a part of, or apart from, Islam. Such uncertainties only add to the individual nature of Sufi-brokered, politically sidelined, Bengali Islam.

(1:iii) The Imposition of Islamic Political Control in Bengal.

Although it would take centuries for Islam to spread from the western side of the Indian subcontinent as far as Bengal, Arab raiders landed in Tana (near Bombay) in 637 AD, and a punitive raid led by Muhammed bin Qasim penetrated the lower Indus region as far as Multan in 711 AD and established an enclave in the Sind by 724 AD. Arab interest in the Sind was largely economic with rich agricultural opportunities and the port of Daybul being well sited along east-west shipping routes. Because these early traders were confined to a few 'tiny pockets'⁶⁶ their rule could be maintained only by careful compromise and accommodation with the majority Hindu and Buddhist populations. Initial conquest gave way (in the fourth/tenth century) to Isma'ili⁶⁷ and

and Historical Revaluation' {hereafter referred to as 'Islamization in South Asia'}, Indo-British Review, 19 [1991], 28-30).

⁶⁵ The line is from a quatrain of Jalal Uddin Rumi's:

'Let the lover be disgraceful, crazy,
absentminded. Someone sober
will worry about events going badly.
Let the lover be.'

(See J Moyne and C Barks, Unseen Rain, np, 1986, 7)

⁶⁶ For further details of these small groupings in other parts of the Indian subcontinent see S Lane-Poole, Medieval India Under Mohammadan Rule, Delhi, 1990, 5; M Ali, op. cit., 29; Abecassis, Identity Islam and Human Development in Rural Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1990, 9; and H Rahman, A Chronology of Islamic History 570-1000 CE, London, 1995, 99.

⁶⁷ They were sent by the Fatimids, as part of the struggle for supremacy between them and the Abbasids. There are interesting parallels between Isma'ili accommodation to (not to say syncretism with, at times) local Hindu and Buddhist faiths, and their use of *taqiya* ('the practice of precautionary dissimulation of one's faith') both of which recall contemporary Sufi practice throughout the subcontinent (much of Lalou Fakir's poetry, for example, is ostensibly about boats and rivers). While it is untenable to suggest 'cause-and-effect' (ie Isma'ili dissembling prompted distant time-and-place Sufis to similarly protect themselves) the continuation of other Sindi practices (such

then (from the seventh/thirteenth century) Sufi preachers who spread Islam ever further eastward following Mahmud's conquest of Northern India. Penetration into Bengal was facilitated by the turmoil engendered by almost a thousand years of social and racial tussles that can be traced back to the Aryan immigration which happened around 400 BC since the Aryans were Hindu while the indigenous Bengalis were Buddhist.⁶⁸ Buddhism continued to dominate until 556-57/1161 when four centuries of Pala rule was replaced by the Hindu Sena dynasty.⁶⁹ The Buddhists were given an opportunity to reassert themselves when the Ghaznavid invasion of Northern India began in the seventh/thirteenth century.

This offensive was led by Mahmud who made seventeen separate operations⁷⁰ against small, separated Indian kingdoms that might well have defeated him had they united between 340/1000 and 370/1030. The first (or maybe second) campaign (in 341/1001) extended Ghaznavid territory from Ghazni (south of modern-day Kabul) as far as Peshawar. After each attack Mahmud regularly returned with his plunder⁷¹ to Ghazni with each campaign subduing greater areas of India until a decisive battle in 398-99/1008 decimated the Hindu forces.

As Ghaznavid fortunes declined (around the start of the sixth/twelfth century) the power vacuum in Central Asia was partly filled by a dynasty which formed from the cluster of tribes in Ghur. In 543/1148 these Ghurids entered Ghazni and after some contesting of

as the five thousand year old Harappan binary counting system) does show how societal habits can exert a long influence (see S Ansari, Sufi Saints and State Power The Pirs of Sind 1843-1947, Cambridge, 1992, 14).

⁶⁸ Buddhism arrived in Bengal around 250 BC (see Abecassis, op. cit., 8; and Akter, op. cit., 28-42).

⁶⁹ Viyaysena was the first Hindu ruler. He promoted Brahminised Hinduism which caused Bengali Buddhists to divide into cults that could not effectively oppose the advance of Hinduism. In a similar way, dissatisfaction with the newly ascended Brahman leader Dahir by the Buddhist majority would help acceptance of Muhammed al Qasim and his faith when he arrived in the Sind in 712 AD (see A Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, Leiden, 1980, 4).

⁷⁰ The exact figure is disputed (Haig records twelve, M Ali suggests 'at least 12', and Lane-Poole 'at least sixteen') but these were raids rather than settlement (see [ed.] W Haig, The Cambridge History of India (Vol III), Cambridge, 1928, 13; M Ali, op. cit., 45; and Lane-Poole, op. cit., 18).

⁷¹ Slaves and riches, particularly those taken from Hindu temples.

the city, they held it. In 571/1175 their leader, Mu'izz ud-Din Muhammed, led their first expedition into India.⁷² He and his cousin⁷³ Ghiyas ud-Din Muhammed worked as a team with the former campaigning westward while Mu'izz ud-Din expanded to the east. He took Multan from the Carmatians⁷⁴ in 570-71/1175, Patan (in Southern Rajasthan) three years later, Peshawar in 574-75/1179 and in 576-77/1181 allied himself with a grouping of (Hindu) Rajas in Jammu and defeated a Ghaznavid army in Lahore. Another alliance and another battle five years later effectively finished the Ghaznavid dynasty. In 588/1192 Mu'izz ud-Din then decimated the Hindu army led by Prithi Raj, leaving Northern India defenceless as far eastward as Delhi, although the army was not consolidated enough to even maintain Ajmer easily. Thus far the Ghurids were repeating Ghaznavid patterns of raid and retreat with the added feature of delegating responsibility and allowing deputies more freedom. Ghiyas ud-Din shared power with Mu'izz ud-Din, who in turn delegated Qutb ud-Din Aibak viceroy of the conquered areas of Northern India. Aibak⁷⁵ proceeded to expand these areas in a series of battles that were perhaps won largely because of a lack of Hindu military tactics.⁷⁶ In 589/1193 he captured Delhi and, with Muhammed Bakhtiar Khalji,⁷⁷ raided as far east as Bihar. Aibak continued with the raid-and-return pattern of warfare but Delhi, not Afghanistan,

⁷² Into 'Uchch, Bhati and Multan' (see H Beveridge, The Tarikh-I-Mubarakshahi by Yahiya bin Ahmad bin Abdullab Sirhindi {hereafter referred to as the Tarikh-I-Mubarakshahi}, Delhi, 1992, 6; the following pages detail further campaigns).

⁷³ They may have been brothers (see S Rizvi, The Wonder That Was India Part II, Delhi, 1987, 18).

⁷⁴ They had migrated from Bahrain early in the fourth/tenth century and formed an enclave in the Saffavid Empire which then controlled the area (see Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, 6, 9).

⁷⁵ The name alludes to his broken finger; his actual name was Kutub-ud-Din. He was a slave who was taken from his native Turkistan to Nashipur when young (see Beveridge, The Tarikh-I-Mubarakshahi, 14).

⁷⁶ See Rizvi, The Wonder that was India Part II, 23-24.

⁷⁷ Ferishta refers this deputy of Aibak as 'Mullik Mahomed Mukhtyar', M Ali calls him 'Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji' and generally refers to him as 'Ikhtiyar al-Din' or 'Bhaktar Khalji'; and Sarkar calls him simply Bakhtyar. He was of the Khalji tribe which was Turkic and also originated in Ghur. He migrated to Northern India where (around 1197 AD) he established a small area of control. This showed his ability (and he was strategically enough placed) to attract the attention of Aibak who effectively recruited him soon after (see [tr.] J Briggs, History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India till the Year AD 1612 Translated From the Original Persian of Mahomed Kasim Ferishta, New Delhi, 1981; and [ed.] J Sarkar, op. cit., 2-3).

was his base⁷⁸ and became the first of the Mu'izzi (Slave) Kings⁷⁹ which would outlast the Ghurids who began them.

Ghurid resources were concentrated on Khurasan over the next five years and they had little interest in proceeding beyond Benares but Bakhtiar Khalji (in keeping with the Ghurid style) acted largely on his own initiative⁸⁰ to continue pushing further east. Bengal⁸¹ was then under the fractious rule⁸² of Lakshman (of the Sen dynasty) whose capital was at Nadiya⁸³ but in 598-99/1202 Bakhtiar Khalji captured the city with apparent ease, using only two hundred of his ten-thousand strong cavalrymen.⁸⁴ Lakshman would be the last of the Sena rulers, and from the fall of Nadiya he was confined to what is now southern Bangladesh until his death in 602/1206. Bakhtiar Khalji continued campaigning, capturing Gaur and consolidated his rule before moving north towards Tibet (although this was unsuccessful and the combination of geography and resistance meant he and a handful of his army barely escaped. Aibak invested him

⁷⁸ He did visit Ghazni in 596/1195 at the sultan's request but in keeping with the dynasty's governing style this was not an occasion for curtailing potentially threatening pretenders but rewarding their initiative, and when Aibak returned the next year to India it was as viceroy of the expanded Muslim areas of India.

⁷⁹ The Ghurids used Turkic slaves as their second tier of leadership, and it was from this group that the so-called 'Slave Kings' emerged. They ruled from 602/1206-962/1555 and formed the first of the six groupings of the Delhi Sultanate (see C Bosworth, Islamic Surveys 5: The Islamic Dynasties, {hereafter referred to as The Islamic Dynasties} Edinburgh, 1967, 186-187).

⁸⁰ Although he did submit his plans to Aibak and would later order that the *khutbah* be given in the name of Mu'izz ud-Din (ruler after Ghiyas ud-Din's death in 1203 AD) a further sign of his titular submission..

⁸¹ Then divided into five administrative areas (Radha, Mithila, Barendra, Banga and Bagdi (see map in [ed.] Haig, op. cit., 261).

⁸² With a three way tussle between Brahmins and Buddhists, Brahmins and non-Brahmin Hindus, and (upper class) Aryans and non-Aryans (for a review of this latter group see E Dalton, Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, Calcutta, 1872, 5-6).

⁸³ Also referred to as Nabadwipa, Navadwip, and Navadvip. Sensarma suggests that Navadwip was a small town whose temporary importance was due to the presence of the 'ruler of Gaur' since 'any place the King halted or stayed became the temporary capital' (see P Sensarma, The Military History of Bengal, Calcutta, 1977, 54; and [ed.] J Sarkar, op. cit., 5).

⁸⁴ Details of the take-over, as contained in Minhaj al-Din's account, for example, are suspect (see M Ali, op. cit., 49-60; [ed.] J Sarkar, op. cit., 5-8 details how the city might have been captured).

with 'the Viceroyalty of the Provinces of Behar and Lakhuauti' (ie Bengal)⁸⁵ but he was murdered soon afterwards in Devkot (in 602/1206⁸⁶) by Ali Mardan who then succeeded him as governor.

Ghiyas ud-Din died in 599/1203 in Herat, to be briefly succeeded by Mu'izz ud-Din until his assassination in Ghazni in 602/1206.⁸⁷ Although the coherence of their rule outlasted them, the Ghurid regime that permanently established Islam in India finished with these two deaths since there were no sons to inherit the realm. Aibak ruled from Lahore until he died in 606-7/1210. His son-in-law Shams-ud-Din Iltutmish⁸⁸ was proclaimed successor but rule was contested and territory divided. Ali Mardan ruled in Bengal⁸⁹ and extravagantly claimed far-off regions as well until he was assassinated around 1213 AD. It would be a decade before Iltutmish emerged as the predominant ruler in Delhi, establishing the Ilbari⁹⁰ regime. In 622/1225 he invaded Bengal⁹¹ and established himself in Lakhnauti⁹² (upstream from modern Rajshahi).⁹³ The ruler of

⁸⁵ See M Salam, The Riyazu-s-Salatin A History of Bengal by Ghulam Husain Salim, Calcutta, 1902, 59. Sarkar sees this investiture as 'a clever act of diplomacy ... to seek an amicable understanding with Malik Qutbuddin (ie Aibak) who might otherwise refuse to recognise him as the lawful ruler of Bihar and Bengal' (see [ed.] Sarkar, op. cit., 8). The 'Riyazu-s-Salatin' was written in Persian and covers around five hundred years of Bengali history but is of dubious veracity (see AC Roy, History of Bengal, Delhi, 1986, 372).

⁸⁶ For a summary of Bakhtiar Khilji's life, see [ed.] Sarkar, op. cit., 31-34.

⁸⁷ 'Pierced by no fewer than 22 wounds' Ferishta notes (see Briggs, op. cit., 105).

⁸⁸ Also written as 'Shams-ud-din Iyal-timish' (and referred to as Shams ud Din); he had been bought as a slave by Aibak in Delhi.

⁸⁹ Or more correctly returned to rule in Bengal. His initial tenure following the assassination of Bakhtyar Khilji had been brief, with 'Izz-uddin Shiran Khilji defeating him in battle and re-establishing the dynastic rule. Ali Mardan was captured, escaped to Delhi in 603/1207, persuaded Aibak to send an army against Shiran Khilji while he himself accompanied Aibak on a foray to Ghazni in 605/1208-9 during which he was captured by Turkic forces under Taj-uddin, then released after about a year to return to Aibak in Lahore and be appointed Viceroy of Lakhnauti. It was soon after establishing himself in Bengal that Aibak died in Lahore, prompting a scramble for power in North India (see [ed.] Sarkar, op. cit., 18-19).

⁹⁰ Also called the Mu'izzi regime; Iltutmish was from the Ilbari tribe of Turkestan.

⁹¹ Then ruled by Hisam ud-Din 'Iwaz Khalji who had taken over from Malik 'Izz-uddin Muhammad Shiran Khilji (see AC Roy, op. cit., 43-58; and M Ali, op. cit., 90). A full list of rulers of Bengal from 1204 AD-1757 AD is given by Eaton (see Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 323-326).

⁹² Which had replaced Devkot as capital, seemingly more for historical than military reasons (see [ed.] Sarkar, op. cit., 23).

Bengal, Iwaz Khalji, had strengthened the region's infrastructure by building roads and establishing a fleet but he was not strong enough to withstand Iltutmish and therefore submitted to Delhi's control. By 631/1233 Iltutmish regained control as far as Aibak had conquered, appointing his sons to govern Bengal.⁹⁴ By the time of his death⁹⁵ in 633/1236 Iltutmish had created a coherent administrative system from the Ghurid adventuring but Delhi remained too threatened by the Mongols⁹⁶ to seriously enforce its

⁹³ The Bengali Sultanate had capitals in Devkot, Lakhnauti (from 1204 AD, or around the time of Iltutmish), Pandua (from around 1342 AD) Gaur (from about 1432 AD) and then Sonargoan. Exact dates of establishment and tenure are uncertain; one author suggests Pandua was capital for fifty two years 'from the beginning of the reign of Shamsu-d-din Ilyas Shah' (ie 746/1345) until the 'seat of sovereignty' shifted to Gaur (which some equate to Lakhnauti) in 795/1392 (see Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 97; Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, 49; and [tr.] H Beveridge, 'The Khurshid Jahan Numa of Sayyad Ilahi Bakhsh al Husaini Angrezabadi' {hereafter referred to as 'The Khurshid Jahan Numa'}, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 3 [1895], 200, 216).

⁹⁴ The first was called Nasir-uddin Mahmood. On his death in 626/1229 Iltutmish appointed another son, but then confusingly renamed him Nasir ud-Din Mahmood also. Ali calls this period 'one of steady expansion and consolidation' and Rizvi suggests Iltutmish as 'the greatest ruler of thirteenth century India' (see [tr.] Briggs, op. cit., 119; M Ali, op. cit., 91, 59; and Rizvi, The Wonder that was India Part II, 27).

⁹⁵ 'Wandered by the door of mortality to the door of permanency' as 'The Tarikh-I-Mubarakshahi' poetically puts it; the date is given as 1235 AD (see Beveridge, The Tarikh-I-Mubarakshahi, 20).

⁹⁶ The Mongols originated as nomads from forests around Lake Baikal and were unified under Temujin (564/1167-624/1227) who is now better known by his title of Chengiz Khan. His genius lay largely in organising the army so erstwhile marauders became an irresistible, ever growing, force that offered neighbouring cities and kingdoms the choice of immediate and complete capitulation or annihilation. When he died, Chengiz allocated his lands to his four sons with Jochi (the eldest) pre-deceasing his father so his share of Western Siberia, Khwarazm, and southern Russia passed directly to his (Jochi's) son, Batu. Chaghatay (Chengiz's second son) was given east Transoxiana, Ogedey was overall commander and Toluy (the youngest) oversaw Mongolia itself. The last two lines merged and established the Yuan dynasty of China which was replaced in 1043/1634 by the Ming dynasty. It was from this line that the Il-Khanid dynasty emerged that would (under (Hulagu) take Baghdad in 656/1258. The descendants of Chaghatay retained power in Transoxiana and Eastern Turkestan until 771/1370 while Jochi's several branches of descendants controlled western Siberia (until 907/1502), Transoxiana (until 1007/1598) and the Crimea (until 1208/1792; see Bosworth, The Islamic Dynasties, 141-159; and P Brent, The Mongol Empire, London, 1976, 6-7, 11-79 detail the life of Chengiz Khan).

rule over distant Bengal.⁹⁷ Succession squabbles further weakened Delhi's ability to govern⁹⁸ and, after the death of Ghiyath-ad-Din Balban in 664/1266, Bengal was virtually an independent region for most of the next four centuries. The price of independence was, to some extent, stagnation particularly when compared with the renewed vigour of neighbouring Hindu principalities.⁹⁹

During much of these four centuries there were regular invasive central Asian attacks towards Delhi and occasional attempts from Delhi to re-assert control in Bengal. For example, after Ghiyath ud-Din Tughluq established the Tughluqid branch of the Delhi Sultanate in 720/1320 he defeated Bahadur Shah¹⁰⁰ and established a western Bengali, and an eastern Bengali governate¹⁰¹. This meant that when Bengal later re-asserted independence it was as two separate entities, a division which recognised the fact that the delta was not uniformly subjugated either in a military or agricultural sense. Indeed, the southern regions remained covered in forest far longer, allowing protection for defeated forces while they regrouped but not providing sufficient arable land to support long term occupation.¹⁰²

Ghiyath ud-Din Tughluq died in 725/1325 but Bengal remained destabilized until Shams ud-Din Ilyas¹⁰³ came to power in 746/1345. He took the provocative steps of independently issuing currency and having his own name featured in the Friday

⁹⁷ Ironically, Delhi was concurrently bolstered by multi-skilled refugees and protected by the 'almost miraculously ill-timed ... (and led by) ... by commanders of secondary rank and skill' (see Ahmad, Studies in Islamic Culture, 13).

⁹⁸ The degree of turmoil around this period can be gauged from the fact that eight Delhi-designated and seven local-contenders all had periods of power in Bengal from 624/1227 to 688/1286.

⁹⁹ See [ed.] Sarkar, op. cit., 43.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 84-86

¹⁰¹ These were based in Lakhnawati and Sonargoan under the governorships of Sultan Nasiruddin and Bahram Khan respectively (ibid., 86).

¹⁰² Eaton describes how it was only under the Mughals, for example, that the Chittagong region was brought under effective control (see Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 235-238).

¹⁰³ This name becomes 'Shums-ood-Deen Poorby' throughout Briggs' translation of Ferishta (Briggs suggesting he was originally called Mullik Hajy Elias Mullahy) and he reigned from 743-758 AH.

khutbah.¹⁰⁴ Delhi leadership was again too fragmented¹⁰⁵ to entirely rule over far-away Bengal and too preoccupied with the next wave of invaders from the west. This was led by Timur.¹⁰⁶ Delhi was decimated at the very end of 801/1398 and North India was left shattered and fragmented. With power remaining localised the Ilyasid regime that Shams ud-Din had established was left unchallenged and would rule in Bengal for most of the next one hundred and thirty four years¹⁰⁷ coming to an end when their Abyssinian Palace Guard usurped power in 892/1487. A chaotic time followed until Sayyid 'Ala ad-Din Husain Shah took power in 899/1494. As his name suggests, he was a Meccan Arab and he founded a dynasty that lasted until 946/1539. This was perhaps the 'golden

¹⁰⁴ Writing of the Mamluk ruler Qalwun, Piscatori notes 'the idea of the unity of the empire remained only in the Caliph's name being mentioned in the Friday sermon and appearing on the coinage' (see J Piscatori, Islam in a World of Nation States, Cambridge, 1986, 63). These two signs of authority are often mentioned as having significance by other historians and therefore had deep significance. Eaton, for example, sees Minhaj's historical account of Bengal of interest not because of its questionable veracity but because it reflects what then constituted 'proper instruments of political legitimacy' which involve raising monuments that honoured both the 'ulama' and Sufi leaders as well as the abovementioned criteria (see Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 32-33).

¹⁰⁵ Power had been devolved to a handful of elite (Turkic) families following the end of Firuz Tughluq's thirty seven-year reign in 790/1388 (one of the more successful leaders of this period, largely because his reign coinciding with a slump in Mongol fortunes).

¹⁰⁶ Timur Lenk (1335-1405 AD; the epithet 'Lenk' denotes the lameness he got from an early wound) was the son of a minor chief of the Barlas clan who were Mongols that settled in the Qashka-Darya Valley in Transoxiana. He (incorrectly) claimed descent from Chengiz Khan and controlled much of central Asia before 'settling' in Transoxiana (based at Samarqand). His success was at the expense of the Chaghatayid Mongols who were in decline. Although he was as militarily brilliant (and brutal) as Chengiz he lacked the ability to establish administrations in the regions he devastated and invaded. Most of Timur's early campaigns were to the west, but in 1398 AD he invaded India, then under the Tuqlud dynasty and ruled from Delhi by Sultan Mahmud. It was an echo of events three centuries earlier since Timur did not occupy but destroy. Another interesting echo involves Timur's absolute rule and titular deference to the Chingizids, as founders of the Mongols, which parallels the manner various dynasties interacted with the Abbasids. Timur's destruction of Northern India was so severe that it would be two further centuries before Delhi again became an effective capital (see J Ure, The Trail of Tamerlane, London, 1980, 35; Ahmad, Studies in Islamic Culture, 19; Bosworth, The Islamic Dynasties, 141-159; and Brent, op. cit., 6-7, 225-234).

¹⁰⁷ The Ilyasid regime was interrupted by a twenty-year seizure of rule by a Hindu landowner whose son converted to Islam and ruled as Jalalad-Din Muhammed. There was much tension throughout this period however between Turks and Bengalis with

age' of medieval Bengal with military expansion (Bihar was annexed¹⁰⁸), involvement of the indigenous population (vernacular Bengali literature was encouraged) and religious tolerance (Hindus held many prominent positions during this administration).¹⁰⁹ The Sayyid regime ended when Ghiyath ad-Din Mahmud Shah was overthrown by the Afghan Shir Shah Sur in 946/1539. He defeated the first Mughal leader, Humayan, but the Mughal dynasty as a whole was not to be so easily deflected.

The Mughals¹¹⁰ would in fact end the four centuries of Bengali semi-independence. This happened under the third Mughal ruler, Akbar, who succeeded Humayan in 963/1556 and became the first person to unite India since Asoka, nearly two thousand years earlier. He would in time control south as far as Bombay and, following the Battle of Rajmahal in 976-77/1576, east as far as Bengal. Part of his unifying influence entailed his religious ideas which essentially blended Hindu and Islamic into a new religion, the *Din Ilahi*. He had wives of both faiths and incorporated the (Hindu) Rajput nobility into his court. He abolished the *jizaya* tax on non-Muslims and summoned Jesuit priests to his new capital at Fatepur Sikri to listen to their views. While it might be thought that his syncretistic ideas would have flourished in remote Bengal this is not entirely correct, as shown by the rebellion led by Mulla Muhammed Yazdi which overran the capital city of Tanda and killed Akbar's governor, Muzaffar Khan. Various campaigns re-

the Bengali noble Raja Ganesh attaining some uncertain measure of power around the third decade of the fifteenth century AD (see Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 51-56).

¹⁰⁸ See M Ali, *op. cit.*, 206 for a map that shows the Bengali 'Kingdom' at this time.

¹⁰⁹ Differences in chronology and nomenclature between the Bosworth's account (cited above) and Brigg's translation of Ferishta are marked. According to Ferishta (and retaining Brigg's spelling) Shums-ood-Deen Poorby Bhungera ruled for sixteen years and established a five generational dynasty that lasted until 788/1386 when a Hindu landowner (Raja Kans Poorby) seized power. Barbik returned the lineage of Shums-ood-Deen to rule in 832/1428. Alla-ood-Deen began his rule in 904/1497 (see [tr.] Briggs, *op. cit.*, vol 4 195-208; and Bosworth, *The Islamic Dynasties*, 194-195).

¹¹⁰ Haig notes that 'this people is usually described as Mongols before and as Mughuls after its conversion to Islam. Mughal is the Arabic form of Mongol and the Mughuls of Persia and Transoxiana were now Muslims'. This seems an overly simplistic explanation, although the founder of the Mughals actually had Mongol and Turkic roots. This was Zahir-ud-Din Muhammed Babur who was born in 889-90/1484 in the Jaxartes Valley (from where the Seljuqs had earlier arisen). His was a ruling family (both Timur and Chengis Khan were distant ancestors) and he succeeded his father as ruler of Farghana when only ten. He conquered more territory and in 909-10/1504

established Akbar's control over Bengal, but there, as elsewhere, his fostering of a religious climate that tolerated all but intolerance arguably led directly to the backlash that would come under Aurangzeb. By 983-84/1576 however Delhi effectively began the rule of Bengal that would continue until the early twelfth/eighteenth century.¹¹¹

Akbar died in 1013-14/1605; under his successor¹¹² the capital of Bengal was shifted from Rajmahal to Dhaka.¹¹³ Shah Jahan ruled from 1038-39/1629 to 1068-69/1658, and then Aurangzeb from 1068-69/1658 to 1118-19/1707 before the British gained control. Bengal was one of the first regions where this occurred and by 1765 AD they had enough Bengali trading partners and a pliant enough Muslim ruler to gain the right to collect revenue. The East India Company claimed powers of jurisdiction seven years later. The Bengali economy was thereby increasingly tied to British demands and crops such as indigo and jute were produced to the cost of former products such as quality cloths. From Bengal, British control moved outward and in 1803 they took over effective control in Delhi although the Mughal regime would supposedly continue until the Indian Mutiny in 1857.¹¹⁴ One of the major legacies of the Mughal regime to Bengal was the increasing economic importance of the area to Delhi-based governments. Bengal became less of an awkward periphery, more of an agrarian resource. This was for several reasons, the primary one perhaps being outside any ruler's control; the shift in rivers' courses. The gradual movement eastward of major river flows meant that siltation, essential for providing the rich soil needed for rice cultivation, increasingly occurred deeper onto Bengal.¹¹⁵ Concurrent with the increasing

established himself in Kabul before occupying Samarqand. In 925-26/1519 he made his first campaign to India (see Haig, *op. cit.*, 225).

¹¹¹ For a full account of the Mughal-appointed governors of Bengal and their attempts to counter both internal dissent and outside forces see M Ali, *op. cit.*, 325-576.

¹¹² Jahangir, who ruled from 1013-14/1605 to 1038-39/1629.

¹¹³ Which was thus initially called Jahanagar. The capital subsequently shifted to several other temporary locations such as Murshidabad just as it had been shifted earlier (see 'The Independent' newspaper {published in Dhaka}, 14/9/97, page 4).

¹¹⁴ See B Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900 {hereafter referred to as Islamic Revival in British India}, New Jersey, 1982, 9-10.

¹¹⁵ See Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 194-199. The maps detailing the changing flow patterns recall one reason for the Abbasid decline during the reign of Al-Mu'tasim (218/833-226/842); the loss of soil fertility in the Sawad region south of Baghdad which had long provided food for the empire. Quite why this occurred is unsure but increased flow-rates in some rivers such as the Diyala altered the previously regular pattern of

viability of cultivating rice and other valuable crops such as cotton, was the increasing need the Mughals had of taxation revenue. This joined with improvement in both land and sea communications which encouraged the growth of exports¹¹⁶ and with the successful incorporation of the 'charismatic authority of the *pir*'¹¹⁷ and by extension the efforts of those forest-clearing inhabitants who looked to the *pirs* for guidance, to bring Bengal ever-closer into a Delhi-led state structure.

Whereas the four hundred years of pre-Mughal Islamic rule over Bengal could generally be described as an independent sultanate, for the two centuries of Mughal rule Bengal could therefore be described as part of a larger political entity. This was led by an Islamic government, and had an ever-growing Bengali Muslim population; hence the inevitable reaction to British invasion when it came was arguably increased since the British were non-Muslims and further exacerbated by the new rulers' preference for Bengali Hindus as their administrative intermediaries. As with other parts of the subcontinent, there were various Reformist movements in Bengal, as well as simultaneous attempts to accommodate Western thoughts. The former was led by the '*ulama*', the latter by the urban, educated Muslims. The larger part of Bengal became independent from Britain as the eastern part of Pakistan in 1947 AD¹¹⁸ and in 1971 AD separated from Pakistan to become the separate nation of Bangladesh.

(1:iv) The Introduction of Islamic Thought into Bengal.

Bengali adoption of Islamic faith (as distinct from Islamic political control) seemingly occurred in the absence of state proselytisation with local rulers generally less

flooding and siltation by which soil fertility had been maintained and also made irrigation harder since only at peak capacity was the water level near land level and at all other times water had to be lifted quite a distance. Moreover, six centuries of irrigation had led to salination of the region.

¹¹⁶ See Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 198-208.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 212.

¹¹⁸ With some Bengali-speaking areas being incorporated into the state of West Bengal in India.

concerned about religious preferences than securing peoples' taxes.¹¹⁹ Conversion came about primarily through Sufis migrating into the region.¹²⁰ Just as happened with political infiltration of Islam, there was a slow progression across the subcontinent. The oldest tomb of a popular Sufi leader in the Sind, the first part of the subcontinent to come under Islamic control, dates from 171/788¹²¹ but widespread dissemination of Islamic ideas began around the fourth/tenth century¹²² with more famous Indian Sufi leaders arising soon afterwards.¹²³ The Suhrawardi,¹²⁴ Qadiri¹²⁵ and

¹¹⁹ In contrast to the Deccan plateau in Southern India where those who 'wielded a sword, ... a pen, ... a royal land grant, (or) ... a begging bowl' actively propagated Islam (see R Eaton, Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles Sufis in Medieval India {hereafter referred to as Sufis of Bijapur}, New Jersey, 1978, 283; for more about the introduction of Islam into Bengal see Mills, *op. cit.*, 8, 19; and Akter, *op. cit.*, 43-49).

¹²⁰ 'Sufis of Northern India ... who not only brought the message of Sufism to Bengal, but also established and greatly popularized this Islamic theosophical philosophy in the country within the span of a comparatively short period of two centuries and a half' according to Haq. It was not only in Bengal, nor even the Indian subcontinent as a whole, that Sufis were pivotal in propagation of Islam after its early rapid expansion; O'Fahey writes of how sultans and holy men complemented each other's leadership in a sub-Saharan setting where the 'holy men would be attracted by the material rewards and prestige that he could find on the Islamic frontier', while for the sultan 'such people could provide a new focus of loyalty, breaking down the old clan and tribal particularisms'. It was the 'holy men' rather than the Muslim traders 'who were the most effective agents of Islamicisation in black Africa'. They used herbs and other medical knowledge, but also charms (usually containing Qur'anic verses), water that had washed Qur'anic verses off a slate, dreams and prayer (although the last mentioned was, perhaps oddly, not widely relied on). The healer was thus respected - but also feared since the ability to cure could (it was believed) easily be reversed and 'punitive illness' imposed. The linkage of faith with health was enhanced by the tendency to see pilgrimage as a potentially healing situation. Another North African study (Saunders) makes the point that 'spirit possession is manifested through illness' which can be countered by trance-dance ceremonies (see Haq, A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal, 1; R O'Fahey, 'Saints and Sultans: The Rôle of Muslim Holy Men in the Kiera Sultanate of Dar Fur' in Northern Africa: Islam and Modernization, [ed.] M Brett, London, 1973, 24, 52; L Saunders, 'Variants in Zar Experience in an Egyptian Village' in Case Studies in Spirit Possession, [ed.] V Crapanzo and V Garrison, New York, 1977, 177-191).

¹²¹ This was of Abu Turāb (see S Haq, 'Early Sufi Shaykhs of the Subcontinent', Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society, 22 [1974], 5).

¹²² See Haq, Bānge Sūphī Prabhāb, 78.

¹²³ Such as Shah Sultan Rumi (died 445/1053), Saiyed Nathor Shah (died 430/1039) and Mukhdum Saiyed Ali (died 465/1072; see Haq, Bānge Sūphī Prabhāb, 71-72; and S Ansari, *op. cit.*, 19-23).

¹²⁴ The Suhrawardi order was begun by an Iraqi, Sheikh Abd al-Qadir Suhrawardi (died 564-65/1169).

Naqshbandi¹²⁶ orders all established themselves in the Sind around this period but it was with the founding of the Chisti order by Khwaja Mu'in ud-Din Chisti in the sixth/twelfth century¹²⁷ that Subcontinental Sufism is traditionally dated. This order remains very important although the Suhrawardis, Qadiris, and Naqshbandis all retain regional influence. An order established in the western part of the subcontinent by Namak Jainak¹²⁸ in the eighth/fourteenth century was carried eastwards two centuries later by Badi-ud-Din Shah-i-Madar¹²⁹ and would become the Madari order. Several centres were established in Bengal, and the order continues to have some influence.¹³⁰

Broadly speaking, then, it was from around 390/1000 to 545/1150 that Sufi ideas were carried by unaffiliated and itinerant Central Asian dervishes¹³¹ into Bengal¹³² although the first person to preach Islam in the region (Shah Bayazid al-Bustami)

¹²⁵ The Qadiris were founded in Iraq by 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (469-70/1077-561-61/1166/561), introduced into India in the late ninth/fifteenth century by Muhammed Ghawth, and became prominent in the eleventh/seventeenth century under the leadership of Miyan Mir.

¹²⁶ The Naqshbandis were begun (probably in Iran) by Baha Uddin Noksh-Band (died 1389 AD) in reaction to Turkic and Mongol influences. It was established in Delhi by Kharajah Muhammad Bakki Billah (died 1503 AD) and further developed under Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi in the eleventh/seventeenth century.

¹²⁷ Referred to as 'Shaikh Salim Sikriwal' by tenth/sixteenth century writer Khwajah Nizamuddin Ahmad (who also lists other prominent mystics of Akbar's time), he was born in Sistan (in southern Afghanistan) in 1142 AD and arrived in Ajmer in 1193 AD (although this date is far from certain, as also is 1236 AD as the date of his death). His arrival coincided with the decline of Raja Prithviraj, and while cause-and-effect may not be immediately inferred there was a change in the regional balance of power from Hinduism to Islam around this period. His tomb is in Ajmer and because this is part of India the shrine of his successor (Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar, who died in 663-4/1265) is currently more important to Pakistanis (see [tr.] B De, The Tabaqati-i-Akbari (by Khwajah Nizamuddin Ahmad) [vol 2], Delhi, 1992, 700).

¹²⁸ He was buried near Kanpur, where Madari devotees both gathered and were also buried (see Haq, Bānge Sūphī Prabhāb, 79).

¹²⁹ 1315 AD-1436 AD. Whether he actually did visit Bengal is questioned (see Haq, A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal, 151).

¹³⁰ For an extensive list of Sufi orders in the Indian Subcontinent see F Rašid, op. cit., 184-241.

¹³¹ At a time when, as Sākalaḃen poetically puts it, 330,000,000 Hindu deities received *pūja* worship (see Sākalaḃen, op. cit., 31; see also F Rašid, op. cit., 69).

¹³² Although it is suggested that Bengali Sufism was indistinguishable from Indian Sufism until the tenth/sixteenth century (see Haq, Bānge Sūphī Prabhāb, 84; and A Ahmad, Islamic Surveys 7: An Intellectual History of Islam in India, {hereafter referred to as An Intellectual History of Islam in India}, Edinburgh, 1969, 37-42).

died as early as 261/874.¹³³ The earliest known Muslim inscription in Bengal date from 617-18/1221¹³⁴ which suggests Sufi-carried Islam had become settled in one corner at least of the region by then.¹³⁵ Sheikh Jalal ud-Din Tabrizi was another famous Sufi (of the Suhrawardi Order) who preceded the Turkic invasions of Bengal. As his name suggests, he was born in Tabriz in Persia and was reputed to be so devoted to Sheikh Suhrawardi that he would carry cooking utensils on his head each year during the pilgrimage and thus be always ready to cook for his teacher.¹³⁶ Sheikh Tabrizi came first to Delhi and then to Bengal where he died in 622/1225.¹³⁷ The Qadiris arrived in the region through 'Abdu-l-Karim Ibn Ibrahim al-Jili in 790-91/1388 and the Naqshbandis via Khwajah Baqi Billah around the end of the ninth/fifteenth century. The most popular Bengali order during this time was the Qalandariyah¹³⁸ but there were also several smaller orders that concurrently emerged.¹³⁹

It was however from the sixth/thirteenth century (until the tenth/mid sixteenth century) when Bengal was ever-increasingly occupied by Turkic migrants that Islamic and indigenous Indian thought became fused within Bengali life. The

¹³³ See MS Khan, 'Impact of Islam on Medieval Bengal: An Overview' Islamic Culture, 59 (1985), 166.

¹³⁴ This notes the establishment of a Sufi lodge (see Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 71-72).

¹³⁵ Haq suggests this introduction of Sufi ideas occurred from 545/1150-802/1400 and Schimmel suggests that following the consolidation of 'Sufi orders in the mainlands of Islam' (around 1200 AD) missionary activity proliferated in the Indian Subcontinent (see Haq, A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal, 3-4; and Schimmel, India in the Indian Subcontinent, 23).

¹³⁶ For a fuller account of Tabrizi's life see A Rašid, op. cit., 22-24; for doubts about his existence, see Sen who notes three different candidates for the Bengali 'Sheikh Tabrizi' and suggests the person remembered by that name may be a fourth person with accretions of other lives. Devotion to one's teacher is, of course, a recurring Sufi theme (see S Sen, Sekasubhodaya of Halayudya-Misra, Calcutta, 1963, vii-ix).

¹³⁷ Both the place and date of death are disputed, with the Maldives being alternatively suggested for the former and 642/1244 and (more doubtfully) 738/1337 for the latter (see Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, 47; [tr.] Beveridge, 'The Khurshid Jahan Numa', 203, 230; and Haq, A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal, 160-168).

¹³⁸ See MS Khan, op. cit., 167. Michel identifies the Chisti and Suhrawardi orders as being paramount in the initial entry of Sufi thought into Bengal but others talk of independent *pirs* as central in the popularisation of mystical ideas (see T Michel, Islam in Asia, Navarra, 1991, 43)

¹³⁹ See Haq, A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal, 4-7.

commonly-mentioned 'Twelve Founders of Bengali Sufism' date from this period (although 'twelve' would seem to be more mythological than actual since no-one in the discussions with this author was able to mention more than a handful of the dozen). The most famous Bengali Sufi, Shah Jalal of Sylhet, lived during this period (although there is no exactitude regarding his dates¹⁴⁰ and his life is recorded more in hagiographic than biographic terms). He was born in Yaman and travelled to Bengal supposedly to follow his teacher's instruction to find the land that matched a handful of earth he handed to him. Other important Bengali saints of this time include Shah Paran of Sylhet, Shah Sultan of Netrakona,¹⁴¹ Shah Ali of Mirpir, Shah Jamal of Rajshahi, Shah Kamal of Bogra, Attur Rahman in Damrai, Shahan Shah (for whom the *Atiya Majar* in Tangail was built), Shah Bayazid al-Bistami (died 261/874; his *majar* is in Chittagong as is the Baroliya *majar* which commemorates another of these twelve) were all frequently mentioned.¹⁴²

From around 957/1550 there was a reaction against the mingling of Islam and Hinduism. This was given initial impetus by Sheikh Sirhindi¹⁴³ with (Mughal emperor) Aurangzeb giving a political form to this reforming zeal.¹⁴⁴ Sufis were

¹⁴⁰ Ibn Battuta noted that Shah Jalal (more completely, Shah Jalal Mujarrad-i-Yamani) lived for 150 years, so it is perhaps unsurprising that Haq (who gives his date of death as 1346 AD) suggests there are no satisfactory chronologically accounts of his life. A much fuller discussion of his origins is given in D Caidurī, *Hajrat Śahjālāl*, Dhaka, 1995, 2-8, 13; see also Haq, *A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal*, 218; Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 73-75 ; and Gardner [who refers to him as Jalal Mujarr-i-Yammani], *op. cit.*, 231).(see, 218-219, D Caiduri, *op. cit.*, 13,

¹⁴¹ Presumably Shah Sultan Rumi who 'left worldly things behind' but also reputedly visited Mymensingh (Netrakona is in Mymensingh district) in 445/1053 (see *Sākalāyen*, *op. cit.*, 33).

¹⁴² Roy mentions the 'twelve *āwliyā'* reputed to have arrived from Baghdad on the back of a fish, but does not name any of them (see Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, 214).

¹⁴³ Whether there was a neat assimilation-then-rejection of indigenous ideas is similarly brought into question by Eaton's suggestion that the 'manual on tantric yoga' (the *Amritakunda*) remained influential for five hundred years after the Turkish irruption into Bengal, with some doubting it and others valuing it throughout that time (see Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 77-82).

¹⁴⁴ It may be overly simplistic to divide the development of Sufism into chronological blocks either in a global sense (as Trimmingham does) or a regional sense (as Haq does, dividing the growth of Indian Sufism into four distinct periods). Rizvi instead approaches the topic by simply describing the various Sufi schools. Similarly, Fisher

helped (in Bengal, as in the subcontinent as a whole) during this time by operating in an atmosphere of local Muslim land ownership and rule, and by their own shrewd choice of settling in sites already deemed holy because of their history.¹⁴⁵ There would also seem to have been some warriors¹⁴⁶ around this period at least such as Shah Isma'il Ghazi¹⁴⁷ who helped the penetration of Islam into the hinterland. He gained influence to the West of what is now Bangladesh both by his military and engineering activities, fighting for Barbak Shah against the king of Orissa (Gajpati) and overseeing the building of a bridge across an area of marshy land.¹⁴⁸ Local Sufis also prospered because they presented Islam in locally acceptable forms by emphasizing ambiguous and speculative ideas that had been modified first by Central Asian asceticism then by Indian pantheism.¹⁴⁹ Islamic understanding was

(in his study of Black Africa) posits a progression whereby 'Islam in quarantine' led to 'a stage of mixing, on which local people begin to adopt Islam, often quite seriously but usually without regarding it as an exclusive loyalty' then finally 'a stage of reform, in which the local Muslims themselves react against mixing' (see S Rizvi, A History of Sufism in India, Delhi, 1992, [volume two], 54ff; and H Fisher, 'Hasebu: Islamic Healing in Black Africa,' in [ed.] Brett, op. cit., 37-38).

¹⁴⁵ At least in the case of the Adina Mosque, built in 776/1374, a Hindu Temple was converted into a mosque. Deliberate usurping of existing symbols to promote new faiths was not unique to Bengal of course. The Abbasids used some Sassanian fashions when stabilising their rule over Iran and al-Mansur used some building materials from the palace of Khusraw at Ctesiphon which had been the centre of Sassanid power when building his new capital at Baghdad and may even have deliberately mimicked Sassanian architecture. And (much later) perhaps part of Mahmud's motive in carrying the Temple Gates from Somnath back to Ghazna was to reinforce his own authority (see J Lassner, 'Search for an 'Abbasid Capital', Muslim World 55 [1965], 203; Lane-Poole, op.cit., 27; Akter, op. cit., 48; and Beveridge, 'The Khurshid Jahan Numa', 211).

¹⁴⁶ 'Gazi is a generic name, given to those whose military knowledge complemented that of the Sufis and 'aided the preaching of Islam' (see Sākālāyēn, op. cit., 35).

¹⁴⁷ Haq gives his date of death as 1474 AD (see Haq, A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal, 181).

¹⁴⁸ He was buried in Rangpur (see G Damant, 'Notes on Shah Isma'il Ghazi with a Sketch of the Contents of a Persian MS Entitled "Risalat ush-Shuhada" Found at Kanta Duar, Rangpur', Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 3 [1874], 215-216).

¹⁴⁹ 'Islam in its Perso-Arabic attire failed to elicit any meaningful response from the masses of Bengali Muslims. Consequently their cultural mediators had not only to pull down the language barricade but also to make Islamic tradition more meaningful to the Bengali converts in syncretistic and symbolic forms'. The irony of most preaching being carried out by the least orthodox believers is striking, and concurs with Berger's findings in Egypt (see Roy, The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal, 248; and Berger, op. cit., 66).

not always remote from Hindu ideas. The Sufi concept of *wahdatu`l-wujūd* approached Hindu pantheistic concepts¹⁵⁰ while the centralising of love¹⁵¹ was not only conciliatory in itself but in its blurring of Creator and created it produced figures so imbued with God they resembled *avatars*.¹⁵² Moreover, the God preached by the Sufis could be perceived via the plurality of phenomena, thus transforming the idea of *tawhīd* (unity) far closer to pre-existing Hindu ideas.¹⁵³ Sufis presented a concept of soul that could be united with God rather than be ultimately judged by Him. This was the time when Chaitanya, one of the foremost *bhakti* leaders, was preaching in Bengal, furthering the convergence of thought.¹⁵⁴

Most writers on early Islam in Bengal concentrate on elite ideas produced by educated scholars. Eaton, by contrast, suggests a mechanism whereby conversion could have occurred in the absence of elite-brokered mechanisms such as military force, political coercion or rulers' patronage¹⁵⁵ and Roy adds that the extent of

¹⁵⁰ Usually translated as ontological or existential monism, this involves the Unity of Being and was first formulated by Ibn Arabi and arrived in India via Persian poets (see Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 39-40).

¹⁵¹ Always a central Sufi theme, although whether to the extent of 'divesting God of His sterner qualities' as one author suggests is questionable (see Akter, *op. cit.*, 50).

¹⁵² 'The Upanishads teach that by knowing the *atman* the Universe is known ... Hence the famous phrase(s) ... 'I am Brahma' (*Aham Brahmasmi*') which is exactly equivalent to the Sufi aphorism *Anal Haq*' (see B Pande, 'The Vedant and Sufism: A Comparative Study', *Indian Horizons*, 44 [1995], 130).

¹⁵³ Pande avers that 'ample and convincing evidence exists to show that all the higher thinkers and religious reformers among the Hindus, from the earliest times had proclaimed the unity of God, declared the equality of all devotees and placed the true faith above all religious rituals and ceremonies'. Burckhardt suggests a continuity between the two faiths by comparing *rishis* with prophets and the Qur'an with the Veda (see Pande, *op. cit.*, 134; and Burckhart, *op. cit.*, 45).

¹⁵⁴ See A Srivastava, *Medieval Indian Culture*, Agra, 1964, 67-69.

¹⁵⁵ He also dismisses the idea that rebellion against caste restrictions prompted the rise of Islam, a point underscored by Ahmed who cites a nineteenth century source as saying the 'social position of a Muslim convert exactly corresponds to the station he held previous to his conversion' (see R Ahmed, 'Conflict and Contradictions in Bengali Islam: Problems of Change and Adjustment' {hereafter referred to as 'Conflict and Contradictions'}, in [ed.] K Ewing, *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*, California, 1988, 120; and Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 113-134; 126-127 detail studies that show how Bengali Muslims are descended largely from the indigenous peoples of the area, countering 'mass migration' theories of conversion).

conversion was due to social, rather than spiritual, promptings.¹⁵⁶ Eaton doubts whether a sense of injustice prompted disadvantaged Hindus to seize the chance of equality when Islam offered it, since this is to assume modern Western conceptions concur with those of medieval Indians.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, the continuance of caste structures into Indian Islam argues against this being the reason for rejection of caste-bound Hinduism. Although Eaton does not question that Islamic rule came to Bengal with the seventh/thirteenth century Turkic invaders¹⁵⁸ he times mass conversions to Islam to the Mughal period. This is because neither Ibn Battuta, during his visit to Shah Jalal in Sylhet in 745-46/1345, nor Ma Huan, the Chinese traveller who visited Bengal almost a century later, noted Muslims outside the urban areas whereas the 1288-89/1872 census showed rural areas such as Noakhali, Pabna, and Rajshahi to be three-quarters Islamic.¹⁵⁹ This finding surprised the British administrators since Muslims elsewhere across the subcontinent were concentrated in urban areas.¹⁶⁰

Eaton elsewhere suggests that during the ninth/fifteenth century independent *pirs* in Bengal pioneered farming¹⁶¹ by organising forest clearance while they concurrently

¹⁵⁶ He also cites other writers to suggest that only seeing Bengali Islam from the elite perspective is simplistic (see A Roy, 'Islamization in South Asia with Special Reference to the Bengali-Speaking Region: A Conceptual and Historical Revaluation' {hereafter referred to as 'Islamization in South Asia'}, Indo-British Review, 19 [1991], 21-22, 36).

¹⁵⁷ Arnold has no such qualms and suggests that those 'despised and condemned by their proud Aryan rulers' found the combination of zeal and opportunity offered by Islam to be irresistible (see Arnold, The Preaching of Islam, Delhi, 1997, 279).

¹⁵⁸ It must be noted that the incorporation of Central Asian ideas into Indian thought was not a new thing. Thapar writes of 'the impact of Persian ideas' being 'felt in various spheres of Indian life' in the fourth and fifth centuries BC (see R Thapar, A History of India 1, Middlesex, 1986, 58-59).

¹⁵⁹ One third of all Indian Muslims were Bengali at this stage (see Ahmed, 'Conflict and Contradictions' in [ed.] Ewing, op. cit., 118).

¹⁶⁰ See Roy, The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal, 19-21.

¹⁶¹ Eaton notes that irrigated rice cultivation, facilitated by the use of iron tools and transplantation of seedlings and accompanied by forest clearance and permanent habitations, had begun in the middle Gangetic Plain (to the west of Bengal) around the fifth and sixth centuries BC. The idea that new faith could be carried in with new agricultural knowledge gains credibility since Brahman priests entering Buddhist Bengal (from around 500 AD) had already brought new farming techniques as well as new religious ideas (see R Eaton, 'The Growth of Muslim Identity in Eighteenth-

introduced mystical ideas. This simultaneous introduction of rice cultivation and faith forged a link between the two otherwise unrelated events.¹⁶² To be a rural Bengali Muslim was to cultivate rice; to be an urban Muslim was likely to imply foreign descent and a concomitant sense of superiority.¹⁶³ *Pir* leadership was enhanced by the lack of other contenders since the constantly changing topography of the delta and difficulty of infrastructure was as hindering to centralised governance as the difficult and sometime dangerous conditions were prompts for people to seek such powerful protectors.¹⁶⁴ Any governing power that could establish itself preferred farmers to cultivate rice rather fish or 'slash and burn' since tax was far easier to collect from them with their stored produce than their more nomadic counterparts. In time, a demarcation emerged between the peasants and the urban elite (*ashraf*) who were descendants of Turks, Afghans, Iranians or Arabs that had migrated from the fifth/eleventh century onwards and who saw administration or warfare as the only suitable occupations.¹⁶⁵ This urban *ashraf* oversaw tax collection through a long chain of *zamindars* (tax collectors), *taluqdars* (landholders), larger sub-contractors who cultivated the land (the rural *ashraf* as well as the *jotedar* class), and smaller cultivators.¹⁶⁶ Land was obtained by donation, purchase or (most commonly) clearance of unclaimed tracts.¹⁶⁷ Either way, the need for tax revenues grew during the Mughal period, thus expanding the

Century Bengal', in [eds.] N Levtzion and J Voll, Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam, New York, 1987, 166-174; and Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 5-6, 10).

¹⁶² And incidentally reinforces the idea of courage and piety providing validation for professed beliefs since climate and wild animals (tigers in particular) made cultivation a dangerous business.

¹⁶³ *Ashraf* was the name given to the elite group, and being foreign, or at least of foreign descent, was central to *ashraf* identity. This was differentiated from the *ajlaf*, or *atrap* (see Ahmed, 'Conflict and Contradictions' in [ed.] Ewing, op. cit., 120; and Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 100).

¹⁶⁴ See Roy, 'Islamization in South Asia', 23.

¹⁶⁵ See Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, 9.

¹⁶⁶ 'The structure of land tenure ... in 1798 ... consisted of three tiers. At the apex was the *zamindar*, aloof from the actual process of forest clearing of field agriculture ... and given to the ceremonial style of a petty raja. Next was ... the pivotal figure who secured from the *zamindar* a grant to clear jungle land and hired labourers to accomplish the task. Finally was the mass of labourers'. Gardner does however point out that variations in landholding patterns did exist, at least in Sylhet where individual land ownership was not uncommon (see Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 251; and Gardner op. cit., 38-39).

rural economy and consequently exacerbating the differing conceptions of what being a Muslim entailed.¹⁶⁸ For the urban landowning *ashraf* and their *zamindars*, farming was dishonourable; but for the larger rural *talukdar ashraf* and the peasant farmers they effectively ruled over it was central to their Islamic identity. The rural *ashraf* based their authority on 'their connection with the forest, which they are believed to have subdued; their connection with the supernatural world, with which they are believed to wield continuing influence; and their connection with mosques, which they are believed to have built.'¹⁶⁹ The urban/rural divide was further widened by racial differences with only rural Muslims (and rural Hindus) being descendants of the indigenous peoples. By the thirteenth/nineteenth century a religious aspect also emerged since *zamindars* tended to be Hindu and *jotedars* Muslim.¹⁷⁰ There was also a class distinction since most converts to Islam came from the lower (and to a lesser extent the upper) classes whereas the middle class who had least contact with *pirs* and most with the urban and rural *ashraf* tended not to convert.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ See Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 253-255.

¹⁶⁸ The tendency of urban rulers relaying orthodoxy out to a hinterland that it relied on for sustenance had already occurred in Central Asia; indeed this urban concentration which left the countryside too weak to easily defend and therefore of declining productivity was one reason for the slump in sultanates such as the Seljuqs. The retention, in Bengal, of an undocumented but apparently viable rural way-of-life thus seems particularly fortunate.

¹⁶⁹ Eaton notes that not all the rural *ashraf* actually possessed all three of these criteria and elsewhere he adds that the *ashraf* were ideologically characterized by their closeness to the Chisti order, their deliberate separation of religion and state, and their reluctance to convert Bengalis to Islam (see Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 173-175).

¹⁷⁰ Typically 'an absentee Hindu acquired *zamindari* rights from the Mughal governor, permitting him to extract as much wealth as he could from a given *ta'alluq* so long as he remitted a stipulated amount to the government as a land revenue. The *zamindar* then contracted with some enterprising middleman, typically a member of the Muslim petty religious establishment, to undertake the arduous task of organizing the clearing of the jungle' (see Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 223: just how 'arduous' the task was is alluded to on page 221; and Eaton, in [eds] Levzion and Voll, op. cit., 174, 181).

¹⁷¹ See Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, 33 and more generally 19-57.

There were racial¹⁷² and linguistic¹⁷³ divisions as well. From the beginnings of Muslim control of Bengal in the seventh/thirteenth century Persian was the court language of the Turkic rulers although throughout the independent sultanate (738-39/1338-944-45/1538) the court-based elites used Bengali as well to promote a defensive unity and thus withstand Delhi.¹⁷⁴ The Mughals continued this official use of Persian when they took over control of Bengal in the mid-seventeenth century AD. The urban *ashraf* who defined 'orthodox' or 'normative' Islam¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Barani, writing in the mid eighth/fourteenth century endorsed the exclusion of non-Turks from high positions in the Delhi Sultanate and there is little reason to suppose Bengal varied in such attitudes (see Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, 21).

¹⁷³ Indian languages are usually divided chronologically into 'early' (comprising Vedic and Sanskrit), post third century BC 'middle' (being Prakrit, or vernacular dialects of Sanskrit) and 'recent' (post tenth century AD). In this nomenclature, Urdu is a 'recent' language that Cragg describes as Persian influences 'grafted on to Hindi' although it is more exact to say that it was an amalgam of Arabic and Persian words and Hindi grammar produced from the fifth/eleventh century onwards by the interaction of Ghaznavid distinct forms. In the north it was largely spoken while to the south it was written, and known as Dakani (from the Deccan Plateau, where it was used). The word 'Urdu' first appeared in the eleventh/seventeenth century and within the next hundred years the northern form began to be used for literary purposes too, specifically for poetry. By the thirteenth/nineteenth century, Urdu was adapted for public oratory, and it gradually then became a widely used language, used by Muslims to differentiate themselves from Hindus who spoke the very similar Hindi that varies primarily in the script and some vocabulary (see D Lelyveld, 'Eloquence and Authority in Urdu: Poetry, Oratory and Film' in [ed.] Ewing, op. cit., 100; K Cragg, The House of Islam, California, 1975, 99; and Ahmad, An Intellectual History of Islam in India, 91-95).

¹⁷⁴ Persian rather than Arabic was India's link to the rest of the Islamic Empire up to Mughal times, partly because the Mongol decimation of kingdoms across West Asia from the sixth/twelfth to eighth/fourteenth suppressed their languages and in consequence promoted Persian, although quite how influential it was in Bengal is questionable. Persian was the language of the Mughal court and Islamic culture in general and was therefore initially adopted by the British when they took over the Indian subcontinent. In 1837 AD however it was replaced by English (in the main centres) and local languages (elsewhere) which led to its decline and concomitant rise in Urdu as the language of Islamic religious and literary expression (see Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, 48; Lelyveld, op. cit., 101; Brent, op. cit., 194; [ed.] S Islam, History of Bangladesh 1704-1971, Dhaka, 1992, [vol. 3], 111, 439; Akter, op. cit., 68; M Zaman, 'The Rôle of Arabic and the Arab Middle East in the Definition of Muslim Identity in Twentieth Century India', The Muslim World, 87 [1997], 283; and T Mahmood, The Muslim Law of India, Allahabad, 1980, 279).

¹⁷⁵ The tendency for urban elites to define normal practice and less powerful groups to challenge it is mentioned by Das, who writes 'instances of departures from this normative level are always drawn from the religion of the villager, the illiterate, and

opposed translating the holy books into *Bangla* (vernacular Bengali) and it was therefore difficult to propagate the urban-based Hanafite '*ulama*' views widely.¹⁷⁶ Arabic remained important in the religious institutions¹⁷⁷ but much of the written scholarship of this period was in Persian which would have given the educated, urban scholars access to Central Asian mystical thought.¹⁷⁸ For such ideas to be disseminated further however, the mediation of Bengali-speaking Sufis was needed.¹⁷⁹

the women' before wistfully asking whether 'an acceptance of normative Islam necessarily commits us to the view that the practice of the poor and the illiterate is always faulty' (see V Das, 'For a Folk-Theology and Theological Anthropology of Islam', Contribution to Indian Sociology, 18 [1984], 297).

¹⁷⁶ This lesser rôle of 'literate Sufis' contrasts with the Egyptian situation where 'the artisan and merchant stratas' were so important to Sufi Orders' viability that as these weakened with Westernization, Sufism itself was weakened. Pande points out that poets and musicians (particularly of the Chistiya and Qadiri orders) were listened to throughout the Indian subcontinent. The tendency of cities to become 'little islands of Islamicisation' was equally widespread (see M Gilson, Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt, An Essay in the Sociology of Religion, {hereafter referred to as Saint and Sufi}, Oxford, 1973, 194; Pande, op. cit., 137; and Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, 10).

¹⁷⁷ Arabic was vital for understanding hadith which was in turn vital for teaching newly converted Bengalis how they should live. Sonargaon, which supplanted Gaur as capital of Bengal until it was itself eclipsed around 1611 AD had several such learning institutions and was also important as a centre of cloth manufacture and a place of trade and learning. Under the subsequent Mughal period, Bengali cities were deliberately specialised in their functions with a geographical separation of religious and administrative expertise (see Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, 10, 48; M al-Ma'sumi, 'Sunargaon's Contribution to Islamic Learning', Islamic Culture 27 [1953], 8, 11; Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 176; and [ed.] Sarkar, op. cit., 259).

¹⁷⁸ Most of these writings were of historical matters, including lives of the saints, but this literary process could well have reversed since the *Amritkund*, concerning yogic practices, was translated into both Persian and Arabic and Hindu writers of the ninth/fifteenth century complained how much Brahman fashions in recital had become influenced by Muslim ideas. Bengali became the official language of the Pathan rulers from the seventh/thirteenth century and 'modern Bengali assumed the status of a standard language in the fourteenth century' (see Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, 50; Pande, op. cit., 135-136; Ahmed, 'Conflict and Contradictions,' in [ed.] Ewing, op. cit., 121-124; A Karim, op. cit., 64; for an account of the rôle of Arabic, Persian and Urdu in Bengali history see [ed.] S Islam, op. cit., volume three, chapter thirteen).

¹⁷⁹ These distinctions of class, language, and ethnic origins are all inter-related. For examples of how local 'cultural idioms and symbols' were used by intermediary practitioners to propagate Islamic ideas in rural areas see Ahmed, 'Conflict and Contradictions', in [ed.] Ewing, op. cit., 126. The situation of an urban elite/rural

The very geography of the Bengal delta mitigates against easy communication too, further distancing town realities from village ones¹⁸⁰ but the eighth/fourteenth century does provide some evidence that the rulers were starting to perceive themselves as less foreign occupiers than new settlers. Sikandar Shah (who ruled from 758-59/1357 to 791-92/1389) oversaw the construction of a mosque that for the first time drew neither on Delhi nor Central Asia for inspiration, but local architecture of the Sena and Pala dynasties.¹⁸¹ This assimilation was however slowed, if not reversed, under the Mughals who saw themselves as 'strangers in a strange land'; a land that provided useful revenues but proved so arduous that it sapped morale and even morals.¹⁸² A shared sense of Islamic identity was again fostered during the nineteenth century tenure of British rule, with a corresponding minimizing of *ashraflajlaf* divisions, although these tensions did emerge at times over specific issues.¹⁸³

populous divide being concretised through language is not unique to Bengal. For example, which Sufi Order, and which language was used, became an issue in Turkey too, with the more popular Bektashi Order using Turkish whereas the Mevlevi Order used Persian (the Palace language) and remained an urban elite phenomenon (see Birge, The Bektasi Order of Dervishes, London, 1937, 15-16).

¹⁸⁰ See Roy, The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal, 49. Moreover, it can easily be guessed that when around two thirds of a region is within ten metres of sea-level the monsoon hinders travel enormously (a guesstimate based on A Islam and M Miah, Bangladesh in Maps, Dhaka, 1981, 10). It is said that approximately one third of Bangladesh is under water throughout the wet season. Transport is so difficult that during the British occupation all goods carried between India and Burma were shipped from Gopalpur-on Sea in Orissa, despite the town's lack of a port and the subsequent need for lighter boats to carry everything from shore to ship.

¹⁸¹ This may have been more a deliberate rejection of Delhi (congruent with the mood of political autonomy) than appreciation of local customs *per se* but it does imply a measure of acceptance nonetheless. Following the emergence of Raja Ganesh this architecturally-reflected promotion of local ideas was increased (see Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 41-49 and 60-63 for more details of the building of Adina mosque and other buildings that show this change in influences).

¹⁸² See Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 167-174 for an exploration of colonial attitudes and expressions by the Mughals in Bengal. The theory of enervation leading to corruption is an interesting variation of Ibn Battuta's ideas, while the 'stranger in a strange land' quote is from the poetry of Robert Service.

¹⁸³ For example, the so-called '*puthi* battles' whereby this vernacular, written form of literature was used by both reformers and traditionalists to propagate their ideas (see Ahmed, 'Conflict and Contradictions', in [ed.] Ewing, op. cit., 116-117).

(1:v) Conclusion.

This chapter has detailed the entry of Islam into Bengal. It has suggested that the peripheral nature of region provided an opportunity for the incorporation of ideas that might have proved contentious elsewhere, ideas such as perceiving the Creator in His creation, and the personalisation of authority. Part of the difficulty in researching these concepts concerns their contentiousness since both undermine the central Islamic tenet of Divine unity.¹⁸⁴ Another research difficulty centred around the very reason Bengal has historically been peripheral, its physical rigours. The major research hurdles were however conceptual since many key terms remain ambiguous. Ambiguity does not necessarily stultify intellectual enquiry; the *Shari'ah* has operated as a legal system for centuries despite its overlapping and imprecisely-defined processes.¹⁸⁵ It is these research difficulties that will now be examined.

(1:vi) Physical and Intellectual Constraints

Such accounts emerge as far from the obvious reality of reality as a Bangladesh village, there involving the rigour of being. Although I had been resident in the region for almost a decade and through direct experience in Bengal, I was surprised at how difficult I found the achievement of village life. Undoubtedly, most of the previous authors in Bangladesh had been in the city of Dhaka but it was not until continuous daily working over these years, knowing I had no longer any options and the very nature of village life, that I realised the importance of the village in my quest for knowledge. It is clear that village life is a reality that is often overlooked in academic studies. The relative ease of urban life, however, is an equally important aspect of the research process.

¹⁸⁴ Hinduism develops the pantheistic dimension, and Christianity the intercessory one, more overtly.

¹⁸⁵ When, for example, does the practice of the Companions become *ʿurf*, or who is qualified to perform *ijtihād* and reach *ijmāʿ*, or how are the law-generating aspects of *qiyās* selected?

(II) Chapter Two: Research Difficulties

(II:i) Introduction.

This chapter examines research difficulties entailed with the investigation of informal religious leadership in Rosulpur village, Bangladesh, an investigation both theological and ethnographic in nature. Whereas, however, pure sciences have a relatively easy task defining terms to begin their research¹⁸⁶ a social science such as anthropology has more difficulty. The bulk of this chapter therefore examines the problematic terminology involved in analysing what leaders in Rosulpur do (the subject of chapter three). Rather than an etymological study, this analysis uses the example of the Deobandi scholars of the thirteenth/nineteenth century who could be perceived as 'formal' in their reliance on textual sources for guidance and authority, and 'informal' in their use of spiritual exercises and supernatural powers.

(II:ii) Physical and Emotional Constraints.

Such academic concerns are far from the obvious problems of working in a Bangladeshi village, those involving the rigours of living. Although I had been resident in the region for around a decade and thought myself proficient in Bengali, I was surprised at how difficult I found the adjustment to village life. Admittedly, most of my previous sojourn in Bangladesh had been in the city of Dhaka, but it was not until afternoons sitting watching rice fields grow, knowing I had nothing on my agenda until the next morning (with a reasonable chance the appointment would, in any case, not eventuate) that I decided that Dhaka was, in some ways,

¹⁸⁶ 'Relatively' being an important proviso. Few problems are as easily solved as the straightforward application of a formula such as the physicist's 'work equals force times distance' and Heisenberg's experiment that aimed to reveal sub-atomic structure but also famously showed that the act of studying altered the object under study has already been cited. The psychological echo of this finding is called the experimenter

more similar to the Western city I had flown out from than the Bengali village I was now living in. It was not just the obvious parallels of roads and cars, rather than bare feet and paths, or even the drastic lifestyle changes that came from such infrastructural changes as the absence of electricity which encourages a regime of sleeping at 9.00pm and waking at 5.00am. Perhaps most dislocating was the necessity of operating outside schedules. 'Research' became a happenstance event rather than something that could be planned for.¹⁸⁷ The anthropological benchmark for such ethnographic studies is a full year of research; this study centres on just less than half of that, divided into three periods, spent in the village of Rosulpur. Whether I could have physically and emotionally endured twelve continuous months is uncertain;¹⁸⁸ although I was already used to both the local diet and water I was no more immune to health problems than those of the village who had survived their childhood diseases. Health remains a constant concern for many in Rosulpur just as elsewhere in the country, and countering ill-health is a common reason for going into debt. Although sickness only once kept me from a seemingly important appointment¹⁸⁹ a hard-to-shake fever lost me a week during my first visit and more minor complaints accounted for sundry other days. Similarly, the evening I was to watch one particular worship ceremony (Kodom Ali's *amal* exercises) unseasonable rain made the path impassably slippery.

The brevity of stay in the village was to the greatest extent possible countered by the timing. Religious events tend to be outside the agriculturally busy, or climatically difficult, periods. This does not imply there is no religious faith or

effect, referring to the phenomenon whereby the experimenter's expectations skew the subject's response.

¹⁸⁷ Barley's note that although rainmaking was a vital concern to the Dowayos with whom he lived, it was only through a chance conversation that he learned anything of the topic and that 'if I had not been on that particular road at that particular time I might never have heard it' resonates with my own experience. It was by means of a similarly stray comment (which became an invitation) that I found out about the *ekdil* ceremony, for example (see N Barley, The Innocent Anthropologist Notes From A Mud Hut, London, 1986, 93-94).

¹⁸⁸ Whether Father Doug Venne who lent half of his hut to me when in the village could have endured my company for that long could also be questioned.

¹⁸⁹ The yearly event whereby a local woman (Shobdulerma) placated her guiding spirits; it was only a short walk away but it was too far for me that night.

practice outside monsoon, harvest, or planting; but most of the formalised events such as remembrance ceremonies for saints do occur in the more lax winter months. Thus it was that I concentrated my visits around this season, with a third trip coinciding with the important ceremony of Eid al-Azhar. Nonetheless, five months would have been insufficient for even cursory research had I not earlier spent almost nine years in Bangladesh. While this had not been devoted to research, there was much that I had noted in that time which proved relevant to the doctorate. For example, I was already aware of the existence of healing *mantras*, and also of how sensitive the topic was since the names of Hindu deities are invoked alongside Muslim names of God, and this allowed me to both broach the subject (albeit obliquely) and immediately disavow any interest in the exact wording, thereby reassuring the practitioner and retaining his trust.

Trust, in fact, was central to researching this topic, and the absolute reliance I had building on the trust Doug Venne has built up over a decade has already been noted. Before going to Rosulpur I had to counter the mistrust of educated city dwellers who could see no value in uncovering what uneducated villagers might or might not know. 'Mystical Islam', for most religious experts I met in Dhaka, was something centred in Persian poetry, or Arabian history. This was not problematic, inasmuch as such expertise did not intrude into village life at all, but there was frustration in knowing that countless Bangladeshis were capable of translating into more standard Bengali the slurred local dialect of a song or mumbled conversation that I was only catching pieces of, yet they remained in cities such as Dhaka while I walked the paths around Rosulpur. Had I found a possible field assistant willing to spend some time with me, there would have been an accommodation problem since there was barely room in Doug's hut for two. Few of those educated enough to translate dialect into standard language and grasp what my research requirements were would, in any case, consider it appropriate to spend time in a village other than their ancestral home. I was fortunate to find one such person from a nearby village, and Govinda's only limitation as a helper was the small amount of time he could spend with me (he is a full-time teacher) with his only 'fault' being his enthusiasm which could lead him further and further into conversations I found harder and harder to fight my way into. As a Hindu, he found it genuinely interesting to uncover parts of

his neighbours' beliefs that had hitherto been unknown. Several times the Muslims we were with pointed out the spontaneity and enjoyment of a Christian (myself), a Hindu, and themselves sitting and talking together as symptomatic of a core aspect of their faith, God's sovereignty over all people and the need therefore for mutual acceptance.

This does not imply there were never hints of divisiveness. A visit to the Barta Mosque, half an hour's walk from Rosulpur, was quickly ended with my being told that since I was not a Muslim they would tell me nothing and I should go away. This was in stark contrast with the acceptance I found within Rosulpur, as exemplified by a general insistence that I attend Eid prayers. To my queries regarding whether my Christianity constituted any sort of barrier, I was told that only if I wanted to go to Friday prayers would there be any contradiction be perceived.¹⁹⁰ Religious faith is a vital aspect of identity for those in Rosulpur, yet the boundaries between faiths remain fluid. This could have proved a research problem had I wished to tease out which aspect was 'Hindu' and which 'Muslim' but such was not my aim, and there was in any case a more difficult blurred boundary to negotiate; was my research to be anthropological or Islamic? Anthropology itself questions what its own research consists of. Is it, as has been ironically suggested, merely a matter of climbing a mountain ('to "do anthropology"') then ('having "done anthropology"') writing up notes based on copious facts whose worth are based largely in the diversion their collection offered to the bored and lonely anthropologist?¹⁹¹ Such a view may be more provocative than authoritative but there are obvious difficulties in constructing 'ostensibly scientific' texts, with the implication of replicatable tests uncovering continuous truths from 'experiences broadly biographical'¹⁹² that underline how elusive absolute certainty is. The major dilemma this research faced in trying to uncover 'truth' was however less within the discipline of anthropology alone than between anthropology and Islamic Studies since the two have fundamentally different

¹⁹⁰ In a parallel manner, Hindus would not be expected at Friday prayers or Eid, but they are included in the annual festivals that commemorate saints.

¹⁹¹ See Barley, *op. cit.*, 51, 55.

approaches to knowledge. Underlying Islamic Studies is the assumption that truth can be known, reflecting the certainty Muslims themselves express regarding their faith. For anthropologists, presuming that 'the truth is out there' awaiting diligent documentation is deemed untenable.¹⁹² Instead, every finding is seen as reflecting the biases of researcher and researched, the circumstances of time and place, and it thus serves only as a developing narrative regarding a particular culture. Added to this fundamental division, each discipline has its own norms of expression (is Mohammed to be referred to as 'the Prophet'; can residents of Rosulpur be glossed in the text as 'they' without hints of patronization, and should the author refer to himself in the first person or remain in an editorial third?).

The reason for situating this thesis primarily within an Islamic rather than anthropological framework is because those I got to know in Rosulpur, like many other Bangladeshi Muslims I have known since 1986, perceive themselves centrally as Muslims. Many are ready to concede faults with their practice and some, after a time, even mention aspects of the faith they find hard to understand, but none would agree that their geographical location or culture is more important than their faith. One can not, of course, blindly accept that such views are the final word on their actual sense of identity, but it is the logical (not to say polite) place to start. It could be suggested that the nineteenth century Orientalist approach similarly directed research along textual lines because Muslims themselves insisted on the centrality of the text. In accepting that Orientalism gave, if not necessarily a false image of Islam, at least a skewed one there is equally a recognition that research in this thesis carries a similar bias. It does, for example, focus more on Middle Eastern than South Asian studies, simply because the Middle East and not South Asia tends to be a focal point of attentions. India is rarely mentioned outside water-sharing disputes (the Farakka Barrage) or communal tensions which tend to prompt a Bangladeshi backlash (such as the destruction of the Babri Mosque) whereas the Gulf States are a constant reference

¹⁹² See C Geertz, Works and Lives The Anthropologist as Author, California, 1988, 10).

¹⁹³ As suggested by the idea that 'the anthropologist in the field is seldom troubled by the 'false' beliefs of those about him; he simply puts them in brackets, sees how they all fit together and learns to live with them on a day-to-day basis' (Barley, op. cit., 161).

point. This does not imply that Bangladesh is somehow more Arabian than Subcontinental India; a quick glance at customs, language, diet, or appearance would all belie such an idea. It is, however, to acknowledge that for the majority of Muslims I have known in Bangladesh, Arabia rather than India was the outside point of expressed identification.

Tellingly perhaps, the word for 'outsider' (*bideśi*) does not usually demarcate between someone from the next village or country; few of those in Dakin Pauli, where research was conducted, had travelled the 100 kilometres to Dhaka more than once or twice, if at all. Dakin Pouli is located in the postal region of Rosulpur, which was thus a more general name for the area. This is approximately ten kilometres north of Tangail. I stayed (either alone, or with its occupant) in a tin-roof bamboo hut that measured eighteen feet by ten feet. Water came from a nearby tube well, although bathing was also possible in a pond during part of the year. There was no electricity which was most noticed during hot-season nights (when a cooling fan would have been welcome). A more major research problem was that so much knowledge held by those in Rosulpur was held by all and so those I spoke to saw no obvious need to explain anything. I, on the other hand, sometimes lacked enough information to even know what questions to ask.¹⁹⁴

(II:iii) Problems of Defining 'Islamic' and 'Leadership'.

In keeping with the aphorism that 'the obvious is a guide to the true', the physical problems suggest more abstract difficulties, such as those surrounding the meaning of key words when researching 'informal Islamic leadership'. 'Islamic' immediately begs the question of who exactly is a Muslim; not a new question since supporters of Ali accused Abu Bakr of being an unbeliever (a view later refuted by

¹⁹⁴ This is a far from unique problem in such research (see D Eickelman, The Middle East, An Anthropological Approach {hereafter referred to as The Middle East}, New Jersey, 1989, 18, 21; P Bourdieu [tr. R Nice], Outline of a Theory of Practice, Cambridge, 1979, 16).

al-Jahiz who cited Abu Bakr's pronouncement of the 'credo of Islam', his adherence to dietary laws, and his exhibiting of Islam as proofs of faith¹⁹⁵). More recently, the 1372-73/1953 Munir Report commissioned following anti-Qadiyani (Ahmediyya) riots in Pakistan reached no decision regarding who was, and who was not, a Muslim, while 'in India there is no statutory definition either of the word "Muslim" or of the term "Islam"' and Indian courts 'refused to regard the Ahmadis as non-Muslims'. Perhaps most Muslims would agree with Iqbal who defined a Muslim as someone who believed in the unity of God and the supremacy of Muhammed's prophetic mission.¹⁹⁶

'Leadership' is perhaps an even more elusive concept. It is, for example, unclear whether empowerment or merely specialization is entailed in its exercise. Do leaders have constant leverage to force others into compliance or are they merely the central person in a specific circumstance? Who, for example, was the leader when caliph al-Ma'mun consulted the imprisoned Ibn Hanbal?¹⁹⁷ Or when Ibn Hanbal asked his jailer for food or water? Obviously, any leadership implied in the latter circumstance is fleeting whereas the need for guidance as the Muslim community grew through its early history meant there was a constant need for experts capable of advising on correct Islamic behaviour. Such expertise has traditionally been divided into the domains of the '*ulama*', who had sufficient knowledge of the Qur'an and the hadith to act as leaders; and the Sufis, deemed to have enough intuitive awareness of the nature of God to direct others towards the truth. These two groups are often seen respectively as the 'formal' and 'informal' leaders of Islam, introducing the third, and perhaps least definable, set of terms within our research aims.

¹⁹⁵ See A Hasan, *The Doctrine of Ijmā' in Islam*, Delhi, 1992, 11;

¹⁹⁶ See C Bennett, 'The Din-Dunya Paradox', *Bulletin of Henry Martyn Institute*, 12 [1993], 63; and Mahmood, *op. cit.*, 31, 36).

¹⁹⁷ Al-Ma'mun was the seventh Abbasid caliph and ruled from 204/813-224/833.

(II:iv) Islamic Concepts of Leadership.

At a general level it is clear that leadership is a Qur'anically endorsed idea, although whether a permanent elite or rule by interchangeable experts is preferred is uncertain since the Qur'an endorses both ranking (which is intrinsic to elites) and equality (which suggests anyone with apt knowledge could be a suitable leader).¹⁹⁸ Muhammed was certainly meant to be seen as the paramount leader over the group of believers that continued to grow in number until his death. While it is stressed that he is a warner¹⁹⁹ it is also clear that his warnings should be heeded, as

¹⁹⁸ Surah Yūsuf (12:76) notes 'We raise by grades (of mercy) whom we will' (and verses 75-76 reinforce the inequality of people by comparing a 'mere chattel slave' with 'one on whom we have bestowed a fair provision' and a dumb man with one who 'encourages justice') Surah al-Zukhruf (43:32) echoes this idea, while surah al-Nahl (16:71) states 'Allah hath favoured some of you above others in position. Now those who are more favoured will by no means hand over their provision to those (slaves) their right hands possess so that they may be equal with them in respect thereof'. By contrast, surah al-Ḥadīd (57:10) indicates that the Believers ranked themselves by their zeal (the immediate occasion was the conquest of Mecca, but Ali adds in his footnote that 'the words are perfectly general'. Surah al Nisā² (4:95-96) and Surah al-Tawbah (9:83-87) similarly link zeal with rank. Surah al-Baqarah (2:228) joins rank to gender, and surah al-Mujādila (58:11) links it to knowledge (Ali translates 'al'alma' as 'mystical knowledge' rather than Pickthall's more prosaic 'knowledge'). Surah al-An^cām (6:132) individualises ranking by stating 'For all there will be ranks from what they did', an idea reinforced by 'We raise some of them above others in ranks' (surah al-Zukhruf; 93:32). It is clear that collective uniformity is not ordained for God's people, since surah al-Ḥujurāt (49:13) states 'We created you ... into races and tribes'. Some Prophets are preferred over others (surah al-Isrā² 17:55). Even land and water are ranked in usefulness as is shown in surah al-Ra^cd (13:4) and surah al-Fātir (35:12). While worldly inequalities (such as the possession of slaves, wives, and male descendants that are mentioned in surah al Nahl, 16:71-72) are sanctioned; it would seem that ranking also occurs in the next world (see surah al-Aḥqāf, 46:19-20). Indeed, without such a differentiation the concept of a Judgement Day would lack meaning. (see M Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, New Delhi, 1990, 237, 610; and Y Ali, *The Holy Qur'an Translation and Commentary*, Maryland, 1983, 1499, 1514).

¹⁹⁹ See surah al-A^crāf (7:188), surah al-Ḥūd (11:2, 11:12), surah Ra^cd (13:7), surah al-Ḥijr (15:89), surah al-Nahl (16:82), surah Maryam (19:97), surah al-Furqān (25:1), surah al-Naml (27:91-92), surah Sabā² (34:28, 34:46), surah al-Fātir (35:23-24), surah Yā-Sīn (36:3-6), surah Ṣād (38:65 and 38:70), surah al-Fat²ḥ (48:8), surah Qāf (50:45), surah al-Dhariyāt (51:50-51), surah Taghābun (64:12), surah Mulk (67:26) and surah Nāzi^cat (79:45). The main complaint against those who rejected Muhammed seems to centre around their pride and conservatism (in doubting that a

exemplified by verses such as surah al-Nūr (24:54²⁰⁰) and surah al-Nisā³ (4:61)²⁰¹ although surah āl ‘Imrān (3:159) does suggest that he was to appropriate others’ advice.²⁰² There are also many hadith which reinforce Muhammed’s pre-eminence²⁰³ although the very existence of the hadith is perhaps testimony enough to his centrality.²⁰⁴

prophet could emerge from their midst or that their forebears’ precedent could be superseded).

²⁰⁰ ‘Obey God and obey the Apostle.’

²⁰¹ ‘Come to what God hath revealed and to the Apostle.’ See also surah al-Nisā³(4:59, 4:80), surah al-Anfāl (8:20, 8:24) and surah Taghābun (64:12). Those who oppose or reject Muhammed are maligned and warned in verses like surah al-Baqarah (2:99-101), surah al-Nisā³ (4:14, 4:46, 4:115), surah al-Mā³idah (5:33), surah al-Tawbah (9:107-109), surah al-Ḥajj (22:11-13), surah al-Furqān (25:41-42), surah al-Aḥzāb (33:36, 33:57, 33:60-62), surah al-Sāffāt (37:170-179), surah al-Aḥqāf (46:32-34), surah al-Fat³ḥ (48:13), surah al-Ṭūr (52:29-47), surah al-Mujādila (58:5-6, 58:20), surah al-Jinn (72:23), and surah al-Ghāshiyā (88:21-26). Such scorning of Muhammed is often linked to rejection of God, or of the Qur’an and this doubt (or even half-hearted acceptance) is maligned and condemned in verses such as surah al-Baqarah (2:170-171), surah al-Nisā³ (4:60-68), surah al-Tawbah (9:43-51, 9:81-87), surah al-Nūr (24:47-50), surah al-Shu³arā³ (26:3-8), surah Ṣād (38:2-8), surah al-Aḥqāf (46:7-10), surah al-Ṭūr (52:29-47) and surah al-Qalam (68:8-16).

²⁰² The circumstances surrounding this verse (‘consult with them upon the conduct of affairs’) involve the aftermath of the Battle of Uhud, and Mohammed’s reliance on others’ advice, such as prior to the Battle of the Trench, is well known (see M Lings, Muhammed His Life Based on the Earliest Sources, London, 1986, 216).

²⁰³ Tirmidhi (209-279 AH; he collated one of the six collections of Traditions that are generally accepted as being authentic) records that ‘Allah created creation and made me (ie Muhammed) the best of them. Then He created them into two groups and made me among the best of them in group. Then He made them into tribes and made me among the best of them in tribe. Then He made them into families and made me among the best of them in families. I am the best of them as a member, and the best of them in family. Muslim reports ‘I (ie Muhammed) shall be pre-eminent amongst the descendants of Adam on the Day of Resurrection and I shall be the first intercessor and the first whose intercession will be accepted (by Allah)’. Imam Malik Ibn Anas recorded Muhammed as saying ‘I have five names. I am Muhammed, and I am Ahmad, and I am al-Mahdi (the effacer) by whom Allah (the Exalted and Almighty) effaces the infidel. And I am al-Hashir (the gatherer) before whom people are gathered. And I am al-‘Āqib (the last; Tirmidhi also notes this tradition). Bukhari (807-870 AD; his Traditions are accepted as the most reliable and authenticated as exemplified in the report that he examined 600000 Traditions and rejected all but 7275 as lacking full attestation) notes Muhammed as saying ‘I have been given the right of intercession (on the Day of Judgement; this is one of the five things that were not given to any of the previous Prophets, according to the rest of the hadith). Muhammed’s supremacy is also reflected in the hadith ‘if thou (ie Muhammed) hadst not been, I would not have created the heavens (see F Karim, Mishkat-ul-Masabih,

The question however is not whether Muhammed was to be considered a leader²⁰⁵ since no Muslim can doubt that. It is instead how leaders could be recognised following his death. Indeed, one of the first disputes in Islam, the Riddah wars, involved the refusal of some Bedouin tribes to transfer their allegiance from Muhammed to Abu Bakr. 'Closeness to the Prophet in blood and faith'²⁰⁶ was the obvious pathway whereby authority could be transferred from Muhammed to emerging contenders for power. Those who succeeded Muhammed should therefore have provided complete leadership but in practice a division soon emerged between political and religious authority. This was partly because of the uniqueness of Muhammed and partly because no single succession method was given in the Qur'an.²⁰⁷ Abu Bakr was chosen from the inner circle of believers who knew his qualities and closeness to Muhammed and their selection was quickly and generally accepted by the majority as correct. Abu Bakr then designated Umar using a document. Umar appointed a council to agree collectively on who should next lead them and Uthman thus became caliph (perhaps helped of his tribal connections). Ali was acclaimed as leader following Uthman's murder. Early conversion was an

volume four, 322; [tr.] A Siddiqi, Sahih Muslim al-Jami-us-Sahih, Delhi, 1977, [volume four], 1230, [item 5655]; See [tr.] F Matraji, Al Muwatta by Imam Malek b.Anas, [volume two], Beirut, 1994, 690; [tr.] M Ebrahim, Shamaa-il Tirmidhi, Uttar Pradesh, 1994, 407-410; and A Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, Carolina, 1975, 215).

²⁰⁴ 'A beautiful pattern of conduct for anyone whose hope is in God and the Final Day' as he is described in surah al-Aḥzāb (33:21).

²⁰⁵ Despite his pre-eminence, Muhammed is not the only person in the Qur'an whose leadership is upheld. Surah al-A'raf (7:59-93) shows five prophets (Nūh, Hūd, Salih, Lūṭ and Shu'ayb) whose leadership is marked by their uncompromising demand that people accept their message and God's subsequent vindication of that message to the cost of the scornful (there are many other passages where leadership of a similar style is upheld. See for example surah al-A'raf (7:160), surah al-Hūd (11:25-94), surah Ibrāhīm (14:5), surah al-Naḥl (16:120-121), surah al-Kaḥf (18:60-98) and surah Nūh (71:3).

²⁰⁶ See G von Grunebaum, Medieval Islam A Study in Cultural Orientation, Chicago, 1972, 199.

²⁰⁷ This would later become so problematic that it was 'one of the most important causes of the decline of the Islamic State' (see R Chejne, Succession to the Rule in Islam with Special Reference to the Early Abbasid Period, Lahore, 1960, 2).

important qualification for these initial leaders²⁰⁸ and this criteria was formalized as a broad method of stratifying society when Umar institutionalized the *dīwān* system which divided the wealth gained through conquest according to conversion date. Within this chronological hierarchy, leader selection for Sunnis was theoretically to be by *shūrā* (consultation) that was reinforced by a more general *ijmāʿ* (consensus) and formalized by *bayʿah* (an oath of allegiance to the ruler).²⁰⁹ Leaders could be any male²¹⁰ with ‘sufficient knowledge of the Qur’an to be able to exercise *ijtihād*, ... of sound mind and body, and probably (though there is some disagreement here) ... of the Quraysh family.’

²⁰⁸ By contrast, Abu Sufyan was the head of the powerful Bani Umayya at the time of Muhammed’s death and might therefore have challenged for leadership, but his late and rather politically-motivated conversion was an irrevocable liability. However a leader was suggested no ratification could be reached until a council of respected Muslims reached agreement that any important choice could be transmuted from opinion to decision; and this corporate consensus was vital in the decision-making process for three generations after Muhammed’s death (see R West, ‘Mohammadan Law in India: Its Origin and Growth’, Journal of the Society of Comprehensive Legislation, Second Series [1900], 31).

²⁰⁹ *Shūrā* (consultation) is based on the Arabic tribal council (the *nādī*) that pre-existed Islam. It is given validation by verses such as surah āl ‘Imrān (3:159) surah al-Naml (27:32) and surah al-Shūrā (42:38) plus hadith like ‘follow the largest group’. *Bayʿah* developed in meaning from a commercial contract (Chejne cites surah Baqarah {2:282} and surah Ibrāhīm {14:36} as examples where *bayʿah* refers to the contractual agreement between buyer and seller), to the adoption of Islam, then the inner-circle oath of allegiance to the caliph (as early as 10/632 the term was used in connection with the selection of Abu Bakr), and finally ‘public recognition of established rule’. A further dimension to *bayʿah* is given by Imdad Imam who equates the word to ‘spiritual allegiance’ when describing how the eighth/fourteenth century Bihari pir Makhdum-ul-Mulk entered the spiritual order headed by Najib-ud-din Firdausi. This concurs with the idea that *bayʿah* can refer to the ‘promise of loyalty to a mentor’ in Sufi contexts implying that ‘the divine light passes from the hand of the mentor into the hand of the initiate’ (see Chejne, op. cit., 50-51; A Imam ‘The Pirs or the Mohammadan Saints of Bihar’, Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 3 [1917], 344; and M Ajmal, ‘A Note on Adab in the Murshid-Murid Relationship in Moral Conduct and Authority, The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam, [ed.] B Metcalf, California, 1984, 243).

²¹⁰ With the exception of a Kharijite group who followed a woman in the late first/seventh century (the Kharijites held that any believer, regardless of lineage, could become caliph). She followed her husband into leadership - similar to recent women political leaders in Pakistan and Bangladesh who have succeeded an assassinated husband (in Khaleda Zia’s case) or an assassinated/executed father (in the cases of Sheikh Hasina and Benizir Bhutto; see Piscatori, op. cit., 16; and Chejne, op. cit., 38).

In practice, Islam soon settled on the office of the caliphate²¹¹ as being the optimal form of government despite the fact that there is no specific Qur'anic support for a permanent ruling class.²¹² 'Caliph' rarely occurs in the Qur'an²¹³ and Abu Bakr therefore probably took the title from common usage rather than its religious connotations. The word carries the sense of 'one who takes the place of another after him in some matter'²¹⁴ and may imply the exercise of authority, usually on behalf of someone else. Ibn Khaldun emphasized this aspect of delegation in his definition of the caliphate when he noted that the 'caliph or *imām*, the representative of God ... is the temporal and spiritual head of the Muslim world and he concentrates in his person all the power needed for the direction of the world. All officials ... act in virtue of a power delegated to them by the caliph or *imām*.'²¹⁵ The caliphate continued through the Umayyad and (after 132/750) the Abbasid regimes to govern by an amalgam of scriptural directives, first/seventh century Bedouin customs, and Persian ideas that emphasized both monarchy²¹⁶ and mysticism. It would seem that both pragmatism and an unwillingness to give up power may also have influenced later governing styles since the Baghdad-based²¹⁷ caliphate remained primarily a dynastic form of

²¹¹ This account of the selection process and its rationale is essentially what would in time be the Sunni version. Shi'ites differ regarding the validity of specific caliphs and also the caliphate itself, instead seeing ideal leadership as being in "the hands of the *imāms* who can trace their descent directly from the Prophet through his daughter Fatima and son-in-law 'Ali". Since the disappearance of the final *imām*, Shi'ite leaders rule on behalf of the vanished leader until his final return (see Piscatori, *op. cit.*, 16).

²¹² Although surah al-Aḥzāb (33:6) is one possible validation (see M Tamadonfar, 'The Islamic Polity and Political Leadership: A Conceptual and Theoretical Assessment,' unpublished PhD thesis, Colorado, 1986, 327).

²¹³ In surah al-Baqarah (2:30) it is translated as 'vice-regent', and al-An'ām (6:165) where it is 'agent' (adding in a footnote that it can at times also imply 'successor, heir, or inheritor'; see Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 24, 339).

²¹⁴ In al-Tabari's words (see W Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh, 1968, 32)

²¹⁵ See A Lambton, 'Concepts of Authority in Persia: Eleventh to Nineteenth Centuries AD' {hereafter referred to as 'Concepts of Authority'}, *Iran* 26 [1988], 95).

²¹⁶ Not just ideas since there was, at times, appropriation of Sassanian styles, too. For example, the giving of embroidered robes by the caliph to those he wished to honour continued the Sassanian practice (see Napora, 'Tensions in the Early Caliphate and the Rise of Sufism, an unpublished PhD thesis, London, 1958, 30-32).

²¹⁷ Apart from five decades (219/836-264/892) when Samarra (eighty miles north of Baghdad; its supposed 'happy who sees' meaning was belied by the fierce military, and Mu'tazilite/non-Mu'tazilite, rivalry) was the capital, the Abbasids ruled from

political control (theoretically thereby facilitating succession and certainly keeping power constrained within a small circle) despite only oblique Qur'anic support for the method of succession.

There were however at least two groups with claims to head any dynasty (the lineages of 'Ali - the Shi'ites - and the Sunnis) and several groups vying for influence within this dynastic structure. Some of these groups rose to prominence because of their local importance and administrative skills²¹⁸ and tended to be ephemeral while others were more durable - none more so than the army. The problem of whether Baghdad should arm and pay locally-recruited soldiers (who would have parochial loyalties that could conflict with Abbasid plans) or non-local mercenaries (who would have no allegiance to the Abbasid state and thus no vested interest in its continuation) was an elongated one.²¹⁹ As well as the army, the '*ulama*' (who will be examined in more detail below), secretaries and Sufi saints, some tribes fought and at times contrived new tribal alliances to retain as much power as they could.²²⁰ It is therefore not surprising that Abbasid caliphs from the time of al-Ma'mun (died 218/833) until the fall of Baghdad (656/1258) rarely had extensive or decisive power. Regional contenders gradually carved peripheral pieces (such as Egypt or Khurasan) from areas supposedly under Abbasid control and over time these individual rebellions coalesced into dynasties (albeit usually limited to three-generational ones).

Baghdad. Dynastic control actually began under the Umayyads but was made permanent under the Abbasids.

²¹⁸ The Barmakids, for example, were a family who formed one of the government secretarial cadre (the *kuttab*) who rose to pre-eminence under the rule of caliph al-Mahdi (158/775-169/785), continued during al-Hadi's brief reign, and began to lose power from around 179/795 under Harun al-Rashid. For more about the 'secretaries' see Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*, 66.

²¹⁹ The Samarra period marks an important point in the gradual usurpation of real power from the caliphate to the Turkic military which finally resulted in caliphs becoming utterly subservient. While it would be inflated to blame the collapse of the Abbasid regime and concurrent rise of smaller states such as the Buyids, Tulunids and Hamdanids solely to this alteration in the power balance, such destabilisation was undoubtedly a factor.

²²⁰ See Napora, *op. cit.*, 11-17.



The Abbasid caliphate was not discarded however. There was value in ‘painting the corpse and pretending there was life in him’²²¹ and hence the commonwealth of Islamic dynasties usually ceded titular, although not actual, power to the Abbasids who apparently gave, rather than had taken, their approval to the regimes. While the precise rôle of the caliphate is now hard to infer, the current place of monarchy suggests itself as an analogy. Sometimes it is pivotal, as (to give a contemporary, non-Islamic, example) when the King of Thailand reconciled the army and the students who were on the verge of destabilising the country in 1412-13/1992. Sometimes it has symbolic rather than utilitarian functions but even then it may centre public attention and thus act as a cohesive device in society. The caliphate must remain similarly blurred since its leadership was constantly contested over a wide range of circumstances.

Alongside the Sunni caliphate there was the Shi’ite institution of leadership, the *imāmate*. *Imām* derives from the verb ‘to be in front of someone’ and is used accordingly in verses such as surah al-Baqarah (2:124) where the word refers to Abraham and implies that he is a leader.²²² Rather than an actual person, *imām* is at times equated to the concept, or the example, of being before something. This example could be either in the positive sense, as in surah al-Furqān; 25:74²²³ or the negative sense, as in surah al-Hijr; 15:79²²⁴. Central to the political *imāmate* was descent from Muhammed through the line of ‘Ali and Fatima, but *imāms* also needed

²²¹ See R Payne, *The Holy Sword*, New York, 1959, 222.

²²² Hughes translates *imām* in surah al-Isrā’ (17:71) as leader but Ali leaves the word untranslated and adds an explanatory footnote suggesting it equates to the representative of each people-group who will bear witness to their corporate ‘virtues or sins’ on Judgement Day. Other possibilities Ali cites are ‘Holy Book’ and ‘Recorder of Deeds’ while Pickthall suggests ‘with their record’ (see T Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, Calcutta, 1988, 203; Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 715; and Pickthall, *op. cit.*, 287).

²²³ ‘Give us the grace to lead the righteous’ (see Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 944).

²²⁴ Here the cities of Sodom and Midian are said to be *imāms* although Pickthall and Ali render the phrase as ‘on a high road plain to see’ and ‘on an open highway’ respectively. Ali’s footnote to surah al-Baqarah (2:124) suggests that *imām* can imply a (i) leader in religion, (ii) leader in congregational prayer, (iii) model, pattern example, (iv) book of guidance; see Pickthall, *op. cit.*, and instruction (as in surah Hūd, 11:17), or (v) book of evidence or record (as in surah Yā’-Sīn, 36:12 - although

to be Muslims, adult, not enslaved, sound in body, able to interpret the *Shari'ah* (as a qualified *mujtahid*) and courageous. Aspects of military, administrative, and spiritual leadership were all therefore theoretically included in the *imāmate*.

In actuality, however, the ideal *imāmate* also failed to materialise. Ali was caliph from 35/656-40/661 and his followers began to emerge as a distinct group as early as Yazid's (Umayyad) caliphate (ie from 60/680-64/683) but there were several hindrances to their becoming powerful. Firstly, even though they were pivotal in overthrowing the Umayyads, they were then outmanoeuvred by the Abbasids. Perhaps more importantly, they had no convincing line of succession through this formative period of Islam despite Ali having three sons. Husayn was martyred in 60/680, Hasan then effectively abdicated from the contest (which would discredit his descendants) and Muhammed Ibn al-Hanafiyya did not have Fatima as a mother. Although the lineage of Husayn would later emerge as the *imāmate* line, it was in the name of al-Hanafiyya that al-Mukhtar led an anti-Umayyad revolt by suggesting he (al-Hanafiyya) was actually hiding near Medina and waiting for the right moment to emerge and rule.²²⁵ By the mid-third/ninth century there was a distinctive concept of *imāmate* that was less a formal system (like the caliphate) than a series of expectations such as constant struggle, clandestine power, and a final vindication for the faithful with the *mahdi*'s apocalyptic return.

While Shi'ite leadership concepts are admittedly peripheral to a study of Sunni Bangladesh they are not entirely irrelevant. Mohorrum is not only celebrated within the country²²⁶ it is done so with such enthusiasm it could be suggested that Husayn's martyrdom gives cathartic release to those who suffer both injustice and discomfort.²²⁷

he actually uses the phrase 'Book [of evidence]' in this case: see Pickthall, *op.cit.*, 262, Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 651, 52).

²²⁵ Al-Hanafiyya could not counter this claim since he died in 81/700.

²²⁶ Observance of the festival was introduced into Bengal at the time of the Shi'ite Murshidabad Nawwabs (see MM Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal [vol 1B]*, Riyadh, 1985, 822).

²²⁷ Pinault writes that the observance of Mohorrum in Sunni areas of Darjeeling gives 'a kind of carnival affording emotional release and a way for the community to release tensions' while Gardner points out how the supposedly Shi'ite festival of Moharrum

As well as caliph and *imām*, the sultan was an important Islamic leader throughout the centuries. Qur'anically, the word is connected with power or authority, as shown in passages such as surah al-Isrā' (17:33),²²⁸ surah al-Dharyāt (51:38)²²⁹ and surah al-Ḥaqqah (69:29).²³⁰ Sultan (like *amir*) arguably came to mean something akin to governor, under the theoretical control of a higher authority. Thus 'the caliph often delegated his temporal authority to an emir, who exercised effective power but recognised the spiritual authority of the caliph. This may be nothing more than a legal fiction; but it alone guaranteed the unity of Islam under the overall authority of the *Shari'ah*.'²³¹

(II:v) The 'Ulama'.

Whether *imām*, sultan, or caliph, both Sunnis and Shi'ites saw hierarchical leadership as essential to preserve justice and order and religious credibility as essential for potential leaders. It was quickly accepted that political leaders would not usually be religious leaders *per se* but would vicariously gain such merit by association with, or endorsement from, religious figures. These were often saints, or '*ulama*', who thereby joined those with more traditional forms of power (wealth, land, or military strength) to form an intermingled elite who preserved their position through descent.

As a group, the '*ulama*' incorporated the earlier specializations of the Qur'anic reader (the *qārī'*), the Qur'anic memorizer (*ḥafīz*), the legal specialist (*faqīh*), the Qur'anic

actually appeals to poor Sunnis, largely because (anti-Shi'ite) Saudi patronage is bolstering the elite, which leaves those festivals that the elite eschew as de facto favourites of the poor. Dunham similarly writes that although Shi'ites in Bangladesh 'comprise less than one per cent of the population ... over ninety percent of the Muharram participants and onlookers are Sunni' (see D Pinault, 'Shi'ism in South Asia', *The Muslim World*, 87 [1997], 249-250; Gardner, *op. cit.*, 244-245; and M Dunham, *Jarigan Muslim Epic Songs of Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1997, 6).

²²⁸ 'We have given his heir authority' (see Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 703.).

²²⁹ 'We sent him to Pharaoh with authority manifest' (*ibid.*, 1426).

²³⁰ 'My power has perished from me' (*ibid.*, 1600).

commentator (*mufassir*), and the grammarian (*naḥwī*).²³² Knowledge, for the ‘*ulama*’, was access to power²³³ since it was knowledge of the core texts of Islam which allowed them to organise the practices which defined the official version of Islam and to frame the method whereby new rules could be generated.²³⁴ The ‘*ulama*’ largely legitimized the various institutions of Islamic political leadership as well as individual leaders at times. For example, those ‘*ulama*’ outside the caliphate’s authority tended to recognise their local rulers as having Divine sanction, either out of a desire to encourage their leaders’ piety or an acceptance that ideal Islamic leadership was no longer possible. Either way, there was a measure of pragmatism whereby they saw acquiescence, rather than opposition, as the better way of promoting the *Shari‘ah*.²³⁵ Moreover, they provided continuity during times of change and turmoil.²³⁶ Particularly as Abbasid power declined from the fourth/tenth century onwards, the ‘*ulama*’ joined the Sufis as one of the two new classes of religious leaders and are often posited as the ‘formal’ balance to the Sufis’ ‘informal’ influence. The ‘*ulama*’ were traditionally linked to landowners, traders and the politically powerful and were sometimes therefore seen as being compromised. Sufis, by contrast, often became local intermediaries between the

²³¹ See Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture*, 5.

²³² This collectivisation has been dated to the time of the third Abbasid caliph, al Mahdi, who ruled from 158/775 to 169/785 (see Bulliet, *op. cit.*, 105; and P Crone and M Hinds, *God’s Caliph Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge, 1986, 91-92).

²³³ Albeit knowledge tempered by money and power, which were also ‘salient qualities of an important *ulama* family’ (see Bulliet, *op. cit.*, 109, 180-181).

²³⁴ They formulated the concepts of *ijmā‘* and *qiyās*, for example.

²³⁵ See [ed.] T Bary, T, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Delhi, 1988, 470-474. While this specifically concerns medieval Indian Islamic leadership, the point can be more generally made that both the ‘*ulama*’ and the Muslim ruler were constantly having to balance ideals of leadership with the general perception of acceptable rule. Hence there was a need to adopt some of the customs that widely conveyed the idea of authority. There is an interesting parallel in this devolution of political power despite inherent compromises and the way spiritual authority came to be ceded to intermediary human practitioners (such as *pirs*) and spirits (for example, *jinn*s).

²³⁶ Birge makes the point that Mongol-brokered uncertainties promoted other-worldly mysticism, while Gardner (albeit dealing with a completely different situation) reiterates that religious-centred stability is crucial at times of rapid change. Gilson postulates that flexibly-structured *ṭuruq* helped Algerians to retain their identity during French occupation and Sākalāyēn who generalises that it was the saints who

general populous and the political leaders. Another difficulty the '*ulama*' faced was because of their increasing specialization²³⁷ which carried the danger of becoming divorced from normal life. Difficulties notwithstanding, the '*ulama*' did manage to provide both stability and direction²³⁸ in their *Shari'ah*-centred leadership. They were pragmatic enough to avoid apparently valid laws that would simply prove unacceptable they were rarely cynical and dishonest.²³⁹ This suggests the underlying idealism with which the '*ulama*' practiced law throughout the centuries. It is testimony to the respected they engendered that the *Shari'ah* they guarded is still seen as a parallel legal system that will emerge one day as a viable code of life rather than an outmoded code²⁴⁰ and less a diminished legal system²⁴¹ than an augmented one.²⁴² It gives both guidance and acts as a rhetoric device to support the hopes of those on the margins of political power.²⁴³ Faith in the *Shari'ah* has now

saved the Muslim states and society in times of crisis (see Birge *op. cit.*, 27; Gardner, *op. cit.*, 229; Gilsenan, *Recognising Islam*, 146; and Sākalāyēn, *op. cit.*, 35).

²³⁷ They needed an ever growing corpus of essential knowledge before being deemed qualified.

²³⁸ 'Being stable and yet not standing still' in the words of Justice Cardozo (as quoted by M Muslehuddin, 'Islamic Law and Social Change', *Islamic Studies*, 21 [1982], 28).

²³⁹ Although such aberrations did of course happen at times. The Delhi Sultan Mu'izz ud-Din Kay-Qubadh (ruled 686/1287-689/1290), for example, found '*ulama*' to invent 'excuses for his violation of Ramadan and indifference to prayer' (see Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*, 16).

²⁴⁰ 'Both constitutional and legal theory were elaborated as storm shelters; if ignored or abused in practice, they would be at least preserved in doctrinal purity for the day when, by God's grace, the millennium might dawn' writes Kerr. Azmeh reiterates this by saying that the *Shari'ah* is the utopia which inspires *fiqh* (see M Kerr, *Islamic Reform, the Political and Legal Theories of Muhammed 'Abduh and Rashid Rida*, California, 1966, 14; and A al Azmeh, 'Islamic Legal Theory and the Appropriation of Reality' in [ed.] A al Azmeh, *Islamic Law Social and Historical Contexts*, London, 1988, 250).

²⁴¹ Which is not to imply that it has no legal function at all; Messick quotes various scholars' remarks on the gap between theory and practice but retorts that 'little attention has been given ... to the obeyed dimensions of the *Shari'ah* or to the extent to which its categories and concerns have influenced behaviours' (see Messick, *op. cit.*, 60).

²⁴² Were it no more than a legal system there would have been a far greater outcry at its being supplanted by Western methods (see N Brown, 'Shari'a and State in the Modern Muslim Middle East', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 29 [1997], 360-361).

²⁴³ Fisher mentions the central role of the '*ulama*' in countering the Pahlavi regime in Iran, showing that the *Shari'ah* retained its value throughout the decades of official neglect when it did not operate as a legal system. Piscatori cites several of these

become part of a reactionary²⁴⁴ reclaiming of Islamic identity²⁴⁵ and upholding it has become one of the ways of re-asserting one's Islamic identity in the face of outside influences.²⁴⁶

(II:vi) The Deobandi 'Ulama'.

The actual rôle of the 'ulama' is best illustrated in a manner relevant to the focus of this study by the work of the scholars of the Deobandi *madrassah* throughout the nineteenth century AD. This is not to imply that 'ulama' were inactive in the subcontinent (or elsewhere) previous to this; their influence in the region dates from the time of the Delhi Sultanate²⁴⁷ when they advised on issues such as whether it

rhetorical 'non-committal slogans' as examples of Western suspicions of Islamic duplicitousness but he does not explore the possible place of rhetoric in maintaining hope during times of disadvantage (see M Fischer, 'Becoming Mollah: Reflections on Iranian Clerics in a Revolutionary Age', *Iranian Studies* 13 [1980], 83; and Piscatori, *op. cit.*, 42).

²⁴⁴ 'The new piety is defined not so much by what it represents but more by what it opposes' (see Gardner, *op. cit.*, 243).

²⁴⁵ By contrast, in 1883 AD when the Egyptian National Court system was extended from the Mixed Courts to effectively marginalise the *Shari'ah* there was only very muted opposition (see Brown, *op. cit.*, 360-361).

²⁴⁶ Just as the sultan's justice was in actuality remote, the bell at the gate of the Ottoman palace provided some hope for fair judgement to those who asked. Similarly perhaps, the *Shari'ah* is an ideal that many Muslims do not realise in their daily lives but it remains nonetheless an ideal and helps to provide a sense of belonging to the world-wide community of Muslims.

²⁴⁷ This six-faceted rule lasted from 602/1206-962/1555. The Delhi Sultans were Hanafite (like the Ghurids but unlike the Ghaznavids who were Shafi'i {most Indian Sunnis are currently Hanafi although there are some Shafi'i's in the south and the west of the country as well as two Shi'ite schools, the Jafari and the Isma'ili}) but were not averse to promoting Maliki and Shafi'i ideas or giving non-Hanafite rulings on occasions. Iltutmish (607/1211-633/1236) gave early encouragement to the 'ulama' by the establishment of *madrassahs* in the city and they were particularly active during the reigns of the Tughluqids and Lodi branches of the Delhi Sultanate (720/1320-817/1414 and 855/1451-circa 932/1526 respectively; see Z Islam, 'Development of Islamic Jurisprudence in Sultanate Period', *Hamdard Islamicus*, 13 [1990], 17-18, 21; Bosworth, *The Islamic Dynasties*, 186-187; Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*, 11; and Zaman, *op. cit.*, 34-35.).

was permissible to destroy a Hindu temple. Moreover, *fatwās*²⁴⁸ were collated into books throughout this time in order to help the judicial process, although these may well have served largely as theoretical exercises since they were written in Arabic and concerned historical, rather than contemporary, cases. The suspicion that local scholarship lacked some respectability is reinforced by the need top scholars had to go to Iraq for their final training.

During the later Mughal period, Indian '*ulama*' studied works pertaining to the law with a core text being the *Hidayat* (all fifty seven books of it) and gained a final certificate that allowed them to work within the state bureaucracy.²⁴⁹ As post-Aurangzeb Mughal power declined both Sufi *pirs* and the '*ulama*' grew in power, the former group largely because of their perceived access to God's grace (*barakah*). There was a concomitant growth in creativity as shown in poetic works and social organisations such as the Nizamiyyah branch of the Chishti order (which began in this time) and a revival amongst the Naqshabandis. Although the *pirs* did have some political rôle, this was more typical of the '*ulama*' who therefore had some responsibility to explain the failure of the Mughal leadership to withstand the British encroachments (they cited a general religious and moral malaise and called for a greater general adherence to the law).

Throughout this initial period of Mughal decline and British expansion²⁵⁰ there was a general artistic and intellectual decentralisation from Delhi to places like

²⁴⁸ These are legally binding opinions, and more correctly are termed *fatāwā* but in keeping with common usage an /s/ is added to form the plural.

²⁴⁹ Although they gained employment, the '*ulama*' were somewhat disempowered in this process since Mughal kings tended to see themselves as capable of giving religious as well as temporal leadership (this is one of the few areas of agreement between Akbar and Aurangzeb). By contrast, the Ottoman '*ulama*' were organised into a coherent social grouping that was less dependent on the ruler's favour (see B Metcalf, *The Reformist Ulama: Muslim Religious Leadership in India, 1860-1900*, {hereafter referred to as *The Reformist Ulama*} unpublished PhD, University of California, 1974, 5).

²⁵⁰ Bengal was one of the first regions where the British established themselves, and by 1765 AD they had enough Bengal trading partners and a pliant enough local Muslim ruler to gain the right to collect revenue. The Bengali economy was thereby increasingly tied to British demands and crops such as indigo and jute were thus produced to the cost of former products such as quality cloths. From Bengal, British

Lucknow with scholars collecting around institutions such as the Farangi Mahall.²⁵¹ Of all the '*ulama*' of this time none were more influential than Shah Wali Ullah. He was born four years after Aurangzeb's death²⁵² and so lived through the Mughal collapse and British encroachment. He not-surprisingly had a sense, shared by others such as Sirhindi, that Islam was threatened and that a revitalization was required. Although he was not against the careful addition of Sufi ideas²⁵³ he saw the *Shari'ah* as the vital element in any such rejuvenation - a *Shari'ah* that could take some note of changing factors²⁵⁴ while retaining its universality but which demanded a cadre of skilled practitioners to correctly apply principles such as

control moved outward and in 1803 AD they effectively control in Delhi. British control had marked financial and social effects since the British wanted to secure the major source of revenue - primary products - and so concluded settlements with those best suited to their interests. This benefited some Indians (in Bengal it was those with land who were advantaged while conversely those who worked on the land - who, in East Bengal in particular were overwhelmingly Muslim - were disadvantaged). There was a concurrent ceasing of grants, which had been made largely to religious institutions; and an increase in governmental service (in particular the army; the princely forces were, in consequence, disbanded). But the most troubling change for Muslims was in the administration of the law. Each religious community's code was fixed, and Muslim law (beginning in Bengal in the late eighteenth century) was altered into Anglo-Islam law (see Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 9-10).

²⁵¹ This 'school' studied a wide group of texts, centred of course around the Qur'an and hadith but also including mystical learning - a blurring of *ulama*/Sufi distinctions was typical of eighteenth century India. The Farangi Mahallis nonetheless continued to rely on government patronage and funding and some of the family's offspring in each generation were sent to work for the court (ie the equivalent of government service) and some to religious teaching. As the government declined, the Farangi Mahallis spent increasing amounts of time in religious wrangling with an emphasis on intellectual rigour

²⁵² His actual life span was from 1114/1702 to 1176/1762.

²⁵³ Sufism was to be subordinate to orthodoxy, not just adherence to the Qur'an and *sunnah* but also allegiance to one of the four main law schools with Hanafi and Shafi'i law being central. Wali Ullah paid particular attention to the Traditions of Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Da'ud and Tirmidhi but was simultaneously drawn to, and wary of, mystical ideas, particularly those of the Naqshbandi Order (the motif of exploring mysticism and emerging undamaged by potential dangers and convinced of the centrality of the *Shari'ah* appears to be a recurring one as both Ayatollah Khomeini and Sheikh Salama of Cairo also followed this pattern (see H Malik, 'Shah Wali Ullah's Last Testament', *Muslim World*, 63 [1973], 109-110; Fischer, *op. cit.*, 110; and Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi*, 14).

²⁵⁴ He used the image of the *Shari'ah* as rain water that was pure in the sky, relatively clean lying on high ground, but muddied and sullied when lying on low lands (see M

ijtihād and *ijmā'*.²⁵⁵ The complexity of questions such as *wahdatu'l-wujūd*²⁵⁶ only emphasized the importance of the 'ulama', but it was in the political rather than theological realm that Shah Wali Ullah had most influence. He believed that the 'ulama' would not merely be spiritual advisers, but that the authorities should share power with them. He therefore wrote to Muslim political leaders of the day offering religious instruction in the hope that some of them at least would eventually provide true Islamic leadership.²⁵⁷

Part of Shah Wali Ullah's legacy is the almost ninety religious schools in India that had come into being by the early twentieth century AD which shared the belief that the social turmoil around them, best evidenced by British rule, was ultimately because of religious error and apathy and that reformation of Islam by using original Islamic thinking and practice was therefore called for. Unlike Wali Ullah however

Muhammed, 'Shah Wali Allah's Concept of the Shari'a' in Studies in Honour of Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, Leicester, 1979, 345).

²⁵⁵ For *ijmā'* to be reactivated he suggested that following the majority, rather than unanimous, view was consistent with hadith directives. Secondly, since he thought the usually-quoted hadith source for *ijmā'* ('my community does not agree on error') was irrelevant because it actually addressed the unity and integrity of believers. *Ijmā'* was justified on the 'basis of all such traditions as imply integration of the community'. Concerning *ijtihād*, Shah Wali Ullah thought that the 'ulama' were capable of interpreting the *Shari'a* - that the Doors of *ijtihād*, in other words, should be reopened (see Muhammed, op. cit., 354; Metcalf, The Reformist 'Ulama', 13).

²⁵⁶ 'Unity of Being' which is variously translated as ontological or existential monism or even pantheism (which had obvious similarities to Hindu thought). This concept was first formulated by Ibn Arabi and had arrived in India via Persian poets. It saw the unity of God as so absolute that existence was illusory and the seeker after God should (mystics argued) obliterate this illusion (*fanā'*) in order to attain knowledge. The early Naqshbandis, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi in particular, opposed this idea suggesting that the apparent unity was rendered obsolete in the face of experiential knowledge (technically called the *wahdatu'sh-shuhud* or the Unity of Witness) - a case of the superseding of the question of "what is" by "what is is". Shah Wali Ullah took the whole conceptual framework another step deeper by suggesting these two apparently contradictory Unities were in fact unified by another level of Divine Unity (see Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India, 39-40).

²⁵⁷ Shah Wali Ullah thought that society went from primitive, urban, monarchical and finally universal stages with each subsumed into the next. It was only in the final stage that a caliphate, the Islamic ideal of political leadership, could be established (see Metcalf, The Reformist Ulama, 12-14).

these Reformers²⁵⁸ were born too late to have much hope for an imminent return of Muslim power in the Subcontinent. They did not therefore attempt to influence their leaders so much as instruct the wider body of Muslim believers and encourage them in their faith. *Fatwas*, traditionally given by a *mufti* (court official) to guide a judge (*qadi*) now became direct guidance to Muslims in general. Such guidance included opposing some popular customs, such as the performance of *milad* (which described events prior to, during, and just after, the birth of Mohammed²⁵⁹) while concurrently promoting populist ideas such as the propagation of Urdu as the major medium to disseminate Islamic teachings.²⁶⁰

Of these Reformist '*ulama*' groupings it was the Deobandis who were the most important. Rather than follow the example of Shah Wali Ullah and participate in the state they²⁶¹ instead chose to set up semi-independent local leadership. The Deobandi *madrassah* was established by two graduates of the Delhi College, Muhammed Qasim Nanautawi (1833-1877) and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829-1905) in the North Indian town of Deoband in 1867 AD. Deoband had been a provincial centre (*qasbah*) in North India under the Mughals and remained a centre of Muslim culture and faith into the second half of the nineteenth century. The school was operated somewhat along British lines and was thus at variance from earlier schools such the Farangi Mahall that had no library and had teachers who taught in their own homes. Deobandi teachers had no court or state patronage and

²⁵⁸ Particularly those living after the 1857 AD Mutiny. These scholars were collectively known as Reformist '*ulama*' because they believed that the *tajdid* (renewal) for which they worked could only come about by reforming Islam from its foundational sources. There were also smaller, less influential, groupings such as the Muslim League but the '*ulama*' were generally apolitical and thus separate from the League (see Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 13-14).

²⁵⁹ It was not the *milad* itself the Reformers opposed but the belief that Mohammed was somehow present in the middle section of the ceremony and that *milad* was in some way a form of intercession (see Metcalf, *The Reformist 'Ulama'*, 35-36).

²⁶⁰ The use of Urdu was reinforced by widespread use of the recently introduced printing presses which produced tracts and poetry, and it increasingly became a mark of Islamic identity.

²⁶¹ Along with those who wanted to invoke *jihād* to expel the British and other groupings of Reformist '*ulama*' such as the Ahl-i Hadith and the Barelvis, plus localised movements such as the Fara'izi in Bengal.

generated their own living through a subscription scheme, one of the school's distinctives (another being the pattern of employing people non-relatives.²⁶²

The Deobandi *madrasah* aimed to train Muslim leaders and to this end had a ten year (later reduced to six years) course. The curriculum emphasized hadith and *fiqh* with most of the students studying Arabic as well. Urdu was the medium of instruction with European topics not being taught, largely to avoid duplication of government schools. Plans by the school for vocational training were not so successful however since most pupils saw the type of training offered as below their dignity (except for calligraphy and medicine). The School had an extensive library, which was gifted many manuscripts and then added books using the then-newly introduced technology of the printing press. Equally innovative was the use of examinations to test students' proficiency. Just as character was important amongst the teaching staff, so character development was one of the teaching aims with hard work and discipline plus modest living standards expected. This last factor was spearheaded by the teachers, most of whom could have easily have obtained better paid positions elsewhere and even took a pay cut in 1872 AD when few contributions were received to the school.

Not only did the Deobandi School produce trained leaders, it also engendered several other similar institutions across the North of India²⁶³ many of them staffed and/or established by graduates of the Deobandi School. This shared education was augmented by shared membership of Sufi *tariqa* and inter-family marriage links to give the Deobandi '*ulama*' a cohesiveness that obviated the need for formal linkage, a cohesiveness that was reinforced by their successful incorporation of both the *Shari'ah* and the *tariqat* (this was not, in itself, new, but was part of a wider attempt by disparate groups in India to bring varied disciplines together). Thus Deobandi-

²⁶² There were, however, less formal ties amongst the staff, such as membership of Sufi orders, most commonly, the Chistiya (see Metcalf, *The Reformist 'Ulama'*, 99).

²⁶³ By the end of the century there were around thirty-five schools across North India that identified themselves as part of the Deobandi style (*maslak*); at the centenary in 1967 there were around nine thousand graduates. Although there was a diverse ethnic range amongst the students there were a particularly large proportion of Bengalis (see

trained '*ulama*' reinforced a sense of Islamic identity across North India by living exemplary lives, performing those tasks expected of a religious leader (such as preaching at Friday prayers) and by giving religious and spiritual advice.²⁶⁴

The '*ulama*' were, in other words, expected to act as both *mufti* and sheikh²⁶⁵ and thus have both intellectual and supernatural capabilities. They tended to co-exist with *pirs* rather than confront them²⁶⁶ in the Indian Subcontinent as elsewhere.²⁶⁷ In Kerala (South India), the '*ulama*' leaders (*tannals*) organised the ceremony wherein saints were revered, for example.²⁶⁸ Deobandi '*ulama*' sheikhs were expected to perform miracles (*karamat*), influence people by the direct force (*tasarruf*) of their

Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India, 135-136; and Metcalf, The Reformist 'Ulama', 121, 126, 133,137).

²⁶⁴ The sheikh was held to have a special intimacy with God because of his discipline and obedience. The practice of each devotee having only one sheikh as spiritual director and the great commitment demanded on both sides of the *pir-murid* relationship, intensified the relationship between the two, and parallels family structures (familial names were colloquially used amongst the Deobandi leaders and their disciples). The final stage of the relationship was when the *murid* was empowered by the *pir* to make his own disciples (see Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India, 161-165).

²⁶⁵ See appendix one for a full discussion of what constitute a sheikh in various societies.

²⁶⁶ Saints did confront and miraculously better the '*ulama*' on occasions but Gilsenan argues that by agreeing to a legalistic framework to settle such disputes they gave tacit support to the '*ulama*' position (see Gilsenan, Saint and Sufi, 23). Rather than a simple '*ulama*'-saint divide, Fischer notes five such competing 'interpretations of ideologies of Islam' viz. scholastic, folk, modernist, sufi and elite-privatised (see Fischer, op. cit., 90-92).

²⁶⁷ In Turkey, for example, the *Tanzimat* reforms that could have marginalised the '*ulama*' occurred at the same time as economic reforms depriving the rural poor, and the '*ulama*' were able to present themselves as champions of these 'new poor' (thus joining the majority and avoiding being linked to an unpopular regime). From being seen as an elitist 'pillar of the state' they focused discontent and centred the reaction against Western capitalism and state reforms. Again, in Egypt, 'the Orders ... evolved ... towards a more symbiotic relationship with the legists and in the process had been incorporated as a vital part of the meaning of being a Muslim.' Sufi brotherhoods often used to meet in mosques in Tanta (Egypt) and Al-Azhar has at times been a centre of Sufism (see Gilsenan, Recognising Islam, 42-48; Gilsenan, Saint and Sufi, 12, 42, 188; and Bulliet, op. cit., 181).'

²⁶⁸ This is called the *nercass* ceremony. The saints apparently take care not to overtly challenge the authority of the '*ulama*' (see S Dale and M Menon 'Nercas: Saint-Martyr Worship Amongst the Muslims of Kerala', Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 41 [1978], 523-538).

being,²⁶⁹ have dreams (those featuring the Prophet having most significance) and oversee the spiritual exercises disciples needed for their development. Central amongst these exercises was *dhikr*.²⁷⁰ Whether this was voiced or silent, the aim was to eliminate all thoughts other than God and to control both breathing and movements in order to eliminate distractions. Other spiritual exercises included *durud*²⁷¹ which entailed meditating on verses praising Mohammed and *amaliyyat*²⁷² that similarly emphasized certain verses by recitation or being worn as an amulet in order to gain a specific aim such as gaining employment. One measure of success in such exercises involved physical effects such as visions of light and spontaneous laughter.

The Deobandi 'ulama' also gained and exercised religious authority through the issuing of *fatwās*, most of which were concerned with belief and rituals.²⁷³ This side-stepped the British legal system and, along with the informal networks the Deobandi 'ulama' had established, ensured their importance despite a lack of any formal position within the British administration.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁹ One aspect of this was the direct intervention on a singled-out disciple, a process known as *tawajjuh* (see Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India, 175-176).

²⁷⁰ *Dhikr* is generally accepted as vital for spiritual development. Deobandis practised two main types, *zikr-i ism-i zat* which repeated the name of God alone and *nafi o isbat* which repeated *la ilaha illa'llah* (see Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India, 185-186).

²⁷¹ Mentioned because this was a term also used in Rosulpur.

²⁷² Whether this term corresponds to the *amal* that disciples participated in after evening prayers under Hozrot Ali's tutelage in Rosulpur is uncertain.

²⁷³ In particular, those related to Sufism. For example, they opposed the ceremony ostensibly centred on the life of Mohammed (*milad u nabi*) since it echoed Hindu practices and promoted the idea that the dead person was actually present, but generally Deobandi *fatwās* either encouraged people to revive lapsed practices such as *hajj*, to avoid fixed holidays (like *urus*) or to stop optional actions being made compulsory. The extent of using *fatwās* can be gauged by the fact that by their centenary the Deobandi School had issued 269215 of them (see Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India, 146, 150-151).

²⁷⁴ From the mid eighteenth century onwards the British rulers had modified the *Shari'ah* they inherited from the Mughals to produce their own criminal codes. Legal processes were initially used only to collect revenue and the Mughal civil and criminal codes remained intact. Statutory law became increasingly used however, and so both religious codes (the *Shari'ah* and the Hindu *dharma*) were gradually set aside. In 1862 AD the British promulgated the Indian Penal Code (based on English criminal law) and the Indian courts were used to alter laws such as amputation for theft

(II:vii) Other Thirteenth/Nineteenth Century Reformist Movements in India.

The Deobandi '*ulama*' were not, of course, the only group of scholars who organised themselves and opposed the imposition of British rule; two similar Sunni '*ulama*' groupings were the Barelvis and the Ahl-i Hadith. As its name suggests, the Ahl-i Hadith saw all necessary guidance for Indian Muslims to be contained within the two primary sources of Islamic law, the Qur'an and the Traditions and so gave no credence to the law schools or the body of jurisprudence they had, over the centuries, generated. Neither did they trust mystical experiences, not just because excesses of zeal sometimes occurred but more fundamentally because of the assumption that one could, by various means, come to know God.²⁷⁵ The Hanafi²⁷⁶ Barelvis resembled the Deobandis in their acceptance of a range of Sufi practices although their leaders tended to be Qadiri rather than Chistiya but they were more reminiscent of the Ahl-i Hadith in their heightened respect for the Prophet. This is symptomatic of the ideologically centralist position the Deobandis had amongst the Sunni Reformist '*ulama*', a position echoed intriguingly by the social hierarchy. Although all the '*ulama*' claimed to be part of the *ashraf*²⁷⁷ it was the *Sayyids*²⁷⁸ who

imprisonment and the admissibility of testimony by non-Muslims. Such change was both gradual and slight (particularly regarding religious matters and family law) since the British saw both Hindu and Muslim laws as best suited to their respective populations and even allowed religious sub-groups to have autonomy. In cases involving people of different faiths the code of the defendant was used and both pundits and muftis (as experts of Hindu and Muslim law respectively) were attached to the courts. The *Shari'ah* was even strengthened in some ways since it was given recognition by the ruling power (by, for example, the 1937 Shariat Act; see A Fyzee, Outlines of Muhammadan Law, Oxford, 1949, 37; J Anderson, Law Reform in the Muslim World, London, 1976, 23-24; Fyzee, 'Islamic Law and Theology in India', 164-167; A Buehler, 'Currents of Sufism in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Indo-Pakistan: An Overview', The Muslim World, 87 [1997], 306-307; and N Coulson, A History of Islamic Law, Edinburgh, 1991, 161).

²⁷⁵ To the Ahl-i Hadith this was inappropriate to the verge of blasphemy (for more about the Ahl-i Hadith see Metcalf, The Religious 'Ulama', 304-336).

²⁷⁶ As were the Deobandis.

²⁷⁷ From elite families who claimed descent from outside India, in other words.

²⁷⁸ Paramount amongst the four *quam* that made up the *ashraf*.

tended to support the Ahl-i Hadith whereas the *Pathans*²⁷⁹ largely supported the Barlevis and the sheikhs, the Deobandis.²⁸⁰

There were also two important Bengali Reformist movements. The more important was the Fara'izi²⁸¹ which began with Hajji Shari'atu'llah Allah (1195-96/1781-1255-56/1840) on his return to Faridpur around 1820 AD after two decades in the Hijaz. Imbued with Reformist Wahhabi doctrines, the Fara'izis opposed popular custom and Shi'ism, and saw Sufism as too dangerous for all but the elect few. By insisting that all Muslims be subject to the law as defined by one of the four main schools they drew power away from Sufis; and by insisting that Bengal was *dar al-harb* they similarly undermined the power vested in the state. After Shari'atu'llah's death, his son (Mohamed Mohsin al-Dain Ahmad, better known as Dudu Miyan) continued to urge people to 'return to the Qur'an' and shun *pirs* and spirit intercessors. The Fara'izis had wide appeal; for a short time virtually setting up a parallel governing system in parts of Bengal but later accommodating themselves to British rule, settling internal disputes within their own administrative structures but using the British Court system for arguments involving (mostly Hindu) landlords and the newly emerged class of British indigo planters.

The other Bengali movement of the early nineteenth century AD reflected changes elsewhere in North India. This was the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah, which was begun by Saiyed Ahmad Shaheed²⁸² and led in Bengal Titu Mir (1782 AD-1831 AD). This also tapped into a sense of social grievance (targeting Hindus and British indigo

²⁷⁹ Lowest ranked of the four segments of the *ashraf*.

²⁸⁰ The sheikhs were second in ranking amongst the four, but it must be remembered that ancestry, was always negotiable (see Metcalf, *The Reformist 'Ulama'*, 168-169).

²⁸¹ From its insistence on the centrality of the fundamental obligations (*farz*, plural *fara'iz*, although in colloquial Bengali the word, either single or plural, tends to be pronounced *foroj*).

²⁸² He was born in Uttar Pradesh, India, in 1200-01/1786 (died 1246-47/1831) and (like many others) was influenced by Shah Wali Ullah's ideas. He left for *hajj* in 1822 AD from Calcutta, which was also his point of return to the subcontinent, and began the Muhammadiyah movement in the North West Frontier region (deliberately chosen because it was independent of British rule) shortly afterwards. Titu Mir met Saiyed Ahmad Shaheed in Mecca, and joined him in the North West Frontier, before

planters in particular). It emphasised *ijtihād* (with military *jihād* as an aspect of this) to rid Islam of its non-Muslim accretions, but had only a brief influence that waned after Titu Mir was killed by British troops following the desecration of a Hindu temple. There was also the more orthodox Ta'aiyuni movement led by Maulana Karamat Ali (1214-15/1800-1289-90/1873) who spent much of his life in Bengal. He was against music and dance, amongst other things. None of these leaders in Bengal were from elite families²⁸³ which may help explain why their movements had some success in the similarly alienated rural population.²⁸⁴ Moreover, the overall impact of the Reformist movement was especially strong in Bengal because this was the only area of India that had an increase in the Muslim population through conversion throughout the nineteenth century. Even as Bengali Muslims recognised the Reformist movements had failed in their stated aims and some sort of accommodation with the British was inevitable, they were encouraged by these movements and made to feel a part of the wider body of Indian Muslims after centuries of feeling isolated from them.

The Reformist movement, whether Deobandi, Ahl-i Hadith or Barelvi, was itself part of a wider intellectual response to British rule that ranged from the Secularists who believed that religious considerations should have no part in the political administration of India which should itself follow European models; to Radical Revivalists who thought a return to Medinan Islam was required and only sudden and powerful action could achieve this.²⁸⁵ Modernists did accept that some European ideas should be adopted but thought the *Shari'ah* could be integrated into a modern Islamic state by adapting the underlying principles such as *ijmā'*, *shūrā* and *maṣlahah*. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1232/1817-1316/1898) was arguably the most important of the Modernists. He lived through a period when the British had conquered Muslim India decisively enough to challenge Indian self-respect and responded by advocating that some aspects of Western knowledge and values could

returning to Bengal in 1827 AD and propagating Muhammadiyah ideas (see [ed.] S Islam, *op. cit.*, 277-279).

²⁸³ See Abecassis, *op. cit.*, 16-17.

²⁸⁴ Ahmed also notes the use of vernacular *puthis* (manuals of religious instruction) that targeted the urban population (see Ahmed, in [ed.] Ewing, *op. cit.*, 116-118, 130).

be used to promote Islam.²⁸⁶ Because of his optimistic openness he was one of the most important of the modern Islamic thinkers in India and influenced aspects such as education, most notably in the establishment of Aligarh University; and even the establishment of Pakistan.²⁸⁷ The Muhammedan Literary Society founded by Nawab Abdul Latif in Calcutta in 1279-80/1863 was another attempt by Modernists to come to terms with a British rule that would not easily be done away with. Iqbal (1289-90/1873-1356-57/1938) was one of the best known Modernists, although he was essentially less a theologian than a poet and writer²⁸⁸ he nonetheless saw the need to reactivate *ijtihād* and re-institute *ijmā'* within the modern legislative process. Syed Ameer Ali also had wide influence, but in the polarization of that time none of the Modernists could convince the majority of Muslims that their vision was other than a capitulation to the West and this, along with their failure to get concrete solutions to problems such as how to elect leaders, meant they had only limited influence.

The neo-Traditionalists were less accommodating of European ideas although they wanted to use modern techniques and methods such as mass communications, organisational methods, and the scientific approach²⁸⁹ to facilitate the following of

²⁸⁵ For an analysis of this varied response to British rule see Bennet, *op. cit.*, 63-68.

²⁸⁶ Amongst these imported ideas were those of the Christian missionaries regarding the authenticity of the Bible and Qur'an, but Ahmad Khan typically turned to Western scholarship and visited British libraries in 1869-1870 AD in order to counter such thoughts (in particular Muir's 'The Life of Mahomet'). Also typical was the way this challenge prompted Ahmad Khan to a wider reassessment of hadith whereby he developed criteria to gauge the authenticity of their *isnād* and argued that hadith should be examined to decide whether Muhammed really said the words attributed to him, whether they meant what the commentators suggested, and whether they contradicted sense and experience. He came to doubt the authenticity of many of the Traditions even as he upheld the importance of those that were reliable and essentially agreed with the Mutazilite idea that while reason may point towards truth only a Prophetic Message could give a fuller knowledge of God (see C Troll, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, a Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology, Delhi, 1978, 101-102, 127-144, 174, 183, 191).

²⁸⁷ He did not campaign for a separate Islamic state *per se* but he encouraged the idea that nationalism should be based on Islamic identity.

²⁸⁸ He wrote in Urdu and English, studied for his doctorate in Germany, and is best for his book 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'.

²⁸⁹ The use of such analytical thought should (according to neo-Traditionalists) be within the framework of a conflict between Islam and ignorance (*jāhiliyāh*) rather than

Islamic laws. Sayyid Abul-'Ala (Maulana) Mawdudi was perhaps the most important of the neo-Traditionalists. He was born in South India in 1321/1903 and is best known for his founding of the Jamaat-i Islami which rejected both a defensive preservation of traditional ways of living and a widespread acceptance of the West. Like Shah Wali Ullah before him, he saw the need for new leadership since most of the current leaders had been educated through the Western colonial system and so were both dispirited and disqualified from bringing about *ijtihad*-directed changes. Democracy was another Western innovation that Mawdudi saw as hindering Islamic leadership developing since the learning and piety required to be a *mujtahid* were not qualities likely to be selected in a broad based elective process. The Conservative Traditionalists such as Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi²⁹⁰ were more adamant in the need to follow the law closely and be wary of syncretism.²⁹¹

(II:viii) Conclusion.

Although the British imposed power through the existing village structures²⁹² to try and minimize opposition from those they governed there was widespread Muslim

by European parameters (evaluation of pure data) as propagated by European education methods.

²⁹⁰ Sirhindi lived from 971/1563-1034/1624 and is remembered in part because of his opposition to Akbar (963/1556-1014/1605) and his syncretistic ideas of religious faith. Both in this courageous opposition to an all-powerful ruler which echoes figures such as Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taimiyya, as well as in his survival of potentially dangerous spiritual experimentation which is reminiscent of Khomeini and al Ghazali, Sirhindi appears to fit motifs of ideal behaviour (see B Faruqi, The Mujaddid's Conception of Tawhid, Delhi, 1977, 19-21; and Bosworth, The Islamic Dynasties, 210).

²⁹¹ He was wary of the Sufi accretions involving belief in saints, use of music to encourage ecstatic states (*sima*) and *zikr*-prompted intoxication but was particularly opposed to pantheism (*wahdat-i-wujūd*) (see M Farman, 'Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi' in A History of Muslim Philosophy [Vol II], [ed.] M Sharif, Delhi, 1989, 873-5; and Faruqi, op. cit., 5).

²⁹² Which inevitably strengthened the customary legal structure to the further cost of religious laws. Inevitably, as colonial rule was progressively rejected and Muslim identity re-asserted there was a reactive repudiation of customary law and concomitant promotion of the *Shari'ah*. Villages were defined in kinship and tribal terms and (in

(and non-Muslim) opposition nonetheless. This opposition was led by 'ulama' such as those trained in the Deobandi *madrassah*, as well as *pirs* organised into their *tariqa* structures.²⁹³ *Pirs* and 'ulama' are often identified as representing the 'informal' and 'formal' facets of Islamic leadership but this chapter has shown that these words (in common with 'Islamic' and 'leadership') are subject to variable and interdependent meanings. 'Leadership' can thus be visualized as consisting of overlapping-but-separated spheres of 'formal' and 'informal' styles, a blurring which dates from the inception of Islam. Deobandi 'ulama' leadership aptly exemplifies how formal Islamic leadership operates. Leaders were called sheikhs, a title implying any or all of Middle Eastern descent, supernatural abilities, and deep knowledge of the Qur'an and hadith.

In the next chapter, the operation of more localised leaders in one Bangladeshi village will be examined. Like the leaders reviewed in chapter two, they do not cleave into neatly separated compartments; but unlike them they are closely attached to their village.

the Punjab at least) grouped into *zails* (equal to ten-to-forty villages) to facilitate administration. In the Sind 'pir families came to control social and economic resources to an extent not possible in more centralised regions. As a result, rulers looked to them for co-operation' (see D Gilmartin, 'Customary Law and Shari'at in British Punjab' in [ed.] K Ewing, *op. cit.*, 46-47; and S Ansari, *op. cit.*, 8).

²⁹³ 'In time the rôle of sufi saints was institutionalised' reinforcing the idea that any clear-cut formal/informal demarcation is difficult to make. The *pirs* were very useful to the British partly because of their rôle in tribal mediation and partly because they 'created a social order' through the *tariqa* system (see S Ansari, *op. cit.*, 23-25, 28).

(III) Chapter Three: Informal Religious Figures in One Bangladeshi Village

(III:i) Introduction.

The previous chapter made it clear that the '*ulama*' of the Indian subcontinent as exemplified by the Deobandi '*ulama*' had a style of leadership that could be described as informally-tempered formality. Religious leaders of Rosulpur Muslims are the opposite side of the same dynamic, reinforcing the perception that overlapping and interacting informal and formal leadership styles prevail. While leaders in Rosulpur village, where research was carried out, largely lack formal theological training and several are illiterate they remain linked to the core tenets of Islam. Formula recited for healing purposes will be in Arabic, and may well not be understood by the reciter. *Pirs* claim linkage back to the founding saints of Islam and from there back to Mohammed himself, a lineage that is less fictive than based in a unquantifiably spiritual realm. 'Informal' though such leaders appear, their credibility relies entirely on a perceived continuity with the 'formal' aspect usually represented by the theologically trained '*ulama*'.

(III:ii) Introductory Remarks Regarding Informal Religious Leaders in Rosulpur.

The leaders in Rosulpur village of central Bangladesh who will be examined in this chapter include the orthodox leader Mustafiz and the healers Shuja, Aziz and Shobdulerma.²⁹⁴ Two singers (Shagor Ali and Torob Ali) are also reviewed since songs preserve much of the commonly-held religious beliefs. The leadership of the *Atiya Majar*, west of Tangail, is also briefly looked at since this is an important site for the fulfillment of vows. Two *pirsabs*²⁹⁵ (Kodom Ali, who died in 1993 and his son Hozrot Ali who is now struggling to establish his own authority) are examined, as is

²⁹⁴ This means 'the mother of Shobdu' (women are usually referred to in this manner); she was also sometimes called Hasaner Bon (the wife of Hasan).

one of their followers (Haru) who is questioning his allegiance to Hozrot Ali while exploring his own powers and spiritual experiences.

The leadership these people provide is, in keeping with its inherent ambiguity, distinct from the exercise of village politics without being completely devoid of power considerations. These leaders often mediate (usually between the petitioner and God) and power is deemed necessary for this, but they do not take part in the localised judicial proceedings (*bicārs*). Some of these leaders are healers, either in the physical or in the spiritual sense (by helping people to become acceptable to God). Others oversee some of the most important festivals in the life of villagers. These include life events such as birth, marriage and death, formal religious occasions (notably the two Eids) and the less formal religious events (in particular the *urus*, but also the *ekdil* and the fulfillment of vows at *majars*). Finally, some leaders help to provide the cosmological framework for peoples' lives. This is done by orally transmitting the shared corpus of information regarding the lives of the prophets and other religious events.

(III:iii) Research Notes.

Research was carried out in the village of Dakin Pauli, a two-taka *tempo ride*, and pleasant walk through the ever changing fields away from Tangail. As well as the previously mentioned constraints of comfort and cultural comprehension was the language barrier, although this was usually not too severe. My knowledge of Bengali was generally sufficient but some problems did arise when the religious beliefs under discussion generated wider and sometimes vigorous debate (as tended to happen) particularly when Hozrot Ali was at the centre of such deliberations (he speaks quickly and indistinctly). Shobdulerma was the other person who proved sometimes hard to understand, largely because the spirit possession which was central to her way of healing was a new topic for me. The possibility of using an interpreter was rarely

²⁹⁵ As *pirs* are called in the area.

available²⁹⁶ but the more common challenge entailed the establishing of trust. This centred around why I, as a Christian, should study Islam and could only grow as people became sure that I had no malevolent aim. In assuring them that I was content to leave all judgments to God and was happy to accept them as they were, I followed the stance of the person whose hut I shared, an American Catholic priest who has lived in the village for around fifteen years. My research was able to proceed largely because of the legacy of trust he has engendered.

(III:iv) Dakin Pauli; Space and Spatialization

My initial visit to the village of Dakin Pauli took place when the village was in its best state of repair, just after the (1403/1996²⁹⁷) monsoon, during the months of *Ograyon*²⁹⁸ and *Kartik*²⁹⁹ (early September to mid October). This is an agriculturally lax period when time is available for the maintenance necessary after the monsoon wetness. A second visit was in *Chattro* and *Boishak*, (1404, March 1997) in the build-up to the following monsoon. This, in contrast, is a very busy period. The winter crops had been harvested and sold.³⁰⁰ In some areas the IRRI³⁰¹ rice crop was already half grown (it would be harvested in the month of *Joystho*, or mid May until mid June).

²⁹⁶ Govinda from nearby Alanga village was occasionally available and then very helpful.

²⁹⁷ The first figure refers to the Bengali calendar.

²⁹⁸ Local pronunciation renders this as *Ogron*.

²⁹⁹ Whether the Bengali calendar (which was streamlined by the government a few years ago and now consists of more or less the same number of days each month) or the Western calendar is used is a clear class and location indicator. Most middle-class Dhaka residents would have no idea of the Bengali date on any given day; most villagers in Rosulpur know only the Bengali calendar.

³⁰⁰ These were mostly vegetables, particularly cauliflowers, cabbages, carrots and tomatoes. The 1403/1996 winter season had witnessed a new crop - tobacco - that entailed an entirely new *modus operandi* of farming. Instead of the farmer selling his produce in the local market (or perhaps in Tangail, or, via others, in Dhaka) a tobacco company oversaw the entire operation and in effect contracted the farmers to produce. By March the tobacco plants were being uprooted in order for the next crop of rice or jute to be planted.

³⁰¹ IRRI stands for International Rice Research Institute. The invention of this variety is said to be one of the major reasons there has been no famine in Bangladesh since 1975.

Moreover, the land is at its driest so 'earth-cutting' operations whereby irrigation and river channels are widened and deepened with the earth carried to raise homestead (*bāri*) land were extensive throughout March. A third visit was made in the following year (1404/1997) during *Ograyon* and *Poys*³⁰² (November-December). This was a moderately busy period since the first winter vegetables were ready for harvest. Although farming is the major source of livelihood, the size of land holdings varies greatly and perhaps one half of all local families own no land but rely on those with land for work (who, in turn, rely on the landless to provide labour when needed). Rice was (as is common throughout Bangladesh) the major crop although winter vegetables are also regularly grown.

Seasons dictate the basic rhythm of life; but this does not imply timelessness. Despite the continuing importance of rice, IRRI did not exist two decades ago and was genetically engineered to meet a specific set of agricultural needs. While houses may still be constructed much as they have been for centuries, only twenty kilometres away the second-longest bridge in Asia nears completion.. Not that many people work there (most make their living closer to Rosulpur) but some men do travel from the village, for example cycling rickshaws in Tangail, labouring in the brick kilns, or transporting earth by truck.³⁰³ Moreover, prior to the creation of India and Pakistan in 1947, there were roughly the same number of Hindus as Muslims in Rosulpur and the current predominance of the latter reflects the massive change of populations that took place at that time. The village arguably remains the basic cell of society, however,³⁰⁴ since

³⁰² In keeping with practice throughout this thesis, words such as the Bengali months that regularly appear in Bangladeshi English publications are reproduced here in that form rather than transliterated. For a full list of the Bengali months see A MacLeod, Colloquial Bengali Grammar An Introduction, Chandpur, 1979, 119-120.

³⁰³ The last two are seasonal. Bangladesh literally rebuilds itself after every monsoon as receding rivers reveal silt deposits that need to be removed (without such deepening of water channels subsequent flooding would be more severe). The earth is needed to raise foundations for new homesteads (which in monsoon are literally islands in an inland sea) and also form the raw material for bricks (used predominantly in urban house-building).

³⁰⁴ In biological terms, the cell is the smallest living unit that can exist by itself. By analogy, the extended family could be suggested as the most viable unit for human (emotional and physical) survival. Writing of the Berbers, Gellner similarly notes that 'such loyalties as have from time to time crystallised in the middle area between the tribal ceiling on one hand, and the universalist claims of Islam on the other, were

even when outside work is found the men return every night to it. Dakin Pauli is perhaps wealthy enough³⁰⁵ for subsistence, yet too poor to push many into an exile-like search for work in the cities where money is concentrated (in contrast to the poverty-induced restlessness that begins the novel *Lal Salu*).³⁰⁶

To call Dakin Pouli a village is perhaps misleading for several reasons. Firstly, the Bangladeshi village (*gram*) is generally less a collection of houses surrounded by fields than fields uniformly dotted by single roomed huts (*ghars*) that are grouped into extended-family hamlets (*bāris*). Each *bāri* tends to have a population of 10-20 people³⁰⁷ housed in five-to-ten *ghars*. Dakin Pauli has 170-200 *bāris*. Wealthy families tend to be surrounded by their own land whereas the poor are either landless or have small disparate pockets of inherited or sharecropped land³⁰⁸ that are some distance away. A 'village' of collected *bāris* is therefore quite spread out, although

ephemeral, and were not firmly articulated in either ethnic or territorial terms' (see Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*, 16).

³⁰⁵ As measured by parameters such as huts having woven bamboo walls rather than the cheaper (and weaker) jute sticks and the number of corrugated iron (rather than thatch) roofs. At the weekly Rosulpur market approximately half of the men (women do not attend) wore shoes. The village is within 15-30 minutes walk from a main road (so crops can be sold in Tangail) while being far from a major river (so non-routine flooding that can not be planned for is rare).

³⁰⁶ Written by Sayed Waliullah, this account of the activities of a village *pir* is both apt (despite being fictional) and part of Bangladeshis' shared awareness (being part of the prescribed reading in the education syllabus). It begins with the central figure of the novel escaping from poverty and ready to take any chance to gain a livelihood. Dhaka city is full of people similarly driven to take such risks but they are generally from poorer regions such as Barisal.

³⁰⁷ This figure is in the process of change since the birth rate is apparently down to 2.1%. 'Apparently' because statistics are notoriously unreliable in Bangladesh. When he was President, Mr Ershad received a UN prize for attaining a 2.1% birth-rate but when he was deposed the caretaker President (Shahabuddin) referred to a 2.6% rate. Nonetheless, the family planning propaganda has made a large impact in Rosulpur at least, with many younger couples now having only two children.

³⁰⁸ Known as *barga jamin*. When irrigation is needed the owner of the deep tube well takes a quarter (*ek shiki*) of the crop with the landowner (*mālik*) and the farmer halving the remainder. The basic units of land measurement in Rosulpur (and Bangladesh in general) are the *parkhe* or *bigha*, and the *decimal*. There are three *bighas* in an acre and a *decimal* is one hundredth of an acre (hence there are thirty-three-and-a-third decimals per *bigha* with each *decimal* consisting of approximately seven by seven metres).

there is likely to be a clear gap between villages.³⁰⁹ Each village consists of several *para*s although this is a somewhat elastic term also. It can conversationally equate to *gram* but usually specifies location (Moddu Para of Dakin Pauli is, as its name suggests, the central area³¹⁰) or perhaps historical ownership (Dakin Para of Dakin Pauli was sometimes referred to as Choudri Para after a family who once owned the land). It would not be entirely fanciful to define a *para* as the area within which a local woman is able to publicly converse with local men. Women rarely travel outside *gram* limits, and when doing so would sometimes wear a full-length *burka* covering³¹¹ and rarely address anyone but their immediate family.

Secondly, the *gram* is not the official way of subdividing rural Bangladesh. For administrative purposes, Dakin Pauli is part of Rosulpur Post Office.³¹² Politically, it is one of the thirty eight villages that form Alanga Union.³¹³ There are nine Union members, and one Union Chairman, elected from these 38 villages to represent local interests to government officials.³¹⁴ Thirdly, the village is overlaid by *sāmāj* lineage

³⁰⁹ Appearing as 'one vast, seamless village' where 'the houses are scattered so that one village often fades imperceptibly into the next' (see J Boyce and B Hartmann, *A Quiet Violence*, Dhaka, 1990, 17).

³¹⁰ 'Dakin Pauli' is itself geographically distinguished from 'Uttor Pouli' since the two villages lie south and north of the Lohojor River respectively.

³¹¹ Gardner also makes the point that village boundaries correspond to the area within which women do not wear a *burqa*. There is some irony in the fact that women, for whom power must remain unofficial or even clandestine, are the agents who demarcate living spaces rather than the 'centrifugally oriented' men (see Gardner, *op. cit.*, 31-32; and Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, 41, 92).

³¹² Which is open for around an hour a day. Rosulpur Post Office takes in the villages of Rosulpur, Dakin Pauli, Pachur, Panch Bikrammati, Salina, Hoyrahati and Ramna Noyapara.

³¹³ The Union is the smallest political unit. Pauli is in fact the southernmost village in Alanga and the neighbouring village of Rosulpur is part of Gala Union. Thus the postal and the administrative units do not entirely correspond with each other.

³¹⁴ At least in theory. Union members tend to promote their own village interests and since Dakin Pauli have no current members, they look to nearby Chenamora village where one (of the three members from there) person is said to be sympathetic to Dakin Pauli. Moreover, the motivation for election is not perhaps entirely altruistic, as witnessed by the repeated statement that 'Amzad Member' (the title outlasts the office since he has not been part of the Union for two years) was no longer interested in office since he could make more money from his truck business. Thorp includes the 'revenue village' (*mauza*) in his discussion of the administrative subdivisions of Bangladesh, but this was not a common term in Rosulpur (see J Thorp, *Masters of*

ties. *Sāmāj* implies a sense of oneness, which immediate context then defines as entailing religious³¹⁵ familial or geographic unity.³¹⁶ Since almost everyone in Dakin Pauli is locally born and raised³¹⁷ and Muslims form an overwhelming majority³¹⁸ *sāmāj* tends to equate to family that is more distant than immediate or extended (*puribār* and *āttīya* respectively) while being closer than lineage (*bāngsha*) in local conversations. Dakin Pauli now has two major *bāngshas*, the Hazi and the Segda, although it once had far more.³¹⁹ The Segda *bāngsha* consists of three *sāmājs* while the Hazi has only one (each *sāmāj* has approximately sixty *bāris*). Although post-1947 migration into and out of the village has been rare,³²⁰ movement within the village area has always occurred so *sāmājik*³²¹ ties cut across geographic *para* and governmental demarcations.³²²

Earth Conceptions of Power Amongst Muslims of Rural Bangladesh, an unpublished PhD, Chicago, 1978, 23).

³¹⁵ In which case *sāmāj* is almost synonymous with *jāti* although it was also used at times in the sense of those who pray at the same mosque. For example, Aziz (the *oja*) who was raised in Pachur village but now lives in Rosulpur saw himself as somewhat an outsider and added that his son (Idul) would only really be part of the village if a mosque was established in the immediate locality and he (ie Idul) took part in its construction. The word Aziz used throughout this discussion was *sāmāj*. *Dharma* means religion in the theological, rather than sociological sense.

³¹⁶ Kalo Meya was one who consistently used *sāmāj* as a synonym for *para*.

³¹⁷ Except, of course, for the women because normal practice is for them to move into the husband's *bāri* when they marry. This does not usually involve a long journey however.

³¹⁸ Bangladesh is 90% Muslim and around 10% Hindu, with negligible numbers of Buddhists and Christians.

³¹⁹ The Korati, Mamul, Chawkudi, Chowdri, Jiley, Brahmon and Hindu Korborter being mentioned. Those I spoke to had heard of Sayed, Pathan and Mollah *bangshos* (these being the names cited in other studies) but said they had never existed in the Rosulpur region. They also denied that any non-Bengali outsiders had ever settled in the area.

³²⁰ The family whose *bāri* I stayed near were themselves 'outsiders' inasmuch as they came from perhaps five kilometres away a generation ago. Even this distant migration arguably gave them the relative freedom to invite the Catholic priest with whom I shared a hut to settle near them fifteen years ago.

³²¹ The *ik* suffix is one of the ways Bengali renders nouns into adjectives.

³²² For a discussion of the various terms of Bengali social organisation see Thorp. His thesis was written in the late 1970's and there have been many administrative changes since then (for example Ershad's promotion of the *upazila* unit) but the identification of the *thana* as the 'focus of local level administration' is apt although calling the *sāmāj* a 'residential brotherhood' does blur over the composite meanings Rosulpur residents could invest the word with (see Thorp, *op. cit.*, 7, 23).

Migration now occurs because work is available away from Dakin Pauli but also because land has become increasingly sought after. The village of Shodlapur is one area that has grown as a consequence of people moving away from Rosulpur, but land in rural areas is becoming scarcer and therefore more expensive. While the question of identity and belonging is a very complex one, it may be suggested that in Bangladesh as a whole the village still centres one's sense of belonging.³²³ This is shown by the migration 'home' every Eid as city-dwellers travel to their father's village on massively overcrowded buses or boats.³²⁴ As well as Eid prayers being a close community affair (albeit with only the men involved in corporate prayer), arrangements for both buying and distributing the sacrificed beast are based on family ties. While a goat is usually brought by one person only, the expense of buying a bull is often shared within the extended family (*āṭṭiyā*).³²⁵ Distribution of the meat involves societal (*sāmājik*) links since the carcass of each sacrificed animal is divided into three, with a third going to the immediate family, a third to distant relatives and

³²³ Gulick suggests that Middle Eastern identity centres around language, religion, ancestry (which includes social class, occupation and ethnicity), gender and location and that 'each ... serves as the basis of cohesion among people who already know each other (and) for making new alliances among people who are only newly acquainted'. These five factors are also of central importance in Bangladesh, although arguably in altered proportions (he gives no estimates of how much weight is given to each category). Language served as one of the definitions of nationhood and the 1952 'Language Martyrs' are remembered every year - although conversely Bengali does not of course carry the same emotive force as Arabic since it has no claims to be the heavenly language. Since Muslims are the vast and growing majority in Bangladesh, the sense of belonging religion imparts is more global (identification with Bosnians, for example). Specific location is perhaps more important in Bangladesh because of the relative lack of mobility, although this is rapidly changing and the completion of the Jamuna Bridge will further facilitate cross-country travel (see J Gulick, The Middle East An Anthropological Perspective, Lanham, 1983, 35-46).

³²⁴ An intriguing parallel to this is the practice amongst Bengali Muslims resident in Scotland to return their deceased family members to Bangladesh for burial although there is a Muslim graveyard locally available.

³²⁵ An Eid goat cost between Tk1800 and Tk2400 in 1403/1997 whereas the price of a bull was around Tk8500. Theoretically one bull can be divided seven ways although three-or-four way divisions are more common (otherwise each person's portion is likely to be smaller than an entire goat). There appears to be an informal consensus that sacrifice is (like the *ḥajj*) only to be performed by those able to afford it, but if a wealthy person did not buy a suitable sacrifice it would be seen as a very shameful lapse.

the poor, and a third to those of one's *sāmāj* who did not themselves sacrifice an animal.³²⁶

Eid prayers at the Dakin Pauli Maidan (the field set aside specifically for these prayers) were disrupted in 1403/1997 by an argument that, in its aftermath, showed another way village unity is maintained. The *bicār* is a village court and it is the main local mechanism for mediating in affairs such as adultery, arguments, or theft. This Eid, two *sāmāj* groupings within the Segda *bāngsha* disagreed over the correct starting time for prayer. While no actual violence was involved, most people were very unhappy at what seemed a deliberate flexing of power at such an important occasion and talked of convening a *bicār* (although this did not finally eventuate).³²⁷ Central to any *bicār* is the rôle of the *matabors*, perhaps best described as village 'headmen'. These are unelected leaders reminiscent of the Iraqi sheikhs studied by Fernea since it is their job to allow both parties to tell their story and then pass judgement (which generally involves some degree of consensus rather than an absolute vindication and condemnation).³²⁸ Disputes that extend beyond village levels

³²⁶ Indeed, *sāmāj* was defined by some as simply those who shared the Eid sacrifice. Thorp has a slightly different explanation of how the Qurbani meat is distributed in Pabna district. He notes that half of it is set aside for the *sāmāj* (which he defines as residential brotherhoods 'made up for the most part of contiguous households') and half for family and friends. From the former half portions are taken to pay the presiding *mullabi* and to distribute to beggars (see Thorp, *op. cit.*, 115-117, 119).

³²⁷ The Segda *bangsho* did however split as a result of this argument.

³²⁸ See R Fernea, *Shaykh and Effendi Changing Patterns of Authority Among the el Shabana of Southern Iraq*, Massachusetts, 1970, 131-135. In Dakin Pauli the principal *matabors* were Amzad Member (whose influence largely came from his wealth which accrued from his former belonging to the Union Porishod, his truck business, his land holdings, and his having sons working in Saudi Arabia), Mofiz (the *munsī* of the local mosque; some distrusted him because of his temper and the fact that he recently led the splinter group from the mosque in Moddhu Paṛa to form a new congregation) and Boser (with half as much land as Amzad Member, he is nonetheless a largish landowner). Amzad Member is the leader of one of the smaller *sāmāj* groups but one which is said to be disorganised and uncontrolled, which invites the other two *sāmājs* of this *bangsho* to challenge them. It was such a challenge that led to the Eid day argument. In addition to these three, Anser, Abu, Abdul, Abdul Haq, Hamid, Sorap, Jilik and Fozlur Haq (notable for once having played for the Mohammadan Football Team in Dhaka) were all said to be *matabors*, although there may be some flexibility in the term since this list was not unanimous. In general, wealth, age and family connections are pre-requisites for a *matabor*.

are more likely to be resolved by the Union Parishad (Assembly)³²⁹ or perhaps (if violence is involved) the police.

Dakin Pauli has two mosques, the larger being in Moddhu Para and the smaller, newer one (led by Mofiz) in Poschim Para, less than a two minute walk away. The building of the latter mosque was because of a disagreement two years ago when the Moddhu Para mosque was rebuilt. Some saw this project as an opportunity to re-site the building while others did not; hence the splinter congregation.³³⁰ There is one *maidan*, where the Eid prayers take place. There are no *majars* in Pouli itself although some of the wealthier *bāris* do have built up gravesites.³³¹ The nearest *majars* are in Pachur, where Kazi Pagla and Kodam Ali (with his wife) are buried.³³² The former is neglected, but the latter now has a corrugated iron hut covering and is well cared for. There is also a *majar* next to Barta Mosque, about forty minutes walk from Pauli³³³ and (further away) the Atiya *majar* and the *majar* of Shah Jalal in Sylhet.

³²⁹ The *maidan* dispute in a sense did extend beyond village limits since Uttor Pouli and Mohila join Dakin Pauli for Eid prayers (there being around a thousand worshippers in total). But because the dispute was essentially an intra-*sāmājik* one, the means of mediation were kept local.

³³⁰ To what extent this argument concerned the ideal situation of the mosque rather than familial power struggles is questionable. The original mosque was overseen by the Hazi *bangsho*, the new by the Segda. Moreover the *munṣī* of the new mosque is Mofiz (a Segda ally).

³³¹ *Majars* are the gravesites of religious leaders. Orthodox figures, such as *munṣīs* and *mullabis* tend not to have such edifices built for them, but *pirśabs* do. *Majars* have a brick or concrete fence built around the grave which is slightly raised to distinguish them from similarly surrounded gravesites of wealthy people. For example the grave outside Amzad Member (the epithet 'member' reflects his period as member of the Parishad Council and is used conversationally despite his no longer holding the office) is very well maintained but has level ground and therefore is identifiable as not being a *majar*.

³³² Of Kodam Ali more will be written. Kazi Pagla was often mentioned in passing as one of the formerly notable *pirśabs* but he seems to have left no successor and therefore his influence is not ongoing.

³³³ One person interestingly said this was more important than the *majars* in Pachur because it required more effort to get to.

(III:v) Standing in the Gap; Those in Rosulpur who Broker Ambiguity.

The majority of those in Rosulpur are Muslims although there is a distinct Hindu Para. The village would appear to reflect the national ratio of 10% Hindu, 90% Muslim quite closely. Akter correctly identified attitudes to Hindus as an important indicator of how Bengali Muslims perceived their own faith³³⁴ and the lack of overt tension between the two communities in Rosulpur would seem to be consistent of her assertion that the two communities co-exist peacefully (although to what extent equality of rights can be therefore be assumed may be questioned³³⁵). I did not hear of local Hindu temples being attacked during the recent tensions over the Babri Mosque/Ayodhya Temple dispute as happened in many parts of Bangladesh. Many Muslims attended the 1403/1996 Hindu festival of Durga Puja and enjoyed the music and festive atmosphere³³⁶ while some Hindus went to the *urus* of Kodam Ali, one of the more important regular Muslim local religious events.

There is a very early precedent for the toleration of Hindus in the Indian subcontinent since the conqueror of Sind (Muhammed Ibn al-Qasim) decreed they were 'People of the Book' and therefore entitled to state protection as early as the second/eighth century.³³⁷ While it is unlikely that anyone in faraway Bengali villages knew of this

³³⁴ In her demarcation of Bengali Muslims into modernists, orthodox, or popularist, she used questions such as 'do you go to *pujas*?', 'should Hindus stay in Bangladesh?' and 'what would you do if someone insulted Muhammed, Allah, the Qur'an or Islam?' While it may be questioned whether her methodology (relying on surveys rather than observation) was conducive of exactitude, the actual questions she addressed were (in this writer's opinion) apt (see Akter, *op. cit.*, 157-158).

³³⁵ The cost of safety could arguably be equality (see von Grunebaum, *op. cit.*, 177-180).

³³⁶ More than the previous year, when the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) which had some links with the Jamaat-i-Islami still ruled. It is also true that Kali Puja, which celebrates a bloodier goddess, is not generally attended by Muslims and Hindus never attend the Eid prayers.

³³⁷ Space prohibits an extensive review of toleration but does allow a brief mention that (i) the Qur'an gives some support for diversity through surahs such as al-Nisā² (4:59), al-Rūm (30:22), al-Shūrā (42:8) and al-Ḥujurāt (49:13); (ii) the Qur'anic view of *jihād* is arguably less combative expansion than inner striving; (iii) both the jurists and governments came to a pragmatic acceptance that non-Muslim territories surrounded them; and (iv) even within Muslim territories there were diverse peoples

formal agreement, it may have provided validation for their urban rulers to justify the more peaceful and expedient path of co-existence throughout subsequent centuries. Of more probable historical importance was the fact that it was a Sufi-tempered form of Islam, with added centuries of experience of persistent Hinduism across North India, which penetrated Bengal.³³⁸ Such co-existence of the faiths also reflects village realities whereby too much conflict could prove hazardous to all, since successful harvesting and planting relies on a high degree of mutual dependence.³³⁹ It is, however, interesting that Muslim tolerance of Hindus did not equate to any dilution in the sense that Islam is the correct path, or in devotion to the person of Muhammed. This sense of exclusive rightness of Islam coupled with an inclusive acceptance of Hindus was also shown by the 'orthodox'³⁴⁰ leaders in Rosulpur.

There were several such people in and around the village, and a brief review of them, and the other types of religious leaders, with now be given (with those introduced in bold type being the seven people I spent most time with). Following this review, the three broad categories of what they did will be discussed.

Momin Master taught in the local primary school but was generally referred to as a Mullah and respected primarily for his for his religious knowledge.³⁴¹ **Mustafiz** was sometimes identified as a *pirśab* but those I spoke to usually went on to explain he was a *munsī*, which suggests the former term may have a more generic meaning as

(see Piscatori, *op. cit.*, 45-48 for a summary of these ideas; their political outworkings are detailed on 50-75).

³³⁸ Roy suggests that many Hindu concepts were acceptable to Muslims arriving in Bengal because they concurred with ideas Muslims thinkers had already formulated (see Roy, The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal, 150-153; and Haq, Bānge Sūphī Prabhāb, 71-72).

³³⁹ Eickelman also makes the point that maintaining social order is vital to avoid damaging confrontation amongst his villagers. The possible importance of an authoritative document to cite and a legacy of living alongside other faiths is suggested by the intercommunal violence in the Balkans despite the same imperative for mutual dependence (see D Eickelman, Moroccan Islam Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Centre {hereafter referred to as Moroccan Islam}, Texas, 1976, 135-137).

³⁴⁰ By which I imply that they do not agree that poverty alters the necessity to fast and ritually pray, and that their teachings are based firmly on the Qur'an and actual hadith (as distinct from folkloric stories that are sometimes presented as 'from the hadith').

well as the specialised sense examined below.³⁴² He was the only often-mentioned religious leader who did not live locally, although he visited regularly to teach his followers, sometimes staying overnight in one of their houses. These teachings were an amalgam of Qur'anic and hadith injunctions³⁴³ translated into everyday living. He, for example, emphasized the inevitability of the Day of Judgement but added that Hindus would be judged according to their own scriptures. Mustafiz also reiterated the basic tenets of faith through his teaching, including the necessity of prayer and fasting, which begged the question of why he was so respected amongst those who did not adhere fully to these very tenets. This is consistent with the way the *Shari'ah* continues to be respected even when it is not followed, probably because it is viewed as an inspiring ideal that Muslims believe will one day be realised. Many who heard Mustafiz's teaching may well have respected his adherence to the *Shari'ah* while not following it themselves. Just as the Eid sacrifice is paid for by the rich and vicariously appropriated by many others, Mustafiz's perceived piety may serve as an available uplift for those who do not, for example, fast and pray five times daily.³⁴⁴ Thus an inability to follow the dictates of the *Shari'ah* actually reinforces the idea that it is a superior code of life and would also suggest the need for intercessory help.

³⁴¹ Although some did call him a *pir* as well, one person saying that he 'knew the four paths and so was a *pir*' although what precisely he meant was unexplained.

³⁴² The title *munsī* is surely unrelated to the Hindu leatherworking caste which bears the same name and instead presumably derives from the Persian word denoting 'writer' etc although Hilali suggests the word comes from Arabic (for composer; see F Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, London, 1957, 1328; and S Hillali, *Perso-Arabic Elements in Bengali*, Dhaka, 1967, 233). *Munsī* is sometimes used in contrast to *mullabi* to denote a man who is able to lead all the prayers (including *millat*) except on Friday (when the *khutbah* address is given) and special occasions (such as Eid). It also may suggest one whose mosque duties receive no remuneration (whereas the *mullabi* does receive payment).

³⁴³ Mustafiz is literate and referred to Bengali translations of the Qur'an and Bukhari's hadith (although whether he had access to a full set of Bukhari's collection or - more probably - a truncated version of the *Miskat-ul-Masabih* that is more common in Bangladesh, is translated into Bengali, and which includes Bukhari's collection, was not made clear).

³⁴⁴ The orthodox theologian al-Shawkani postulated that such rural Muslims had the legal and moral status of the *al-jāhiliyāh* (ie those who lived in the pre-Islamic 'Age of Ignorance'). They were thereby at least tied into the Islamic framework rather than excluded entirely from it (see Messick, *op. cit.*, 155-156).

Kodam Ali was a very well known local religious leader. He died four years ago at which time he had around eight hundred followers (*síśú*) from 30-40 km away (most reputations do not extend further than the next village). He was uneducated, and was said to be the fourteenth Bengali *pirśab* in a lineage that claimed mystical, though not genealogical, linkage back to Muhammad.³⁴⁵ The Hindu pundit Gaur gave a more prosaic account of Kodom Ali's elevation and said that his own father, and another Hindu, had both instructed Kodom Ali. It is hard to ascertain quite what Kodam Ali's reputation rests on.³⁴⁶ Certainly many of those I spoke to claimed that he had healing abilities but such claims are not unusual. It is only the 'first twelve' *pirs* who are widely credited with spectacularly extraordinary powers. I was told several times that Shah Jalal regularly prayed his *Fujr* prayers in Mecca before being miraculously being transported back to Sylhet in time for breakfast.³⁴⁷ People refer to Kodam Ali's 'love' for everyone and his acceptance of Hindus and Muslims alike but beyond such generalisations it was not possible to get a clear picture of the man.³⁴⁸ Again, attitudes to Hindus serve as one indicator of piety.

³⁴⁵ This figure of fourteen is suspiciously identical to the colloquial general term for 'ancestors' which literally is 'fourteen men' (*caudda purush*) and did not concur with the common claim of descent from one of the twelve 'founding *pirs*' (usually referred to as *āwliyā*) who first came to Bengal.

³⁴⁶ Although McDaniel refers to Bengali Hindus, her criteria of an ascetic life, and (more importantly) having disciples and performing miracles as validating leadership claims are perhaps also relevant in the Rosulpur situation (see J McDaniel, *The Madness of the Saints*, Chicago, 1989, 246-247).

³⁴⁷ Roy refers to the same report and Abecassis reinforces the importance of the miraculous by writing that 'with the possible exception of warrior-*pirs* or martyr-*pirs*, belief in a saint's miraculous powers was a pre-requisite for purification' (see Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, 226; and Abecassis, *op. cit.*, 11). While it would be credulous to believe all reports of miracles, doggedly refusing to allow that some saints have such gifts may be just as limiting. A single story from a Dutch priest living in Bangladesh may suffice to illustrate. He reported a *fakir* who stopped him while walking on the path, bending down and scooping up a handful of dust which he then offered to the priest as food. Gamely he accepted - and was surprised that it tasted like sugar.

³⁴⁸ Roy makes the point that *pirs'* lives were recorded using similar, recurring motifs, which concurs with Attar's standardised reportage of Islamic saints' lives. Moreover, Mills found the presumption of sanctity surrounding the Atrosi *pir* meant detailed interviewing, which would have individualised the man, was deemed presumptuous (see Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, 222-223; [tr.] A Arberry, *Farid al-Din Attar: Muslim Saints and Mystics*, London, 1966; and Mills, *op. cit.*, 35).

Hozrot Ali is one of Kodom Ali's sons. He is not the oldest, but the only surviving suitable candidate to succeed his father since two of his brothers died and a third was a thug or *mastan*. Whether he will actually fill the vacancy and continue his father's work is far from certain. His claims are bolstered by a written genealogy (*silsilah*, or *kilapod*) that traces his spiritual lineage right back to Muhammed and comes down through 'Shanal Shah' (whose *majar* is said to be in Dhaka) and finally his father. Secondly, Kodam Ali formally nominated Hozrot Ali by placing a turban on his head five years before his own death. But Hozrot Ali clearly does not enjoy the same degree of respect his father had. In fact, he tends to be surrounded by older, more educated figures who act as spokesmen when questions are directed at Hozrot Ali himself. This compounds the problem of finding out precise details of his life-history which is already made difficult by the tendency to counter specific inquiries with general responses (as mentioned above). Thus it was hard to discover how influential his being the son of Kodom Ali actually is. Similarly, while he mentioned that his father gave him no special training, it proved difficult to discover whether such training is usual or what it might consist of (none of those connected to Kodom Ali's *majar* mentioned the Hindu element Gaur talked of, for example). Leadership is Hozrot Ali's, if he can prove himself a leader.

Haru is a *fakir*; a flexible term alluding to his acceptance of Kodam Ali's leadership³⁴⁹ and his assumed ongoing spiritual progress as witnessed by his possession of powers, in particular healing which is always a major concern in such a disease-prone situation as rural Bangladesh tends to be. He has four children and gives his age as 'about sixty' although fifty may seem more likely since his first child was very young at the time of the 1971 War of Independence.³⁵⁰ His *bāri* consists of three huts, two of which have corrugated iron roofs. He has a little inherited land in Rosulpur village but since shifting last year to Shodlapur (thirty minutes walk from Dakin Pouli) he rents a *bigha* of land adjacent to his *bāri*. Most of his income is derived from selling in local

³⁴⁹ *Śiśu* is the usual term for devotees of a *pir*. Interestingly it tends to have Hindu associations (religious language is often highly polarized between Islam and Hinduism) with *umot* being the more orthodox Islamic term.

³⁵⁰ This is often used to date events amongst those I spoke to in the village.

markets.³⁵¹ He sells some of his own produce but mostly spices which he buys from Gala market and walks five days a week to various markets to resell. Thus religion is, in his own words, a 'night matter'; providing for the family as a marginal farmer and trader takes most of his daily energy. Haru's father had little curiosity in religion, and it was not until he was 'fifteen or twenty' that Haru began his interest, first in orthodox (*sarīyat*) and then unorthodox (*mārephat*) forms of faith. He dates his regular attendance at Friday prayers³⁵² from 'after the War' and his devotion to Kodam Ali to an unspecified healing, and the subsequent fulfillment of a vow (*niyat*³⁵³) followed by the performance of initiatory rites. These included fasting for forty-one days (eating only 'a handful of rice a day') and the learning of various *mantras* and *dhikrs*.³⁵⁴ He actually met Kodam Ali around five years before the War but it was not until some years after this that he became a disciple (*sīsu*). While Haru is reticent about such details, he did mention that Kodam Ali could read his own thoughts and that he now sees him in dreams.

Several of the informal religious leaders specialised in healing (as will be examined in the next section) and Jinot Ali appeared to be such a leader. He was referred to as *kabirāj*, a term often used to describe those supposed to have supernatural powers although he himself was dismissive of such 'superstitions'.³⁵⁵ He has one of the few shops in Rosulpur bazaar that remains open throughout the week.³⁵⁶ It is strictly a medical centre, and Jinot Ali relies totally on his knowledge of herbs and Ayurvedic

³⁵¹ The most common form of market in rural Bangladesh is the *hāt*. This is not a permanent market but instead sellers travel each day to a different place (the Rosulpur *hāt* occurs on Tuesday, for example). The importance of the *hāt* is only partly financial; it is also a chance to catch up on local events and opinions (see Thorp, *op. cit.*, 162-163).

³⁵² Indicative of a growing interest in religion. The War alluded to is the 1971 War of Independence.

³⁵³ The words *minot* and *manshik* are also used for vow. Eaton mentions a vow-fulfilling pilgrimage to the (Chisti) shrine of Shaikh Nur Qutb-i 'Alam in Pandua in 1609 AD so the practice of pledging one's thanks is not new (see Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 177).

³⁵⁴ *Sākalāyēn* mentions the formula *la illahi* as one way devotees gained control (see *Sākalāyēn*, *op. cit.*, 17).

³⁵⁵ For a discussion of the rôle of the *kabirāj* in Sylhet see Gardner *op. cit.*, 251-253).

³⁵⁶ The bazaar operates as a *hāt* therefore it is only on one day per week (Tuesday) that trade is widespread.

medicine for healing.³⁵⁷ His son is currently being college-trained in homeopathy and sometimes works under his father's guidance in their shop.

There were at least two people in the area whose leadership rested on their perceived ability to cure the condition known as *sarper bātās*. These *ojas* (as they are called) were **Shobdulerma** and **Aziz ul Haq**. Aziz is a Muslim male, aged in his mid-thirties³⁵⁸ and married with two young sons. He was educated to class five and this education was the reason why his father chose Aziz, rather than his older brother, to pass the *mantras* onto. He now works in a variety of capacities. He has some sharecropped land. He sometimes labours in wealthier neighbours' fields. He is often in Tangail, but rarely doing the same job. At various times he was an electrician (*elektrik mistri*), a film announcer/advertiser³⁵⁹ or a truck-labourer. He has, in other words, an entrepreneurial inclination but no fixed business. Shobdulerma is also a Muslim, a widower, probably in her late fifties. She sees nothing unusual in a women being an *oja* or a *kabirāj* (she claims both skills), but her life history is not entirely typical since her husband came to live in her *bāri* after their marriage, unlike normal practice.³⁶⁰ Moreover, her appearance is unremarkable only as long as she keeps her head covered with her sari (ie outside the *bāri* or when unfamiliar visitors arrive). Otherwise her hair is shown as being very matted, in order (she explained) to house the spirits that attend on her. These are *jinns* and *bhut-petni* but also include a group that only she in the village made reference to, the *matha*. Although she herself did not acknowledge any linkage (and may have been unaware of it), this shows her to be (however distantly) a follower of the *Mathari* order. This began around the same time

³⁵⁷ By contrast, Haru lays his wares out on the ground close to Jinot Ali's durable (*pākka*) building and openly practices his healing skills while continuing his trading livelihood.

³⁵⁸ Ages are guesstimates since births, even now, are rarely registered and their dates left un-noted, in the village. The 1971 War of Independence often acts as a dating mechanism ('what were you doing when ...').

³⁵⁹ New films are advertised by someone travelling around in a rickshaw, interspersing clips of dialogue and song from the film with their own encouragements. In a similar manner, deaths (and the time of the *janaza*), missing children, political propaganda etc are broadcast.

³⁶⁰ An event made less surprising by the fact that his *bāri* had recently fallen into the Lohojor River.

as the orthodox *Fara'izi* movement and, like them, actively opposed the British (in particular the indigo cultivators in the North, around Rangpur).

Shobdulerma claimed to be able to see³⁶¹ and even control her *matha* as long as she kept the agreement that had been made between them both. This included her leaving an offering by the river once a month, and holding an *urus*-like celebration once a year where a *munsi* led *waj* prayers and chickens (rather than goats and cows) were slaughtered and eaten.³⁶² She would heal, or answer questions by going into a trance.³⁶³ These questions would generally involve family trouble and tensions, or why someone had suddenly become panicked or disturbed. For Shobdulerma, these mediating powers were part of being a *kabirāj* rather than being an *oja*. She in fact claimed to have four distinct skills since, in addition to these two she said she was also able to cure sexual diseases (such as gonorrhoea or *dozobongo*) and infertility. It was only for the *kabirāj* and *oja* functions that the use of a *mantra* was essential. Surprisingly for someone claiming such a wide range of healing abilities, Shobdulerma said that she learned everything via dreams. The first dream taught her the specific, secret *mantras* and instructed her how and why she should wear her hair. The second (or subsequent; it was not clear whether she had only two dreams or more) gave her specific pharmacological knowledge. Like Aziz, she insisted that her curative powers derived directly from God and was adamant that she needed to be 'pure' in order to heal.

Knowing about plants was central to Shobdulerma's work, but in a completely different way to Jinot Ali's ayurvedic skills. She needed plants to make amulets to counter *gashānto*. *Gashānto* alludes both to the practice of hurting someone by burying a bundle of clothes with plant fragments near the intended victims' house, as

³⁶¹ She described them as 'like a brahmon, like a person', which I understood as being of distinguished appearance. The reference to *brahman* (ie Brahmins) is obviously Hindu, but she was adamant that she had nothing to do with Hindu deities. Only she was generally able to see the spirits but she said that a *matha* had, on her request, revealed itself to her sons who immediately became extremely frightened because of its size and power.

³⁶² She did not use the word *urus* but the more general *anustan*. It occurs on 16 Ogyron (of the Bengali calendar; this corresponds to early November).

³⁶³ For this she always sat in a special place in her hut, and she was not able to go in a trance (*bhar hawa*) on Sunday or Thursday.

well as the prophylactic amulets. These have fragments of plants (rather than the Qur'anic verses a *fakir*-prepared amulet would have) inside the metal casing. While the first aspect of *gashānto* seems like a form of cursing, Shobdulerma differentiated between it and *bān kora* which is a specific curse and which has a sudden effect whereas *gashānto* is gradually debilitating. *Bān kora* is performed specifically by magicians (*jādukars*) whereas *gashānto* could be done by anyone, but neither phenomenon is, according to Shobdulerma, related to spirit-induced harm.

Shobdulerma collects the plants and prepares the cuttings herself. Since each protective amulet contains many such parts (one has ninety-nine) this requires her to be always looking out for such plants. She does not consciously rely on her accumulated knowledge of herbal medicine but on specific instructions from her *matha* that are received while entranced.

Shobdulerma's comprehensive claims could be viewed with suspicion. For example, on my mentioning that Jungshe Fakir³⁶⁴ was remembered as able to command the *jinn* she very quickly asserted her equal abilities. It must be pointed out that her reputation concurs with her claims. No-one suggested that she could not do all she said and she did disclaim some abilities. While she does see her Islamic piety as an essential ingredient to her operation, she totally disagreed that she had *mārephate*³⁶⁵ powers despite functioning like a *fakir* or a *pirśab* in some respects. She equally eschewed any *śariati* skills but since she does little that a *munṣī* or a *mullabi* would do this was unsurprising. When operating as an *oja* she (like Aziz) runs her hand over the ground towards the afflicted person, and she detects buried *gashānto* in a similar manner. Like Haru, it needs to be emphasized that any exercise of her powers and abilities is essentially part-time. The sheer business of survival takes most of the day and her position as grandmother in the *bāri* entails a lot of domestic and managerial duties.

³⁶⁴ He died about twenty-five years ago, and lived in adjacent Borrobashaliya village.

³⁶⁵ Junaid defined *marifot* (here written as it appears in English publications rather than transliterated from Bengali) as 'the perception of the existence of your real ignorance in the face of God's knowledge' but the word relates to mystical, experiential knowledge in normal conversation (see Rasool, *op. cit.*, 63).

The third *kabirāj* in the area is Shuja, an elderly Hindu. Despite his faith he always referred to God as 'Allah' throughout our conversations,³⁶⁶ an indication perhaps of the varied faiths of his clients. Indeed, none of the three seemed limited by their sex or religion but instead told of all ages of male and female Hindus or Muslims visiting them.³⁶⁷ Unlike Aziz and Shobdulerma, Shuja does not deal with *sarper bātās* but he is very learned in both the curative powers of specific plants and the theoretical physiology of the body. This more 'scientific' basis to his practice does not stop the countering of curses being a major part of his work. Like Shobdulerma he agreed that a *kabirāj* could harm others but that he himself would never act in this way. He does make preparations that boomerang curses back to the originator and thus *gashānto* is not merely a prophylactic but also a deterrent.

Shagor Ali is a singer (*giyak* or *bayati*³⁶⁸). He is unusual in being well-known enough to spend much of his time engaged outside the village. While much of his repertoire is religious, he was taught from the age of fifteen by a Hindu (Sunil Dewan) and describes himself as a Baul, a group he sees as comprising both Hindus and Muslims. Such elasticity was reflected in his choice of Lalon Fakir as a favoured poet³⁶⁹ and in his willingness to take either side in the *pali* songs which present opposing sides of an argument contrasting Hindu and Muslim perspectives in alternating, often extemporary verses. In this he was more 'professional' than the ubiquitous singers that make a more meagre living from singing at the local *hāt* markets such as in Buapor or Tangail and present more uniformly Islamic themes. Nonetheless, Shagor Ali also specialises in *gajals*³⁷⁰ although he does play the *beyela* in other songs.

³⁶⁶ Language variations are one of the major markers of religion and Hindus will generally use *Ishor* or *Bhagban* for God (there is virtually a parallel vocabulary of religious terminology). There may also be other indicative signs, such as clothing, but language is the most obvious.

³⁶⁷ Others doubted the uniformity of clientele, suggesting that *sarper bātās* afflicted newly married young brides in particular (since marriage involves the woman's resettlement in a new *bāri* and adjustment to living with a man who may be at least double her age of around thirteen, stresses can be anticipated).

³⁶⁸ The second word is intriguingly close to *bayet*, an occasional synonym for *murid* or *śisū* (disciple of a *pir*; see Sākalāyēn, *op. cit.*, 27).

³⁶⁹ He also sang the songs of Jalal, Rojob Ali Dewan, and Halim.

³⁷⁰ There does not appear to be complete agreement regarding the limits of the various styles of songs. This definition is therefore culled from several interviews and does

Although others refer to Shagor Ali solely as a singer, he himself also claims status as a religious figure. His own father (Shodor Chan) who died four years ago was a *pirśab*, and (two years before his death) he nominated Shagor Ali as his successor, saying that through his singing he would day become a *pirśab*. So far, however, Shagor Ali has not made any disciples (*śisū*), without which claims of being a *pirśab* lack substance. He says that such a rôle will come later and that he already administers *pāni pora*, adding that this is a *kabirāj* rather than a *pirśab* matter since it does not involve showing God's way to people. More than merely medical, however, is his claim that his audience gain blessing (*āśīrbād*³⁷¹) from hearing his songs.

As well as the abovementioned people and *majars* there are two mosques in Rosulpur, but it is really on Friday mornings that the mosque becomes the focus of religious life. Although none disparage the mosque or the *imām*, neither were referred to when people talked of how they lived out their faith. This is partly because people like Mustafiz fulfill the rôle of the orthodox *imām* and partly because of the other contenders such as the *pirśabs* and *fakirs*.

not fully agree with any of them. *Gazals* are unaccompanied songs while *kawalis* concern themselves specifically with lives of the prophets. *Jāri gan* seems to be almost synonymous with *Baul gan* (although Dunham links it to the Muharram story) since both are accompanied by some or all of the following; harmonium, bamboo flute (*bashee*), small cymbals (*juri*), and the two-stringed, upright string instrument (*beyela*). *Baul gans* tend to take everyday events or objects and extrapolate universal and eternal themes from them. of these song forms are specifically religious (see Dunham, *op. cit.*, 3).

³⁷¹ This, or *rahamat*, are the words invariably used for blessing rather than *barakah* (which is pronounced as *burkat* in Bengali but it is rarely mentioned, consistent with Bourdieu's assessment that its importance is overstated; see Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, 228).

(III:vi) What Informal Religious Leaders in Rosulpur Do.

If the central concern of sociology questions how social order is possible³⁷² it could be suggested that informal religious leaders in Rosulpur help bring order into their society in three ways. They provide mediation, partly between people but most importantly between God and His people. They oversee some of the major festivals that mark out the year; and finally, they retain some of the body of knowledge held by those in the village. Not everyone referred to above (and in the following section) do all of these things, but they each provide leadership by doing some of them. This leadership is ceded to them and in return they help those around them re-create a sense of corporate identity.

(III:vi:1) Mediation

(a) Between People

Power is distributed throughout the village in several ways. Although men are generally considered to be in charge, women often have considerable influence within the *bāri*.³⁷³ Disputes between *bāris*, or *paṛas*, will generally be resolved with recourse to the *bicār* system, assuming that informal arbitration fails. While the *matabors* who are the central figures in any such arbitration are not per se religious figures, Mofiz is both a *matabor* and leader of the breakaway mosque in the Poschim Paṛa of Dakin Pauli. To what extent his position relies on prestige derived from his assumed piety and to what extent other factors such as the patronage of Amzad Member (as one of the powerful proponents of the new mosque) is difficult to judge. But it seems that religious leadership in its own right does not have a major rôle in interpersonal mediation. Thorp lists the qualities of a successful village leader as including

³⁷² As one definition suggests (see J Hughes, A Martin and P Sharrock, Understanding Classical Sociology Marx, Weber and Durkheim, London, 1995, 1).

³⁷³ Thorp suggests that they oversee livestock and the close-by garden (*bagan*) from which vegetables for the *bāri*'s own consumption come, as well as being responsible for the children, cooking and cleaning. It needs to be pointed out that important societal changes, including the rôle of women, have taken place in the almost two decades since his study was carried out (see Thorp, *op. cit.*, 71-72).

fairness, activism, worthy of respect, perceptive and knowledgeable, and a willingness to help³⁷⁴ - none of which are specifically religious qualities. He notes that an ability to construct acceptable compromises is essential which would be equally true in Rosulpur, and also concurs with the studies of Fernea regarding the Middle Eastern sheikh.

It is interesting that informal religious leaders are not required to counter the effect of the evil eye (*cakker lāge*). The protective pot (*pātel*, also locally as *piyēla*; it is usually broken) always has circular patterns painted (with *chun*, the lime used when chewing betel). These are said to draw envious attention away from the field itself and thus divert danger. No particular pattern is needed nor is any specific expertise required and each farmer generally paints and plants his own pot.

(b) Before God

It is mediation before God that is more particularly the preserve of the religious figures in Rosulpur, in keeping with other studies already cited. This intercession is more for daily needs than salvation; such ultimate questions are thought best left to God to decide. Healing was the most urgent and widespread of these daily needs and although this healing was not directly through intercessory prayer, the ability of those healers I observed was deemed to rely entirely on a correct relationship with God. Patients hoped to appropriate the healer's position in order to access God's blessing, echoing the rôle of the *pirśab* in justification (the *pirśab* accepts his own *śísus*, Muhammed accepts the *pirśab*, and God accepts Muhammed). The practices of the *kabirāj* and the *oja* (or *roja*³⁷⁵) differ but overlap. The *oja* treats snake bites³⁷⁶ and also "snakes' breath" (*sarper bātās*) since it is widely assumed that the wind can carry the

³⁷⁴ Which, although he does not point this out, pre-supposes he is wealthy enough to spare the time to listen to neighbours' stories. Abul (the *mator* who lives in Choudri Para that my own shared hut adjoined) who often spent time squatting on the verandah, smoking, and hearing various complaints had several *bighas* of land. Thorp uses the term *paramanik* but the office would seem to correspond to *mator* with the proviso that in Rosulpur there seems to be no paramount 'brotherhood leader' (to use Thorp's terminology) but several complementing ones (see Thorp, *op. cit.*, 87-88).

³⁷⁵ Writing of Hindus in West Bengal, MacDaniel equates this word to 'exorcist' (see McDaniel, *op. cit.*, 8).

poisonous breath long distances³⁷⁷ and therefore afflict people. Symptoms include nausea and dizziness, with disagreement regarding the outcome when the inhaled poison reaches the brain, some believing death is inevitable at this point. In Rosulpur the *oja* is seen as a healer of physical complaints rather than as an overtly religious figure although some are believed to have additional power over *jinns*, *bhuts*, and *petni*. There is therefore some justification in perceiving the *oja* as fulfilling a religious function because of his-or-her spiritual prowess despite the lack of any overt religious status, and the practice of one of them will now therefore be examined.

Aziz is an *oja* but he also cures more general complaints by *phu deoṃa* or the blowing of a series of quick puffs onto the affected and (if etiquette allows) exposed part of the body.³⁷⁸ If this is not possible he will blow onto water which is then drunk. Before exhalation, he makes sure both his, and the patient's, feet are in contact with the ground. Because the earth is believed to be alive, this creates a connection without which he would not be able to cure. Aziz then faces westward with the patient before him and says the *Bismillah* before silently reciting the rest of a secret *mantra*.³⁷⁹ Then he blows through pursed lips in a series of four-or-five quick breaths, with a ten-to-fifteen second gap between each breath during which he silently repeats the *mantra*. This is therefore evidently quite brief (the entire exercise takes only two or three minutes), and although the Aziz did reveal that the *mantra* he uses when healing by

³⁷⁶ With tight binding, in other parts of the country. If inexpertly administered, this can lead to gangrene.

³⁷⁷ Some *ojas* (for example Aziz) believe that the phenomenon is caused, not by direct transmission of the snake's exhaled breath but by poison that had been spilt on the ground being released as the ground dries. There is also some uncertainty regarding how widespread belief in *sarper bātās* is, with some people telling me it was common and others who migrated to Tangail reporting that they had not previously encountered it. Moreover, whether *sarper bātās* is seen as having a spiritual or a physical cause seems to have regional variation.

³⁷⁸ The curative effect of breath is one of the miraculous powers popular belief ascribes to Muhammad (see M Abdullah, The Ascent of the Prophet Mohammad, Delhi, 1989, 21).

³⁷⁹ *Mantra* is pronounced *montra* in Bengali. One which I heard (but did not note in detail) when resident in Bangladesh some years ago began with the *bismillah* and invoked the name of Muhammed before invoking several Hindu deities. Aziz would not reveal his *mantras* to me but agreed that they were of this form. The tendency to broadly base such invocations is noted in a medieval Chittagonian ballad (see Eaton in [ed.] Levtzion and Voll, op. cit., 176).

phu deoyá, and that he uses in cases of *sarper bātās* are different although both involve Qur'anic material along with lists of Hindu deities.³⁸⁰ In fact the entire routine when curing *sarper bātās* varies from curing by *phu deoyá*. Again, he makes sure that both his and the patient's feet are in contact with the ground and then makes an initial examination. Even if this is a woman this will involve physical contact since he touches the hand and wrist (presumably to note the pulse) and also touches the forehead (to check temperature) and also the feet. No exception is taken at this contact that would in normal situations be thought totally unacceptable, not only because of the male-female factor but also because of the degradation implied when contact is made with feet.³⁸¹ He then squats by the patient's feet, breathes deeply (perhaps grunting slightly) while silently saying his *mantra* (this is utterly essential for successful healing in both *phu deoyá* and *sarper bātās*). One of Aziz's hands (it does not matter which one) then slides along the ground towards the feet in a motion so fluid that it resembles a snake. If the complaint is caused by *sarper bātās*, the hand is drawn towards the patient. If not, the hand will be repelled, first to one side then the other, as it is moved towards the patient.

Shobdulerma (the *oja* and *kabirāj*) also relies on running her hand over the ground (*hāt cālāna*). When testing for *sarper bātās* she notes whether her hand 'runs' straight or is turned to the side.³⁸² If the former occurs *sarper bātās* is the cause; if the latter, it is not. Indeed, the symptoms of *sarper bātās* include nausea, dizziness and fainting; all of which could have a physical cause.³⁸³ She also detected buried *gashānto* by running her hand over the ground. While Shobdulerma was both an *oja* and a *kabirāj* she disclaimed any *mārephati* knowledge or skills.

³⁸⁰ *Kālām* and *debata* being the words Aziz used.

³⁸¹ Even when a man inadvertently touches his (male) neighbour with his foot in a crowded situation there is an elaborate social routine of the offender lightly touching the leg of the offended and bringing his hand to his heart (or a variant on this theme). I was unsure whether Aziz would be left alone in a room with a women.

³⁸² Her expression for a hand that was 'balanced' and therefore able to 'run' was *dularase*.

³⁸³ Aziz finished one diagnostic session by telling the patient's husband to take his wife to the doctor and another by telling the mother of a small girl that she had worms and therefore should eat salt and ginger.

For Haru (the *fakir*) such learning is, by contrast, of central importance. He does not use *hāt chālāna* at all, although healing is also part of his function. Haru usually diagnoses by tying a piece of thread around the finger. Once the finger is bound any *bhut*, *petni*, or *jinn*³⁸⁴ inside the person is forced to answer Haru's questions and thus betray its presence, and then obey Haru's commands. There is often bargaining involved in the expelling of occupying spirits, with the spirit demanding a sacrifice and Haru either refusing or reducing the demand. Finger-tying can also be used to heal. For example, while he was sitting at market one day a father brought a child who had been upset for two or three days. The child stopped crying once the string was tied. Haru also writes ('perhaps two or three each month') amulets (*tabij*) and has memorised three Arabic formulae one of which will exorcise *jinn*, one which will cure sickness, and one for 'human activity'.³⁸⁵ Amulets are also used to repel curses, in which case plants, rather than Qur'anic writings, will be inside the metal casing. This expertise is seen as part of the *kabirāj* rather than *fakir* repertoire and Haru therefore pointed out that he had some of that discipline's skills as well. *Fakirs* are usually deemed able to give *pāni pora* (water that has been blown over with breath made sacred by a Qur'anic verse) and Haru administered this for internal complaints, with *tel pora* (oil) serving for external pains.

Controlling *jinn* requires long preparation. Verses, perhaps from surah Yā³-Sīn or surah al Jinn, or Ayat al Kursi, are given to a would-be practitioner (usually a *pirśab* or perhaps a *fakir*) who then has twenty-one days of preparation. After this, these

³⁸⁴ *Bhut-petni* is to some extent a generic term implying a spirit, but some people do demarcate between them. I was told that *petni* are associated with 'love affairs' which I presume to be a euphemism for aborted fetuses and suicides. Haru stated that *petni* resulted from 'unsettled deaths' such as those who had not had a *janaza* ceremony. This would imply that *petni* might be linked to Hinduism and Haru did link *bhut-petni* to Hinduism while saying that he did not know why they were found around Hindu *bāris* in particular. There seems little unanimity regarding the types of spirits, however Abul (from Kathal Bagan, Dhaka) suggested that *petni* were the result of Hindu cremations (*cheeta*). Another informant (Jalath) said simply that *bhut* caused mental problems while *jinn* are tied to the land. Hindu deities do not seem to be feared or heeded with the exception of *Kali*, because people were at one time sacrificed to her (and, some suggest, still sometimes are) and ghosts of such people are thought to remain.

³⁸⁵ *Manuser korte* were his words; meaning human works. This rather cryptic phrase seemed, from its context, to mean relationship difficulties, such as family tensions.

verses are recited in a night-time ceremony involving candles, incense, and a circle drawn on the ground. The *jinn* thus summoned will remain with the person throughout his life.

(IIIvi:2) Overseers of Important Festivals and Events

Every society has its complement of festivals that heighten experience regularly or in regard to specific events. These can be as apparently incongruous as the administration of justice and are often tied to religious functions³⁸⁶ and informal religious leaders in and around Rosulpur are similarly linked to specific places or events. Of these the *urus* is perhaps the most important.

(a) The *Urus*³⁸⁷

This festival is itself inseparable from the making, and fulfillment, of vows. These were vital in the spiritual life of those I knew in Rosulpur (although becoming less so³⁸⁸) as they contracted to pay later for favours received immediately.³⁸⁹ These vows

³⁸⁶ Bedouin courts also provide a sense of drama, while saints' involvement in entertaining festivities has been noted from Kerala to North Africa (see A Kennet, Bedouin Justice Laws and Customs among the Egyptian Bedouin, Cambridge, 1925, 148-149; Dale and Menon, op. cit., 294-295).

³⁸⁷ *Urus* dates are usually reckoned by the Bengali calendar although Kazapaglar's *urus* (his *majar* is in Pachur, close to Kodam Ali's grave) was given as 13th Mohorrum and the *urus* of Bukrap Pirsab whose Borabi *majar* is at Amlapara in Mymensingh is ten days after *Eid ul-Fitr*. Mention was made of a woman *pir*, Forida Parvin, who lives in Sherpur and 'protects drivers and people who work in trucks and buses' and who held her commemorative *urus* on 'second of October'; but these details could not be personally confirmed. When Kodam Ali was alive, *Pohila Magh* (the first of *Magh*, in mid January) was the date of the *urus* although it was not the actual day of Kodam Ali's father and own *pirsáb*) Formankha's death.

³⁸⁸ Mintu, the shopkeeper, thought that at the time of the war (1971) about three-quarters of all people in the village would make at least one vow in their life, now it was only around twenty percent. He attributed the change to education and opposition from the mosque-centred *mullabis* (although he added that they had no objection if the vow was redeemed at the mosque).

³⁸⁹ There is a curious parallel with the commercial reality too, since both labour and trade are conducted largely on the *baki* system whereby goods or work received is often only partially paid for immediately with the remainder given at the end of the

can be made without any mediator although those I asked suggested husbands and wives made the decision together; but they can be redeemed either at a mosque (usually after Friday prayers), an *ekdil*, or (most commonly) at an *urus*. This will usually occur in the colder months (November through to February) probably because this is the relatively quiet agricultural time. If Ramadan occurs during this period the *urus* is unaffected largely because it is a nightly affair with devotees typically gathering around sunset and leaving during the night or at sunrise. Kodam Ali's *urus* is on the 13th of *Kartik* (late October) and in 1403/1996 there were several hundred in attendance, although numbers thinned after the meal around midnight.

The food at Kodam Ali's *urus* was given to fulfill earlier pledges, made when requesting healing, safety, or sons (the most commonly cited reasons). By 3.00 am there were still perhaps two to three hundred listening to the music. Hozrot Ali was one of the central figures at his father's *urus*; literally so once the singing began as people sat surrounding the musicians with Hozrot Ali and two other apparently senior disciples also at the epicentre. These three were the regular recipients of honorific displays of embracing and foot touching. Until 3.00 am such displays were sober and almost ritualistic although as the evening wore on they became less restrained. Equally, it was apparent that Haru who I had previously observed interacting with Hozrot Ali with easy familiarity was now relegated to far more menial tasks such as helping to serve the meal. Each successful *urus* furthers a *pir's* abilities since the ability to gather money, as witnessed by hospitality, is central to a *pir'sab's* credentials.

(b) The *Ekdil*³⁹⁰

The name *Ekdil* derives from the title of one of the twelve saints (*baro āwliyā*) who first introduced Sufism into Bangladesh, according to Imam Ali,³⁹¹ the singer at the

month. In other words, people often pay back some of what they owe but remain semi-indebted, which is also perhaps how one's account with God is perceived.

³⁹⁰ It is unsure whether this festival is localised to Tangail or more widespread since some informants from elsewhere in Bangladesh had not heard of it.

³⁹¹ He could only name eight others (Shah Hale Bogdarti of Mirpur, Shanshari of Atiya, Shah Kamal of Kagmar, and Shah Poran and Shah Jalal of Sylhet, Sultan Mohostan of Bogra, Musa Awliya of uncertain location, Mouinuddin Chisti of Ajmer) thereby concurring with the trend whereby 'twelve *āwliyā*' are mentioned but somewhat fewer named on in a variable list.

ekdil of Anis, held at Jungshi Village, in December 1997. 'Ekdil Gaji' was instructed by Gilani (probably the best known of early Sufi figures in Bangladesh) and was then sent to the Sunderbans where he is said to have a *majar*.³⁹² When Ekdil Gaji married he could not have a son and therefore made a vow that he would feed others with milk and sweets as a thanks-offering if his wife gave birth to a boy. When this happened he fulfilled his vow, and thus his name now serves as the title of this ceremony. Just as *pirs* are said to be still alive despite having died years, or centuries ago, Imam Ali assured me that he had seen Ekdil and was in communication with him. He was reluctant to tell me more than this, however, and to a query regarding whether dreams were the medium of this communication he gave a sharp, dismissive, twist of his wrist.

Imam Ali leads a group of five musicians who sing at such functions in a manner that is both entertaining and instructive. He dressed in a long red frockcoat that has an attached waistcoat-like jacket and would often dance in circles making small shuffling steps. The songs, too, are less doctrinal than narrative. Imam Ali was in fact more of a storyteller than either singer than preacher, since his voice, although adequate, was inferior to one of his group's and the songs, which are interspersed with long spoken sections, tend to be derived from, rather than reproductions of, Islamic history.³⁹³ Each song lasts a long time; the evening performance was a single item that began around 9.00pm and finished about 2.30-3.00am. It concerned the four children of a pious couple who were disobedient and therefore went their various ways and died. The parents therefore made a vow to ask God for a new son and daughter. As a result they were given several more children who were obedient.

The singers are a central part of the *ekdil* ceremony, but there are other aspects. This ceremony centred around Anis, aged two-and-a-half, who had been so ill at his birth

³⁹² Supposedly close to Khulna.

³⁹³ One which he related to me concerned the fact that all the prophets lived for multiples of hundreds of years, starting with Adam (who lived for a thousand years) and decreasing until Muhammed lived only for one century. When he died, aged seventy-two (according to Imam Ali), Muhammed asked why he had not lived his full quota. He was told that he had in fact lived for 100 years since the *miraj* trip to heaven had lasted for 28 years even though it was only one night for those on earth.

that his parents made the *ekdil* vow. He was passively involved in the evening, being brought out of the hut at the start of the event. At this, milk is poured into a very carefully made hole that formed the centre-piece of the informal 'stage'³⁹⁴ before four bananas and 2 handfuls of sugar are added. Anis was held by his father as he (the father) lit some candles and placed them around the small milk-filled hole (it measured around eight inches by four inches) but he was too tired to take much note. The morning was much more ceremonial. Around 11.00am, Anis' grandfather (*dādu*), maternal uncle (*māma*) and brother-in-law (*dulubey*) had their hair ceremonially washed as the musicians continued playing. The event was a curious mixture of informality and seriousness. The washing began almost solemnly, with an elderly woman (the grandmother, perhaps) carefully filtering the water through leaves before it splashed on the heads of the three who knelt before her. But before long other women (and girls) joined in and water was more liberally splashed over the men and even each other, accompanied by much mirth.

After this wash, the men rubbed themselves with mustard oil (*sosha tel*) and withdrew to dress. Anis wore new clothing and the four males then lined up. Their hair was carefully combed since it was the cutting of Anis' hair that would form the culmination of the ceremony and mark the fulfillment of the vow (it had not been cut since birth). There was ritualistic placing of grass and red threads on each of the males' heads, but (as before) there was a curious mixture of seriousness and informality about this. The singers stopped performing during this part of the ceremony (which lasted for about half an hour) but as it finished they again began to sing. They then continued for around two hours and again centred attention until Anis' hair was cut. This was done by Imam Ali, although he cut only a single lock and gave it to Anis' mother. The hair would be fully cut later, after the guests had been fed and dispersed to their homes, but the singers (and Imam Ali in particular) were pivotal throughout the eighteen hours of the ceremony as they maintained the momentum, participated at crucial parts, and provided the theoretical and theological rationale for the events.

³⁹⁴ Imam Ali and his singers performed in the courtyard of the *bāri* that had been swept and cleaned and had poles positioned in the corners with lights hung from these. Towards the periphery, straw had been laid down for people to sleep on.

(c) *Majar* Visitation

There are no actual *majars* in Pouli itself although nearby Pachur has that of Kodam Ali and (somewhat neglected) Kazi Pagal. Less than an hour's walk away there is the Barta Mosque that has a *majar* beside it, and more distant is the Atiya *Majar*. This is southwest of Tangail and takes about 1½ hours (and about 20 taka) travelling time each way. Atiya is more well known for its mosque, which dates from Mughal times and which is pictured on the ten taka note. The original mosque in Atiya stood by where the *majar* still stands but it was shifted around four centuries ago to fulfill a vow.³⁹⁵ There are two graves at the site, the larger being of Hozrot Shanshar³⁹⁶ who came with thirty-nine followers from Kashmir five centuries ago. The area is overseen by a *kadam* who is habitually a descendant of these thirty-nine. The current *kadam* (Hafiz Abdul Aziz Kadam) was selected by a committee consisting of other descendants and local political figures. This mixture of religious and secular is also shown in the fact that the government pays a salary to the *kadam*, although they also receive payment in kind since they eat some of the food that is offered as a vow fulfillment. Either the *kadam*, or one of his helpers, leads prayers when people come to the *majar* to pray and may administer healing-by-breathing (*phu deoyá*) if this is required. A striking difference between the mosque and the *majar* concerns the allowability of individualism. Whereas the performance of the ritual prayer (*namaz*³⁹⁷) is standardised, there was no such uniformity in the way people conducted themselves before the *majar*. All were respectful but some showed this by prostration, some by touching the grave surrounds and bringing their fingers to their chest and/or lips. When leaving some, but not all, backed out. Often people would brush dust off the

³⁹⁵ This was according to Yusuf, one of the *kadam* at Atiya *majar*. Kasmiri Badshah was thus buried close to the mosque rather than five minutes walk distant (as the two buildings now are) obviating any suggestion that he was deliberately buried in a separated site.

³⁹⁶ Alternatively referred to as Baba Adam Kashmiri or more fully Shanshar Rahmatullah Babajon Kashmiri Rahmatullahalli.

³⁹⁷ As *salat*, the ritually-prescribed prayers are called in Bangladesh.

grave surrounds and wipe it onto themselves.³⁹⁸ The variations were wide, but the individuality and the absence of any enforced method was noticeable. This informality was also seen in the general behaviour at the *majar*. Even as *millat*³⁹⁹ was taking place before the tomb there could well be people sleeping on the floor five metres away. No-one was demanding a particular form of behaviour although I never observed disrespect or rowdiness.

The *majars*' main function (both at Atiya and in general) would seem to be in the fulfillment of vows, which may entail some specialisation. Those in the Tangail region who either operate, drive, or labour on, trucks tend to fulfill their vows at Atiya, for example; while nearby Kagmar *majar* has a more general clientele. Most of the people I saw at Atiya came to perform *millat* prayers and give something to fulfill a vow (*niyat*). Women often give gold (in the form of jewellery) which is said to go towards the cost of the *urus* which commemorates the death anniversary of Baba Adam Kashmiri (13-15 of the Bengali month of Falgun, equating to the beginning of March). The reciter and leader of the *millat* will be paid, but not substantially (perhaps ten taka). The most prestigious *majar* for the people of Rosulpur is Shah Jalal's in Sylhet and to visit this is very much a once-in-a-lifetime hope for most. This would take days and some hundreds of taka. Although religion is important for the people of Rosulpur it has to be recognised that survival takes the majority of most peoples' energy and attention.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Thesiger noted the same behaviour in Saudi Arabia amongst the Bedouin (see W Thesiger, *Arabian Sands*, London, 1960, 160).

³⁹⁹ The ceremony whereby the fulfillment is acknowledged. The *kadam* leads sung prayers that are in Bengali with a shared refrain in Arabic that praises Muhammed.

⁴⁰⁰ 'Instead of visualising two separate and self-contained social groups, Hindus and Muslims, ... one may see instead a single undifferentiated mass of Bengali villagers who, in their ongoing struggle with life's usual tribulations, unsystematically picked and chose from an array of reputed instruments - a holy man here, a holy river there - in order to tap supernatural power' (see Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 281).

(d) The Chalashi.

The *janaza* is held immediately after a death (particularly in the hot season when decomposition occurs quickly) and corresponds to a funeral service. The *chalashi* (or *karaj*⁴⁰¹) is held on the thirty-ninth day after death and it is a feast given on the understanding that those who attend will pray for the salvation of the deceased. It is therefore less commemoration than reconciliation and allows anyone with a grievance against the deceased to reach a conclusion. Whereas the *janaza* is announced (broadcast from a hired rickshaw or 'baby taxi'⁴⁰²) and quickly organised, the *janaza* is carefully planned and invitees are expected to attend. The arrangement is overseen by a *matabor*, who will advise the family who to invite and therefore how much food to prepare. Three or four days before the *chalashi* people gather and pledge what food they will bring, so the expense is shared. The *matabor* is vital in conducting this meeting and also at the actual ceremony.⁴⁰³ Nonetheless, the *munsi* also has a rôle at the *chalashi* since he will recite from the Qur'an and lead *munujat* prayers.

Perhaps this linkage of informal religious leaders with festivities explains the otherwise inexplicable association of prostitution with *majars*. That prostitution is universal is as indisputable as Islamic opposition to it, but the oddity is less in its existence than its location. Not that it is only at *majars* that prostitutes are to be found⁴⁰⁴ nor many *majars* that have such a reputation. The High Court *majar* in Dhaka is perhaps the most notorious for its association with both prostitution and drug taking but even the Shah Jalal *majar* in Sylhet is said by some to be similarly affected. While sanctity and such activities can not be easily reconciled, it is less difficult to see how festivities can include such behaviours.⁴⁰⁵ While most visit *majars* for religious reasons, most notably to fulfill vows, some also go out of an interest to see and visit a famous place.

⁴⁰¹ The word simply means expense. Another term for the event is *shindu* but this is used by Hindus for their parallel ceremony.

⁴⁰² These are three-wheeled motorised vehicles for private hire.

⁴⁰³ 'If the *matabor* did not come the *cholasi* could not go ahead but if the *munsi* was not there it would still continue' is how Aziz put it. There were about 35 at his father's *cholasi*, which was held early in 1403/1997.

⁴⁰⁴ Tangail has a large area near the Alanga *tempo* stand, for example.

⁴⁰⁵ Prostitutes are similarly sometimes associated with *melas*, or secular festivals.

(III:vi:iii) Interpreters/Recipients of Knowledge

Part of Rosulpur residents' shared world view comes from their common body of religious knowledge. A major part of this comes from the primary schools' syllabus, since many children attend the first few years of school and the first five years of Islamic education appears to be widely known.⁴⁰⁶ Much of it is not written down however, but memorised and transmitted by the *pirsábs*, *fakirs* and in particular, the singers (*gāyaks*⁴⁰⁷). The *fakirs* and *pirsábs* have knowledge of the linkage of the universe and the human body. So, for example, they teach that the thirty letters used in the writing of the Qur'an (*harap*) correspond to exact positions on the human body. Also in the human body are twelve *burus*, fourteen *kaman* and six *ripu* (enemies, or faults). The body has ten *indro* inside the body (which do not correspond to *chakra* of

⁴⁰⁶ The first of these books introduces the Arabic alphabet and some simple vocabulary, gives some basic facts of Islam (such as 'how often should we pray?') then repeats some of these with the answers being in Arabic and finally reviews the major Muslim festivals. The second book reviews the Arabic alphabet and basic tenets of faith but adds some Arabic vocabulary and details the necessary rituals such as prayer and fasting. There is also a section on etiquette ('what to say when you sneeze' for example). The third to fifth books all have a similar format, beginning with the nature of God, then a section on worship followed by etiquette (in the third book this has greetings and the importance of honesty, for example), then a further teaching of Arabic culminating with surah Fatiha, and finally some teaching about Muhammed. The fourth book has a similar format to the third and thus again begins with the nature of God and how to worship Him but this time the language and concepts are a little more complex (although still fairly simple; this is after all for 8-10 year olds). The worship section includes different types of prayer, such as Eid *nāmāj*, while 'etiquette' looks at treatment of others (such as respect for elders and parents, and care for the sick). The fourth part extends the teaching of Arabic to simple religious phrases and this book concludes with another section about Muhammed. The fifth book initially stresses the creativity of God and then again centres on worship (with key words and phrases now translated into Arabic). This includes things such as *zakat*. Next, correct behaviour is outlined with a widening emphasis (looking at love of one's country, for example). Arabic and Qur'anic section has advice on pronunciation of Arabic as well as excerpts from various surahs. In conclusion there is a brief look at some Prophets other than Muhammad.

the *kundalini* system) and ten openings (*darjārs*) into the body. One of these, at the top of the head, is closed. The *fakirs* also know the stages of spiritual progress. These four *mukam* are , which are *lashud*, *molkud*, *jobrul* and *lahud*.⁴⁰⁸ These correspond respectively to *dhikr* and devotion to the *pir*, a growing awareness (through dreams, perhaps) of the spiritual realm, the attainment of *mārephat*, and the total absorption into God.⁴⁰⁹ More important than the *fakirs* and *pirs* in retaining and recycling the more popular stories are the singers (*gāyaks*). In so doing they help maintain a sense of corporate identity. These following stories (or fragments) are part of a much larger body but they do represent the major themes mentioned by the singers⁴¹⁰ of cosmology, and the lives of the saints (often having an element of vindicating Islam).

(a) Cosmology:

The Creation Story.⁴¹¹

'Allah first created His light, and from this light He made Muhammed, but in a spiritual form. Then Allah made everything else. If Muhammed had not been made,

⁴⁰⁷ The Chistiya and Suhrawardi orders are supposedly most partial to the use of music ('to stimulate the heart') which suggests where such practices in Rosulpur may have originated from (see Sākalāyēn, *op. cit.*, 31).

⁴⁰⁸ As pronounced by Haru and at some variation to the way Haq noted these terms (see Haq, *A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal*, 97-99).

⁴⁰⁹ Haru was both reticent about this topic and also much of the vocabulary he used was unfamiliar to me. To what extent his use of words mirrors the definitions Haq uses, and how much this description of the spiritual path corresponds to other descriptions is far from clear. For Haru, the way to God (*asroy* was the word he used, which actually means protection) involved *fana³ fil murshid* (absorption onto the teacher), *fana³ fil rosul* (absorption into Muhammed), *fana³ fil Allah* (absorption into God) and *Bakabillah*. Sākalāyēn writes that *fana³ fil* occurs when distinctions between the Creator and His creation are 'wiped away' while R Sarker suggests that *baka* is 'one of the two principle aims of Sufism which is centred around the existence in the attributes of God' (see Sākalāyēn, *op. cit.*, 17; and R Sarker, *Bauls of Bengal In the Quest of Man of the Heart*, Delhi, 1990.138, 224).

⁴¹⁰ They are a common feature at any of the larger *hāt* markets although Rosulpur is too small to attract them (they are frequently encountered in nearby places such as Buapor, Gopalpur or Tangail).

⁴¹¹ This version of the creation story is basically as it was told by Haru, and then checked with others to see whether it was generally accepted. A similar version of the story has Kabel's jealousy of Habel due to his twin sister's 'beauty' rather than colour (see Thorp, *op. cit.*, 34-36).

Allah would not have made anything else. The first person to be created was Adam.⁴¹² Muhammed was made from light whereas Adam was made from earth (brought to Allah by the angel Azrael). So was Eve, who was created to accompany Adam, and all people originate from these two. They lived in Paradise (which is in heaven) but were told not to eat the *gadam* fruit. When they disobeyed, they were expelled from heaven, but even as they lamented their exile, Allah wrote 'La illaha ila Allah' in the sky to encourage them. They understood that they would someday be free from their sins.

Adam and Eve had many children. Their final children were two sets of (boy-girl) twins. First there was Habel and Gredja; then Kabel and Aklima. They were supposed to cross-marry, and thus produce all the races of the earth. But Kabel refused to marry Gredja because she was too dark. Out of jealousy Kabel killed Habel. Allah saw the murder and sent two crows to Kabel. One crow killed the other and buried it, and so Kabel knew his sin had been seen. But he did not repent and instead went on another path and built idols and did *puja*. In this way the two paths (ie Hinduism and Islam) were established.

The Birth of Isa (Jesus)

Jesus' grandfather (*dadu*) made a vow at Mecca and in fulfillment of this vow Mariam was born. By her service he would repay the vow. Later, Gabriel sneezed and his breath went onto a flower. When Mariam smelt this flower she became pregnant. When Jesus was born Mariam was thrown out of the house. She was thirsty and thus searched for water. Jesus was just born and was still covered in blood⁴¹³ but he kicked the ground and water came out. This was at Zamzam and caused the well there.

⁴¹² 'Adam' is pronounced 'Adom' in Bengali; Eve is 'Bibi Hawa'.

⁴¹³ Other local stories note that Jesus was unique in not being covered in blood at birth.

The Flood

There was so much sin and injustice (*tasrib*) in the world that Allah destroyed it with a flood. Even after the flood sin crept back in so Ibrahim (*koley Ullah*) was sent. He made the Ka'aba with rocks that Isma'il brought to him. But even then, sin crept back into the world.

(b) Lives of The Saints:

Gabriel and Fatima⁴¹⁴

Gabriel arrived one day at Muhammed's house in Medina to give a revelation. Fatima greeted him at the door then ran to tell her father, saying 'your *chatta kaka*⁴¹⁵ is here'. This upset and angered Gabriel, because he saw himself as 'bigger' (more important) than Muhammed and he told Muhammed his grievance. Muhammed then proved his own pre-eminence by asking what Gabriel first saw when he was born. Gabriel answered that he saw 'five stars in the sky' to which Muhammed asked who these five creations of God's 'play' would become. Gabriel admitted that he did not know, but Muhammed told him the largest was himself and the others were Ali, Fatima, Hossein, and Hasan. By explaining these things, Muhammed proved that he was present at these events and was therefore pre-eminent. He then asked whether Gabriel had ever seen God. At this point Gabriel began to cry, because even though he had faithfully served God for so long he had never seen him. At Muhammed's urging, he then returned to heaven to see God. After several false attempts he approached God's room in heaven. A figure was in the bed, sleeping. After a strange, contextualised description of the room⁴¹⁶ Gabriel pulled back the covers and saw Muhammed lying there.

⁴¹⁴ This comes from an uncatalogued cassette called 'Fatima-Jibrail' by Torob Ali. Torob Ali is known in Rosulpur although his home is somewhat distant (in Nagarpor, one hour's tempo travel from Tangail where the cassette was bought).

⁴¹⁵ Small (ie younger) paternal uncle.

⁴¹⁶ Which has a bed, blanket and mosquito net, all made of light.

Moses⁴¹⁷

After a formulaic beginning that introduces God with the rhetorical question of 'who is the life-giver', Mohammed by similarly asking who is the one closest to God,⁴¹⁸ and finally the singer's own teacher (*ustad*⁴¹⁹), the subject of Moses is raised. Pharaoh claimed that he himself was a God and so when he heard that a Prophet (*nabi*) was to be sent he became concerned. He therefore decreed that no-one could have children or even marry for the next forty years. In this way he hoped to stop the birth of a would-be opponent.

On the very day of his announcement, however, a son was born to the wife of one of Pharaoh's menial workmen (a *darwan*). The *darwan* and his wife were convinced they all would be killed because of the prohibition and therefore placed the child in a water-tight box and put it into the river. Pharaoh saw this box floating downstream and told his wife (*Bibi Asiya*) to collect it. She did so and, despite her husband's objections, took the infant home and raised it as her own. When then child, who was Moses, was seven years old Pharaoh began to wonder if this was the promised Prophet. One day a woodcutter (*koriwallah*) came to Pharaoh's palace but got into an altercation with the *darwan* and was subsequently killed. Moses saw the argument and was so upset that when another woodcutter arrived he stopped another such event occurring. This upset the *darwan* and he, joined by other workers, went to Pharaoh and lied that Moses had beaten the first woodcutter. At this Moses became fearful for his life and ran away to the jungle.

Here he worshipped God ever more fervently until he became lost in love for Him (*ashek dewana*). While Pharaoh called on his Gods, he was destroyed when Moses came to earth. Moses, however, only wanted to see God and therefore began to walk towards the mountain he would climb to meet with God.

⁴¹⁷ This is taken from the uncatalogued cassette 'Mucha Nabī Jārī', recorded in Milon Studios, Ghatail but bought in Tangail.

⁴¹⁸ The word used is actually *bondi* which technically means prisoner.

⁴¹⁹ *Ustad* seems to have the implication of being the teacher of an artistic skill.

On the way he meet a woman crying. He asked the reason for her sadness and she told him it was because she could have no children and asked Moses to intercede for her. Moses did so but God told him that the woman would not have children and he relayed this news back to the woman.

Some time later a wandered dervish (*pagol*) also passed by this woman's house and asked for some food. This was given to him but before eating he noticed her sadness and, like Moses before him, asked the reason. She again explained that she and her husband could not have children, asking what the use of riches were if one could not have children. After learning this the *pagol* began to intercede in prayer for the woman.

At this time, God noticed a trembling and disturbance in His throne. He asked Gabriel to investigate what was causing this and Gabriel traced the reason back to the *pagol* who was prostrated (*sejda*) in prayer. Gabriel demanded that the *pagol* lifted his head; the *pagol*, with ever-increasing firmness, demanded that God give a child to this woman. Finally this wish is granted and God, through Gabriel, tells the *pagol* of the success of his petition. Three children were eventually given to the former childless couple while the *pagol* returned to the forest and was so fervent in his *dhikr* worship that he grew thin.

A long time later Moses walked along the same road and noticed the three children. He found out where they were from and grew angry at God for not telling him the truth. He demanded that God tell him why He had lied. God replied that He would tell him only when Moses, in return, granted His request. He wanted some human flesh to eat. Despite Moses' protests that God neither ate nor drank, God was adamant that, without this gift, he would not answer Moses' question. Moses therefore began a long search for someone willing to donate their own flesh to give to God, thereby enabling Moses to find out why God had not been honest with him.

Finally, he found the *pagol*. He agreed to the request despite his emaciation but with trepidation because he thought of himself as too sinful to be able to provide a suitable offering. Not only, therefore, does the *pagol* cut bits of his body off to give to Moses

as an offering, he carries on to remove parts of his heart and liver. Moses took the offering back to God; God in return asked who was the devotee (*ashek-mashuk*) who was prepared to give even parts of his internal organs. On hearing about the *pagol* He tells Moses that the *pagol* is the true disciple (*bokto*), even more so than Moses who is a Prophet (*nobi*). God then rhetorically asks Moses whether He could refuse someone as completely devoted to Him as the *pagol* proved himself to be.

Moses then returns to earth and seeks out the *pagol* who stops his prayer and hurries to Moses, anxious only to know if God has found his offering acceptable despite the fact it came from a sinner. Moses tells him, not only that God accepted his gift but also that the *pagol* is the one closest to God's heart, the true *bokto*.

The song ends again formulaically with the poet introducing himself ('I am Samad'), extolling the virtues of the true *pagols* and telling people not to neglect them, Finally he asks the listeners to pray for him.

The Arrivals of Chisti and Shah Jalal.⁴²⁰

When Prithiraj attacked the saint Chisti, the latter responded by drying up all the waters in the region to the extent that mothers' milk stopped. The people recognised Chisti's power and so became Muslims. Another such story concerns how Islam first came to Bengal. This suggests the first Bengali Muslim was a Sylheti called Borhan, and he had become a Muslim directly from God. He would sacrifice cows and give the meat to those Hindus who had received Islamic instruction from him. This so outraged the ruler of Sylhet, Govinda, that he told Borhan to cut up his own son as a sacrifice. Borhan did so and God reconstituted the boy. Following this, God instructed Borhan to walk to Baghdad, which he did. He became a disciple of Gilani, who was prompted to ask for others to go to Bengal. Shah Jalal responded to this call, but Govinda tried to prevent his entry to the town. First he flooded the surrounds, but Shah Jalal placed his prayer mat on the water and prayed his way across since the mat was miraculously made to float. Next, he scattered rice grains across the path,

knowing that no-one would walk on them. Shah Jalal called pigeons to some and they ate the grains, thus allowing Shah Jalal's entry into the town and thereby the introduction of Islam in Bengal.

Not all these stories involve famous people. One song⁴²¹ involved Hindus and Muslims travelling by boat to a wedding. As prayer time arrived the Muslims requested they go briefly to shore to allow prayers but the Hindus refused since time was too short. The Muslims responded by putting their prayer mats on the water, shouting 'Allahu Akbar' and stepping onto the mats. God kept them afloat and they completed their prayers even as the voyage continued. The most intriguing feature of this story was that I was assured that it was 'from the hadith' despite the lack of Hindus anywhere near Arabia in the first/seventh century.

(III:vi) Conclusion

It has been shown that informal religious leaders in and around Rosulpur fall into several categories. The *kabirāj* has expertise with plants, either in a strictly medical sense (the homeopathic healers) or with a spiritual implication as well as happens with *gashānto* treatment. The *fakir* is characterised by some knowledge of Arabic and subsequent ability to control either *jinn*, or perhaps the weaker *bhut-petni*. This knowledge may only be cursory, and involve the repetition of *mantras* or writing of amulets. The *oja* specialises in healing *sarper bātās* although he or she may well also have other healing skills. The singers store religious knowledge in fable-like stories that combine the everyday and mythical. The *jādukar* or 'black magician' was also mentioned by some in Rosulpur but there were said to be none in the area. This may have been true but it seems unlikely since measures to counter them were present. Magic (*jādu*) is said to be accessed by speaking Qur'anic words backwards (part of surah Yā' Sīn so recited is said to cause fire to appear at one's fingertips) but anyone

⁴²⁰ This story was related by the *ekdil* singer, Imam Ali, who uses it as a subject for one of his songs.

⁴²¹ Heard in the Newmarket area of Dhaka city some years ago.

who does this will apparently not go to heaven, so the practice is both feared and clandestine. Such magicians are primarily involved in cursing people (*ban kora*) which is done by the burial of various items such as hair and clothing that belong to the victim. It is to negate this that Shobdulerma performs her *gashānto*. *Jādukar* are also reputed to harm crops by the use of the evil eye (*cakker lāge*⁴²²) and the characteristic white-patterned pot placed on top of a post in the middle of a field used to divert this problem is a common sight.

The dominant informal religious figure in Rosulpur however is the *pirśab*, despite the absence of a living example.⁴²³ He is characterised by his knowledge of Arabic (less as a means to argue theology than to access power), having sufficient followers (as shown by a successful yearly *urus*) and (perhaps most importantly) a reputation not just for piety but also for inclusive compassion.

⁴²² *Lāge* can have many meanings which generally imply adhering to something.

⁴²³ Just as the absence of a Sunni theodicy has been cited as a possible reason for the attraction of Shi'ism amongst supposedly Sunni Bangladeshis, it could be suggested the proxy leadership of a lesser-but-living *pirs* is closer to the concept of the *imāmate* whereby the *imām* rules instead of the awaited *mahdi*.

Chapter Four: Towards a Practice of Theory.⁴²⁴

The formal description of what it means to be a Muslim is relatively straightforward; one must give a profession of faith in God and Mohammed as His prophet and then keep to the tenets of the faith. But throughout this thesis the question of what constitutes 'formal' faith and practice and how it relates to 'informal' expressions has reoccurred. The abovementioned statement of formal faith which asserts belief in God and Mohammed as the Prophet of God is generally supplemented by the need to maintain a correct relationship with the key texts of Islam, the Qur'an in particular but also the hadith. It is in defining what constitutes a 'correct' relationship with these texts that the formal/informal distinction arises. While formal leaders suggest a straightforward following of rules that are explained when necessary by those trained in textual knowledge (the '*ulama*') constitutes proper faith, informal leaders (the saints) instead propound the text as often mysterious and figures such as *pirs* as the only ones able to negotiate the multi-dimensional texts skillfully enough to lead others. Doubts have therefore increasingly been expressed whether there is any central experience at all of 'being a Muslim' that various local realities can be measured against.⁴²⁵ Such doubts have been sourced by a realisation that 'local realities' are less often simple than simplistically interpreted⁴²⁶ and compounded by a rejection of the idea that any 'central reality' of Islam could be found in the core texts of the Qur'an and the hadith. Western scholastic doubts notwithstanding, the idea that

⁴²⁴ This title obviously alludes to Bourdieu's similarly titled book which (amongst other themes) explores the relationship between theory and practice.

⁴²⁵ Bulliet is one who argues that 'edge-centred' (in his nomenclature) rather than city-centred leadership predominates in Islam, which is why Islam did not collapse following catastrophes like the Mongol invasion and the impoverishment of cities.. Citing Nishapur in particular, he postulates a struggle whereby central authority was unable to impose its will on recalcitrant marginal groups, but because the centre more or less controlled the writing of history and construction of lasting edifices (both physical buildings and administrative structures) the false impression of central control over fragmented pockets of local behaviours is preserved. This does not imply Islam as an overarching entity does not exist. Although Eickelman writes that Islam 'is fundamentally "plastic" in its essence ... so that one can speak of a Malay Islam, an Arab Islam, an Iranian Islam, a Tunisian Islam, and other Islams' he continues that 'each ... suggests essential attitudes which cannot be reduced to folklore' (see Bulliet, *op. cit.*, 186-187, 194; and Eickelman, *The Middle East*, 192).

⁴²⁶ A point made by Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, 9.

a true and pure form of Islam does exist is held by many Muslims in Rosulpur at least, and it influences local practice.⁴²⁷

Assuming an idea of model Islamic behaviour exists for Rosulpur Muslims, what then is its relationship to the textual canons, and the Arab societies that gave rise to these texts? While the village, in common with much of rural Bangladesh, is in some ways remote this does not mean it is sealed from the rest of the world and untouched by incidents elsewhere. Global events such as the football World Cup prompt interest, although the scale of support for unknown Cameroons during the 1990 contest was less predictable. Presumably there was a vicarious 'poor-against-the-rich' solidarity. It is, however, concerns within the *ummah* that attract most attention. Indeed, news from Palestine, Bosnia or Baghdad have an almost personal importance to Bangladeshis, at times. Military action in such places almost axiomatically leads to public demonstrations in Dhaka at least.⁴²⁸ Interest and respect towards the Arab world goes beyond fleeting situations like this, however. Just as Bangladesh Biman, in common with many other Islamic country's airlines, constantly updates its in-flight information to display which direction the Ka'ba is (to facilitate prayer), Mecca remains a fixed point of reference.⁴²⁹ Houses are oriented around it with sleeping quarters and toilets being designed so unseemly organs such as feet *et al* do not point towards the Holy site, and strangers may well be asked if their country is 'further than Mecca'.

This is not to suggest that there is exact or accurate knowledge in Rosulpur of either theology or the practice of Islam in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere in the Muslim world.

⁴²⁷ Not only localised practices; in some ways globalised faith in the *Shari'ah* reflects this idea of a pure form of Islam awaiting recovery.

⁴²⁸ Newsworthy events perhaps serve more easily as a rallying point of faith, and are therefore more easily discussed, when they are remote. Anti-Israeli sentiment is probably stronger in Dhaka than Amman where the Palestinians have had to come to terms with the loss of their own land.

⁴²⁹ Buitelaar notes how during the Ramadan Fast, Moroccans in Berkane and Marrakesh similarly use Saudi Arabia as a standard regarding timings, while Pfleiderer noted that the spatial arrangement of a North Indian Muslim shrine reflected the idea that 'West, the direction of Mecca, is good and East is bad' (see Buitelaar, *op. cit.*, 84-85; and B Pfleiderer, 'The Semiotics of Ritual Healing in a North Indian Shrine', *Social Science and Medicine*, 27 [1988], 423).

People simply do not sit and discuss such things after a day's work in the fields and even when the learned refer to, for example, theology it tends to be in generalities (or platitudes) rather than through closely reasoned arguments.⁴³⁰ Indeed, Arabia⁴³¹ is a problematic reality to Bangladeshis since they are generally in the area as migrant workers and therefore feel themselves to be in an inferior situation.⁴³² Pakistan may appear a more appropriate Islamic 'reality' since it is culturally far closer to Bengal, but it is only a generation ago that its unjust rule ended with three million Bengalis killed. The memory of this is kept alive, not only by regular celebrations such as Independence Day (16 December) but residual difficulties, in particular the repatriation of 'Biharis'⁴³³ or the Jamaat-i-Islami's pro-Pakistani leadership. Hence, while assuming that those in Rosulpur may have an idealised concept of how Islam should be lived, neither Saudi Arabia nor Pakistan are ideally suited as models.

Nonetheless, Bengali respect for the Arab world not only exists, it has done for some time. Approximately a century ago there was a rush to adopt Arabic surnames that saw the number of titular Sheikhs noted in census counts increase from around 0.01 percent in 1872 AD to over 90 percent in 1901 AD.⁴³⁴ While this clearly shows the

⁴³⁰ My first lengthy session with Momin Master, for example, consisted of hearing how all people always kept the Fast, which was easy because it was ordained, and (many) other such bland assurances (Buitelaar reports similar initial statements of intent; see Buitelaar, *op. cit.*, 3).

⁴³¹ 'Arabia' rather than 'the Arab world' or 'Saudi Arabia' since this Arabia is an imaginative construct of the birth of Islam and eschatological expectations of its culmination.

⁴³² This statement is hard to justify with a single quote or specific research. Migrant workers tend to share their experiences, however, and I have heard many such conversations. Perhaps the most bitter occasion was on a flight from the Middle East filled with migrant workers who were swapping stories and sharing their anger at what they perceived as being constantly treated with arrogance.

⁴³³ This term actually refers to those Urdu-speaking residents of Bangladesh who sided with the Pakistani army during the 1971 war. After Independence they were gathered into camps awaiting transportation to Pakistan, but many still remain waiting in their camps on the periphery of Bangladeshi society.

⁴³⁴ 'Genealogy is not primarily a question of historical authenticity at all, but rather of specific religious, political, and economic significance. That is to say, it is a way of reflecting and conceptualizing a series of changes that take place on the ground in the social order' writes Gilson. Reeves and Eickelman reiterate this point, the former suggesting the present social order could dictate how the past was seen; the latter that genealogies reflect existing social relationships (see Gilson, *Recognising Islam*, 64;

attitude to census-taking (seen less as an accounting exercise than a chance to establish social positions) and the interdependence of status and wealth⁴³⁵ the most pertinent aspect to this current discussion is the recourse to specifically Middle Eastern titles as a way of aggrandisement. Those with power over Bengal at that time were even more unambiguously unattractive than Saudis or Pakistanis since neither the British rulers nor their Hindu administrators were Muslim.⁴³⁶ People might be paid by a Mr Thakur for services rendered to a Sahib⁴³⁷ but given a chance to change one's name people became Syeds. To try and become Mr Smith or Mr Thakur was to concurrently weaken one's Islamic credentials while identifying with Britishness or Hinduism respectively when both groups had enough local representatives to question the description.⁴³⁸

Respectful reference to Arab culture appears in quirky ways, at times. Religious vocabulary tends to be Arabic, although some Persian and a lesser number of

Reeves, *op. cit.*, 42; Eickelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 192; and for exact census figures and a fuller analysis involving the other three prestigious Muslim titles (Syed, Mughal and Pathan) adopted in Bengal see Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*, 115-116).

⁴³⁵ As summed up in the saying 'last year I was a Jolaha, this year I am a Shaikh, next year if prices rise I shall be a Syed' (see Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*, 21).

⁴³⁶ Bengali Hindus adapted quicker to British rule than Muslims and so tended to fill administrative positions, partly because in 1717 AD Murshid Quli Khan had replaced Muslim revenue collectors with low ranking, honest Hindus in the hope of maximizing profits. When the British gained power some decades later, these officials were well situated to mediate the new regime's rule. Moreover the eighteenth-century Bengali trading class was largely made up of Hindus who, again, were well placed to gain maximum advantage from the British intrusion. This may have aided the introduction of Hindu concepts into Islamic life (such as the perception that Hindu deities could help with problems such as sickness, that *pirs* and legendary figures such as Khidr could be elevated into god-like status, and the acceptance of a caste system) but it is also true that becoming Muslim was more generally a more effective way of retaining customary practices (even when these apparently contravened Islam). Akter suggests that Hindu ideas were promoted because of Hindus social superiority but does not explain why this same 'trickle-down' of ideas had not earlier worked for the urban *ashraf*. That Hindu ideas may have had added credence at a time of turmoil, just as Islamic ideas had half a millennium earlier, is certainly possible (see Akter, *op. cit.*, 58-60).

⁴³⁷ Thakur is an upper-class Hindu name while 'Sahib' was the title given to British officials.

⁴³⁸ See Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*, 114.

vernacular words are also used in this context.⁴³⁹ Some such words have an intriguing shift in meaning. *Urus*, for example, is the Arabic word for wedding but became the annual death remembrance ceremony that celebrates the mystic's union with God. Similarly, the exercise Hozrot Ali led every night after Ishor prayers took an Arabic word but then re-defined it. This *amat*⁴⁴⁰ exercise consisted of repeating sacred words⁴⁴¹ while counting through the rosary beads and facing a picture of Kodam Ali (which was in turn on the wall that faced towards Mecca). The recitation was done silently (unlike most forms of *dhikr*) and the successful disciple subsequently saw Muhammed in a dream as a confirmation that power had been received and the devotee could therefore expect to have the power to heal through *pāni pora* and *phu deo'ya*.⁴⁴²

Hence 'Arabia' emerges less as a geographical region of sociological mores than a rhetorical device (similar to the Bengali village which is pictured on innumerable Dhaka walls as an idyll of clear running rivers and uncrowded fields⁴⁴³). 'Rhetorical'

⁴³⁹ Other languages, too, may well have been incorporated into Bengali religious terminology; *sādhana*, (to worship), for example, appears to be the same word as used in Tibetan Buddhism. Although Arabic terminology is widely used for Muslim religious words in Bengali, there is no absolute, or obvious, pattern dictating which languages have been appropriated for which subjects. It could, for example, be suggested that terms suggesting closeness tend to remain in the vernacular (so *sī'su* is generally preferred over *murid* or *umot* for disciple/acolyte) but this would give no clues why an abstraction such grace is also referred to in the Sanskrit-derived vernacular (with *aṣīrbād* usually preferred to *barakah/burkot*).

⁴⁴⁰ While this word is clearly Arabic in origin, its origins are questionable. Since the 'ayn sound is transmuted into a simple Bengali /a/ it could well derive from the word for 'work' 'practice' etc but the word for hope (which begins with a simple alif) is also possible. In either case, the general term has taken on specialised meaning (see Hilali *op. cit.*, 13-14; and H Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, Beirut, 1980, 28, 644).

⁴⁴¹ *Durut kora*.

⁴⁴² Similarly the 'eleven faults and ten virtues' that Haru mentioned as needing to be respectively repressed and encouraged are based on Arabic terminology. No such easy etymology suggests itself for the Ekdil ceremony, although the Persian *dil* is widely used as a synonym for the more common *rida'y* (meaning heart in the emotional sense) while *ek* is Bengali for one (see also Sākalā'yen, *op. cit.*, 20, 25-26).

⁴⁴³ Or similar even to the Qur'an and hadith which few in a village such as Rosulpur know beyond primary-school basics and folkloric stories nor adhere to entirely, yet still believe to be comprehensive, authoritative and, in an ideal world, obeyed (for similar ideas see Messick, *op. cit.*, 16).

implies that 'the obvious is not always a sign of the true'⁴⁴⁴ since the selection of evidence is done according to an underlying rationale, rather than according to *prima facie* evidence. Thus, for example, any feelings of solidarity Bangladeshis feel with the Arab world are based more on underlying beliefs of the transferable nature of Divine Blessing⁴⁴⁵ and the ultimate unity of Muslims than the reality of Bengalis providing a pool of cheap, easily discarded labour. 'Rhetorical' does not imply 'contrived' however, since it is possible to invent such artificial arguments to link current Rosulpur practices to those from the mythologised 'Golden-Age' of Islam and the theories that undergirded them. It could, for example, be argued that just as the Qur'an mentions the existence of unseen worlds, most of the informal religious leaders in Rosulpur not only accept these as real but interact freely with them. These leaders are generally assumed to be familiar with the departed spirits of their erstwhile masters (through dreams, in particular) or the ubiquitous *bhut petni* that are a constant threat to village stability. Thus the widely accepted claim that Junshi *Fakir* of Borro Bashaliya (adjacent to Rosulpur village) was able to summon and control the *jinn* has a direct resonance with the Qur'anic description of Solomon using them as workmen and carriers.⁴⁴⁶ Similarly, just as the Qur'an is uncompromisingly monotheistic but ambivalent regarding the functions of secondary powers such as the *jinn*, Rosulpur Muslims are absolute in their espousing of Allah as the One True God yet take frequent and careful notice of the Spirit world. The yearly horoscopes (*panchika*) publications are therefore carefully noted right across Bangladesh.⁴⁴⁷ It is not only invisible guides that are relied on in the village since many people consult a *pir*⁴⁴⁸ from time to time; and this again has some consistency with the Qur'an which both recommends the mystical path while leaving only partial clues how this should be

⁴⁴⁴ In Jalaluddin Rumi's words.

⁴⁴⁵ As centred in time (fourteen centuries ago) and place (Mecca and Medina) and disseminated from there.

⁴⁴⁶ More specifically, in the construction of the Temple (it would seem, although the reference is not certain) and the bringing of the Queen of Sheba's throne to Solomon (see surah al-Naml, 27:17, 39-40; and surah Sabā², 34: 12-14).

⁴⁴⁷ Horoscopes are used in particular to time events such as travel or weddings (for information regarding the use and reliance on *panchika* I am indebted to Jalath de Souza; for an example of the genre see the Loknath Haf Panchika 1404 Saner, Dhaka, 1997).

⁴⁴⁸ As are *fakirs*, *ojas* and *hakims*, but usually for the more immediate needs of healing.

followed (which allows a group such as the saints to emerge as mystical leaders and directors⁴⁴⁹).

Similarities could even be suggested between Bedouin society at the time of Muhammed and rural Bangladesh now.⁴⁵⁰ The Bedouin clan was of central importance and this probably numbered around the same as a Bangladeshi *para* while the tribe approximates to a village, and the family to the *bāri*. More importantly, the degree of influence each unit exerted on the individual would seem to be remarkably consistent. Just as Bedouin legal mechanisms principally operated at tribal or sub-tribal level since most disputes concerned domestic affairs (such as compensation for theft or violence, marriage, or inheritance), the *bicār* is the most important legal device in Bangladesh with few cases warranting police attention.⁴⁵¹ Although the ultimate

⁴⁴⁹ And consistent with history as well since the '*ulama*' generally lost prestige over time to the saints, perhaps because their theoretical studies had little to do with daily life. In the Indian subcontinent the '*ulama*' looked only at ancient studies unrelated to actual circumstances and, as early as the Delhi Sultanate (602/1206-962/1555) did not generally write of contemporary issues but instead 'concentrated on writing commentaries on earlier works of Islamic law or producing legal compilations on the model of the well-known compendiums of Islamic jurisprudence' (see Z Islam, *op. cit.*, 22; Piscatori, *op. cit.*, 17-19; Zaman, *op. cit.*, 291; and Bulliet, *op. cit.*, 181).

⁴⁵⁰ The Bedouin were organised into family tents, tent-encampment clans, and related clan tribes. The clan was held together by patriarchal blood-lines and the need for self defence while the less important tribe collected hundreds or even thousands of distantly related people loosely located around a few oases (see M Geijbels, An Introduction to Islam, Rawalpindi, 1975, 6-7; R Savory, Introduction to Islamic Civilization, Cambridge, 1979, 54; and [for a comprehensive account of the traditional explanations of pre-Islamic Arabian social structure] A Bahador, Series of Essays on the Life of Mohammad, Delhi, 1981, 13-118).

⁴⁵¹ The question of how much customary law, as distinct from provisions of the *Shari'ah*, govern any given Islamic society is too large to be examined here (as is the question of whether, technically, pre-existing customs in a region such as Bangladesh can be equated to the *urf* of Islamic legal theory). Agbede suggests areas such as taxation, road traffic, immigration, customs and excise, and insurance (amongst others) that Nigerian customary law was completely silent about (with several additional categories that were barely covered by the existing law) and which the British therefore had to legislate entirely for but does not explore how the *Shari'ah* operated in these areas. An analysis of which legal traditions were used to settle conflicts over a period of time in an area of Yemen very interestingly shows the amount and circumstances of each tradition's usage (see I Agbede, 'Conflict Between Customary and non-Customary Systems of Law: Preliminary Observations', Journal of Islamic and Comparative Law, 4 [1972], 52-53; and M Mundy, Domestic

Bedouin legal sanction, exclusion, had far more power than any *bicār* ruling,⁴⁵² it remains extremely difficult in contemporary Bangladesh for an individual to survive separated from the extensive family connections that are generally village-centred.⁴⁵³ Even the festivities have apparent similarities, with the Bangladeshi *mela* being reminiscent of the Bedouin annual fair (such as that held at Ukaz, near Mecca⁴⁵⁴).

Evidence could also be cited to link village practices with foundational legal concepts. *Qiyās* is one of the four principles that undergird the *Shari'ah* and involves the extraction of the decisive principle (the *'illah*) in an existing law to extrapolate new laws when faced with unprecedented local situations. It could be argued that the *pirs* help people to select which Qur'anic concepts will be followed, which modified, and which overlooked. Even formal *qiyās* was subordinated to prevailing practice when the attempt to outlaw coffee because of its slight intoxicant effect was abandoned as unenforceable; how much more scope is there within the *pirs'* informal leadership to defer to custom at the cost of the rules?⁴⁵⁵ Great learning was needed to identify the *'illah* and thus extrapolate rules to live by, and *pirs* similarly need exact local knowledge to adjudicate which local practices should be condoned and which condemned.

Government Kinship, Community and Polity in North Yemen, London, 1995, 247-267).

⁴⁵² Exclusion from the tribe was tantamount to a death sentence in first/seventh century Arabia since co-operation was vital for survival in the desert. Moreover, in the absence of an extensive judiciary, the removal of any threat of retribution that resulted from being outcast meant a single person was defenceless.

⁴⁵³ Eighty percent of Bangladeshis live in rural areas.

⁴⁵⁴ These were held during one of the 'forbidden' months of Muharram, Rajab, Dhu'l Qa'da and Dhul Hijja when war was prohibited and pilgrimages occurred. They were 'in some sort the centre of old Arabian social, political and literary life' although they also had a legal aspect since they gave an opportunity to refer difficult cases to an arbiter (*hakim*) or a soothsayer (*kahin*). The fair at Ukaz lasted for twenty days (see Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 239; R Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, London, 1907, 135; and M Guraya, 'Judicial Institutions in pre-Islamic Arabia', Islamic Studies 18 [1979], 341-345).

⁴⁵⁵ Particularly because there are clear legal precedents to upholding customs even when they contravene textual evidence (see M Laldin, 'The Theory and Application of *'Urf* in Islamic Law', an unpublished PhD thesis, Edinburgh, 1995, 44, 48, 145-146, 189-193).

As well as *qiyās* both *istislāh*⁴⁵⁶ and *ijmā'* have local resonances. The first could be invoked since overturning well-established *pir*-leadership would be so disruptive that it would be difficult to argue public interests were being protected. The *pirs* are (however loosely defined) Muslims and following even flawed Muslim leaders is recommended by hadith such as the necessity of praying even behind such people.⁴⁵⁷ Moreover, *ijmā'* is central to *pir* leadership since they either rule by consensus or they do not rule at all. Against secular leaders' wealth and orthodox Muslims' claims of piety and theoretical knowledge, the informal religious leaders pit general acceptance of their authority and thus can lead only for as long as they 'express and ratify popular will.'⁴⁵⁸ Any hope they offer to the dispossessed can only be hinted at since overt self-promotion would immediately negate their assertion.⁴⁵⁹ They can not tolerate widespread dissent⁴⁶⁰ but merely forward their vision of Islam. While it is simplistic to suggest a simple power/authority dichotomy whereby power directs and authority inspires it is true that the *pirs et al* do tend towards the second category while the secular and orthodox Sufi leaders are more likely to wield the former.⁴⁶¹ Perhaps the most succinct definition of informal religious leadership was Abu Helmi's 'I became a sheikh when people called me sheikh'.⁴⁶² Indeed, *pir* leadership could in some ways be said to be closer to al-Shaf'i's original conception of consensus than later jurists' learned opinions since it involves the whole community and not just the scholars'.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁶ Known also as *maṣlahah*, or *maṣlahah mutlaqah* this is the legal principal of Consideration of Public Interest (see M Kamali, Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence. Cambridge, 1991, 267).

⁴⁵⁷ Reference has already been made to these.

⁴⁵⁸ As Gellner puts it The suggestion that local realities can alter the law at all is dismissed by others with comments such as 'there is only one Islam and only one Fiqh' (see Gellner, Saints of the Atlas, 150; and I Hilal, Studies in Usul ul Fiqh, California, [nd], 150-153).

⁴⁵⁹ See Gilsenan, Recognising Islam, 137.

⁴⁶⁰ One exception to this linkage of recognition and rule is idea of the 'Hidden Saints' who are unknown to all but God, yet who are deemed central to this world's running nonetheless (see Eickelman, Moroccan Islam, 236).

⁴⁶¹ Lambton makes a similar power/authority dichotomy (see Lambton, 'Concepts of Authority', 96).

⁴⁶² Abu Helmi was sheikh of this author's acquaintance in Amman, Jordan. The 'proof' of *barakah* being the existence of clients who act as if a particular *marabout* has it, is a similarly circular definition (see Eickelman, Moroccan Islam, 180).

⁴⁶³ In his book *Jima al-ilm* al-Shaf'i suggested that 'the opinions of scholars alone was fallible, that the whole community should be involved, and that *ijmā'* should not allow

Ijtihād is another legal principle that echoes Bangladeshi village practice since disciplined effort is needed by the *pirs* in order to discover the correct behaviour in any situation.

This is not to argue that Rosulpur is actually similar to first/seventh century Bedouin life, or that strict *ijmāʿ* is operating in the village, or that *pirs* carefully follow a particular *mathhab's* understanding of *ijtihād* or *qiyās* in order to reach a decision.⁴⁶⁴ It is rather to question why *Shariʿah*-based validations of village practice are never actually made. The obvious reason is that counter arguments against these claims could easily be raised; but this in turn questions why more frail claims are left unchallenged⁴⁶⁵ and why more robust claims are not made. For an example of the latter, malnutrition is a medical condition that most rural Bangladeshis suffer from, yet no-one I have yet met has mentioned the *Shariʿah* provision for deferment of the Fast due to ill health that could validly be cited.⁴⁶⁶ Similarly, Ahmad Barelawi's attempt to justify the practice of Islam he saw as a Qadiri Sufi using textual evidence⁴⁶⁷ is notably unusual since it appears more common in a village such as Rosulpur to follow a global framework of Islam using local forms without such

of any dissent' (see A Naqeshbandi, The Doctrine of Consensus in Islamic Law, unpublished PhD, London, 1958, 212).

⁴⁶⁴ Indeed, I have never actually heard any of these claims been made either in Rosulpur or elsewhere in Bangladesh.

⁴⁶⁵ Such as the hagiographic writings about Muhammed (as exemplified by the school text books that inform that 'from his childhood Muhammed was very good ... He never argued ... He never was abusive ... Everybody loved him ... He loved people ... He was always truthful') or the simplistic portrayals of Western decadence, or the assertion that Indian Muslims had retained their faith even as Middle Eastern believers had been diverted by attractions such as nationalism. Presumably these do not occasion any reaction because they simply repeat generally accepted 'truths' (see F Masud *et al*, Islām Śikhha Tiritiya Śreni, Dhaka, 1996, 63; A Rašid *op. cit.*, 1-3; and Zaman, *op. cit.*, 292-294).

⁴⁶⁶ See surah al-Baqarah (2:184); average daily calorific intake for Bangladeshis is around 1800. Interestingly, when a legal argument for exemption of the Fast was made (for those fighting a plague of locusts in 1988 in Morocco, based on the arduousness of their task) it was a central leader, rather than one of the plethora of peripheral contenders, who made it, thus reinforcing the idea that peripheral leadership, such as that of the *pirs*, has less need of explicit arguments (see Buitelaar, *op. cit.*, 91).

pleas.⁴⁶⁸ The Fast, for example, is one of the defining experiences of being a Muslim anywhere and so it remains in Rosulpur. But it is transmuted into a complete prohibition of public consumption followed every dusk by demonstrative feasting with many people keeping the first few days (and almost all the twenty-seventh day since this precedes the Lailat al-Qadr⁴⁶⁹) of Ramadan. There is however no insistence on a thirty-day total fast as Qur'anically enjoined. Even in the towns and cities most tea-shops remain open throughout the month with merely a cover hung from the doorway to hide the customers. Similarly, the Eid al-Azhar sacrifice is centrally important for Muslims across the world, yet in Rosulpur there is no insistence that the poor sacrifice an animal. The congregational prayers that precede the sacrifice have similar been redefined to become as much an expression of village solidarity as a celebration of faith.

This co-existence of text-based tenets of faith that local practice reinterprets (and perhaps contravenes) suggests that an atmosphere of ambiguity prevails. This in turn suggests one reason why the *pirs* have emerged as leaders in the village. These non-medical healers,⁴⁷⁰ non political fixers, unorthodoxly pious figures who apparently

⁴⁶⁷ He was encouraged by what he had seen of the growing Wahhabi movement during his visit to the Hijaz to reform Islam in India (for more regarding Barelawi see Zaman, *op. cit.*, 276; and Buelher, *op. cit.*, 301).

⁴⁶⁸ Shaikh al-Alawi of Algeria also wrote a defence of Sufism which perhaps again suggests the similarity of organised Sufism to orthodox practice (and the dissimilarity of both to localised practices) since such overt writings contrast to the uncommented departures from orthodoxy at village level. This distinction between local forms centred by a known personality on the one hand and dispersed expressions that present only delegated authority figures to the majority of adherents on the other, is explored by Reeves in his study of a mosque-shrine in Tanta, Egypt. He calls the former a '*walī* complex' and notes that leadership is accessible to all; and the latter a '*tariqa*' complex' which (he suggests) is marked by hierarchical authority structures (see Lings, *A Sufi Saint*, 88; and Reeves, *op. cit.*, 122, 411-412, 423-429).

⁴⁶⁹ The 'Night of Majesty' that commemorates the first Revelation given to Muhammed. These comments are based on my experience in Dhaka and Tangail more than Rosulpur since the approximately ten Ramadan months I have spent in Bangladesh have all been in these two localities (see A Jafar, *Muslim Festivals in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1980, 73-75).

⁴⁷⁰ Not all saints are devoid of medical knowledge (*hakims*, for example, often have herbalist skills). Similarly some *pirs* have political ambitions and others strongly endorse the *Shari'ah* but their power does not usually rest solely on any one attribute. That a group can be socially ambiguous and still have influence is illustrated by

lead but actually represent others' thoughts and hopes while lacking full commitment to any single perspective while hinting at several are (as this description suggests) brokers of ambiguity. While details of their emergence remain unsure, it is known that *pirs* oversaw the change from semi-nomadic subsistence farming to rice cultivation while preaching the new faith of Islam. They also concurrently reinforced old customs (such as the hierarchical structuring of society) and beliefs (such as the existence of supernatural spirits). This promotion of change while providing stability and introduction of new ideas while retaining some opposing old ones⁴⁷¹ demanded combining activism with acceptance⁴⁷² and habit with novelty. Such adroit balancing was perhaps the decisive factor in the *pirs*' establishing themselves as leaders, but it was a leadership marked by uncertainty (in contrast to the '*ulama*'s search for unequivocal answers). Just as entranced women can concurrently control events while apparently being out of control themselves⁴⁷³ *pir*-leadership is simultaneously directive and passive. The central importance of local leadership, such as that of the *pirs*, is however undeniable. It is one of the major, albeit unstated, themes of Samad's song *Mucha Nabī Jārī*. Even Moses, as the story is told, lacks both the faith and the closeness to God of the unnamed *pagol*. The song does not denigrate Moses but does position itself carefully to suggest an effective way for Bangladeshi villager listeners to communication with God can be found through local *pir*-like leaders and intercessors.

The fact that a suggestion such as this is inherently contentious suggests one reason why ambiguity could be necessary for informal leadership as practiced by *pirs*, *giyaks*,

Dalrymple's description of eunuchs who are 'turned into something half way between a talisman and an object of ridicule'. Ewing notes that *pirs* embody two opposite theories of God; that He is absolutely separate from His creation, and that certain men can have direct access to Him and possess some of His power (this ambiguity is why many are uneasy in discussing some aspects of the *pir*'s power, such as manipulation of dreams, she suggests; (see W Dalrymple, *City of Djinn*s, London, 1994, 169-183; and Ewing, *The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam*, 137).

⁴⁷¹ Such as monotheism and the animistic-like placation of localised spirits.

⁴⁷² Gellner suggests that in Morocco 'this general function ... of enabling men to feel they are 'doing something' about (though not controlling, for that is recognised to be impossible) important things which are out of control ... is also provided primarily by the saints or their shrines (see Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*, 138).

et al. Another reason is that the mystical knowledge that underpins such leadership is ambiguous. The Qur'an says of itself that some of its meanings are hidden⁴⁷⁴ which gives a fundamental validity to such uncertainty and perhaps an impetus to non-analytical forms of creative inquiry. It is possible to explore difficult concepts with rational arguments but there seems instead to generally be a chosen obtuseness,⁴⁷⁵ as illustrated by the plethora of birds, cages, rivers and boatmen in Bengali mystical poetry.⁴⁷⁶ The bird could be God, although He may also appear as the moon, the 'Man of the Heart'⁴⁷⁷, a jewel, or even a thief.⁴⁷⁸ The difficulty on capturing the mystery of faith even extends to who the faithful are; one of Lalon Fakir's most well-known

⁴⁷³ See T Blanchet, Meanings and Rituals of Birth in Rural Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987, 52.

⁴⁷⁴ See surah *āl-Imrān* (3:7); surah *Najm* (103:11) specifies that it was Muhammad's heart that perceived the Qur'anic Revelation. Several hadith reinforce the idea that Hidden Knowledge is important (such as Suyuti's 'Knowledge of the inward is one of the Secrets of God' and Bukhari's 'Knowledge is of two kinds, knowledge in the Heart which is the knowledge that availeth and knowledge upon the tongue which is God's evidence against His slave'). M Rahmān writes that the Qur'an may have multiple meanings while Imam Ali, the *ekdil* singer, said that the Qur'an consisted of 30000 *kālām* (words) that were concerned with the *Shari'ah* but there were a further 60000 *kālām* that were hidden and could only be discovered by *mārephate* (mystical) knowledge. A Qur'anic verse such as surah *al-Baqarah* 2:217 which says that warfare in a Sacred month is a lesser evil than diverting people from God suggests that, in addition to Hidden meanings there may be derived meanings, which injects further uncertainty (see Lings, A Sufi Saint, 90; and M Rahmān, *op. cit.*, 74).

⁴⁷⁵ A contrived obtuseness, at times; the book 'Mārephate Gapan Rahasyā' spends much time alluding to the central secret summed up in the word *āmānāth* which, it transpires, equates to the spiritual love of God (see M Rahmān, *op. cit.*, 31).

⁴⁷⁶ Abu-Lughod found that sentiments and ideas that would normally be socially unacceptable, and perhaps even contradictory to those usual expressed by the speaker/poet, may become acceptable when expressed in poetic form. While she was examining issues of intimate personal relationships that both demanded a strict social code and prompted powerful individual emotions, there are obvious parallels to the Bangladeshi situation where Islam both dictates a code of life and causes powerful reactive feelings amongst those who (for whatever reason) do not follow these codes closely. Thus poetry/songs are again used to give some expression to hopes such as acceptability before God that if spoken openly would seem both presumptuous and (in the absence of adherence to the prescribed rituals) provocative (see L Abu-Lughod, Veiled Sentiments Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society, California, 1986, 175, 189, 197, 221, 226-227).

⁴⁷⁷ This term is also used by the Bauls to denote the 'Ultimate Being (which) is in other words the self realisation' (see R Sarkar, *op. cit.*, 31, 46).

⁴⁷⁸ For a useful summary of some such similes see Brother James, Songs of Lalon, Dhaka, 1987, 110-113.

songs begins 'Everyone says "what social grouping does Lalon belong to"⁴⁷⁹ and continues by questioning the validity of such labels. Religious distinctions are often blurred in such songs (reflecting the attitude displayed by the *pirs*) and this is underlined by the plethora of Hindu and Muslim terms they employ for God.⁴⁸⁰

This infusion of Hindu ideas is typical of Bengali Islam,⁴⁸¹ prompted by the overlap of some Scriptural principles between the two faiths, and the persistent weight of Hindu numbers. Some similarities have already been mentioned but further examples of convergence include Shobdulerma's habit of offering food to her familiar spirits every full moon by leaving it by the Lohorjor river beside Rosulpur⁴⁸² and Haru's forty days of semi-fasting to become a devotee of Kodam Ali. Although none of the healers who relied on *mantras* consented to reveal their formulae, all agreed that names of Hindu deities were included. Such similarities are not new; Naqshband is said to have gained enlightenment in a manner more commonly associated with Hindu *sadhus*⁴⁸³ and even immediately after Partition (when Islamic political expression reached a peak) Muslims were demonstratively respectful of overtly Hindu practices. One informant⁴⁸⁴ recalled how his own father would wear a *dhuti*⁴⁸⁵ whenever any local

⁴⁷⁹ 'Social grouping' being *jāti* in the original Bengali. The difficulty of translating this has already been alluded to but the context of the song shows that it is religious demarcations that are being referred to. This song is famous enough for Hasan Raja to begin one of his songs with (see F Hosen, *Bānglar Baūl Lālan Giṭī*, Dhaka, 1993, 12; and M Bārī, *Hāsan Rājār Gān o Sādhan Sangīt*, Comilla, 1976, 10).

⁴⁸⁰ Interestingly this is best displayed in the collection of Lalon's songs translated and collected by James, which perhaps shows his particular interests as well as Lalon's attitudes (see James, *op. cit.*, 12, 26, 36, 50, 51).

⁴⁸¹ Which is not to deny that orthodox Islam, ordinary custom and human need (such as the universal wish to co-exist with one's neighbours peacefully, or discern the order underlying the apparent chaos of unseen forces and powers) all contribute to contemporary rural village practice in Bangladesh.

⁴⁸² Not only is this indistinguishable from village Hinduism, it could have persisted for centuries. Whether the Mathari order that Shobdulerma appears to be linked to (despite her total lack of reference to it) is even Islamic is disputed by some writers (see W Ivanow, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts*, 110-111).

⁴⁸³ He is said to have spent fifteen days prostrated in prayer asking God to be compassionate and show him his path (see Sākalāyēn, *op. cit.*, 24).

⁴⁸⁴ Faruque of Tangail (although he was bought up in Demrai, near Dhaka); Haru concurred.

⁴⁸⁵ A signal of Hinduism as clear as the kilt denotes Scottishness. I have not been aware of a single Muslim wearing a *dhuti* in Bangladesh over the last decade, so this

puja was taking place, and that his mother would warn them to be particularly solicitous to Hindus on the day of Lokhi *puja*.⁴⁸⁶ Hinduism perhaps impacted on Islam more in Bengal than any other part of the Subcontinent because Muslims were more distanced from the Scriptural roots and central rule in Delhi (when it was enforced) and therefore more accommodating of other faiths.⁴⁸⁷ Asim Roy stresses the deliberation with which Bengali Muslim writers echoed the themes and forms of existing Hindu works to present the person of Muhammed⁴⁸⁸ while in return Hindu thinkers responded to the irruption of Islam by sidelining aspects such as knowledge (*gyan*) or action (*karma*; this included aspects such as adherence to the caste system that alienated the majority) and instead emphasising aspects such as devotion to One God (*bhakti*). This both widened the appeal of Hinduism and narrowed the gap between it and Islam. *Bhakti* worship⁴⁸⁹ became intertwined with Vaishnavism, where Vishnu (in one or other of his manifestations) was the object of devotion.⁴⁹⁰ While the pivotal period of Islamisation in Bengal is still unsure, it would appear that just as Islam was becoming an integral part of Bengal, Hinduism had one of its most devout and popular saints propagating ideas that were in foundational ways consistent with Islam. This was Chaitanya (1485-1533 AD)⁴⁹¹ who preached the *bhakti* cult of

practice would seem to be defunct (see also K Aziz, *Kinship in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1979, 16).

⁴⁸⁶ Goddess of financial prosperity; the hope being that her favour to Hindus on that day would spill over to respectful Muslims (in a similar way to the supposed accessibility of *barakah*).

⁴⁸⁷ 'Nowhere did the Hindus and Muslims come as close to each other and nowhere did they identify themselves with each other's culture so intimately as in Bengal'; almost as if, in Gnostic terminology, 'emanations' of two revered writings encountered each other and were able to be reconciled because of the weakening of their original positions (see Pande, *op. cit.*, 135).

⁴⁸⁸ See Roy for examples of legend-like songs of Muhammad and his family. The process of localising Islam within Hindu, and Bengali, realities is not only historical however (see Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, 87-110).

⁴⁸⁹ *Bhakti* faith is egalitarian in a way caste-centred ideas are not; it focuses on a single deity (albeit a false one in Islamic theology) rather than a plethora of such Beings although it does not discount their existence; and it allows for ecstatic behaviour and accepts the validity of experiential, as distinct from intellectual, knowledge.

⁴⁹⁰ See Srivastava, *op. cit.*, 53-55.

⁴⁹¹ He was born in Nadia, where he would later be more or less deified by his devotees, but spent around twenty years in Puri (in Orissa) which became the centre of his mission (see Srivastava, *op. cit.*, 69; Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture*, 150; and Latif, *op. cit.*, 96-98).

Vaishnavism which promoted devotion to Krishna and ecstatic expressions of faith while demoting the caste system. He began exercises such as the constant but silent remembrance, and the occasional congregational recitation, of the name of Krishna (reminiscent of *dhikr*). Such Hindu accommodation of Islam is shown in contemporary Rosulpur by Shuja's general use of 'Allah' rather than Bhāgwān or Ishar for God.⁴⁹²

The incorporation of Hindu ideas is perhaps a major reason why so many ideas and thoughts are expressed in ambiguous and uncertain ways. To overhear *dhikr*, with its fragments of Arabic and mentions of God is one thing; to know of a *mantra* that mixes Allah with Hindu deities quite another. It is not only Hindu concepts, but also some quite blatantly blasphemous ones too, that can be introduced in this manner at times.⁴⁹³ One of Lalon's songs plays with the words 'Ahad' and 'Ahmad' (synonyms for God and Muhammed respectively)⁴⁹⁴ and Torob Ali's song 'Fatima and Jibrail' explores this idea as it hints at the equation of Muhammed with God although it does not explicitly say this. Indeed, the alternative reading of Muhammed merely outpacing Gabriel in the trip from earth to heaven and so being able to trick him could easily be made. The simultaneous suggestion of blasphemy and aggrandization (Lording and lauding⁴⁹⁵) nonetheless remains; the suggestion is given that Muhammed is inseparable from God without explicitly stating it.

Even more blasphemous, and so even less overtly mentioned, is the hope that God, on Judgement Day, will absolve a person because his devotion found acceptance from a living *pir* who was in turn accepted by a deceased *pir*, and so on through *silsilah*

⁴⁹² Language is usually a clear indicator of religious faith, and I can only conclude that it is part of the leadership provided by people such as Shuja *et al* to express a greater measure of religious inter-dependence.

⁴⁹³ Eickelman similarly comments that the *marabouts* in Morocco make 'no formal assertion ... of the "closeness" of the Sheqawa (his subject group) and God' even as they operate under the shared assumption of this closeness, which deflects attacks from Islamic reformers (see Eickelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 11, 180; and Sākalāyēn, *op. cit.*, introductory comments to the first edition).

⁴⁹⁴ See James, *op. cit.*, 40.

⁴⁹⁵ Or, in Roy's words, the 'co-existence and interpenetration ... of orthodoxy and heterodoxy' (see Roy, 'Islamization in South Asia', 32).

connections right back to Muhammed?⁴⁹⁶ Or does the devotee at least hope to plead non-culpability at the Day of Judgement on the grounds of wrong leadership?⁴⁹⁷

The concept of close interaction of God and humans may have been promoted by the incorporation of Hindu concepts of the Avatar.⁴⁹⁸ The thirteenth/nineteenth century poem 'Ocean of Love' exemplifies this intermingling when it begins with obeisance of God and Muhammed, then continues by describing how God (now called Niranjana/Vishnu) drew awareness of Himself from primordial elements and displayed this awareness as the Light of Muhammed.⁴⁹⁹ It also has a source in the Qur'anic insistence on Muhammed's centrality which not only suggests that he is to be respected⁵⁰⁰ and obeyed⁵⁰¹ but even that acceptance of him as a Prophet is one of the pivotal factors deciding one's own acceptability to God.⁵⁰² Moreover, there is at least the possibility of his ability to perform miracles (other than the Qur'an itself⁵⁰³) and intercede for others.⁵⁰⁴ This does not provide a theological justification for the attribution of divinity to Muhammed, but it does suggest a climate whereby hints of such an idea could get a favourable response.⁵⁰⁵ Intercession was also foundational to

⁴⁹⁶ Salvation through devotion to one's *pir* is a wide belief in the Indian Subcontinent (see Buehler, *op. cit.*, 300).

⁴⁹⁷ Although these are tentative ideas rather than report-based (not that those hoping to plead ignorance are likely to confess to knowing they were ignorant) they do concur with suggestions elsewhere in the subcontinent. One report suggests that Muhammad will, at God's prompting, demarcate between sinners and the righteous after death (see Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*, 149; and M Rahmān, *op. cit.*, 37)

⁴⁹⁸ 'Allah and the Prophet are two Avatars' wrote Lalou Fakir (who is perceived by Bangladeshi Muslims to be a Muslim and West Bengal Indian Hindus to be a Hindu (see A Caiduri, *Lālan Śāh*, Dhaka, 1992, 140).

⁴⁹⁹ See [tr.] D Cashin, *The Ocean of Love Ali Raja's Agama/Jnana Sagara*, Stockholm, 1989, 11-21.

⁵⁰⁰ See for example surahs al-Nūr (24: 63), al-Hūjurāt (49:1-3), and al-Mujādila (58:12-13).

⁵⁰¹ See for example surahs al-Nisā² (4:59, 4:80), al-Anfāl (8:20, 24), al-Aḥzāb (33:71), and al-Taghābun (64:8).

⁵⁰² See for example surah al-Baqarah (3:132), surah al-Nisā² (4:13), al-Fatḥ (48:17), and al-Şaf (61:11-13).

⁵⁰³ Such as the splitting of the moon in surah al Qamar (54:1).

⁵⁰⁴ See for example surah al Mu²minīn (23:118).

⁵⁰⁵ Although most writers accept that Hindu practices impacted on Sufism in the Indian subcontinent, some postulate that Sufism was complete before arriving in India

Hindu thought as well⁵⁰⁶ and just as Hindu concepts of the body or cosmology positively fed back with similar Muslim ideas, it seems the suggestion of intercession may be founded in both faiths.

It is therefore clear that ambiguity is both protective and suggestive. It deflects potential anger and both suggests spiritual truths through local images and makes spiritual progress locally available. Ambiguity does not however imply either incoherence or randomness. Informal religious leadership in Rosulpur not only has a pattern, this pattern mirrors the major concerns of both textual Islam and Muslim practices elsewhere. The Fast is honoured, just as the Qur'an demands, although the form such honour takes is re-negotiated. The *ḥajj* is a once-in-a-lifetime hope, but financial realities mean a trip to Shah Jalal's *majar* in Sylhet rather than Mecca is aimed for.⁵⁰⁷ Even departures from the faith are shared. In Bangladesh (as elsewhere) the drinking of alcohol is seen as wrong but not reprehensible whereas the eating of pig-meat, which actually is Qur'anically allowed under extreme conditions,⁵⁰⁸ is never deemed acceptable.⁵⁰⁹ The point is not that such actions are 'right' or 'wrong' but that similarity of practice suggests Muslims in Rosulpur do share an agenda of faith that centres around a few Qur'anic ideas⁵¹⁰ and a mythological image of Mecca.⁵¹¹

and thus it could not have been augmented by other ideas (see, for example, Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture*, 123).

⁵⁰⁶ They actually pre-date Hinduism since during the Vedic Age (which ended around 800 BC) the eastward-migrating Aryans developed the concept of intercession while compiling the four Vedas until by the third of these (in the Atharva-Veda) it is suggested that some of the Gods themselves depend on priest-led rituals before being able to act (see D MacKenzie, *India*, Guernsey, 84).

⁵⁰⁷ It does not of course command as much respect as the actual *ḥajj* but most of those of Rosulpur and surrounding villages who gathered to travel by overnight bus to the *majar* definitely saw the trip as a pilgrimage (*ziyārat* rather than *jātra* or *brāman kora* was the word used to describe the journey). The bus unfortunately crashed en route.

⁵⁰⁸ See surah al-Naḥl (16:115).

⁵⁰⁹ I have met perhaps five Muslims who have tried pig meat (from curiosity) whereas many more than this have drunk alcohol (this situation is far from unique to Bangladesh and suggests the tacit acceptance that purity and its lack are graduated; see Buitelaar, *op. cit.*, 104, 106).

⁵¹⁰ Just as it has been suggested that purity is a central concept to Ramadan in Moroccan and actions are performed following this imperative, it could be said that maintaining community cohesion is paramount in Bangladesh and rituals such as the Fast are ordered accordingly. To try and enforce the full thirty days of Fasting would undermine this central aspect, so such challenges are not made and community

Moreover it is centred by the person of the *pir* (in particular, although the other informal leaders such as *fakirs* and singers are also important) since authority in Islam tends always to be personalised. This tendency is far from unique to modern Bangladeshi Islam since it is hard to imagine the early (second/seventh century) figure of Ibn Hanbal having so much influence had he lacked the courage to challenge al-Ma'mun's ideas. Nor is personalisation of authority unrelated to Islamic legal theories, since the person of the *mujtahid* was inseparable from the concept of *ijtihād* (one could not claim to be a *mujtahid* unless *ijtihād* was performed.⁵¹² This personalisation of authority is also shown in the way Islamic law developed primarily as an oral, not written, discipline (although the two forms were complementary rather than in competition). Al-Shafi'i, for example, would recite his *Risāla* to pupils and later check whether they had correctly recorded his words (his memory having final authority). This oral basis to knowledge is also reflected in the ancient *matn* and *sharh* legal text-book system whereby the *matn* was an almost cryptically short summary of legal knowledge that was designed to be memorised while the *sharh* was a more complete explanation that could be read when specifically needed. In contemporary Bangladesh, religious knowledge is briefly taught at primary school level but supplemented by oral traditions particularly as practiced by the singers. The discussion of religious ideas in *Pīr-Muridī Samasyā* and some of the currently-used children's texts for teaching Islam at primary level in Bangladesh⁵¹³ are similarly structured as a series of questions and answers, and again this suggests a dominating

enhancing forms (such as evening feasting) are instead promoted (see Buitelaar, *op. cit.*, 102).

⁵¹¹ As reinforced by poetical images of the 'internal Mecca' that echo al-Hallaj's advice that 'the important thing is to proceed seven times around the Ka'ba of one's heart' (see S Āli, *op. cit.*, 17; No Author, *Jana Priya Lālan Sāiyer Gān*, 24; A Rašid, *op. cit.*, 104; and M Homayouni, *The Origins of Persian Gnosis*, London, 1992, 14).

⁵¹² Just as a *pir* must act as a *pir* regardless of his knowledge or genealogy. Indeed, that is Hozrot Ali's problem. He has the credentials in the form of a written *silsilah* that reaches all the way back to Muhammed (and none in the area appear to question the validity of this document) as well as nomination by his father. Yet as one of his closest associates disappointedly told me in Hozrot Ali's absence, 'the line will stop with his death because he is lazy' (ie he does not do what is expected of a *pir* because he does not know enough Arabic to control the Spirits).

⁵¹³ See V Hāmid, *Pīr-Muridī Samasyā*, Calcutta, 1924; and M Parbhij, *Islām Dharma Śikhā Ditiyā Śrenī*, 3-11.

oral tradition (while not proving it since this format could also be a literary device). Because Islamic learning was personalised, the *madrassah* education system rarely became accountable to a larger constituency or an independent corpus of knowledge but remained localised and bound to a single, central figure. Rather than a student gaining credibility through an impersonal degree or certificate, the personalised *ijaza* conferred by a known scholar allowed the learner to begin teaching.⁵¹⁴

Such centering of authority comes about because as the informal religious leaders validate their neighbours' understanding of Islam they in turn have their own leadership validated. This understanding promotes those features of the faith most villagers hold as central (such as hope for salvation, peaceful co-existence with Hindus, the need to offer some recompense to God⁵¹⁵) and it helps to negotiate compromise forms of problematic religious observances. This requires expert knowledge of local realities and an almost *qiyās*-like methodology to identify essential principles (the need to survive and to provide for one's family⁵¹⁶) and then extend these into daily-life situations. The *pirs*, for example, recognise the difficulty of praying when the requirement for ritual cleanliness would take time away from daily labour, and hence tacitly accept a form of fasting and prayer that varies from the Qur'an. Prayer is therefore widespread every Friday and mandatory at Eid but very

⁵¹⁴ This is why the *madrassah* can not be seen as analogous to the European university despite superficial similarities (see Messick, *op. cit.*, 29-33, 191-192, 213; and G Makdisi, 'Law and Traditionalism in the Institutes of Learning' in [ed.] von Grunebaum, *op. cit.*, 75-88).

⁵¹⁵ The Sunni observance of Muharram similarly accesses a remote (to Sunnis) Islamic concept to answer absolute human needs, in this case a theodicy (ie an explanation of how evil and suffering can co-exist with a good, omnipotent God - 'to justify the ways of God to man' in Milton's phrase). The Shi'ite story of Karbala does chronicle how suffering can be reconciled with Islamic faith. The poor in Bangladesh have the suffering of poverty to contend, although those I have asked regarding participation in Muharram have always simply replied that they enjoy the festivities (see E Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, New Jersey, 1984, 3-5; to note how suffering may be negotiated through poetry and song see Abu-Lughod, *op. cit.*, 174).

⁵¹⁶ These human wishes are endorsed by the Qur'an (see surah al-Nisā³ 4:29). Providing for one's family is made more difficult in Bangladesh because of the day-to-day nature of the vast majority's economic circumstances and the total lack of any governmental 'safety-net' provisions (even the 'free' hospitals all-too often require bribes).

few pray five times daily.⁵¹⁷ By understanding local difficulties, utilising ambiguities inherent in the Qur'an⁵¹⁸ and emphasizing that salvation may be obtained through faith and mediation rather than total observance of the rituals, the *pirs* give authoritative sanction to the practice of Islam around them. Similarly, perhaps one of the most controversial aspects of Samad's song *Mucha Nabī Jārī* concerns the pre-eminence of a *pagol* over the Prophet Moses. This is not merely the personalisation of authority, this is aggrandisement localised saints which is underlined as the song finishes with the singer slipping out of narrator mode and addressing the listeners as himself to direct them to take care and note of their local saints despite their apparent unimportance.

To some extent this concentration on what is familiar echoes the '*ulama's* acceptance of European codes as temporary compromises while highlighting the *Shari'ah* perfection and waiting for the culminating triumph of Islam when the *Shari'ah* will be fully implemented. And just as it was argued that the *Shari'ah* so treated became as much a rhetorical device as a legal code,⁵¹⁹ it can be said the *pirs* presented a rhetorical view of faith since they carefully chose their evidence (an idealised view of Arabia, and a slight understanding of the Qur'an and hadith supplemented by folkloric stories) to propagate a vision of Islam that both satisfied their neighbour's aspirations and put themselves in positions of leadership. While it is commonplace for *pir*-centred faith to be dismissed as improper⁵²⁰ it seems almost churlish to be overly critical of their

⁵¹⁷ I never saw anyone observing the early morning prayers in the new mosque in Rosulpur (which does not preclude the possibility of people praying at home, or in the old mosque). The Fast can similarly be seen as something that, when fully realised, will be part of an ideal world (see Buitelaar, *op. cit.*, 83).

⁵¹⁸ 'The Qoran (sic) expresses great mysteries by means of aphorisms which are too elliptic to "cause offence" but which have at the same time an overwhelming directness' (see Lings, *A Sufi Saint*, 39).

⁵¹⁹ 'Rhetorical' because its importance was greatly emphasized (by glossing over the fact that it had long ceased to have more than a peripheral legal function in Islamic societies and concentrating instead on the belief that it would, in God's time, become of central importance) to the point that it became an '*ulama*'-led rallying point of faith by the selective interpretation of evidence.

⁵²⁰ Census, corrupt, nominal, and folk are some such descriptions of Bengali Muslims' faith (see Roy, 'Islamization in South Asia', 26-28).

leadership when it was historically pivotal in the mass conversion⁵²¹ of people to Islam. It is currently still respected⁵²² perhaps because the other two contenders for religious authority are not widely trusted (the political leaders who espouse Islam but are generally held to be corrupt and the orthodox groups which are too associated with acts of cruelty or repression⁵²³).

In conclusion, this chapter has considered the uncertain relationship between the theory of Islam and the practice of Muslims, particularly in Rosulpur village. It has tried to avoid viewing saints in isolation and thereby 'describing elephants as trees'⁵²⁴ but recognises that relationship between theory and practice is somewhat less than 'cause and effect'. In the absence of historical documents such as letters and tracts (probably few to begin with and destroyed by innumerable monsoons) exactly what linkage there was between core ideas of Islam as reflected in the Qur'an, hadith, influential writings and customary practice of those far from Bengal, and societal mores in Rosulpur itself can only be guessed at. It must be considered unlikely that, for example, groups of the urban learned and rural *pirs* collectively decided that al-Ghazali's defence of singing⁵²⁵ made local forms such as the *ekdil* or *jāri gān* (such as they then existed) lawful forms of worship. The absence of arguments such as those cited above that 'prove' the authenticity of village practice suggests that those likely to make such claims (the urban-based '*ulama*') were not interested in doing so. Yet the presence of village practices that parallel these core ideas does suggest a linkage beyond the co-incidental. The loyalty given to a *pir* is powerful enough to suggest the

⁵²¹ 'Conversion' itself is an uncertain description of events whereby Islam progressively became the decisive faith of the majority of Bengalis through 'inclusion' 'identification' and 'displacement' (see Eaton, The Rise of Islam, 270-290).

⁵²² Although such respect would seem to be declining.

⁵²³ Such as the Chattro-Shabir's widely reported habit of blinding or cutting the tendons of those who oppose them, and the Jamaat-i-Islami's opposition to empowerment of rural women despite the large measure of support this has generated because of its success in alleviating poverty.

⁵²⁴ The allusion is to Rumi's elephant-handlers who gropingly explored the animal and declared it to be like a 'water pipe', a 'fan' a 'pillar' or a 'throne' 'on account of the {diverse} place {object} of view'. Perhaps tellingly, the metaphor originally was Buddhist (see [tr.] Nicholson, The Mathnavi of Jalalu'Uddin Rumi, [volume III and IV], 71-72; and R Zaehner, Hindu and Muslim Mysticism, London, 1960, 100, 101).

⁵²⁵ See F Karim, Imam Ghazzali's Ihya Ulum-Din (Book II), Delhi, 1991, 182-202.

bay'ah pact given to caliphs⁵²⁶ without sharing any of its formal structure. The consensus needed for *pir* leadership does similarly suggest *ijma'* without actually adhering to the strict legal framework of that juristic device.

Some surety is apparent amid this uncertainty. The '*ulama*' and the *pirs* have been culturally and geographically separated from each other throughout the history of Bengal, a separation compounded by the relative weakness of central control⁵²⁷ and consistent with a desire for co-existence rather than conflict. The *Shari'ah* has proved to be both flexible⁵²⁸ and inspirational even when not strictly applied; while the mystical practices that proved influential at village level were shrouded in enough ambiguity to deflect conflict with orthodox ideas. This atmosphere of 'seeing without seeing'⁵²⁹ was enhanced by the *pirs* whose power was itself concentrated by the personalisation of authority common in Islamic societies.⁵³⁰ This is not to argue legal

⁵²⁶ And to the leaders of larger, well established, Sufi Orders (which again suggests a divide exists between any well organised grouping - whether political, orthodox-religious, or Sufi - on the one hand, and the small, *pir*-centred groups on the other. In the Middle East, both the '*ulama*' and Sufi groups tended to associate themselves with the ruling elite (see Reeves, *op. cit.*, 2-4; and Berger, *op. cit.*, 67).

⁵²⁷ As shown by its ability to 'control material resources and benefits and ... compel obedience to political decree, enforce tax collection, and so on'. Such control and compulsion was minimised in historical Bengal because geographic conditions whereby huge rivers became inland lakes every monsoon, and continues to be minimal in modern Bangladesh, partly because poverty truncates central government. So long as central demands remain slight local leaders are unlikely to challenge them. But if the centre does make unpopular intrusions into the periphery it will lose support - as happened in the 1986 local elections in Bangladesh when vote-rigging impacted on the hitherto reasonably fair local elections and led to village level disenchantment with the Ershad regime (see Gilson, *Saint and Sufi*, 190).

⁵²⁸ A flexibility that comes from the prime source of the *Shari'ah*, the Qur'an, being too exact to apply widely thus other forms of regulation had to be found, and from the elasticity of central concepts such as *ijma'* (it has never been settled, for example, how extensive agreement must be before being deemed authoritative) as well as how these central concepts interact (how, for example, does the *sunnah* of Mohammed differ from *'urf* or at what point does *ra'y* become *ijtihad*).

⁵²⁹ Which is encouraged when 'each man is his own master (and) the world is recognised as imperfect so that men strive to criticize the actions of others as little as possible unless it directly affects their own interests' (see Eickelman, *The Middle East*, 189).

⁵³⁰ This began with the personalisation of Muhammed's authority, and belief in him (as Prophet) and the Qur'an (as Revelation) are often mentioned together as being pivotally important. It is on his and the Book's authenticity (as Prophet and exactly

justification but rather suggest a mechanism that combines the authority ceded to *pirs*, the strong corporate sense of being Muslim, and the widely observed unorthodoxy.

This has eventually been an initial study of a barely researched topic. Bangladesh's rural areas of limited reputation. Consistent with initial studies, there have been essentially no studies, although not completely absent. The unorthodox/different, for example, has not been touched or much or recognized. This was done in a manner relevant to the topic, with the study of the Dharmas, whose main approach are a formal grouping of religious scholarly leaders but who actually have many of the qualities of unorthodox leaders such as *pirs*.

After exploring such key ideas like anthropology and presenting observations of religious practice in Bangladesh, a classification of these observations was proposed which suggests religious tradition in Bangladesh village is shared amongst a variety of practitioners skilled in areas such as healing, knowledge, education, even entertainment. The derivation of terms, observation of phenomena, and qualitative classification follows the unorthodox/scholarly European scientific model whose limitations were (highlighted in the introduction). These restrictions have, as far as possible, been recognized and countered by acknowledging that the observer is not some remote detached and analyzer but a living person intimately involved in the events he or she studies.¹⁰ Moreover, within the pluralist 'define, observe, and classify' model, classification has largely not been according to imposed concepts but rather instead been consistent with the belief system of Bangladeshis Muslims, Gans of Kowloon is particular. This approach, for example, has been examined with respect to Qur'anic studies rather than the theories of political Islamism as expounded by Weber, Huntington, Mead, et al. The explanation of how Kowloon is socially structured and culture defined back to the *Shari'ah* which has is theoretically the most important code by which Islamic societies are organized, an importance apparently reflected in the significant detail the 'norms' employed in describing and defining how Muslims should live and collectively interact.

recorded Word of God respectively) rather than theological or legal arguments that authority is vested. (Waqf and *Shari'ah*).

Chapter Five: Conclusion.

This has essentially been an initial study of a barely researched topic, Bangladeshi rural saints of localised reputation. Consistent with initial studies, terms have been carefully explored, although not completely defined. The formal/informal dichotomy, for example, has not been resolved as much as exemplified. This was done in a manner relevant to the topic, with the study of the Deobandi '*ulama*' who supposedly are a formal grouping of orthodox scholarly leaders but who actually have many of the qualities of unorthodox leaders such as *pirs*.

After exploring such key, albeit fluid, terminology and presenting observations of religious practice in Rosulpur, a classification of these observations was proposed which suggests religious leadership in Rosulpur village is shared amongst a variety of practitioners skilled in areas such as healing, knowledge, recitation, even entertainment. This definition of terms, observation of phenomenon, and tentative classification follows the nineteenth-century European scientific model whose limitations were (foot)noted in the introduction. These restrictions have, as far as possible, been recognised and countered by acknowledging that the observer is not some remote recorder-and-analyser but a living person intrinsically involved in the events he or she studies.⁵³¹ Moreover, within the classical 'define, observe and classify' model, classification has largely not been according to imposed concepts but it has instead been consistent with the belief system of Bangladeshi Muslims, those of Rosulpur in particular. Thus leadership, for example, has been examined with respect to Qur'anic themes rather than the theories of political leadership as expounded by Weber, Bottomore, Mosca, *et al.* The examination of how Rosulpur is socially structured similarly referred back to the *Shari^cah* since this is theoretically the most important code by which Islamic societies are organised, an importance apparently reflected in the incredible detail the '*ulama*' employed in defining and deciding how Muslims should live and collectively interact.

⁵³¹ Such as those of Mundy and Buitelaar.

It has however been suggested that the *Shari'ah* is ultimately as much a rhetorical device to inspire Muslims as it is a complete code of life to order them into structured societies. The *Shari'ah* suggests there is an exact, legally prescribed, way of performing every human action and that, in the fullness of God's time, each correct way will be known and obeyed. This inspirational function is paramount; the apparent marginalisation of the *Shari'ah* into a handful of laws regarding (for example) inheritance or marital affairs has been more than counterbalanced by its centralization as part of the Qur'anically promised culmination of history when Islam will prevail.

Paralleling the *Shari'ah* in both theoretical and actual functions of governance is the Muslim leader. Rulers such as caliphs and *imāms* were supposedly to give integrated guidance accessible to all; writings such as the 'Mirrors of Princes' genre show how this ideal was again transmuted into both pragmatic practice and idealised mythology. The bell-pull outside the Sultan's Palace was available for all in the Ottoman Empire to appeal to Sovereign justice - for as long as it was not generally used.

Pir leadership (along with other informal village styles) is, by contrast, easily accessible; but at the cost of deliberately eschewing the type of absolutism leaders such as the '*ulama*' or caliphs claimed. Instead, the *pirs* et al give a sense of worth and meaning to their followers; the former by hinting at God's acceptance despite non-adherence to rituals such as the Fast; the latter by reference to a cosmology that links daily life into universal operations. Despite their avoidance of overt, all-embracing claims, the apparent universality of informal religious leadership styles is one of its more intriguing aspects. In Rosulpur, just as in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco or cities of Tunisia, it is these religious figures of local renown⁵³² who are entrusted to direct daily faith rather than those more orthodox persons whose credentials rest on remote authorities.⁵³³ Part of this continuity can be explained by parallelism; illness is

⁵³² Werbner suggests that throughout South Asian Islam there is a tendency to perceive history in terms of outstanding personages (see P Werbner, 'Introduction', *Social Analysis*, 28 [1990], 3).

⁵³³ This informal universality is echoed in other ways too; trucks fronting painted hands of Fatima as if anthropomorphically parrying harm from the inanimate machine, or women wearing a veil to symbolically protect themselves from their ruler's impiety,

part of the human condition so healers are always needed. In the absence of medical practitioners, faith-healers will be relied on; in Islamic societies these people will work within the symbols and concepts of Islam. But the convergence of details suggests more than mere parallel development. Spiritual healers may need training in order to access the spiritual power they need, but why does 'forty days' recur as a motif in this preparation, for example? Haru and Nizam Ali (amongst others) mentioned this as the period needed to gain access to one's *pir* outside of time and space constraints and get control over the *jinn* respectively; is it coincidence that forty days is also the period of initiatory exercises mentioned in the Qur'an⁵³⁴ and, prior to that, the Torat and the Injil?⁵³⁵ It seems that local practice and features of the wider faith have interacted, and reinforced each other at times.⁵³⁶ Rosulpur residents are Muslims, not primarily because they follow rituals of the faith (as Islamicists might say) or because their actions continuously re-create a sense of Islamic identity (as anthropologists might suggest) but from an interaction of the two. Their self-awareness of being Muslim results from a negotiation of classical ideas of Islam into locally framed forms. Samad's song about Moses and Pharaoh glosses over the Qur'anic account which emphasizes the contest of power between the two and dwells on locally-important themes such as the need for healing⁵³⁷ and the closeness unknown local saints may have to God and their subsequent ability to intercede.

This negotiation of core Islamic themes and regionalised individual concerns could only take place within a flexible situation, such as that provided by *pir* leadership. Their allowance and promotion of ambiguity suggested truths beyond mention,

can be seen right across Asia and the Middle East (see Eickelman and Piscatori, Muslim Politics, New Jersey, 1996, 3-4).

⁵³⁴ See surah al-Baqarah (2:51); this story of Moses is repeated in surah al-A'raf (7:142).

⁵³⁵ See Exodus 24:18 and Matthew 4:2. The former reference is again of Moses, the later of Jesus. It is not only in preparation or initiation that 'forty days' features, since it is the period of supposed impurity following childbirth in both (at least?) Bangladesh and Morocco (see Buitelaar, op. cit., 112).

⁵³⁶ Gilsenan makes the point that just as Sufis tacitly support the '*ulama*' even when challenging them because they do so within the latter's legal and logical framework, reference to the Qur'an reinforces its importance even though specific rulings are not exactly followed (see Gilsenan, Saint and Sufi, 23).

⁵³⁷ Of childlessness, a major reason women visit *pirs*.

protected those who searched out such truths using unQur'anic methods, and perhaps even hinted at absolution for the searchers. In dim light, oblique vision serves best.⁵³⁸

Whether *pirs* will continue to provide leadership into the future is debatable.⁵³⁹ They have certainly hitherto retained a large measure of influence despite competition from the *madrassah*-trained orthodox and politically-directed secularists but may well lose power (along with the other two groups) to the emerging group of Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) workers. This group shares a secular outlook with the politicians but is hitherto untainted by their extreme degree of corruption.

Of all the events witnessed during my field research perhaps the most important, and certainly the most effusively acknowledged, was the victory of the Bangladeshi cricket team in a second-tier international event (the ICC trophy). This win allowed them to enter the 'premier league' of cricket nations and it was immediately and spontaneously celebrated (after a day in Dhaka city when the entire populous appeared glued to transistor radios or compelled to regularly question those so attached) with explosive fire-crackers and flag-waving processions. If the *pirs* led by giving people a sense of worth and meaning it could well be that their localized terms of reference are passing. In Bangladesh, as elsewhere, honour increasingly comes from global (rather than geographical) village recognition and those who appear to be familiar with and valued by this media-framed, semi-imaginary society could be the next generation of leaders.

⁵³⁸ Looking slightly away from a semi-darkened article optimises perception of it because receptors in the eye that discern black and white are located to the sides (colour receptors are clustered around the centre)..

⁵³⁹ Jewel, the twenty-something year old student son of the owner of Chowduri Para where I stayed in Rosulpur was representative of his generation's genial derision of *pirs*, *fakirs et al.* He simply saw them as impostors and rogues and thought my research amusing in its irrelevance. Mintu, a generation older, retained full respect for such people but thought the keeping of vows (as an example of informal religious observances) had fallen from around half of the village population to a fifth in one generation.

Glossary

<i>Āsīrbād</i>	Blessing.
<i>Āttiya</i>	Extended family. This word is often collocated as <i>āttiyo-sajan</i> .
<i>Āwliyā</i>	Qur'anic term, implying closeness to God.
<i>Baby taxi</i>	Three-wheeled motorised taxi.
<i>Bangsha</i>	Lineage. Like all kinship terms it can be ambiguous and thus meaning can vary with context (for example sometimes equating to religion).
<i>Ban kora</i>	To curse.
<i>Bāper bāri</i>	Father's house. This is often the way one's original home is expressed.
<i>Barga jamin</i>	This usually refers to sharecropped land, although it can sometimes imply land that is simply rented for a fixed price.
<i>Bayti</i>	See <i>gīyak</i>
<i>Bicār</i>	Informal village court.
<i>Boishakh</i>	First month of the Bengali calendar (and first of the two-month hot season) lasting from mid April until mid-May.
<i>Burqa</i>	All-covering garment women often wear when outside their immediate neighbourhood.
<i>Cakker lāge</i>	The 'evil eye'.
<i>Chalasi</i>	Funeral ceremony held forty days after death (also called <i>karaj</i>).
<i>Car</i>	Thief
<i>Chotro</i>	Last of the twelve months in the Bengali calendar and second of the spring.
<i>Dhuti</i>	Lower-body garment for Hindu men.
<i>Fakir</i>	A somewhat fluid term, implying one with a serious interest in following a particular

	<i>pirśab</i> , or line of spiritual inquiry. It probably implies the possession of some spiritual powers too.
<i>Gīyāk</i>	Singer (also known as <i>bayti</i>).
<i>Ghar</i>	House; usually in the village this will be a single-roomed hut. In the Tangail region these usually have bamboo thatched or corrugated iron walls but in other parts of the country mud walls are common.
<i>Gram</i>	Village; but see main text for further comment regarding the fluidity of all terminology surrounding 'village'. etc.
<i>Hāṭ</i>	Regular (usually weekly) market held in a fixed location.
<i>Jādukar</i>	Magician.
<i>Janaza</i>	Funeral ceremony held just after death.
<i>Jāri gān</i>	Village song of a religious nature.
<i>Kabirāj</i>	Healer who relies on a knowledge of plants for his or her skill. There may or may not be a supernatural aspect assumed in this healing.
<i>Kadam</i>	Caretaker of a <i>majar</i> . Larger <i>majars</i> will have several attendants, descendants of the original (probably long deceased) <i>pirśab</i> .
<i>Kartik</i>	Seventh month of the Bengali calendar (and first of the two-month autumn season) lasting from mid October to mid-November.
<i>Khedmot</i>	Service, such as labour, given by a follower to a <i>pir</i> as an act of devotion.
<i>Kilapod</i>	See <i>silsilah</i> .
<i>Kurta-pyjama</i>	Long shirt and loose trousers (so loose the word was adopted into the English language as night attire). This type of clothing is associated with religious men.

<i>Mastan</i>	Thug, but usually with connections to powerful families or politicians.
<i>Matabor</i>	One who has the responsibility of conducting the village <i>bicārs</i> and passing judgement.
<i>Matha</i>	Group of spirits.
<i>Majar</i>	Tomb of a reputed saint. It may be attended by caretakers and be a substantial building (such as Lalon Shah's <i>majar</i> in Kushtia or Kasmiri Badshah's <i>majar</i> in Atiya) or a simple village structure.
<i>Milad/Milat</i>	Ceremony of thanksgiving a remembrance of Muhammed.
<i>Munṣī</i>	Term of respect for a man well versed in formal Islam, also used for the leader of a mosque.
<i>Namaj</i>	Salat, or the five-times-daily ritual prayer prescribed in Islam.
<i>Niyat</i>	Oath taken, usually in private or within family confines but redeemed at a <i>majar</i> , an <i>ekdil</i> ceremony or (less often) at a mosque. Also known as <i>minat</i> , or <i>mansek</i> .
<i>Ograyon</i>	Eighth month of the Bengali calendar, (and second of the two-month autumn season) lasting from mid November to mid December.
<i>Oja (or Roja)</i>	Healer of the complaint known as <i>sarper bātās</i> or the imbibing of snakes' breath.
<i>Pāgal</i>	'Mad', but at times carrying connotations of Divine Inspiration.
<i>Paṛa</i>	Section of a village.
<i>Pirśab</i>	A somewhat fluid term for an informal religious leader. It usually implies having devotees and access to spiritual power, either

	through knowledge of the Qur'an and hadith, or familiarity with intermediary spirits.
<i>Puriba</i>	Family, usually nuclear (as distinct from <i>āttiya</i> , extended family).
<i>Sarper Bātās</i>	Literally "snakes' breath", this is the attributed reason for a range of complaints such as nausea, fainting, vomiting etc.
<i>Śisū</i>	Literally 'child', this word is often used for a disciple of a <i>pirśab</i> .
<i>Sāmāj</i>	Societal group. This can correspond to religion, village, family etc depending on context.
<i>Silsilah</i>	Spiritual chain linking a <i>pirśab</i> to his supposed source. Also known as <i>kilapod</i> .
<i>Tābij</i>	Amulet.
<i>Tempo</i>	Three-wheeled motorised public transport vehicle that runs fixed routes allowing people to get on or off wherever they choose.
<i>Urus</i>	Yearly celebration recalling the death date of a <i>pirśab</i> , or saint. These are generally held in the winter months, regardless of when the death actually occurred, and may reflect the importance of the current <i>pirśab</i> rather than the original founder of the mystical line.

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¹⁰ Whether Satan acquired a form or an image is not clear (see Y. Ali, pp. 107, 110, footnote 337).

¹¹ See surah al-Baqarah (2:166), surah al-A'raf (7:142), surah Ya-Sin (36:6) and surah al-Zakariya (21:102).

¹² See surah al-Ma'idah (5:90), surah Matfufunah (47:27), surah Zukhruf (24:20-21) and surah Sha'ar (28:22).

¹³ See surah Yusuf (12:42) and surah al-Kahf (18:70).

¹⁴ Similar to surah al-Baqarah (2:170) which says the trouble between Joseph and his brothers is Satan. It is surah Araf (7:141) which mentions the suffering of Noah.

¹⁵ See surah al-Baqarah (2:170-171) and surah Haq (10:25) respectively. For a list of those who worshipped the pre-Islamic gods see W. Fisher, *The Original Sources of the Qur'an* (London, 1925, 28) and M. Lecker, *The Worship of pre-Islamic Gods in Mecca* (1997), 131-136.

¹⁶ Various translations have various names such as 'false gods', 'gods' which include God. Those whom you have worshipped and whose names you recited as partners to God. See, for example, surah al-Araf (7:191), surah al-Araf (7:194, 7:195), surah Yunus (10:100), surah al-Hajj (22:17, 22:18), surah al-Zakariya (29:17), surah al-Baqarah (2:122), surah al-Baqarah (2:123-124), surah al-Baqarah (2:125), surah al-Baqarah (2:126), surah al-Baqarah (2:127), surah al-Baqarah (2:128), surah al-Baqarah (2:129), surah al-Baqarah (2:130), surah al-Baqarah (2:131), surah al-Baqarah (2:132), surah al-Baqarah (2:133), surah al-Baqarah (2:134), surah al-Baqarah (2:135), surah al-Baqarah (2:136), surah al-Baqarah (2:137), surah al-Baqarah (2:138), surah al-Baqarah (2:139), surah al-Baqarah (2:140), surah al-Baqarah (2:141), surah al-Baqarah (2:142), surah al-Baqarah (2:143), surah al-Baqarah (2:144), surah al-Baqarah (2:145), surah al-Baqarah (2:146), surah al-Baqarah (2:147), surah al-Baqarah (2:148), surah al-Baqarah (2:149), surah al-Baqarah (2:150), surah al-Baqarah (2:151), surah al-Baqarah (2:152), surah al-Baqarah (2:153), surah al-Baqarah (2:154), surah al-Baqarah (2:155), surah al-Baqarah (2:156), surah al-Baqarah (2:157), surah al-Baqarah (2:158), surah al-Baqarah (2:159), surah al-Baqarah (2:160), surah al-Baqarah (2:161), surah al-Baqarah (2:162), surah al-Baqarah (2:163), surah al-Baqarah (2:164), surah al-Baqarah (2:165), surah al-Baqarah (2:166), surah al-Baqarah (2:167), surah al-Baqarah (2:168), surah al-Baqarah (2:169), surah al-Baqarah (2:170), surah al-Baqarah (2:171), surah al-Baqarah (2:172), surah al-Baqarah (2:173), surah al-Baqarah (2:174), surah al-Baqarah (2:175), surah al-Baqarah (2:176), surah al-Baqarah (2:177), surah al-Baqarah (2:178), surah al-Baqarah (2:179), surah al-Baqarah (2:180), surah al-Baqarah (2:181), surah al-Baqarah (2:182), surah al-Baqarah (2:183), surah al-Baqarah (2:184), surah al-Baqarah (2:185), surah al-Baqarah (2:186), surah al-Baqarah (2:187), surah al-Baqarah (2:188), surah al-Baqarah (2:189), surah al-Baqarah (2:190), surah al-Baqarah (2:191), surah al-Baqarah (2:192), surah al-Baqarah (2:193), surah al-Baqarah (2:194), surah al-Baqarah (2:195), surah al-Baqarah (2:196), surah al-Baqarah (2:197), surah al-Baqarah (2:198), surah al-Baqarah (2:199), surah al-Baqarah (2:200).

Appendix One: The Theory Behind, and Indian Subcontinental Practice of, Placating Spirits.

Two certainties have always existed for Muslims; God is Greater than anything else and Muhammed was a genuine Prophet of God. Other than these 'anchors of the soul' there are lesser powers and messengers to be recognised (without being exalted) and imperatives to follow. The supernatural beings mentioned in the Qur'an are such powers. They are either inferior or superior beings who interact in human affairs and possess strengths that demand acknowledgement. Satan (Iblis) is paramount amongst the inferior spirits⁵⁴⁰ and there are several specific references that back up the assertion that he is our 'enemy'.⁵⁴¹ For example, he leads people into wrong behaviour⁵⁴² and causes forgetfulness,⁵⁴³ strife,⁵⁴⁴ and suffering.⁵⁴⁵ There are a few other named demons (three who were once worshipped in Mecca and three who Noah's people had worshipped⁵⁴⁶) but most Qur'anic references to evil spirits are more generalised. Many verses stress the ultimate uselessness of these 'demons'.⁵⁴⁷ They would seem at times to operate

⁵⁴⁰ Whether Satan originated as a *jinn* or an angel is not clear (see Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 319, footnote 929).

⁵⁴¹ See surah al-Baqarah (2:168, 2:208), surah al-An'am 6:142), surah Ya'-Sin (36:60) and surah al-Zukhruf (43:62).

⁵⁴² See surah al-Ma'idah (5:90), surah Muhammad (47:25), surah Sabā' (34:20-21) and surah Şād (38:82).

⁵⁴³ See surah Yūsuf (12:42) and surah al-Kahf (18:63).

⁵⁴⁴ Surah Yūsuf 12:100 attributes the trouble between Joseph and his brothers to Satan.

⁵⁴⁵ In surah Rad (38:41) Job blames his suffering on Satan.

⁵⁴⁶ See surah al-Najm (53:19-23) and surah Nuḥ (71:23) respectively. For a list of those idols worshipped by pre-Islamic Arabs see W Tisdall, The Original Sources of the Qur'an, London, 1905, 38; and M Lecker, 'Idol Worship in pre-Islamic Medina', Le Muséon, 106 [1993], 331-346.

⁵⁴⁷ Various translations have various phrases such as 'false deities', 'idols', others-besides-God' 'those-whom-you-have-worshipped' and 'those-whom-you-ascribed-as-partners-to-God'. See, for example, surah al-An'am (6:71, 6:94), surah al-A'raf (7:194, 7:197), surah Yunus (10:106), surah al-Ḥajj (22:73, 22:12; this adds that the demons can not harm either), surah al-Furqān (25:3, 25:55), surah al-Ankabūt (29:17), surah al-Rūm (30:13), surah Sabā' (34:22), surah al-Fātir (35:13-14), surah Yā'-Sin (36:23, 36:74), surah Ha-Mim (41:47-48), surah Zukhruf (43:86) surah al-Jāthiya (45:10), surah al-Aḥqāf (46:28) and surah al-Zumar (39:43 - verse 44 adds that only God can grant intercession).

under God's sanction (as when appointed to oppose prophets,⁵⁴⁸ being used as labour,⁵⁴⁹ countering unbelievers,⁵⁵⁰ and misleading those who will be damned⁵⁵¹).

Jinns are another form of supernatural being⁵⁵² belief in whose existence predates Islam⁵⁵³ and continues despite ambiguity regarding who, exactly, they are. Yusuf Ali suggests they might be 'disembodied spirits of evil men'⁵⁵⁴ presumably because of their being judged alongside human beings for their rejection of faith. It is not only in this exercise of free-will⁵⁵⁵ that *jinn*s resemble human beings. They are created by God,⁵⁵⁶ grouped together by descent,⁵⁵⁷ have physical features,⁵⁵⁸ and are mortal.⁵⁵⁹ Some *jinn*s believed in the veracity of the Qur'an and repented while others remained unrighteous.⁵⁶⁰ *Jinn* are thus presented as a varied group of generally untrustworthy beings. Equally ambiguous, but more to be relied on, are the *wālī* (plural *āwliyāh*). These 'friends of God' straddle both

⁵⁴⁸ See surah al-An^cām (6:112), where *shayṭān al-nās wal-jinn* cause trouble for Messengers to both these groups, presumably to test their resolve. In surah al-Shu^carā³ 26:77) Abraham specifies idols as his enemies.

⁵⁴⁹ See surah al-Anbiya (21:82), where *shayṭāni* were subdued by God and forced to work for Solomon. In other places *jinn* are specified as Solomon's helpers.

⁵⁵⁰ See surah Maryam (19:83).

⁵⁵¹ See surah Zukhruf (43:36-39) and surah al-A^crāf (7:38).

⁵⁵² Surah al-An^cām (6:112) distinguishes *jinn* from *shayṭāns* and incidentally specifies that *jinn*, too, have their messengers (see Y Ali, *op. cit.*).

⁵⁵³ See S Zwemer, The Influence of Animism on Islam, London, 1920, 126 (125-145 explore the topic of *jinn*s).

⁵⁵⁴ See his footnote 953, commenting on surah al-An^cām (6:130; Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 328).

⁵⁵⁵ As also attested by their apparent dissatisfaction when working for Solomon since the extended period of labour obviously was against their will (see surah Sabā³, 34:12-14). Pickthall comments on surah al-Kaḥf (18:50; 'We said to the angels "Bow down to Adam": they bowed except Iblis. He was one of the *jinn*s and he broke the command of his Lord') that Satan's rebellion proves that he was not an angel since *jinn*s and humans (but not angels) have free-will (see Pickthall, *op. cit.*, 299).

⁵⁵⁶ See surah al-An^cām (6:100). Surah al-Ḥijr (15:27) notes that *jinn* were created prior to mankind and were made from fire ('smokeless fire' adds surah al-Raḥmān, 55:15).

⁵⁵⁷ See surah al-A^crāf (7:38) and surah al-Aḥqāf (46:18).

⁵⁵⁸ See surah al-A^crāf (7:179). Here '*jinn*s and men 'We have made for hell' are the subject but it could perhaps be argued that the subsequent pronoun ('they') to whom 'hearts eyes and ears' are attributed refers only to 'men'.

⁵⁵⁹ Many are said to have 'passed away' in surah Fuṣṣilat (41:25).

⁵⁶⁰ See surah al-Jinn (72: in particular verses 2-18).

this, and the next, world⁵⁶¹ and are widely assumed to be able to intercede for their followers. Moreover, a supernatural ranking system is implied since followers hope 'that the *walī* is relatively high on a mystic scale and that he enjoys privileged access to divine favor ... it is desirable ... to make one's request to the most powerful intercessor possible. On the other hand, it is also vital that some relationship has been established with this mediator before one can be assured of his mystic services.'⁵⁶²

Angels are clearly superior beings. Like demons, they remain mostly anonymous although Gabriel is named.⁵⁶³ Similarly, in surah al-Kaḥf (18:60-82) Moses' attendant is often considered to be Khidr, although quite who Khidr was is not agreed. There are also ambiguous references to 'the 'Spirit'⁵⁶⁴ but most numerous are more general mentions. In these, angels are portrayed as being involved on the Day of Judgement (by, for example, bringing of souls to their final judgement

⁵⁶¹ Surah Yunus (10:62-64; 'Behold! Verily on the friends of God there is no fear nor shall they grieve. Those who believe and (constantly) guard against evil, for them are Glad Tidings in the life of the present and in the Hereafter') is the main Qur'anic evidence for the importance of *awliyāh*, but the word (in plural or singular form) appears almost a hundred times in the Qur'an. It is not always translated as friend however and does not always refer to followers of God. In Surah al-Baqarah (2:257) *walī* alludes to God Himself (it is one of His 99 names) and is translated (by Ali) as 'Protector'. As one of God's names, it is also rendered as 'Governor' (by Siddiqi and Afshan) and 'ruler/patron' (by Burrell and Daher). Reeves makes the points that the term *walī* became common in the third/ninth century and initially denoted a 'pious hero' and a 'divine intermediary' and that there is now a tendency in Egypt to refer to deceased saints in particular as *walī/awliyāh*. The tension between 'friend' and 'governor' as meanings of *walī* exemplifies the conflicting visions of how Islamic authority should be manifested (see Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 103; M Siddiqi, *Ninety-Nine Names of Allah*, Delhi, 1990, 110; J Afshan, *The Gracious Names of Allah*, Hyderabad, 1994, 86; D Burrell and N Daher, *Al-Ghazali The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God Al-Maqṣad al-Asna fi Sharh Asma Allah al-Husna*, Cambridge, 1992, 127, 140; Reeves, *op. cit.*, 42-43, 122-125; and Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 31).

⁵⁶² See P Gaffney, "Shaykh, Khutba and Masjid: The Rôle of the Local Islamic Preacher in Upper Egypt," an unpublished PhD thesis, Chicago, 1982, 39; Reeves, *op. cit.*, 209; and Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi*, 56.

⁵⁶³ In surah Taḥrim (66:4), and surah al-Najm (53:5-18) is generally thought to refer to him. Harut and Marut are also disparagingly mentioned (in surah al-Baqarah, 2:102).

⁵⁶⁴ See surah al-Isrā' (17:85), surah Maryam, (19:17-21), surah Ma'arij (70:4) in which the Spirit (*ruh*) is distinguished from angels, as also occurs in surah al-Naba (78:38). Ali mentions (in his footnote 5677) that Gabriel might being referred to, but he prefers a more general reading (see Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 1605).

and thence conveying souls either to heaven or hell⁵⁶⁵), helping believers (including Prophets⁵⁶⁶), and interacting with God.⁵⁶⁷

This is a brief overview of demons, *jinns* and angels only and does not mention all their various functions and attributes. It is intended only to show that just as this visible world has people of different rank and trustworthiness, the invisible world is similarly structured. Although the Qur'an is uncompromising in its upholding of monotheism it does present an array of unequal beings that have to be acknowledged and interacted with. There is therefore a theological basis for people to claim authority on the basis of their ability to deal with, and perhaps even control, these unseen powers.

In the Indian Subcontinent, just as in Middle Eastern, familiarity with these unseen powers was central to the credibility of any would-be saint and it was this knowledge, as distinct from knowledge of the sacred texts of Islam, that distinguished the *pir* (or otherwise labelled saint) from the '*ulama*'. The would-be *pir* also needed an accepted claim of *sayyid* genealogy,⁵⁶⁸ devotion to Muhammed,⁵⁶⁹ the ability to intercede before

⁵⁶⁵ See surah al-Nisā³ (4:97), surah al-An^cām (6:61 which also mentions overseeing guardians who Ali notes are usually taken to mean angels), surah al A^crāf (7:37; the word used is *rusuluna* which Ali translates as 'our messengers'), surah Sajda (32:11, which specifies the Angel of Death or *malak al-mawt*), surah al-^cAnkabūt (39:71 and 39:73 both use the word *khazanatu* which Ali translates as 'keepers' while suggesting [in his footnote 4348] to be angels; see Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 305, 349, 1258).

⁵⁶⁶ See surah āl-Imrān (3:124-125 which mentions the sending down of three thousand angels to help the Muslims at the Battle of Badr), surah al-Anfāl (8:9-12; a more general reference which Ali [in his footnote 1184] relates to the Battles of Uhud and Badr), surah Fuṣṣilat (41:30-31), surah al-Zukhruf (43:60) and surah al-Dhariyāt (51:24-37). There are also unspecified helpers such as those unseen forces of surah Tawbah (9:40) and surah al-Aḥzāb (33:9) who helped Muhammed and Abu Bakr on their flight from Mecca, and the believers in Medina at the time of the siege respectively; plus the 'voice' of surah Maryam (19:24-26) which guided Mary (see Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 417).

⁵⁶⁷ See surah al-Ra^cd (13:13), surah al-Naḥl (16:49), surah al-Zumar (39:75), surah al-Shūrā (42:5) and surah al-Zukhruf (43:19 where angels are made 'into females' by the foolish).

⁵⁶⁸ An accepted genealogy need not always equate to an historically proven one; in Bengal at least there emerged 'a tendency to claim fictitious foreign ancestry by aspirants to social position' and perhaps also a tendency to ascribe such ancestry to those apparently worthy of it. The successful leadership of Ahmad Riza (1856-1921

God,⁵⁷⁰ heal, and give legal advice. All of these relied on the assumed possession of *barakah* that could either be bestowed by the *pir* to his followers⁵⁷¹ or genealogically passed on; and was verified by the performance of miracles (*karamāt*). *Barakah* was thought to survive after a saint's death as a residue at his tomb (which thus becomes a place of pilgrimage) and was even thought to continue growing after a saint's death.⁵⁷² But if the *pir* is seen as embodying God's ongoing grace, he is also concurrently seen as someone far more accessible and homely. Indeed, the usual Punjabi term for *pir* is *buzurq* ('elder') while the Atrosi *pir* (in Bangladesh) was sometimes addressed as *dada* (uncle).⁵⁷³ *Pirs* differ from the *sadhus* (Hindu holy men) they in some ways resemble since *sadhus* renounce commonplace activities such as family life whereas *pirs* are heads of extended families as well as advising their followers. Thus they do not so

AD) of Bareilly exemplifies several of the imperatives for spiritual authority. His father deliberately sent him to Al-e Rasul for his *sayyid* lineage which could be transferred to Ahmad Riza and thereby confer *barakah* on him. Ahmad Riza was initiated into discipleship with Shah Al-e Rasul when only twenty one despite the lack of any previous relationship, or the obligatory forty-day pre-initiation training. Also atypical was the non-appearance of his future *pir* in a dream (see U Sanyal, 'Pir, Shaikh and Prophet: The Personalisation of Religious Authority in Ahmad Riza Khan's Life', Contributions to Indian Sociology, 28, [1994], 36-37; and Roy, The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal, 61).

⁵⁶⁹ See Sanyal, op. cit., 55; Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 213-227; and Sākalaḃen, op. cit., 23.

⁵⁷⁰ While surah Zukhruf (43:86) suggests Muhammad as the best of intercessors the perceived need for a immediate mediator can promote respect for pious individuals into veneration for interceding saints. Although dealing with Hindus, Lambert makes the point that amongst the pantheon of deities and powers there is both specialisation and ranking, and that it is the lower level deities who appear more approachable for daily concerns (involving sickness, marriage, and fertility). The distinction that people 'propitiated rather than worshipped' deities is one that Muslims, as well as Hindus, might make in reconciling the apparently opposing trends of monotheism and folk belief (see H Lambert, Medical knowledge in Rural Rajasthan: Popular Constructions of Illness and Therapeutic Practice, unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford, 1988, 133-136; and Buehler, op. cit., 300).

⁵⁷¹ This is more suggestive of Shi'ite ideas of *nass* transmission than Sunni ideas.

⁵⁷² Since the *pir* 'does not actually die in the ordinary sense of the term. He is "hidden" and over time he continues to develop spiritually, so that his *barakah* increases, as does the importance of his shrine' (see Ewing, The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam, 28-30).

⁵⁷³ The use of fictive kinship terms is common throughout Bangladesh to facilitate social interactions in several ways. Women, for example, are more able to address unfamiliar males when calling them *bhai* (brother). The use of fictive kin terminology

much renounce as extend; when they make decisions for visitors it is only a continuation of what they would do as head of their family. Such willingness to lead others can lead *pirs* into a wider, more political level as well but (in theory at least) they are less interested in the worldly goal of power than spiritual purification. This allows God to grant His *barakah* which paradoxically then gives the *pir* access to power and a measure of societal leadership.

Ordinary people seek a *pir* to assess the *barakah* they see as necessary for both 'ultimate salvation and for the general warding off of malevolent influences'.⁵⁷⁴ Throughout the Indian subcontinent there is a perception that the world is dangerously populated by powerful beings who cohabit and interact with people and from whom the *pirs*' protection is vital.⁵⁷⁵ In Bengal, *bhut* were once thought to be 'masters of the land ... when there was no civilisation ... associated with beginnings, a primitive or initial state of the world'⁵⁷⁶ but are now more likely to be seen as ghost-like unfulfilled human souls (such as stillborn or aborted children) unable to rest in peace.⁵⁷⁷ Although spirits, *bhuts* are said to be found in specifically physical locations (such as dark areas, graveyards,⁵⁷⁸ rivers, bamboo groves, and cross-roads.⁵⁷⁹ Possession by spirits is a particular danger. Malevolent *jinn* may possess those who urinate on a surface where they happen to be.⁵⁸⁰

in the religious leader/disciple context serves to convey both respect and closeness (see Aziz, *op. cit.*, 76-82).

⁵⁷⁴ See Ewing, *The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam*, 28-30.

⁵⁷⁵ 'World' of course is taken to mean more than the physical and visible environment. Sufi cosmology postulates matter as ascending through mineral, vegetable, animal and human states each having its own soul (human souls have all four states; *Ibid.*, 31, 43).

⁵⁷⁶ See Blanchet, *op. cit.*, 54, 55.

⁵⁷⁷ Ewing defines *bhuts* as 'a human ghost whose spirit is not at rest or who did not die in a pure state as a good Muslim' and adds that Pakistanis generally believe that only Hindus and Christians can become *bhut* since Muslims are protected by their faith (see Ewing, *The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam*, 54, 56).

⁵⁷⁸ The area around the extensive Banani graveyard in Dhaka is never subjected to the elsewhere ubiquitous power cuts for this reason.

⁵⁷⁹ The association of spirits with rivers is neither specifically Islamic or Bengali; Waikato Maori (in New Zealand) have a saying that the Waikato River has a thousand bends and on each one there is a spirit (*taniwha*; see Blanchet, *op. cit.*, 53; and B Pfleiderer, *The Semiotics of Ritual Healing in a North Indian Muslim Shrine*, *Social Science and Medicine*, 27 [1988], 419).

⁵⁸⁰ The association of spirit possession with human excretion was repeated by one informant in the Kathal Bagan area of Dhaka, and is worth detailing for its unusual features. A Chakma (tribal) Christian man fell into a roadside ditch conveying (as

Not all possession is seen negatively however. *Jinn* can use entranced men during religious ceremonies and women as oracles (such women then paradoxically being able to control others while being out of control themselves⁵⁸¹). They may act in a manner that would normally be unacceptably wild and flirtatious (there is often a sexual element involved⁵⁸²). Crapanzano (and others) have suggested that possession is a way of representing emotional troubles in symbolic terms⁵⁸³ although Gardner is doubtful that 'spirit possession is a resort of the dispossessed' since exorcisms re-establish the formal Islamic order rather than undermine it.⁵⁸⁴ Possession is not the only possible way spirits may affect people⁵⁸⁵ nor exorcism (which may involve beating or the tying up of hair) the only response. Human beings are said to be *bhuts*' main targets however, particularly ritually impure (ie menstruating, pregnant or parturient) and 'insecure and

such ditches do) sewerage and became uncontrollable after getting out. Several men could not hold him down and a *mullah* was called. He diagnosed a *petni* and burnt red chillies under the man's nose to expel her (ie it was a female spirit). After some temporising during which the *petni* tried bargaining for more time she left the man who remained unconscious for some hours.

⁵⁸¹ Not all researchers accept that such performances actually entail a total loss of control (see Buitelaar, *op. cit.*, 48-49).

⁵⁸² See Blanchet, *op. cit.*, 52.

⁵⁸³ Betteridge similarly notes that historical events and people can be used to channel current unhappinesses or even political discontent (see Betteridge, *op. cit.*, 62-63, 66).

⁵⁸⁴ It is not uncommon for educated Bangladeshis to scorn the supposed existence of *bhuts et al* or at least explained them away in Western psycho-analytical terms, but this avowed scepticism is often belied by peoples' actions, Crapanzo also makes the point that (in Morocco at least) not all *jinn*s are considered evil but may be deemed 'whimsical and arbitrary, capricious and revengeful, quick-tempered and despotic and therefore potentially dangerous' and the negotiation and establishment of a symbiotic relationship between possessor and possessed is sometimes possible. Most rural Bangladeshis of this author's acquaintance did not doubt the existence of *bhut-petni*, and it is important to note (with Crapanzo) that 'for the possessed, possession is real'. He moreover points out that possession validates belief in a class of intermediate spirits and provides a way of articulating experiences (see Ewing, The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam, 80; S Kakar; Shamans Mystics and Doctors, Chicago, 1991, 105-106; V Crapanzo, 'Mohammad and Dawia: Possession in Morocco' in [eds.] Crapanzo and Garrison, *op. cit.*, 141-142, 144-145, 152, 166-170; and Gardner, *op. cit.*, 254).

⁵⁸⁵ Rose notes that 'sometimes a disease is taken for the influence of an evil spirit' and some in Bangladesh see crops as vulnerable to spiritual attack (see H Rose, Rites and Ceremonies of Hindus and Muslims, Delhi, 1983, 180).

fragile⁵⁸⁶ women as well as children. *Jinns* are similarly deemed to be controllable by a suitable practitioner⁵⁸⁷ although magic rather than force is deemed important.⁵⁸⁸ Numerology also forms the basis of amulets and charms which have very intricate internal logic.⁵⁸⁹

Jinn exist alongside human beings but are 'creatures of the sky' in contrast to terrestrial *bhut* (and humans) and so are unable to touch the earth directly, only some surface covering it. Kakar suggests that everyone has its own attendant *jinn*. When the person dies so does the *jinn*, killed by the soul-taking angels. Sometimes however (particularly with sinful people) the *jinn* escapes by hiding in 'the organs of elimination' which are impure and thus out of the angels' reach. Such a *jinn* will then become a demon (*bala*) which will trouble and possess people. There are several types of *bala*; the *jaljogini* is similar to the Hindu *churel* since it appears as a beautiful woman, the *jaljogini* is a headless ghost while the *bhutna* has the appearance of fire. Moreover there are *bhuta-pretā*, a collective group of 'ghosts of unfulfilled desires'⁵⁹⁰ and (in Pakistan at least) it is thought that Hindu deities and spiritual forces called *asar* can also trouble people. Each

⁵⁸⁶ The corollary of this being Gilsenan's suggestion that the mark of a true sheikh (in Lebanon) was the ability to discern ritually impurity (see Blanchet, *op. cit.*, 52; and Gilsenan, *Recognising Islam*, 118-120).

⁵⁸⁷ Even suitable practitioners need to repeat specific formulae a numerological-decided number of times (one example mentions 137,613 repetitions so preparation is evidently not an instant affair; see [tr.] G Herklots, *Islam in India or The Qanun-i-Islam*., Curzon Press, London, 1972, 225).

⁵⁸⁸ Magic is 'to command the presence of the *Jinn* and demons who, when it is required of them, cause anything to take place; to establish friendship or enmity between two persons; to cause the death of an enemy; to increase wealth or salary; to gain income gratuitously or mysteriously; to secure the accomplishment of wishes, temporal or spiritual' (see Herklots, *op. cit.*, 218-219: pages 218-246 examine 'magical' aspects of Indian Islam).

⁵⁸⁹ And wide apparent efficacy; charms are used as 'love charms, to create enmity, to cause men to be silent regarding another, to prevent dreaming, and to cast out devils. In northern India they are used to cure various diseases, to cause butter to increase in the churn, or milk in a woman or a cow, to remove cattle disease, to make fruit-trees give their fruit, to make a husband obey his wife.' Magic is also used for catching thieves (see Herklots, *op. cit.*, 254, and more generally, 247-263; while the general subject of magic and amulets is also examined at length by Zwemer, *op. cit.*, 163-207; the Bengali publication 'Ruhānī Tābijāt' by A Sāttār has an extensive list of numerological amulets and their effect).

⁵⁹⁰ See Kakar, *op. cit.*, 25. On page 189 he adds that *bhuta* cannot simply be equated to 'demon' since there can be good *bhuta* as well as evil ones.

name of God is also said to have its own *maukil* who manifests that particular attribute and who are sometimes seen as the source of *pirs'* powers. There is also the 'evil eye' which often derives from envy and which can be transmitted (perhaps unintentionally) by a glance.⁵⁹¹ To what extent this theoretical classification is adhered to is debatable, however; in Bangladesh any supernatural being is often referred to by the collective noun *bhut-petni*.⁵⁹²

Pirs are seen as able to deliver people from all these supernaturally-sourced problems by directing their *barakah* to perform exorcisms. Both the local language and Arabic may be used in ceremonies, with the former to some extent being explanation while the latter is thought to carry the actual power since it is the language of the Qur'an.⁵⁹³ Breath and water may also be used. The *pir* may blow on the patient (perhaps on the affected area if there is one) after a verse of the Qur'an has been recited but it is the *pir's barakah* rather than the actions performed that is always seen as pivotal in the healing process.⁵⁹⁴ He may similarly blow on water (called *dam pani* in Pakistan) which the patient then drinks. The hair may be knotted to stop the demon escaping (with one or two hairs plucked out

⁵⁹¹ This author was assured by one sheikh (Abu Helmi) in Amman that the evil eye was not a supernatural but a human power.

⁵⁹² This terminology perhaps owes more to the Bengali linguistic habit of alliteratively doubling up words rather than cosmology. For example, while both *cala* and *jāyā* are verbs of movement they are invariably collocated (for example *āmi cale jāī* meaning 'I am going'). Similarly for *ādar* and *jatna* as verbs denoting care-giving. Nonetheless, some in Bangladesh do demarcate between *bhut* and *petni*. This author was told that *petni* are associated with 'love affairs', presumably a euphemism for aborted fetuses and suicides. Haru (from Rosulpur village) stated that *petni* resulted from 'unsettled deaths' such as those who had not had a *janaza* ceremony. This would imply that *petni* might be linked to Hinduism and Haru did link *bhut-petni* to Hinduism while saying that he did not know why they were found around Hindu areas in particular. Abul (from Kathal Bagan, Dhaka) suggested that *petni* were the result of Hindu cremations (*chita*). Another Dhaka informant (Jalath) said simply that *bhut* caused mental problems while *jinn* are tied to the land. Hindu deities do not seem to be feared or heeded with the exception of *Kali*, because people were at one time sacrificed to her (and perhaps still sometimes are) and ghosts of such people are thought to remain. There seems little unanimity regarding the types of spirits, however (see Blanchet, *op. cit.*, 51).

⁵⁹³ See Ewing, *The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam*, 81; this author has noticed the intermingling of Bengali and Arabic in similar situations in Bangladesh..

⁵⁹⁴ Western psychology would tend to see the externalising and manipulation of a problem using a bottle, or water, or an amulet, (which Das notes is widely practised) as being more central to the healing than intangible *barakah* (see Das, *op. cit.*, 297).

at the ceremony's culmination and sealed in a bottle thus trapping the demon).⁵⁹⁵ Treatment may involve the writing of a Qur'anic verse inside an amulet but this is more involved since what exactly should be written depends both on the complaint and also numerological considerations (see below for further accounts of amulets). Spirits are thought to be susceptible to either *nuri ilm* (luminous knowledge, which is Godly and thus controlled by Qur'anic verses and the names of God) or by *kala ilm* (black knowledge, which is evil and is seen as using Hindu techniques although it draws on Satan, and *jinn* as well as Hindu deities). *Kala ilm* is practiced by a *jādugar*; and an adept (*amil*) practices *nuri ilm*; but neither of these is to be equated with the *karamāt*-working *pir* whose theoretical aim extends beyond the mere manipulation of powers to union with God. The *amil* is often an 'apprentice *pir*' who must be physically and mentally acceptable to God and who relies on intermediate spirits for his power. Unlike the *pir* who does not need to follow set rituals (*chilla*) the *amil* would be destroyed by the very spirits he uses, even the relatively benign *maukil*, unless performs the commanding rituals exactly. As well as performing exorcisms, Pakistani *pirs* are vital as solvers of family problems⁵⁹⁶ and healers of illnesses that they are deemed capable of discerning without any overt explanation.⁵⁹⁷

Pirs are thus widely consulted at times of need, but they also provide more regular guidance to their *murids*.⁵⁹⁸ As has been mentioned, the difference between a *murid* and a casual visitor is not always clear-cut, but it would seem that the religious beggars (*malangs* or *qalandars*⁵⁹⁹) are too extreme to be easily grouped with other devotees.

⁵⁹⁵ Pfleiderer describes a possessed woman's hair as being 'the last resort of the demon' which 'symbolised important elements of the girl (being treated; see Pfleiderer, *op. cit.*, 422).

⁵⁹⁶ Ewing describes a situation whereby a tense family situation was defused by a *pir*-catalysed solution (see Ewing, *The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam*, 61-63).

⁵⁹⁷ Ewing gives two case studies which describe variant *pir*'s 'bedside manners' (one being amiable or *jamālī* and the other majestic/wrathful or *jalālī*); and in neither case did the *pir* require the 'patient' to detail her (or his) 'case history' beyond a bald statement of the immediate problem (which often involved sickness, infertility, work-or-study pressures). The *jamālī/jalālī* terminology exactly parallels two facets' of the glorious attributes which denote God (see Ewing, *The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam* 71-74; and Herklots, *op. cit.*, 219).

⁵⁹⁸ *Śisū* is the more commonly used word in Bangladesh.

⁵⁹⁹ As they are called in Pakistan. They wander from shrine to shrine, staying for variable periods at each (see Ewing, in [ed.] Metcalf, *op. cit.*, 357-358, 364).

They are not strictly linked to any particular *pir* although they do see themselves as part of the Sufi tradition⁶⁰⁰ and bound by an internal hierarchical structure.⁶⁰¹ Moreover, they do not closely follow the *Shari'ah*. Because they are wanderers, their lives are open to constant scrutiny and habits such as their use of *charas* and *bhang* (both derivatives of marijuana) is obvious.⁶⁰² Drugs are used to counter the tyranny of the *nafs* (lower soul) and thus allow the outer reality (*zāhir*) to be brought under inner (*bātin*) control thereby facilitating the reception of orders (*ḥukms*).⁶⁰³ These may come from God, or a dead saint via waking visions or dreams⁶⁰⁴ but they direct all the choices a *malang* makes. But *malangs* are more than just bizarre adjuncts to religious expression; they merely extend the common pattern. *Murids* are encouraged to be obedient and to explore their dreams, by relying on the *pir* both for interpretation⁶⁰⁵ and guidance.⁶⁰⁶ *Malangs* obey

⁶⁰⁰ In Pakistan they tend to claim association with Lal Shahbaz Qalander, a thirteenth century Sindi saint.

⁶⁰¹ They are linked into a loosely-knit community of *malangs* and there is a clear social hierarchy whereby the 'little' *malangs* serve the 'big' *malangs* (particularly at the *urus* celebration). The difference between these two is largely a matter of 'age and experience' as well as the importance of the *malang's* 'home' shrine. Shrines are called *dargahs* or *majars* 'on the basis of familiarity rather than distinction'. More importantly, 'such tombs afford proof' of the current *pir's* sanctity (see Ewing, in [ed.] Metcalf, *op. cit.*, 367-368; and P Jackson, 'Perceptions on the Dargahs of Patna' in [ed.] C Troll, *Muslim Shrines in India*, Oxford, 1989, 98).

⁶⁰² Shiva devotees use marijuana sacramentally. The widespread use of marijuana in Western countries as a form of recreation suggests another dimension to the *urus* ceremony and *pir* devotion in general; its entertainment quotient. Dale and Menon mention this aspect in passing when describing the Kerala Nercass ceremonies (see Dale and Menon, *op. cit.*, 526).

⁶⁰³ Forcing the *nafs* to become subservient to the *ruh* (spirit) is also the aim of those who follow the *Shari'ah*, but they see the law as a way of taming the lower to allow the higher to develop. Ewing points out that it is the aim of the *pir* to 'bring the outer man - the *nafs* - under the control of the inner man - the *ruh*'. The *ruh* is seen as that which survives after death but the term can have negative connotations since those who die while impure, such as during childbirth, may become a *bhut* or harmful *ruh* (see Ewing, in [ed.] Metcalf, *op. cit.*, 363; and Ewing, *The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam*, 37).

⁶⁰⁴ There is a long Middle Eastern tradition of interpreting dreams and Abu Sa'id ad-Dinawari's 397/1006 compilation contains principles still mentioned in modern Pakistani publications. Dreams can either be 'true' (emanating from angels or God and needing interpretation for guidance or 'false' (which need to be interpreted for protection and well-being (see Ewing, *The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam*, 103).

⁶⁰⁵ Interpretation is more complicated than the mere reading of symbols (although there are particular images that are read for specific meaning such as an eagle equating to a king, a fish to a woman, or a butcher to the angel of death) since factors such as the

their own etiquette and independently interpret their own dreams. Once communication via dreams is established between a *pir* (even a deceased one) and any follower, distance becomes irrelevant.⁶⁰⁷ Similarly, the *malangs*' actions at the *urus* are certainly different from both casual and serious followers, but they are extensions of the same impulse. In fact, the *malangs* are of central importance in both organising, and giving the shape of, *urus* celebrations.⁶⁰⁸ Thus it is not surprising that they are viewed with some ambivalence; somewhat suspected as false *pirs* while concurrently respected since the 'true' *malang* is seen as the 'only remaining devotee of God'.⁶⁰⁹

The practical similarities of Hindu and Muslim devotees needs to be emphasized. A comment such as 'a large proportion of illnesses have ... always been treated by religious forms of therapy' reads as true for a Muslim context as the Rajasthani Hindu one it

dreamer's age, sex, habits, religion, class, job, morals etc all need to be considered by the *pir* who will prescribe an action such as the reading of specific Qur'anic verses at specific times, or the writing of an amulet (see Ewing, The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam, 103).

⁶⁰⁶ This is obtained by concentrating on the *pir* while repeating specific Qur'anic verses and thinking of the particular problem just prior to sleep. The appearance of saints in dreams was mentioned to this author in rural Bangladesh and is also reported from Iran (see Betteridge, op. cit., 50).

⁶⁰⁷ Since the vital *pir/murid* relationship ideally culminated 'in the condition of *fana' fi'l shaikh*, or total absorption in one's *pir*' communication was theoretically not easily broken (see Sanyal, op. cit., 40)

⁶⁰⁸ The *malangs* collect the money for a *urus* by begging in groups of by six or seven. Invitees (indicated via dreams) are sent a three-stranded thread. Travel to the *urus* by the invited *malangs* will involve flag-carrying, dancing and the beating of a drum but once they reach the shrine they will not enter until invited. The observation of etiquette is vital, an etiquette which extends to less-important *malangs* serving the more important (as measured by their age, experience, and importance of the *malang's* 'home' shrine). The fear of retaliatory black magic (*jādu*) tends to enforce this ranking and deferential behaviour. The caretaker-*malang* or *sajjada-nishin* (caretaker) meets the invitees in the '*divan khana*' (the outer area of the shrine) where shoes must be removed. There may be singing in this area too. Reading of the Qur'an and poems in praise of Muhammed will take place in the inner shrine area, as will the most important rituals involve the washing of the grave and the changing of the covering sheet. Drug-taking continues throughout the *urus*, a practice with obvious similarities to Hinduism; see Ewing, in [ed.] Metcalf, op. cit., 359-360; Pfleiderer, op. cit., 422-423; [ed.] Troll, op. cit., 101; Gaffney, op. cit., 21; and R Burton, Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al Madinah and Meccah. London, 1924, 155).

⁶⁰⁹ See Ewing, The Pir or Sufi Saint in Pakistani Islam, 165.

alludes to.⁶¹⁰ Similarly broad is the 'hot/cold' dichotomy of foods and illnesses⁶¹¹ or the suggestion that localised deities rather than God are pivotal in the daily needs of villagers. Total devotion to one's spiritual guide is demanded whether he be a *pir* or *guru* and total absorption into the Divine is the aim whether the process is called *fanā* or *moksa*. The Islamic *lata'if* (centres of light in the body) model of human physiology resembles the Hindu concept of ascending *chakras*⁶¹² while techniques such as *dhikr*, the use of *tasbīyā* (rosaries), breath control, control of the passions, and meditation all have similarities to yoga. The Sufi stages of *malkūt* (entering the spirit world), *jabrūt* (realising the attributes and essence of God) and *lahert* (union with God) resemble the Buddhist progression towards sainthood. Even the Sufi concept of receiving revelation from the dead (*kashful-i-qubur*) is Tantrik in origin⁶¹³ while the Hindu Upanishads posited intellectual knowledge as inferior to the Higher Knowledge that came when the senses and reasoning were repressed, which is consistent with Sufi thought.⁶¹⁴ Another such congruence is shown by the Hindu *Bir Baba* cult⁶¹⁵ with its equation of *birs* with deities or spirits who can possess people or cause illness or misfortune, its annual festivals (*melas*) that are part religious ceremony (*puja*) part festival, and the need for

⁶¹⁰ See Lambert, *op. cit.*, 337.

⁶¹¹ Kurin mentions how this belief in cooling/heating influences burial practices in (Pakistani) Punjab and Karachi while Shaykh Chisti sees hot and cold as 'the most important concept relating to human physical health' and the Baluch perceive their own human nature in 'hot/cold' terminology (see R Kurin, 'Morality, Personhood and the Exemplary Life: Popular Conception of Muslims in Paradise' in [ed.] Metcalf, *op. cit.*, 200; Lambert, *op. cit.*, 72; H Chisti, *The Book of Sufi Healing*, Singapore, 1994, 43; and S Pastner, 'Sardar, Hakom, Pir: Leadership Patterns among the Pakistani Baluch' in, [ed.] Ewing, *op. cit.*, 167).

⁶¹² The six centres within the body that 'represent different states of consciousness' also parallel the six evolutionary stages (*maqamat*; singular *maqam*) of Sufi development. For descriptions and diagrams of *chakras* and *maqamat* see Kakar, *op. cit.*, 187-190 and 197-204; and Chisti, *op. cit.*, 25-37.

⁶¹³ McDaniel mentions the sitting overnight with a corpse until it comes to life as a specific Tantric practice, along with self-sacrifice leading to the attainment of power, the transformation of substances, and the power, not to say deification, of women (see McDaniel, *op. cit.*, 88).

⁶¹⁴ Inferior knowledge is technically termed *apara vidya*; superior, *para vidya* (see Pande, *op. cit.*, 128).

⁶¹⁵ See Coccari, *op. cit.*, 56-60, 91-93.

birs to convince their own guardian spirits to help when exorcising others all echo Sufi practice.⁶¹⁶

This convergence of faiths suggests the existence of universal human traits that find locally acceptable expressions, whether Hindu or Islamic.⁶¹⁷ It is contrary to the apparently irreconcilable gulf between a monotheistic faith that abhors representations of God and a faith that has countless gods endlessly portrayed.⁶¹⁸ Not surprisingly then, Reformers⁶¹⁹ have wanted to purge Islam from what is seen as Hindu and non-Islamic elements, in particular the *pir/murid* relationship which is seen by some as a Hindu corruption.⁶²⁰ These reformers have tried to move people away from the idea that the *pir*

⁶¹⁶ Although the most obvious *pir/bir* connection is unexpectedly spurious since *bir* derives from the Sanskrit *vira* meaning hero or chief and seems unconnected to the Persian-derived *pir*. Nonetheless, there is an intriguing convergence whereby the 'Five Heroes' cult in which the five predominant Shi'ites provided a model whereby local candidates became effectively deified 'represents a complete compromise between Islam and Hinduism in which the low caste disciples of either equally participate' (Rizvi suggests the five settled on the figures of Ghazi Miyan, Zinda Ghazi, Sheikh Farid, Khwaja Khizr and - in Bengal at least - Pir Badr; see R Greevan, *The Heroes Five*, Allahabad, 1893, 3; and Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, [volume one], 317).

⁶¹⁷ Or even Jewish, since one study of a modern Jewish saint closely resembles those dealing with Muslim saints. Both report how blessing in inherited, water can be used for healing, grace is seen as tangible and transferable, and dreams are perceived as a means of divine communication (see Y Bilu and E Ben-Ari, 'The Making of Modern Saints: Manufactured Charisma and the Abu-Hatseiras of Israel' *American Ethnologist*, 19 [1992], 677-678).

⁶¹⁸ Although Shabistari wrote 'If the Muslim knew what an idol was he would know there is religion in idolatry. If the idolater knew what religion was he would know where he had gone astray' the differences between the two beliefs are vast. Nonetheless when the Sind was first conquered and Muslims thus first encountered Hindus the conquerors declared Hindus to be 'People of the Book' and therefore a tolerated people (see I Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*, Middlesex, 1975, 207; and R Mottahedeh, 'Toward an Islamic Theology of Toleration' in *Islamic Law Reform - Human Rights: Challenges and Rejoinders February 1972 Oslo Seminar on Human Rights and the Modern Application of Islamic Law*, Copenhagen, 1993, 26).

⁶¹⁹ As part of this there may be a strong assertion of the Qur'anic base for Sufism and denigration of the idea that Hinduism has had a major influence (see, for example, M Rahmān, *op. cit.*, 64).

⁶²⁰ As well as 'the Vedantism of India' (the term used by Pande throughout his article) echoes of Greek and Roman philosophy can be seen in Sufi thinking. Valiuddin, for example identifies 'the neo-platonism of Alexandria' as a major influence on the 'mystic tendency among Muslims'. While it is true that the neo-Platonistic concept of good and evil existing as a continuum (thus allowing everything to give some idea,

could intercede before God for his *murids* to seeing the *pir* merely as a guide. Such a task is perhaps made difficult because of the constant need for physical healing throughout the Indian subcontinent.⁶²¹ The tendency to see the ‘holy man’ as a healer is part of both Hindu and Islamic tradition and both faiths see a rôle for supernatural beings in the healing process.⁶²² Sufi theory postulates that numerological formulations can be curative, either when spoken, silently recited, attached to the body, washed from ink-written words on a glass surface and then drunk as a medicine⁶²³ or dispersed on the sheikh’s breath.⁶²⁴ *Dhikr* (the repetition of *La ilaha illa Llahu*, or fragments of this; or one of the ninety-nine names of God) is also medicinal when properly performed, as well as having other effects.⁶²⁵ Other formulae deemed potent for healing include *Surah al-Fatihah*, the *Bismilla* (*Bismillah al-Rahmān al-Rahīm*) and the *Maqalad as-Samawati wal Ard* (Keys of the Treasures of the Heavens and the Earth).⁶²⁶ In addition, *salat* (the ritual prayer) is said to confer physical benefits⁶²⁷ because of the postures involved and the way the Arabic resonates throughout the body.⁶²⁸ Al-Asmar mentions the *al-*

however faint, of the ultimate good, or God) does have similarities to Sufi though, the already-mentioned caveat that congruence does not prove linkage must be added (see M Valiuddin, *The Qur’anic Sufism*, Delhi, 1987, v).

⁶²¹ This is said to be the major cause of indebtedness in Bangladesh.

⁶²² ‘Sufis ... have knowledge of specific verses of the Qur’an, and the names of various attributes of God, which are combined in particular ways to effect cures. This form of healing is called the science of *ta’widh*’ (see Chisti, *op. cit.*, 131 - he is of course speaking of the Chisti order in particular but the acceptance of sheikh-brokered divine healing is not confined to this order).

⁶²³ Fisher mentions this as common in African Islamic healing too, with the difference that slate, not glass, was written upon. He also mentions ‘ashes from burnt paper, inscribed from the Qur’an’ as similarly medicinal - although this author was told several times in Bangladesh that the Qur’an would not burn and whether anyone there would dare to try and burn any written words of the Qur’an is questionable (see Fisher in [ed.] Brett, *op. cit.*, 34).

⁶²⁴ See Chisti, *op. cit.*, 134. Pages 136-139 exemplify some healing numerological formulae.

⁶²⁵ It ‘drives away evil forces and defeats them: pleases Allah the Almighty: attracts livelihood; makes the personality impressive and prestigious; gives access to Allah the Almighty; revives and resuscitates the heart; banishes flaws and faults; saves the speech from gossip and backbiting; remedies all ailments of the heart; removes all fear and fright from the heart; prohibits hypocrisy’ (*ibid.*, 146).

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁶²⁷ ‘For anyone who desires to enjoy the most excellent health, harmonizing the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual life, there is no better medicine than *salat*’ (*ibid.*, 108).

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 126-127; the transliteration is as rendered by Chisti.

mu'watheen (ie surahs al-Falaq and al-Nās; 113 and 114), the *Ayat al-Kursi*, and the *Fatihah* as particularly protective.⁶²⁹ From seeing the *sheikh/pir* as a temporal healer to a spiritual one (salvation is spiritual healing) is a logical, albeit prohibited, extrapolation.

Throughout history, 'Wahab's blasphemy in the Prophet' is an exception considered, mentioning this blasphemy is less critical. Whether it demonstrates ill-will through Allah or through the *shaykh* (by grouping Mohammed's words Allah belonged to him) is debatable. The fact that some Muslims since the Islamic conquests of Islam, the *shaykh* The use of *shaykh* 'blasphemy' in the form of a limited prophecy that provides a spiritual message through the *shaykh* (rather than Allah) to Mohammed himself is commonplace amongst Islamic religious in Bangladesh. Further showing how *shaykh* are less associated with 'blasphemy' in Islamic religious discourse. *shaykh* approaches respect for Mohammed and Islamic *pir*.

A second conceptual difficulty with Islamic leadership grows out of the recognition of authority; indeed, the few key leaders of Islam are respected because they acted as leaders rather than their credentials or (personal) methods of selection. Central to successful leadership in many social systems (political or otherwise) is the ability to develop working relationships with concerned individuals, and this leadership role correlates with the presentation of piety as a requisite for the Islamic leader.

Prior to Mohammed's, the Bedouins were ruled by their tribal chiefs. They had around them men of talent and wisdom who exercised the control of affairs of the tribe known as the *shaykh* or *shaykh*.⁶³⁰ Leadership of a tribe was elective

⁶²⁹ See R al-Asmar, *Iṣābat-al 'ayn-Haḥiqatuha, al-Wiqāya Minha 'ilajuha*, Lebanon, 1991, 80 (the title means 'The 'Aiming' [ie evil] Eye, its Truth, Protection and Recovery from it'). This is not a scholarly publication; in fact it was bought on the streets of Amman and thus represents popular belief rather than scholarship.

⁶³⁰ 'Shaykh' is an extremely flexible term since it can imply anything from simply to highly-learned. Some suggest the tribe is among the most frequently used terms in anthropology and its derivatives account. He was the ability to establish a coalition to the concepts of tribal solidarity; he was typically a man of skill to show how 'authoritative' can imply authority as well as 'correct' since economic alternatives are the tribe's rule. Writing of the *shaykh*, an Arabic speaking Egyptian who lived in the north of Africa. The *shaykh* Mohammed himself *shaykh* according to Bell

Appendix Two: The Sheikh in Various Islamic Societies

There have been several conceptual difficulties with Islamic leadership throughout history. While 'closeness to the Prophet' is an accepted credential, measuring such closeness is less settled. Whether it demanded lineage through Ali or through the wider family grouping Mohammed's uncle Abbas belonged to has divided Shi'ite from Sunni since the foundations of Islam, for example. The use of fictive 'closeness' in the form of a *kilapod* genealogy that provides a spiritual linkage through the famous saints of Bengal to Mohammed himself is commonplace amongst informal religious in Bangladesh, further showing how vital, yet how unfocussed, such 'closeness' is. At its loosest, 'closeness' approaches respect for Mohammed and Islamic piety.

A second conceptual difficulty with Islamic leadership grows out of the importance of activism; indeed, the first four leaders of Islam are respected because they acted as leaders rather than their credentials or (varied) methods of selection. Central to successful leadership in many rural societies (Muslim or otherwise) is the ability to broker working relationships within contested situations, and this facilitating rôle co-exists with the presentation of piety as necessities for the Muslim leader.

Prior to Mohammed, the Bedouin were 'ruled by their tribal chiefs. They had around them men of talent and wisdom who constituted the council of elders of the tribes known as the *nādī* or *shūrā*.'⁶³⁰ Leadership of a tribe⁶³¹ was elective

⁶³⁰ See M Khel, 'Legitimacy of Authority in Islam', *Islamic Studies*, 19 [1980], 167.

⁶³¹ 'Tribe' is an extremely flexible term since it can imply anything from twenty to 20000. Emanuel Marx suggests 'the tribe is among the most frequently used terms in anthropology, and its definitions abound'. He sees the ability to subsist as central to the concept of tribe, although he intriguingly cites Southall to show how 'subsistence' can imply restriction as well as survival since 'economic alternatives are the tribe's ruin'. Writing of the Hassaniya, an Arabic-speaking Sudanese tribe living in the north of the White Nile province in the Sudan, Mohamed defines tribes according to their founding 'lineage sheikh' who were in turn themselves often founders of religious orders. Eickelman also explores the question of what 'tribe' means and Khusa has examined the tribal composition of Jordan in depth (see E Marx, 'The Tribe as a Unit of Subsistence: Nomadic Pastoralism in the Middle East,' *American Anthropologist*, 79

rather than hereditary with all tribesmen being involved, although 'custom and tribal law' was generally handed down from father to son and so genealogy was in fact central to the ordering of society.⁶³² Such leadership was given Islamic legitimacy by hadith such as 'follow the largest group'⁶³³ and verses like surah Shūrā (42:38).⁶³⁴

The leader of the tribe was called 'sheikh' but this term is as elastic as 'tribe' is to define. For Kennet the sheikh may 'oversee a tribe or family but ... is, above all a law-giver and administrator' who is also perceived as being a continuation of the founder's *barakah* and thus able to act as an intermediary for followers before God, provide them with charms and blessed water (giving healing and protection) and bring rain. Gilsenan echoes the idea that sheikhs could mediate in both the seen and unseen realms, 'between government and people and between Muslims and Revelation.'⁶³⁵ It has also been suggested that sheikhs in the White Nile region of Sudan were arbitrators (*agwad*) who relied partly on their supernatural abilities.⁶³⁶ They were so pivotal in arbitrating intra-lineage conflicts that governmental and tribal courts were generally unnecessary. Such conflicts rarely escalated into feuds since economic and social unity was essential for the survival of all, but between lineage grouping such sanctions were weaker and it was here that the sheikhs' mediation was vital. They received payment for their mediation and thus acquired cattle and grain, which in turn increased their power.

[1977], 344; A Mohamed, White Nile Arabs, New Jersey, 1980, 35, 40; Eickelman, The Middle East, 126-150; and A Khuṣah, Al-ʿAshaʿir al-Urdunīya wa al-Falastīniya wa Washaʿij al-Qurbā Baynaha, Amman, 1989, 127-190).

⁶³² See Kennet, op. cit., 3, and 22.

⁶³³ See Tamadonfar, op. cit., 271.

⁶³⁴ This extols those who 'conduct their affairs by mutual consolation' and is reinforced by surah āl-Imrān (3:159) and surah al-Naml (27:32).

⁶³⁵ For Gilsenan, the sheikh was the leader of a *ṭariqa*, and was marked by his piety, morality, knowledge, ability to teach and detachment from worldly vanities. However, it is the *khalīfah*, as overseer of the local *zāwiya* groupings that are associated to the *ṭariqa* who has most to do with individual devotees (see Gilsenan, Saint and Sufi, 66, 68, 73).

⁶³⁶ The sheikh is 'responsible for the well being and security' although 'law-giving and administration' were less important than being 'essentially holy men venerated for their well-known piety and miraculous power' specifically the ability to curse (see Mohamed, op. cit., 70, 73).

Moreover, they had the means to control labour (echoing Mosca's thought that elites were characterised by their ability to administer) helped them to withstand lean periods, even lending grain at such times to be repaid later at the inflated, famine-period, rate.

Fernea augments this view in his study of the Southern Iraqi el-Shabana tribe⁶³⁷ where the sheikh oversaw and supported the pivotal societal unit, the *ashira*. His ability to control necessary corporate actions (such as canal cleaning) and administer customary law were essential pre-requisites to power. Again, this power attracted more power. Fernea notes how the sheikh of el Shabana had far more land than was justified by the need to support the 'court'⁶³⁸ which forced people to move away and in turn led to an overall decline in tribal importance.⁶³⁹ Not only was the government-appointed *effendi* increasingly an official figure of authority⁶⁴⁰ he was consulted on more general problems too, reflecting his growth in authority at the expense of the sheikh. Fernea echoes the already-noted

⁶³⁷ The el-Shabana tribe as Fernea describes them in his 1956-1958 study numbered about 450-600 adult male members and lived near the town of Daghara. Sedentary tribal (*fellahin*) groups predominated with some nomadic groups who herded goats or camels. The El Shabana were organised into a series of territorial groups ascending up from *bayt* (house), *hamula* (some houses), *fakhd* (hamlet), *shabba* (collection of hamlets), *ashira* (tribe) and *sillif* (consisting of 12 *ashira* - in Daghara the *sillif* studied was 'el Aqra' and had over 5000 men). It is perhaps symptomatic that all the terms designating parts of the tribal organisation relate to the body or to blood relationships with the exception of *shabba* which derives from 'area' or 'district'. Southern Iraq retained its traditional social structure longer than the north and was in fact outside and effective central government control from 1258 AD until after 1918 AD (see Fernea, *op. cit.*, 86, 93-94).

⁶³⁸ The sheikh's main 'court' was the *mudhif*; a 'social centre, political conference chamber and a court of justice.' which was the centre of more frequent interaction than the *sillif*, had wider power than the *shabba* or *fakhd*, and housed legal proceedings' (see Fernea, *op. cit.*, 91).

⁶³⁹ Fernea's study in fact noted the decline of the sheikh's power as outside forces (in the person of the *effendi* of the book's title) encroached into the region.

⁶⁴⁰ Most crucially in deciding water distribution because this required co-operation both in construction and maintenance, particularly since the pattern of irrigation was very complex (reflecting the flooding patterns of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers). In fact it was a common system of irrigation canals that largely held the *shabba* together (although kinship, contiguous or joint land ownership, and intermarriage was also important). Whenever a dispute led to the digging of a new canal a new *fakhd* was automatically created as well (see Fernea, *op. cit.*, 118).

ambivalence regarding whether a sheikh was born or made, but adds that how a sheikh attained leadership mattered less than how he exercised it.⁶⁴¹ To distribute tasks and advantages in a broadly satisfactory manner needed wisdom, social skills, and activism (but not religious expertise⁶⁴²). His opinion that ‘the test of whether a man should be a sheikh is thus whether he can be a sheikh’⁶⁴³ agreed very closely to the words of a sheikh of this author’s acquaintance in Amman, Abu Helmi, who said that he ‘became a sheikh when everybody addressed him as sheikh’.

Although Abu Helmi was a definite ‘fixer’⁶⁴⁴ he saw himself primarily as a teacher⁶⁴⁵ who was qualified by his previous training from a recognised sheikh and by his wide religious knowledge. There was a clear division of labour between him and the *imām* of the mosque since he was an unpaid teacher of Qur’anic recitation⁶⁴⁶ while the *imām* was employed to preside over the mosque generally and perform the Friday morning service (in which he delivered the *khutbah*). During the teaching sessions Abu Helmi was clearly the one in charge.⁶⁴⁷ For Abu Helmi, formal religious training could only give a specialised knowledge of the law whereas the sheikh needed a wider knowledge. He was also

⁶⁴¹ The sheikhdom ‘may pass to anyone of good standing within the tribe, but usually goes to a son or brother of the last incumbent shaykh’ (*ibid.*, 108).

⁶⁴² ‘The shaykh has no religious function and no sacred quality is attached to the position’ (*ibid.*, 133).

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶⁴⁴ He sometimes adjudicated in local disputes, supplanting central authority (in the form of the police) and mentioned how murderers may be imprisoned only for the amount of time needed for an informal, sheikh-presided, court to reach an agreement between the deceased and the killer’s two families regarding the amount of retributive payment to be made

⁶⁴⁵ He taught regularly in a mosque in the First Circle area of Jabal Amman.

⁶⁴⁶ ie in accordance with one of the seven possible pronunciations. For more regarding this topic see C Gilliot, ‘Les Sept “Lectures”’: Corps Social et Écriture Révélée’ in *Studia Islamica*, 61 [1985], 5-25; and (more fully) A Allah, *The Variant Readings of the Qur’an: A Critical Study of Their Historical and Linguistic Origins*, unpublished PhD, Edinburgh, 1984.

⁶⁴⁷ Not, it must be added, in any dictatorial way. Disagreements did of course occur, but Abu Helmi invariably dealt with them genially. Moreover all the students felt able to challenge each others’ pronunciation during recitation if they felt it was erroneous, and this even included teenagers questioning the *imām*’s pronunciation at times (he attended the teachings). This seemed to cause no offence.

consulted regarding more mundane matters, such as sickness. He was very reticent regarding any supernatural powers, clearly seeing (or wanting to present?) himself as a teacher rather than mystic. He conceded that 'some sheikhs' did treat people for such supernatural complaints but he himself was dismissive of such claims. For him cases of *ḥasad* and *ʿayn sharr*⁶⁴⁸ were simply manifestations of an individual's jealousy - but he did on one occasion say how he had (at the prompting of his wife) prescribed a 'magic cure' for one woman. He was adamant its efficacy had relied solely on the woman's belief in it rather than any supernatural intervention.⁶⁴⁹ A more detailed picture of the rôle of local religious leadership in Jordanian society is provided by Antoun.⁶⁵⁰ He concentrated on one particular preacher (*khaṭīb*) pseudonymously called Sheikh Luqman.⁶⁵¹ Unlike the example just cited where a clear *imām*/sheikh division was made, Sheikh Luqman⁶⁵² did deliver the Friday *khutbah*, but he also oversaw the mosque, acted as a theologian, a government spokesman and as a community representative.

For the Berbers, holy men were primarily important for the societal continuity they provided although they did have some of the spiritual characteristics that are

⁶⁴⁸ ie cursing and the evil eye.

⁶⁴⁹ A fuller discussion of 'The Evil Eye' and 'The Curse' is given by Westermarck, but he does not examine the work of any particular practitioner (whether sheikh or otherwise named). Betteridge explains that amongst Shirazi Muslims at least, jealousy is seen, not as an emotion, but an active force that once unleashed may be irreparable (see E Westermarck, Pagan Survivals in Mohammadan Civilisation, London, 1933, 24-86; and Betteridge, op. cit., 39).

⁶⁵⁰ See R Antoun, Muslim Preacher in the Modern World: A Jordanian Case Study in Comparative Perspective, Princeton, 1989. Much of the book examines sermon content (approximately one half of the twenty six sermons Antoun analysed related Qur'anic and hadith ethical teachings to current and localised situations, a quarter were theological, and a quarter concerned Islamic history).

⁶⁵¹ Gaffney makes the point that the *khutbah* has only been analysed in the first, and most recent, century-and-a-half of Islamic history (see Gaffney, op. cit., 111). Presumably for the long intermediate period its message was too familiar, or its listeners too unconcerned about fitting local knowledge into a wider framework, for such analysis to be attempted.

⁶⁵² Although he uses the word 'sheikh' in a general sense, Antoun elsewhere notes that immediately after Muhammed's death there were *wa'īz* preachers (who admonished people to follow the Qur'an), *mudhakkir* preachers (who reminded them of coming judgement) and *qass* preachers (who told edifying stories) as well as the *khaṭīb* - but it

often implied by the word 'sheikh'⁶⁵³ (such as seeing themselves as chosen by God⁶⁵⁴ and claiming genealogical linkage with the founding saint of their particular shrine). Their shrines are often at tribal boundaries which places them ideally for inter-tribal mediation.⁶⁵⁵ This is vital in a state too weak to provide working institutions such as police and law courts⁶⁵⁶ but too inter-dependent because of needs such as grazing rights to merely co-exist as a collection of isolated settlements. Saints provide cohesion in Berber society. Only they are permanent with the office of sainthood often passing down the generations in a single family.

The term 'sheikh' in Zaydi Yemen generally referred to a tribal leader as distinct from the *imām*, who headed the Zaydi state⁶⁵⁷ and was important because

was only the last named who was specifically associated with a mosque (see Antoun, *op. cit.*, 69).

⁶⁵³ Similarly, the Sudanese Berti are led by a *fākī* who do some things (such as lead prayers and teach the Qur'an) that elsewhere would prompt recognition of their religious orthodoxy and other things (such as write protective amulets, heal with treated water and use divination) that would similarly suggest them as unorthodox leaders. Again, any clear distinction in both titles and functions is obviated (see L Holy, *Religion and Society in a Muslim Society The Berti of Sudan*, Cambridge, 1991, 22, 30-37).

⁶⁵⁴ Which, Gellner explains, creates tension during times of succession since how can human beings presume to know where God's *barakah*, which saints alone possess, is to flow? He suggests there is 'a kind of unconscious choice by the tribesmen which decides the succession' but this is never made 'manifest or explicit'. Instead there is a collective recognition that a candidate has the required characteristics. He illustrates by saying that a favoured candidate would attract enough donations to be generous (one indicator of *barakah* and thus a 'badge of office') without impoverishing himself (which would itself show a lack of *barakah*; see Gellner, in [ed.] Keddie, *op. cit.*, 316-317).

⁶⁵⁵ It is not only at macro-governmental level that state structures are weak; tribal chiefs are chosen every year in a quirky manner (each of the three sub-groups immediately below tribal level rotates in providing the tribal chief but it is the other two sub-groups who actually elect the chief) weakening micro-govern as well. Interestingly, Gilsenan notes how mosques in a North Lebanon town are not situated between various groups but towards the centre of each one's sphere of influence (see Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*, 31-35. Gilsenan, *Recognising Islam*, 165-169).

⁶⁵⁶ See Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*, 31-35.

⁶⁵⁷ The Zaydi Imamate was centred on the northern Plateau of Yemen and it fluctuated enormously in size and power during its 280/893-1962 AD reign. The linkage of 'sheikh' and 'tribe' is shown by the fact that tribe membership could be discovered by asking 'who is your sheikh?' Yemeni society has three vertical status divisions, the *sayyids* who claim descent from Adnan then Muhammed (through Ali and Fatima)

authority was centred at tribal, rather than central, level.⁶⁵⁸ The office was usually handed down from father to (oldest or most capable) son which allowed for apprentice-like training for the new generation. The sheikh represented the tribe in inter-tribal disputes (as well as tribal-governmental negotiations), organised work groups (such as governmental road building) and provided hospitality and help. He had to be ruthless and take every opportunity to maximise his own position (including strategic marriages). Conversely, he also had to be generous⁶⁵⁹ so judiciously deciding when to give and when to take, when to defer and when to be authoritative, was vital. He had to know the law well enough (and be creative in its use) to resolve disputes satisfactorily. This ability to manage others' conflicts was so vital⁶⁶⁰ that allowance was made for dishonesty so long as an agreement that all could tolerate was reached.⁶⁶¹

being uppermost, the tribal *gabayil* who claim descent from Qahtan being intermediate and the *mazayanah* (singular *muzayyin*) who claim no particular ancestry and perform occupations that are deemed 'dishonourable' - which largely equates to charging for services that would be part of hospitality in the tribal framework'. This perception of whether an action is honourable or shameful depending on whether it is freely offered or openly compensated echoes Bourdieu's description of parallel cousin marriages as the 'best or worst' depending on whether people see it as voluntary or forced. Having 'servile' (or black) origins bars anyone from 'conforming to the requisite standard of nobility' according to Levy (see J Meissner, 'Tribes at the Core: Legitimacy, Structure and Power in Zaydi Yemen,' an unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia, 1987, 126, 132; R Levy, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Islam*, volume 1, 76; Messick, *op. cit.*, 162: and Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, 49).

⁶⁵⁸ The sense of tribal autonomy was 'the standard by which status is measured' (see J Shyrock, 'The Rise of Nasir al-Nims A Tribal Commentary on Being and Becoming a Shaykh', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 46 [1990], 168).

⁶⁵⁹ Reeves makes the point that such generosity and hospitality are signs of *barakah* while Gardner writes of Bangladesh that 'whilst nobody ... would agree that one has to be rich to be a good Muslim ... outward, formal displays of piety are easier to maintain for the rich' (see Reeves, *op. cit.*, 175; and Gardner *op. cit.*, 237).

⁶⁶⁰ He quotes Dresch from 'The Position of Shaykhs among the Northern Tribes of Yemen' as saying 'what distinguishes Nasir al-Nims is not his capacity to *eliminate* conflict; in the tribal world, such a capacity would entail the elimination of autonomy as well. Rather, Nasir can *direct* the conflicts of others. He can master them, resolve or exacerbate them, much as he would his own. In conditions of popular anarchy, where conflicts easily become intractable, men who can "put things in order" ... are very much in demand' (see Shyrock, *op. cit.*, 170).

⁶⁶¹ Such thoughts concur with Kay Ka'us' 'Become known for veracity so that if ever in an emergency you utter a lie it will be believed ... a lie which has the air of truth is preferable to an accurate statement which seems to be false'. Politics for the Swat in Northern Pakistan is also pragmatic, but Lindholm draws the interesting parallel with

The sheikhs in other areas are, by contrast, essentially spiritual leaders. The sheikh at the *Zāwiya* of Sidi al-Hari in Tunis, for example, oversees a loosely-structured act of corporate devotions.⁶⁶² Some sheikhs may even have spiritual specialities; Sidi Mahraz (for example) is the patron saint of Tunis but also patron of the poor and of the local Jews, while Lilla 'Arbiyya attracts women with fertility problems. Acting as spiritual (as distinct from temporal) leaders, such sheikhs display *barakah* and *karamāt* (grace and miracles respectively) as their signs of sainthood⁶⁶³ and oversee spiritual exercises and even public ceremonies (such as the *ḥadrah*⁶⁶⁴ and *ziyarah*⁶⁶⁵).

Rather than the type of leadership provided, a distinction between the size of constituency and complexity of its organisation can be usefully made as well. Reeves does this in demarcating the 'walī complex' from the 'Sufi complex'. The two share some features (such as the personalisation of holiness) but differ in the

material success in the USA, which is equally amoral and ready to justify the means by the end (see C Lindholm, 'Validating Domination Among Egalitarian Individualists: Swat, Northern Pakistan and the USA', *Social Analysis*, 28 [1990], 27-28; [tr.] R Levy, *A Mirror For Princes (The Qabus Nama) by Kai Ka'us Ibn Islander* {hereafter referred to as *The Qabus Nama*}, London, 1951, 35).

⁶⁶² Men gather in the mosque with women in an adjoining room and the sheikh in a small reception area. The men chant from the Qur'an and the women dance and ululate. The men then perform *dhikr* and perhaps they too dance (dance is also an important facet of the *zar* ceremonies whereby possession is used for healing; see Johnson, *op. cit.*, 1-6; and Saunders, *op. cit.*, 177-191).

⁶⁶³ The 'ways and means' pairing of *barakah* and *karamāt* was observed to Gilsenan's surprise to be separated in North Lebanon where sheikhs were empowered by patronage of the ruling beys and did not rely on having access to *barakah* (see Gilsenan, *Recognising Islam*, 95-96, 106; and Reeves, *op. cit.*, 125).

⁶⁶⁴ *Dhikr* and litanies specific to each Sufi order are chanted (see Reeves, *op. cit.*, 214-216).

⁶⁶⁵ The word simply means 'visit' but in a religious context refers to the visitation of shrines, three-quarters of which are attached to mosques. These shrines consist of a dome covering the saint's tomb (thus allowing circumambulation). The tomb itself consists of a *tabut* (a catafalque, or wooden box on top of the saint's burial spot), a *kiswa* (a cloth, often elaborately embroidered, covering the catafalque), an *imma* (a turban wrapped around a pole that rises from the catafalque) and *qubab* or *mawadin* (ornaments at each corner of the catafalque). Almost half the tombs in Tanta are enclosed in a *maqsura* (cage) which is usually opened at festivals (see Reeves, *op. cit.*, 240-257 for a fuller description of the shrines; 260-273 details behaviour while visiting them).

accessibility of *barakah* since the former sees tomb visitation⁶⁶⁶ rather than *tariqa* membership as central. Although visitation is individualistic, behaviour is never disrespectful. Visitors normally greet the saint when entering the tomb and may then read Qur'anic verses such as the Fatiha or tell the names of God on a rosary. There may be (ritual or informal) prayer, circumambulation of the tomb, kissing or caressing the *maqsura* (grilled cage surrounding the tomb) or the *kiswa* (cloth covering the tomb) to glean *barakah*. A remembrance (*dhikr*) might be left to keep the petitioner before the saint's attention; but Reeves makes clear that all these actions are possible while none are ritualistic requirements. The motivation for visiting tombs is equally individualistic, since his informants mentioned seeking blessing or specific favours (such as healing, a successful birth, protection or revenge, examination success, the recovery of lost items) as reasons for their trip. Other reasons cited included being obedient to dream-guidance, accompanying a friend or relative, satisfying curiosity, or even for professional purposes (gaining legitimacy for politicians and begging for beggars).

Reeves sees the *mūlid* ceremony as the other major tomb-centred activity.⁶⁶⁷ These are held during the hot season⁶⁶⁸ and generally last around a week, with the first few days and the final evening (which will be a Friday) being most active.

⁶⁶⁶ Saints are believed to continue existing after death in an intermediate world (*al-barzakh*) which lies between this and the divine world (*al-dunyā* and *alim al-gaib* respectively) and do not die as others do, so the tomb is viewed as a meeting point between the two worlds where *barakah* is available (see Reeves, *op. cit.*, 128-129; and Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, 226).

⁶⁶⁷ Reeves talks about the *mūlid* ceremony in general and examines several specific *mawālīd* (the plural of *mūlid*) particularly that of Sayyid al-Badawi which largely concurs with Gilsenan's description of 'Saint's Day'. It is interesting that the word *mūlid* derives from the verb 'to give birth' and it occurs on the saints' birth anniversary whereas the equivalent ceremony in the Indian subcontinent (the *urus*) is derived from the verb 'to get married' and commemorates the saint's death anniversary, reflecting the blurred life/death distinction believed to govern saintly existences (see Reeves, *op. cit.*, 281-350, 364-384; Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi*, 47-64; and K Ewing, 'Malangs of the Punjab: Intoxication or Adab as the Path to God' in [ed.] Metcalf, *op. cit.*, 326).

⁶⁶⁸ Although exact timings are reluctantly revealed (too-careful planning has the appearance of unspirituality) the festival is positioned according to the solar calendar which inevitably means there are conflicts with lunar-timed events such as the Eids that move through the seasons (festivals falling in Ramadan are generally cancelled or postponed). In Bangladesh most non-lunar festivals tend to occur in winter.

Even though Tanta is neither a large nor important town⁶⁶⁹ people come from as far away as Morocco, Algeria and Iraq to visit the shrine, view the relics, listen to Qur'anic recitation and music, watch the procession (*zaffah*) and eat food at the shrine (which has symbolic rather than physical importance since it implies the imbibing of *barakah*). Ecstatic behaviour mingles with fairground entertainment but such commercialisation does not alter the perception of the event as primarily a spiritual one.⁶⁷⁰ It is also primarily a saint rather than Sufi centred occasion.⁶⁷¹

For Johnson and Reeves *et al*, then, the saint is above all a spiritual and not a political leader. His 'election' is ordered, usually by another saint but sometimes by Muhammed appearing in a dream.⁶⁷² His power is available through specialised events (the *ziyārah* and the *mūlid*) and displayed through miracles (*karamāt*). While some have compiled typologies of miracles⁶⁷³ (such as healings, transformation of objects, flying through the air, vindication of a saint through confrontation) Reeves is more interested in why people appear willing to believe in them. Not all do, he suggests; but they participate in the life of a *walī* complex nonetheless for its sociability, excitement, economic advantage, or prestige. Others hope, rather than believe, for an answer to a current need such as healing. For others the miraculous touch is central to their sense of self-respect ('if the saint has

⁶⁶⁹ Its population is approximately 340000 and it has 37 shrines of which that of Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi (1199 AD-1276 AD) is the most important.

⁶⁷⁰ Gilsenan's perspective is slightly at variance (or perhaps the particular Tanta *mūlid* he witnessed was different) since he described a procession where 'the somewhat pathetic group of *Aḥmadiyya*' (ie devotees of the founding *tariqa* in Tanta) were totally overshadowed by the military band, much to the chagrin of the religious-minded' (see Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi*, 49).

⁶⁷¹ Although Sufi groups may well attend since *mawālīd* tend to act as regular 'conference centres' for the Sufi orders. But Reeves' point throughout is to draw a distinction between the 'high and low church' forms of Islamic spirituality and to emphasize that an event such as the *mūlid* has wide appeal.

⁶⁷² There are several hadith that speak of the possibility, and trustworthiness, of dreams in which Muhammed appears (see [tr.] A Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, [volume four], 1225).

⁶⁷³ In his study of the Egyptian saint Salama Ibn Hassan Salama, Gilsenan identified four 'themes' of miracles viz. extraordinary and inexplicable learning, confounding his opponents when challenged, an awareness of 'secret' knowledge, and helping his followers at their times of need. Gardner suggests the mutability of bodily forms is central to the miraculous (see Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi*, 29-30; and Gardner, *op. cit.*, 247 and 258).

bestowed his *barakah* on me I must have some worth').⁶⁷⁴ Thus emotional and spiritual worth intermingle, just as material and spiritual values do when generosity is seen as indicative of *barakah*.⁶⁷⁵

In conclusion it can be suggested that the sheikh is an ambiguous term; is he (for example) a spiritual guide or a canny manipulator of local interests? It could be argued that different authors' biases prompt these variations with ethnographers noting facets of social interactions while Islamicists see religious observances. Meissner's *imāms*, Gellner's saints of the Atlas and Fernea's Southern Iraqi sheikhs are all presented essentially as social facilitators who (to use Evans-Pritchard's nomenclature) negotiate the nesting segments of a segmentary society into position.⁶⁷⁶ Reeves and Johnson's sheikhs, by contrast, are spiritual practitioners. It is therefore clear that there is no archetypal 'sheikh'. Beyond the obvious social/spiritual division, however, some continuity can be seen. The sheikh provides societal cohesion in at least three major ways. He solves potentially disastrous disputes; he represents local opinion; and he orchestrates the excitement of regular festivals. Each of these has a social and a spiritual aspect. Village disputes are damaging because villagers mutually depend on each other; but unity is incumbent on Muslims while all share the dependence on God's grace (however accessed) to avoid Divine retribution for wrong deeds. Local representation is needed to focus and counter outside forces, but these forces can be unseen powers as well as greedy neighbours.⁶⁷⁷ And festivals combine

⁶⁷⁴ See Reeves, *op. cit.*, 202-204.

⁶⁷⁵ See Gilseman, *Recognising Islam*, 140; 116-141 detail a Lebanese village where Kurdish immigrants outlasted their Ottoman patrons and thereby established themselves as a ruling dynasty. The local sheikh apparently opposes the dominating Kurdish *beys* while actually supporting them in return for the *beys* provision of cheap land rental or gifts of grain.

⁶⁷⁶ Whether any society is as tidily arranged as the 'organised anarchy' of Evans-Pritchard's tidy telescopic model is debatable. Reeves, for example, saw Egyptian society as 'a puzzle' consisting of pieces of Islam, 'along with subsistence practices, the family, political organisation etc. from which a coherent picture of the community would emerge'. However simple or complex, anthropological studies focus on the 'local social structure' (in Gellner's words) and attempt to identify the forces that have fashioned it (see Evans-Pritchard, *op. cit.*, 6; Reeves, *op. cit.*, 417-418; and Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*, 138).

⁶⁷⁷ Ali notes that *jinn*s could be 'jungle folk hidden in the hills' but others assume they are 'invisible or hidden forces' reiterating the idea that threats may come from either

religious fervour with emotional catharsis. The sheikhly rôle incorporates these three, dual-sided disparate aspects.

Every society requires leaders; because Islamic societies were to be guided into spiritual and temporal success into a celestial realm there is an emphasis to offer encourage and advise. Muslim leaders as from the Umayyad attempted to do so at least give social balance covering their community progressively full. It was this later that the Islamic "Munawwar" (enlightened) genre of writing is important. These might sound the end of the medieval society and contained of accounts by the guidance of "the great officials". They grew the in various Sultans.

⁷⁷ Referenced in the history, as "Islamic" throughout the discussion.

⁷⁸ See M. Leveau, *A Comparative Study of Arabic and Islamic Studies for Muslims from the Seventh to the Sixteenth Century A.D.*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, London University, 1963, 2.

⁷⁹ The Nazarian writings (which concentrated on the career and morality of governmental and domestic aspects such as justice and administration, matters, leadership advice and discipline in a semi-philosophic, semi-political manner) had the same root been influenced by Greek thought from the time of Alexander the Great. It was the post-Islamic period, which that Greek style ideas were first introduced into Islam. While it has revealed this study to consider the flow of our study shows from Greek neo-Platonic thought, however late Islamic thinking is very far removed to really follow the well ordered, true of justice, which a "justice" whose meaning is universal derived from the eastern Western world that justice in the legal capacity of all citizens, brought to Greek world of a just ruler was the concept of *episteme*, both at an individual and a societal level, whereby everyone was equally distributed. The justice that was an essential feature of argument justice, which the ancient Greek concept of justice was in the proper place, either as a priest, a warrior, a farmer or an artisan. Moral law, justice as involving human consequences of the Islamic faith, the thing was concurrently a strong need for order, which led some Muslims, such as Sa'ad al-Din Khatibi to advocate acceptance of the ruler's order as the leader of law civil, the order being chosen. Islamic culture with its in a sense, which order by keeping each member of society beyond its position. This for example, which spiritual position, a God ordained, long maintained, making of society whereby each the relevant people in their order, people will then carefully maintain, these positions for others in those further down the social scale. While equality is not envisaged, justice is done. Not only would this be philosophically wrong, it would also prove impractical, as it stipulated by the saying "Mirrors, which reflect images, they show in an identical

realm and therefore a potential defender needs capabilities in both. Eickelman echoes this by writing that 'the core of *maraboutism* is quite simple. It postulates that relations between men and the supernatural operate in nearly the same way as do relations between men only' (see Y Ali, *op. cit.*, 319; and Eickelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 160).

Appendix Three: The 'Mirrors of Princes' Genre of Writing.

Every society requires leaders; because Islamic societies aim to integrate both spiritual and temporal aspects into societal control there is an imperative to either encourage piety amongst Muslim leaders (as Shah Wali Ullah attempted to do) or at least give some Islamic covering over essentially pragmatic rule. It was this latter task that the Islamic 'Mirrors for Princes'⁶⁷⁸ genre of writing is important. These began around the end of the second century AH and consisted of 'manuals for the guidance of rulers and officials'⁶⁷⁹ They grew out of earlier Sassanian,⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁸ Referred to, for brevity, as 'Mirrors' throughout this discussion.

⁶⁷⁹ See M Dawood, A Comparative Study of Arabic and Persian Mirrors for Princes from the Second to the Sixth Century AH, unpublished PhD thesis, London University, 1965, 2.

⁶⁸⁰ The Sassanian writings (which concentrated on the ethics and morality of government and covered aspects such as juristic and administrative matters, leadership advice and philosophy in a semi-idealistic, semi-realistic manner) had themselves been influenced by Greek thought from the time of Alexander the Great. It was via post-Sassanid Persian writers that Hellenistic ideas were first introduced into Islam. While it lies beyond this study to consider the flow of any single theme from Greek via (Pahlawi-language) Sassanian into Islamic thinking it may be of interest to briefly follow one such concept; that of justice - albeit a 'justice' whose meaning is somewhat altered from the modern Western sense that focuses on the legal equality of all citizens. Intrinsic to Greek sense of a just order was the concept of equipoise, both at an individual and a societal level, whereby everyone was optimally positioned. The justice that was an essential feature of Sassanian life thus emphasized the maintenance of each person in his 'proper' place, either as a priest, a warrior, a farmer or an artisan. Islam saw justice as involving human acceptance of the Divine will, but there was concurrently a strong need for order which led some thinkers (such as Fakhr ad-Din Razi) to advocate acceptance of an unfair ruler as the lesser of two evils (the other being chaos). Islamic rulers were to maintain societal order by keeping each section of society securely in position. Thus (for example) Nizam al-Mulk postulates a God-ordained, king maintained, ranking of society whereby each tier selects people to serve under them and then carefully monitors these servants for abuses to those further down the social scale. While equality is not envisaged, neither is abuse. Not only would this be intrinsically wrong, it would also prove ultimately destabilising as is exemplified by the saying 'Mirrors' writers often quoted that 'there is no kingdom without an army, no army without wealth, no wealth without material prosperity, and no material prosperity without justice.' Al-Ghazali quotes the hadith 'The justice of one day of a just sultan is more excellent than the worship of sixty years' in his 'Nasihah al-Muluk' while the later writer Nasir ad-Din Tusi (in his Akhlaq-i-Nasiri) again presents justice as the maintenance of societal order and regal care of all. The Islamic concept of justice thus fitted into pre-existing Sassanian and imported

Babylonian, and Byzantine forms since pre-Islamic Arabia had no large scale political life unlike the Sassanians *et al* who had developed a rationale and a form for imperial rule.⁶⁸¹ In keeping with the multi-cultural nature of the Abbasid regime, these 'Mirrors' were written in both Arabic and Persian (two of the earliest Arabic writers - 'Abd al-Hamid and Ibn al-Muqaffa - were actually non Arabs). They took the form of advice regarding suitable behaviour (*adab*⁶⁸²), epistles (*risala*) and testimonies (*wasiyya*). Ibn al-Muqaffa postulated the ideal leader as authoritarian, Godfearing (and therefore spending time with the '*ulama*'⁶⁸³), refined, efficient, and vigilant of his officials' behaviour and ready to punish or reward them accordingly. In a kind of 'power purifies' wistfulness he suggested that since the ruler was all-powerful he had no need of malice, greed or flattery and thus his rule should be marked by moderation and honesty. Good rule, for Ibn al-Muqaffa, was marked by regal splendour (a Sassanian, rather than Arabic, attitude) and the stability of government. Such pragmatism is also reflected in his suggestion that rulers need to make judgements that increase their power and public recognition and his recognition that despotic rulers did exist (and honest officials thus faced the choice of flight or martyrdom). Like other 'Mirrors' writers Ibn al-Muqaffa saw the caliph as being appointed by God and thus obedience to him was a religious duty.⁶⁸⁴

Hellenistic ideas (see A Lambton, 'Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship', *Studia Islamica*, 17 [1962], 93-97).

⁶⁸¹ 'According to which virtue and order radiated outward and downward from an all-benevolent and semi-divine emperor, supported politically and ideologically by a hierarchically graded corps of soldiers-administrators' (see Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 160).

⁶⁸² Reeves suggests *adab* has the general meaning of refined behaviour since the word roughly translates to etiquette or manners, although in Sufi contexts it involves poverty, control of bodily appetites, seclusion, silence, night vigils and connection with a mystical leader. Metcalf adds that *adab* 'distinguishes cultivated behaviour from that seemed vulgar ... means discipline and training ... denotes good breeding and refinement ... is the respect or deference one properly formed and trained shows to those who deserve it'. Böwering compares it to *sunnah* 'in the sense of the traditional norm of conduct derived from the exemplary behaviour of the ancestors' and distinguished an ethical, social, and intellectual dimension to the term (see Reeves, *op. cit.*, 216-218; B Metcalf, 'Introduction' in [ed.] B Metcalf, *op. cit.*, 3; G Böwering 'The *Adab* Literature of Classical Sufism: Ansari's Code of Conduct' in [ed.] Metcalf, *op. cit.*, 66).

⁶⁸³ Ironically al-Muqaffa's own faith was suspected and he was accused of being a Manichean at a time when the caliph (al-Mahdi) was persecuting them.

⁶⁸⁴ See Dawood, *op. cit.*, 53-61.

Al-Jahiz (died 255/868)⁶⁸⁵ and Ibn Qutayba⁶⁸⁶ also wrote Arabic 'Mirrors' of the *adab* form, and these also cited the Qur'an and hadith for each topic considered while concentrating on more temporal things.

The epistle (*risala*) form of the 'Mirrors' genre usually contained more Islamic values, were shorter, and more practical than the *adab* material. They were often written to advise new governors, suggesting how rule could be maintained and an area best administered. The form was standardised by 'Abd al-Hamid (died 132/749-50) and was clearly Islamic in tone, with the inclusion of Qur'anic quotations, prayers, and references to the Hereafter, although it also had Persian and Greek ideas. The importance of nobility⁶⁸⁷ was also stressed in the 'Mirrors' epistle of Tahir Ibn al-Husayn to his son ('Abd Allah Ibn Tahir). The Arabic testimony (*wasiyya*) 'Mirrors' followed the pre-Islamic Arabian tradition of a dying man leaving a will and the most important of these was arguably that written by al-Mansur⁶⁸⁸ to his son, al-Mahdi. After preliminary exhortations to faithfulness, al-Mansur advises that stability can only come about when there is security, justice and close monitoring of officials.

By the early fifth century AH Arabic 'Mirrors' had become a widely-sourced, mostly theoretical literary genre intended for entertainment as well as edification.⁶⁸⁹ Al-Turtusi (died 525/1131) wrote the 'Siraj al-Muluk' which exemplifies this later type of 'Mirrors' with its Islamic ethical basis overlaid with Sufi concepts and non-Islamic ideas. He states that kings are appointed by God to prevent lawlessness and

⁶⁸⁵ The 'Kitab al-Taj' is usually attributed to him although Dawood suggests Ibn Qutayba (died 276/889) as the actual author (see Dawood, *op. cit.*, 66-67).

⁶⁸⁶ He wrote the 'Kitab al-Sultan' (the first chapter of the 'Uyun al-Akhbar').

⁶⁸⁷ An advantage of relying on the nobility is that they have 'less to acquire from the favour of the King, (and therefore they) will be more likely to draw the attention of the Sovereign to the defects which may arise in the administration of the Kingdom and the remedies which they call for' (see F Cartwright, The Mystic Rose From the Garden of the King: A Fragment of the Vision of Sheikh Haji Ibrahim of Kerbala, London, 1925, 56). Reasoning that the already privileged are more likely to be honest prompted some to support Ershad and his entourage during the last days of his regime.

⁶⁸⁸ He was the second Abbasid caliph and ruled from 137/754-158/775, to be followed by al-Mahdi who was caliph from 158/775-169/785.

⁶⁸⁹ See Dawood, *op. cit.*, 168.

that they should be just and beneficent, while the ruled should be grateful for justice and see unjust rule as Divine punishment for some corporate sin.

In addition to the Arabic 'Mirrors for Princes' there were also Persian versions.⁶⁹⁰ The 'Qabus-Nama' was perhaps the first written and contained advice from Unsur al-Ma'ali Kay Ka'us b. Iskandar (a Ziyarid prince) to his son and successor, Gilanshah. Because it was written in 475/1082 the 'Mirrors' genre had already been standardised and the 'Qabus-Nama' is therefore similar to Arabic versions.. It does however reflect local realities (such as the injunctions to 'learn a craft' which reflects the fragility of the Ziyarid regime) and local traits (like the superiority of the rich and the pleasures of wine-drinking and homosexuality). Sufi ethical ideas are also evident, such as the elitism of only a chosen few possessing the ideal qualities of wisdom, truth and manliness . The Qabus-Nama is written in short, disjointed, imperative sentences punctuated by some discursive passages⁶⁹¹ apparently arranged in a random order. But there is (in common with the Arabic 'Mirrors') an assumption that temporal rule should have a religious basis and kings are instructed in clear Islamic terms to be caring, magnanimous and pious. This does not preclude the inclusion of pre-Islamic Persian ideas as well, such as the Sassanian idea that the king should be somewhat remote from the public.⁶⁹² Again the tone is pragmatic, not to say expedient or even at times cynical (distrust between the king and the vizier is assumed and the army is pictured as formerly abusive of civilians and potentially a threat to the king in the future). It seems the author has been unable to fully live out the ideals of Islam and is offering advice on the assumption that his son will equally be caught between what he should, and what he feels he can, do. 'I should prefer you not to drink' he writes before detailing when and

⁶⁹⁰ Albeit written in New Persian (using the Arabic script and incorporating many Arabic words) rather than Pahlawi, thus distancing them from the earlier Sassanian writings.

⁶⁹¹ For example in 'The Good and Bad in Speech' the author writes 'I have also heard another story, unsuitable for this book - and yet "nothing witty should be wasted"' before digressing into the story (see [tr.] Levy, *The Qabus Nama*, 39).

⁶⁹² Such remoteness contrasts with the informal accessibility that perhaps prompted Justice Frankfurter's oft-quoted 'we do not sit like some kadi under a tree dispensing justice according to considerations of individual expediencies' promotion of Western legality. Messick is one who cites this disparaging phrase before describing the format whereby a Yemeni judge did operate (see Messick, *op. cit.*, 169-171).

where drinking should take place since 'I know you will not withhold your hand from wine because of these words nor will you welcome my advice.'⁶⁹³ Kay Ka'us finishes this chapter suggesting that if his son refrain from alcohol on Fridays he 'should achieve reward on the next world and good report will be yours in this world.'⁶⁹⁴ Confining such appetites to one's youth and indulging them only moderately would seem to constitute acceptable behaviour. The point is not whether alcohol (or homosexuality) are Qur'anically sanctioned (they clearly are not) but that a Muslim ruler felt he had to include such liberal advice to his Muslim son rather than merely repeating what the orthodox '*ulama*' would say.

Thus the 'Qabus-Nama' reads more as an instructive letter of sundry aphorisms from a rakish uncle than a religious tract, or even a political biography. There are few details of Kay Ka'us' home region of Gilan (in the South Caspian region) and nothing approaching a contemporary political commentary although references abound to more distant (in time and place) caliphs, dynastic kings and ancient Greeks. A decade after this was written⁶⁹⁵ Nizam al-Mulk (died 485/1092) wrote the 'Siyasat-Nama' in response to a request by Malikshah.⁶⁹⁶ This is set within the Seljuq sultanate framework, whereby the sultan had charge of political and military powers while ceding religious authority to the caliphate. Maintaining order rather than the strict implementation of the *Shari'ah* is thus the primary concern, although (after politic compliments to the present ruler) there is an affirmation that the apparent cyclic changes in human fortunes are overseen by God. Rule is thus seen as divinely ordained and the state and religion should be in harmony with each

⁶⁹³ See [tr.] Levy, *The Qabus Nama*, 57 and following.

⁶⁹⁴ Similarly, Kay Ka'us gives advice regarding other recreations such as eating, homosexuality ('as between women and youths do not confine your inclinations to either sex; thus you may find enjoyment from both ... but on this topic it is requisite that one's discourse should be brief, lest it engender appetite'), hunting, polo, jesting, playing backgammon and chess (see [tr.] Levy, *The Qabus Nama*, 77-78).

⁶⁹⁵ Dawood gives 484/1091-92 as the date; Nizam al-Mulk himself says that the work was commissioned in 479/1086 and it was formally published in 499/1105 (see Dawood, *op. cit.*, 246; [tr.] H Darke, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings (The Siyasat-Nama or Siyar al-Muluk al-Mulk*, London, 1970, 1; and Böwering, *op. cit.*, 63).

⁶⁹⁶ The Seljuq leader under whom the Seljuq empire reached its zenith. He ruled from 464/1073 (when only eighteen years old) until 485/1092.

other.⁶⁹⁷ The 'Siyasat Nama' reads less as a specific history than a collection of themes presented by a variety of participants.

A third Persian 'Mirror' is the 'Nasihāt al-Muluk', written around 503/1109-10 by al-Ghazali⁶⁹⁸ for the Seljuq prince Sanjar (then governor of Khurasan). Al Ghazali saw the Seljuqs as legitimate sultans by whose *bay'ah* the caliphate was in turn legitimized. Although the 'Nasihāt al-Muluk' includes Persian, Indian, Judeo-Christian, and Greek ideas, Arabic outweighs non-Arabic material in al-Ghazali's sources. The Islamic stance is immediate since the opening chapters are devoted to faith and worship and moral injunctions are underpinned by Islamic rather than Persian concepts but al-Ghazali also reflects to some extent Persian thinking in pragmatically stating that the sultan's first duty is to implement justice rather than the *Shari'ah* and be just, humble, moderate and kind.

There are of course other writings that concern themselves with the exercise of power, but these tended to have a slightly different emphasis. For example, Firdausi (born 320/932) invoked stars, planets and elements rather than prophets and alluded to ancient Persian rulers when extolling the Ghaznavids in his 'Shah-Nama'. Al-Mawardi's fifth century AH 'Al-Ahkham as-Sultaniyyah' is prosaic in its advice (such as the appointment of *viziers* and the establishment of the *imāmate*) and neither recalls ancient rulers nor invokes Qur'anic themes. By not giving direct answers it tends to raise as many questions as it answers.⁶⁹⁹ Ibn al-Tiqaqa (born 659-60/1261, date of death unknown) who lived immediately after

⁶⁹⁷ 'If it were right for men to do as they wished, God would not have created the king and appointed him over them' (see Darke, *op. cit.*, 41).

⁶⁹⁸ The original was lost within a century and only the Arabic translation survived which led to confusion regarding authorship. Dawood concurs with Lambton in attributing it to al-Ghazali but others such as Hillenbrand disagree (see Dawood, *op. cit.*, 237; Lambton, *Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship*, 94; and C Hillenbrand, 'Islamic Orthodoxy or Realpolitik? Al-Ghazali's Views on Government,' *Iran* 26 [1988], 91-92).

⁶⁹⁹ For example '*imāmate* comes into being in two ways; the first of these is by the election of those in power and influence, and the second is by the delegation of the previous *imam*' which gives little clues regarding when one method should prevail over the other or who those with 'power and influence' are (see A Yate, *Al-Ahkham as-Sultaniyyah The Laws of Islamic Governance by Abu'l Hasan 'Ali Ibn Muhammed Ibn Habib al-Basri al-Baghdadi al-Mawardi*, London, 1996, 12).

the Mongol invasion⁷⁰⁰ does recall previous rulers (Muhammed, the first four caliphs, Umayyad, Abbasid, Buyid and Seljuq) in his study of the exercise of power. He begins, however, not with an invocation or idealization but an admission that power has been divided into religious and temporal aspects before mentioning (with varying degrees of detail) the ten key characteristics of effective leadership. Intelligence is paramount, he suggests; but a king also needs to be just, God-fearing, widely knowledgeable (so expert advice can be appropriated), avoiding of hatefulness, generous, commanding of respect, skilled in statecraft, honourable with his treaties and commitments, and well aware of the minutiae of his subjects' lives.⁷⁰¹ The eighth/fourteenth century Indian historian Ziauddin Barani similarly gives his opinion of the ideal Islam state while recording (although not impartially) the rule of Slave King Ghiyas ud-Din Balban (he ruled from 664/1266-686/1287).⁷⁰²

Thus it can be seen that the leadership studies provided by the varied 'Mirrors' alluded to religious ideas but were based on pragmatism. They were written by those interested in maintaining the social order and therefore did not highlight inconsistencies between ideals and practice or ambiguities in their arguments.⁷⁰³ Just as there is a composite theological picture that both upholds God's sovereignty while acknowledging *jinns et al* there is a combined sociological image whereby it is accepted that Qur'anic rules would govern an ideal society while accepting compromise solutions for immediate effect. Historical veracity and religious orthodoxy are lesser concerns than the provision of useful advice to leaders.⁷⁰⁴ This

⁷⁰⁰ 'A dynasty enriched with ... military and civil obedience' he judiciously writes (see [tr.] C Whitting, Al Fakhri on the Systems of Governments and the Moslem Dynasties by Ibn Tiqtaqa, London, 1947, 24).

⁷⁰¹ A 'study of obscure matters' in the author's words (see [tr.] Whitting, op. cit., 21).

⁷⁰² See Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, 13.

⁷⁰³ Ibn Qutayba quotes some contradictory hadith in his 'Kitab al-Sultan', for example, without adding his own ideas (see Dawood, op. cit., 85-86).

⁷⁰⁴ The *Siyasat Nama*, for example, has historical lapses such as the Saffarid revolt being presented as a Fatimid-promoted action despite the fact that the latter regime was not founded until forty years after the actual revolt, and 'Umar being punished after his death for tardiness in his civic duties to Baghdad although he died over a century before the city was founded. Lambton suggests that 'the historian tended to view history as important so far as it 'proved' Islam and acted as a warning to those

flexibility is reminiscent of the way the *Shari'ah* is seen as the ideal legal code waiting for full implementation while providing some legal measures and cohesive rhetoric. As always, translating Eternal edicts into a temporal world requires some adjustments.

who rejected or failed to fulfil its demands; the biographer regarded as significant those aspects of character and life which helped to build up the Muslim community' but whether Nizam al-Mulk was motivated to 'prove' Islam is less sure. To whom was he offering such proof? (see Darke, *op. cit.*, 17, 13; and Lambton, Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship, 91).