ISLAM REFORMED IN INDIAN HISTORY: THE DYNAMIC SUFI HEART IN VITAL TRANSITION TO PRINTED SCRIPTURE

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Abstract: Attempting to comprehend the controversial subject of Islamic reform, this study compares the development of Indian Islam to the Protestant Reformation. Seminal findings from social science aid in understanding religious reform as an evolving historical process. During the transition to colonial rule in India, Christian missionaries introduced a scripturally defined concept of religion that challenged the traditional worldview with Sufis at the heart of organic universal order. Shah Waliullah interpreted the social disorder as the historical operation of the transcendent and willful God, declaring Islamic scriptures as the only authoritative guide for believers. Reformers translated the Qur'ān, preached to the masses, and established independent Muslim schools. Scripturalism expressed as literalism became puritanical resulting in sectarian fragmentation and conflict with Islamic and Christian reform. But the most disruptive change agent was technological: the printing press transformed scripture from oral and manuscript traditions, and the pervasive printed Qur'ān in local languages shaped individual and communal Muslim identity. The profound historical impact of religious reform with printed scripture could portend a new era with digital scripture in cyberspace.

Keywords: Islamic reform; Christian missionaries; Shah Waliullah; scripturalism; embodied mind; printing press.

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Introduction

Reporting on an encounter with Muslims in 1794, William Carey of the Baptist Missionary Society in Bengal visited the tomb of a Sufi saint and questioned worshipers who had professed a belief in the divine origin of the Qur'ān: "Have you ever seen it or read it?" Someone eventually appeared and when Carey asked the meaning of the words in the sacred book replied: "No, for it was written in Arabic, and no one could understand it." The ready response from the missionary was, "How then can you obey it? and wherefore are ye Mahomedans?"[1]

This early Muslim-Christian engagement illuminates a baseline for historical perspective. In an effort to comprehend current events in the Islamic world, the purpose here is to identify patterns in a historical process of religious reform by highlighting the themes in this simple story: common worship at a shrine; availability of actual Islamic scripture; comprehension of scriptural content; and finally, awareness of what it means to be a Muslim facing the challenge to Islam as a distinct religion and belief system. Islamic reformers and puritans for centuries have experienced an organic identity shift from a comprehensive static to individualistic dynamic worldview. This historical identity change among Indian Muslims stemmed politically from imperial loss to colonial power combined with the transformation of language and technology.

This essay is based on my earlier historical examination of the Muhammadi movement, an activist and sometimes militant Sufi order that is recognized as critical to a broader reform movement in Indian Islam. While no new historical evidence is offered here, the intention is rather to extend the key themes from my earlier research with reference to social science studies on religious identity. The most significant works on the Muhammadi reformers using primary historical resources have appeared in recent years. An essential book by SherAli Tareen, *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity*,[2] analyzes the

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[1] *The Annual Report of the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society*, 1 (1792-1799), 162. This anecdote is taken from my history dissertation (Harlan O. Pearson, "Islamic Reform and Revival in Nineteenth Century India: The Tariqa-Muhammadiyah (PhD diss., Duke University, Durham, 1979) that later became a book: Harlan O. Pearson, *Islamic Reform and Revival in Nineteenth-century India: The Tariqa-i Muhammadiyah* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008), 131.

[2] SherAli Tareen, *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020).

vernacular reformist literature and debates between traditionalists and descendants of Shah Waliullah. Tareen discusses in detail the ongoing controversy between traditionalists and reformists with their emphasis on forbidden popular practices (*bid'a*) and the sovereignty of Muhammad during a time of uncertain political sovereignty. Another major book on Islamic reform by Moin Ahmad Nizami, *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam: The Chishti-Sabris in 18th-19th Century North India*,[3] adds rich historical detail in describing the complex interactions among Sufi groups related to Shah Waliullah and later anticolonialist movements.

This update to my previous research was inspired by scholarship from linguists and cognitive science. Although abstract theory can obscure cultural nuance, patterns of religious development become clearly evident with historical comparison and social analysis. In seeking to comprehend the organic worldview professed and displayed by Sufis, I was guided originally by pioneering social theories, including religion as a reflection of society from Emile Durkheim,[4] the analogy of organic and social systems from Mary Douglas,[5] and scripturalism from Clifford Geertz.[6] With the later appearance of the straightforward classic book *Metaphors We Live By*,[7] linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explained how everyday language and the body shaped human thought and set the stage for the Embodied Mind theory. While questioning assumptions of Western philosophy, their theory of knowledge emphasized the dominance of the human unconscious. The theoretical approach from embodied cognition illuminated the religious role of language and confirmed my previous historical views with a comprehensive explanation for the continuing organic vitality and dynamism of Sufism in Islamic history.

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[3] Moin Ahmad Nizami, *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam: The Chishti-Sabris in 18th-19th Century North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[4] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1915).

[5] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Vintage Press, 1973).

[6] Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

[7] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). For an introduction to Embodied Mind theory, see Mark Johnson, *Embodied Mind, Meaning, and Reason: How Our Bodies Give Rise to Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Another noteworthy theoretical framework developed by a group of social psychologists to understand human morality across cultures is The Moral Foundation Theory.[8] With ongoing research and widespread acceptance, the findings of this exemplary project were used here for analyzing the dynamics of different reformist responses to colonial rule. Social theories provide useful tools for analyzing religious history, but this method also requires that the stories from history, such as the colonial encounter between two religious traditions, inform and verify social theory on religious development.

Sufi Shrine Worship

The location of the Christian missionary account at a Muslim tomb introduces the first theme of historical development that reveals the prevailing form of worship in premodern Islamic empires. Despite the prominence of grand mosques built by Mughal conquerors for the orthodox, the common worship centres were the tombs of Muslims widely regarded as mystics or saints. Islam made inroads in India through Sufi leaders who often resembled familiar Hindu holy men mixed in the stew of Indian spirituality and religion. A missionary would easily find ordinary Muslims at a shrine since devotion to a living or departed Sufi saint was a prevalent religious expression that continues in present times.

With wandering ascetic fakirs as well as establishment clergy claiming Sufi spirituality, commentators have struggled to define Sufism, often just referring to Islamic mysticism. Some Sufis expressed hostility to royalty, while others provided legitimacy in the imperial court. Sufi ritual worship often includes *dhikr* or meditational remembrance of God's name, sometimes rhythmically merging with music and dance. For most followers, emotional if not spiritual expression through Sufi ritual was complemented or replaced by shrine veneration—offering prayers and seeking blessings at the tomb of a saint. Heretical Sufis aroused orthodox reaction, but the emotional and popular appeal of Sufism in India and throughout the Islamic world transcended sectarian and ethnic divisions. Though

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[8] For a discussion of this theory from a key project developer, see Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012).

ineffable, fluid and undefinable, Sufism displayed social patterns for belief, worship and institutions operating in history.

Early social science considered the Elementary Forms of the Religious Life as a reflection of society. "Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities; rites of religious assembly excite, maintain or recreate mental states within the group."[9] Shrine worship involves reverence through pilgrimage and devotion to a sacred place whether dedicated to a deity, relic, ancestor or departed saint. Evident everywhere, shrines mediate from the known profane to a transcendent sacred world. Later anthropologists saw "Religion as a Cultural System", not confined to the explicitly sacred—a system of reflexive symbols provides a meaningful image of reality that orders the subjective worldview and guides conduct.[10] Institutionally, Sufism often took form as patriarchal households reflecting the monarchical state.

The main Sufi institution was the communal brotherhood led by a father-king in the spiritual realm representing the paternal role to his people and monarch as the head of the body politic. The imperial court model was apparent with the Sufi leader: assuming royal titles; claiming a spiritual territory; appearing in public ceremonies with awed supplicants; and displaying a spiritual hierarchy from commoners to advanced disciples. The biological family model was evident with familiar titles and strong spiritual ties symbolized by an oath of allegiance (*bay'ah*) with the fatherly master.

Celebrated Sufis popularly regarded as genuine saints became spiritual father to many at the higher level of king with continuing influence after death. When disciples reached spiritual maturity, they progressed by claiming a spiritual territory and attracting disciples of their own. Even local saints were worthy of village shrines as institutional places for sacred prayer, blessing and intercession in life. Sufism represented Islam's social and spiritual heart for both the popular folk Little Tradition and the orthodox Great Tradition of the urban elite.

Classic Sufi texts describe a worldview incorporating organic and familial systems in the natural hierarchical order of the universe. The cosmic Universal/Perfect Man reflected the Islamic monarch

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[9] Durkheim, *The Elementary*, 389.
[10] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System", in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

with the microcosm Sufi saint reconciling the harmonious unity of being. Understood similarly as the Cosmic Man in India and the Great Chain of Being[11] in the West, this Perennial Philosophy[12] viewed an organic hierarchy: from earthly elements to animals and demons; from humans of varying social and religious worth to nobility and saints; from angels through the heavenly hierarchy beyond to the heavenly stars and the monarchical Supreme Being. Sufi comprehension was universal and pervasive in the Muslim world, but historical events could disrupt stability.

Even before the influx of Christian missionaries, Indian Muslims responded to the decline of the Islamic Mughal Empire. The eighteenth-century theologian Shah Waliullah reaffirmed the Sufi worldview, incorporating organic systems in a natural hierarchical order of the universe. He reconciled this harmonious unity of being—encompassing a Muslim emperor—with the apparent disorder of society by emphasizing the historical operation of the transcendent and willful God evident in the sacred scriptures as the code of conduct for Muslims. Without support from the Islamic state, scripture increasingly became the organizing principle—the ultimate sacred symbol for sustaining the individual within an ailing community. Sufi shrines established and sustained popular Islam, but any deviation from orthodoxy also clouded the definition of individual and communal meaning for Muslims.

In order to understand identity in historical context, cognitive studies suggest that conscious thought is much less significant than the unconscious in influencing human understanding and action. Linguists particularly maintain that symbols and metaphors are essential. The *Metaphors We Live By*[13] depend on bodily experience and meaning in a certain cultural environment and historical time. The metaphor is not just words; metaphorical grounding connects to human life, society and religion—a visceral connection to lived experience. Inner-outer imagery from bodily metaphors was expressed in doctrine—Sufism represents the inward spiritual struggle or *jihād* requiring the same discipline as the militant warrior. Reasoning and rationality depend on the conscious use of symbolic

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[11] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (1936; reprint edition., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

[12] Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945; reprint edition., New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009).

[13] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live*.

representations in the mind that relate to the external world. The notions of embodied and immanent emphasize the bodily and familial sources of human meaning beyond rational constructs.

The human body and biological family provide basic analogies of the social system furnishing a harmonious universal system of symbols. From the Natural Symbols[14] of an organic conception of society, we see Faces in the Clouds[15] with the Embodied Mind. Organic sources predominate with inherent emotions and feelings shaping our view of the world. Whether or not we are created in the image of God, human thought is mainly unconscious, requiring a body. As metaphorical beings, we make the world in our image—the image of the body initially emerging in the family.

The patriarchal social pattern prominently features the authoritarian father symbolically acting in the state and household. While paternal symbolism is obvious in Islam, the nurturing maternal connection is less apparent. The Qur'ān contains veiled references to the archetypal Divine Book in heaven and source of all true scriptures as the Mother Book (*umm al-kitāb*).[16] Thus the whole family had personal, social and cosmic significance connected to scriptures. For a person interacting dynamically in society and history, the human body and family are models for world order shadowed by the religious establishment.

Using this approach to understand Islamic history, Sufism becomes a manifestation of the Embodied Mind. In this worldview, the amorphous Sufi collective represented the spiritual and emotional heart (*qalb*, *dil*) of society sustained by the biological family and reflected in the patriarchal institution of the Sufi brotherhood. Commentators often consider Sufism as the mystical heart of Islam even if this popular view of the heart now seems emotionally excessive to orthodox Muslim clerics and scholars. Religious symbols combine with Natural Symbols reflexively to represent social realities.

By reflecting natural systems, religion confirms and supports the static divine hierarchy but also acts as an agent of change in a dynamic society. Especially in a historical crisis, social change can produce alienation leading to a search for individual and collective

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[14] Douglas, *Natural Symbols*.

[15] Stewart Elliott Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory in Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[16] Qur'ānic verses 43:4 and 13:39. Pearson, *Islamic Reform*, 18.

identity within the framework of religious ideology. Without the supporting social and cosmic web, Muslims could no longer rely on politically-benign inward-directed Sufism; religious identity increasingly was channelled into outward action—sometimes militant *jihād*—requiring justification in the tangible written Word of God. The decline of the Mughal Empire undermined the organic Sufi worldview of a unified hierarchical Islamic society. Western colonialism only intensified the erosion of this comfortable understanding of social order mediated by Islamic judges and administrators. With no state support, community survival increasingly depended on individuals and local clergy to inspire with greater access to sacred authority and symbols—particularly the printed Qur'ān in a meaningful language.

The Qur'ān: "Have you ever seen it or read it?"

While the worshipers at an eighteenth-century tomb were vaguely aware of the Qur'ān, the difficulty in finding someone familiar with the sacred book illustrates everyday illiteracy and also lack of availability. Early in the next century, the descendants of Shah Waliullah were among the first Muslims anywhere to adopt the printing press to spread the message of Islam. The printed Qur'ān was a crucial change in the Islamic world making the divine revelation available to a much wider audience. Muslim reformers distributed sacred scripture and preached the conscientious observance of its transcendent commands together with avoidance of earthly authorities.

Elite reform leaders related to Shah Waliullah were Sufis who understood mystical nearness to God, but their printed pamphlets stressed puritanical themes—attacking any mediation between man and God, particularly prevalent practices at Sufi shrines. Although certainly aware of the publishing activities by Christian missionaries, Indian Muslims initiated the printing of the Qur'ān and reform literature independently as a response to Mughal decline as well as Western ascendency. Even centuries later, literacy is still not necessary for Muslim devotion, but the Qur'ān remains the dominant symbol wherever there are Muslims at mosques, madrassas, and shrines.

In Christian Europe, the printing press was the means for communicating the authoritative word during the Protestant Reformation. Along with undermining the Catholic Church and the

established scribal culture, printing and preaching brought standardized biblical texts directly to all people. Printed pamphlets expressed distinct interpretations of standard scriptures that created sectarian divisions rather than reinforcing customary beliefs and practices. The Protestant reformers proclaimed their own versions of truth to define and rally competitive and sometimes militant followers.

The printing press was an Agent of Change[17] that ushered the world into the Gutenberg Galaxy of modernity—a different paradigm not just for religion—with the standardized, distributed printed word. Emerging during the Enlightenment, printing press technology was adopted by Protestant Christians to promote the individual-family-community understanding of religion as biblical belief and faith. The Muslim world did not adopt the technology of the printing press until centuries after Europe. This disparity in technology adoption must be considered in the historical accounting of variations in religious development.

Preliterate society saw an interconnected organic world with an oral tradition which for early Muslims included the pervasive sound of Qur'ānic recitation. These powerful vocalizations dominated the world of early Islam. The memorized Qur'ān was eventually rendered as written manuscript and later printed book. This introduced a new dimension with letters as abstract visual representations of the oral. Since history and logic are largely the products of writing and literate thought, print technology further enhanced the role of scripture while spreading the sacred message. The transition to print portends an even more rapid and dramatic shift with the emerging paradigm of digital technology.

The next age of religion is available online—religious development beyond the Gutenberg Galaxy[18] alters the information with limitless access and memory to represent the sacred. In order to spread the message, the reactionary conservative clergy paradoxically often adopt new communication technology. Online propaganda effectively recruits even militant followers. The Information[19] in

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[17] Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

[18] Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

[19] James Gleick, *The Information: A History, a Theory, a Flood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011).

cyberspace is transformative just as the emergence of writing and then printing; however, a sterile Medium is the Message[20] objectivist view does not account for the varieties of human emotion and religious experience.

The static physical book does not lure followers; the metaphorical narrative of Islamic history becomes the inspiring call to action through new technologies. Like the European Protestants, Muslim reformers spread the original word as a sacred symbol and the Islamic story through printing and preaching. Scripture in a language understandable to ordinary people produced a readily identifiable symbol to define and inspire the community.

'No, for it was written in Arabic, and no one could understand it'

The availability of printed sacred scriptures and literature in a language understood by ordinary people was essential to reformist beliefs and practices. The Qur'ān in the classical Arabic language is the divine revelation and foundational symbol of Islam, representing the faith for Muslims. Veneration of Arabic as the revelatory language of the Qur'ān is critical in the formal institutions of Islam. Recitation, memorization and study of the Qur'ān in the original Arabic are the highest callings for most devout Muslims. Even the young can achieve special status through their Qur'ānic skills. While Islam does not exhibit the formal institutions or centralized leadership of Christianity, Islamic leadership is determined and distinguished by proficiency in Arabic and knowledge of holy scriptures. Aside from basic rituals such as prayer, however, for the vast majority of Muslims religious dialogue and education depend on the language of the locale.

In stratified Mughal India, Shah Waliullah translated the Arabic Qur'ān into the elite Persian language—possibly the first translation of the complete Qur'ān in the Islamic world. Following this radical example, his descendants much later made translations into the lingua franca of Urdu. Besides adopting the printing press to efficiently reproduce scriptures, these reformers were among the first Muslims anywhere to spread their puritanical message using pamphlets in the vernacular language. Even with low literacy, widespread reform

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[20] Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967).

preaching and popular religious literature in the Urdu language presented the divine Law for the first time to common people.

Translations of the Qur'ān—often referred to as "interpretations of the meaning" in reverence to the original language—made available the understandable content of the sacred text. Arabic remained a sign of legitimacy for leadership in the community, but vernacular languages generated much wider communication. The printed Arabic Qur'ān often with an interlinear or separate translation in the local language became a standard mass-produced artifact and ubiquitous sacred symbol. Anyone could now interpret their own sacred meaning whether rationalistic or apocalyptic.

The shift of scriptural language from the oral to the written word is critical in understanding religious history. Since language emerges from the human mind, linguists do not view it as a technology requiring prior thought and special methods.[21] Even before the printing press, writing itself introduced a technology. The written word is produced by tools while at the same time operating as a tool to preserve and continue knowledge. Before writing, communication was ephemeral and local. The written word had progressed from pictographic—the representation of things—to the representation of spoken language. Encoded visual signs or abstract symbols create words instantiated on paper. Writing is concrete performance and an artifice developed to retain information across time and space. Taking knowledge away from people, writing put human memories in storage, a powerful form of artificial memory which restructured thought and created a notion of history.

Especially for Muslims, written scriptures were even further removed from the flowing performance of vocal language intimately bound with thought and being. The Qur'ān originated in spoken Arabic of the Prophet Muhammad and was gradually written down as manuscript, initiating a scribal culture that embraced elaborate artistic expression. Together with prophetic traditions and sayings, it formed the law of Islamic empires; however, the law was restricted in scribal culture to elite leadership. With the printing press and translation, the Qur'ān developed into a widely dispersed sacred symbol in regional languages.

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[21] Johnson, *Embodied Mind.*

The Muslim clergy and imperial administrators controlled religious law with Arabic just as the Catholic priesthood with Latin and Brahmans with Sanskrit. Even in a religion without central institutions, Hindu reformers in colonial times translated and published Sanskrit scriptures in vernaculars for all Indians.[22] The elevation of original texts to a sacred status characterizes numerous modern religious and political movements. Protection of the declining community meant preservation of the central sacred symbol and artifact. The elite controlled not just daily rituals but also the law. Facilitated by language and technological change, elite reform leaders acknowledged lower-class Muslims as willful individuals participating in society and history.

'How then can you obey it? and wherefore are ye Mahomedans?'

By questioning what it means to be a Muslim, William Carey—the "father of modern missions"—presented a competitive challenge to worshipers at a shrine and also a new religious framework. In addition to producing understandable translations of the Bible and Qur'ān, Protestant missionaries preached their own reformed interpretation of Christianity to the masses. As British representatives in India, Christian missionaries described Muslims as "more rigid and fierce"[23] and often targeted them for conversion. Early on, they sometimes enraged Muslims with criticisms of the Prophet's character. Eventually, most learned to temper their message and engage Muslims with moderate vernacular tracts that later resulted in informed debates on the merits of the two religions. But simply exposing devoted worshipers to an alternative truth could only result in dissonance.

Presenting religion as a doctrine—a set of beliefs expressed in scriptures—the missionaries projected their own Protestant perspective. The early Baptists reported that sometimes the Muslim villagers in Bengal would show no inclination to embrace Christianity by conversion but would promise to abandon superstitions and "cast off their lying, stealing, worshipping the sun, offering to departed souls, etc."[24] For frustrated missionaries with few conversions, a more

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[22] Pearson, *Islamic Reform*, 230-232.
[23] Ibid., 130.
[24] Ibid., 139.

austere lifestyle was an acceptable incremental path for Muslims. The notion of religion as a puritanical way of life-based on scriptures contributed to a historical process of religious reformation resulting from individual and social change.

Reformation of Islam and Scripturalism

Entering a Muslim shrine in the late eighteenth century, a Christian missionary challenged a diffuse organic worldview with scriptural belief. This story introduces questions about the historical development of Islam in comparison to other religions. Although there are many candidates for the Martin Luther of Islam, Shah Waliullah in eighteenth-century India stands out as a preeminent Islamic Reformer. He reformulated Islamic knowledge and translated sacred scripture in his efforts to revive an ailing Muslim community and failing institutions. His family followed later with a wider reform movement driven by the adoption of the printing press and vernacular literature. These parallels to the European Reformation suggest a turning point in the history of Islam.

As an educated monk in the sixteenth century, Luther undermined the church hierarchy by producing a vernacular Bible and reform literature propagated with the printing press. Along with elevating the status of the book itself, personal interpretation and text selection determined devotion to a particular biblical approach. As a consequence, the detailed definition of the sacred initiated centuries of sectarian strife and fragmentation that redirected authoritarian tendencies. With the transition from a religious state, sanctioned religious authority to interpret scripture devolved from the patriarchal Church to the rigid local clergy and the strict father.

The male head of the family in the Protestant Christian household was ultimately responsible for the preservation of the true faith, reinforcing an exclusive group or tribe as a divine elect with predestined status. Rejecting other faith interpretations as unworthy, belief-defined superiority of the group distinguishes sectarian religion. Sectarianism based on disparate literal interpretations of scriptures illustrates the power of the written word in shaping historical and human development.

In Christian Europe, varying interpretations of scriptures from literal to metaphorical guided religious action from conservative to liberal. Indian Muslims also had diverse scriptural responses to

gradual regime change. One strain of the Islamic reform movement did lead to militant *jihād* against several adversaries in northwest India. But the basic reform ideology became institutionalized in the course of the nineteenth century. The social responses of Muslim reformers changed from violent resistance to accommodation with the reality of British colonial rule.

One prominent traditional response resulted in the Deoband Seminary[25] that essentially became a voluntary private organization without a dominant princely patron—unique at the time in the Muslim world. While promoting orthodoxy, Deoband taught from available Arabic printed texts in the Urdu vernacular and retained elements of Sufi loyalty such as the oath of allegiance (*bay'ah*). This practice of pledging commitment was apparent in other patriarchal institutions and continues even in contemporary militant groups. Although sometimes associated with Indian Wahhabism/Salafism, the Deoband school inspired different political responses in India and later Pakistan. Modified traditional practices and beliefs allowed for accommodation and institutionalized a new identity dedicated to community preservation. Aided by increasing literacy, preaching and availability of religious literature, sacred scripture defined Islam and identified Muslims.

Although scripture was beyond question, selection and interpretation of the text could lead to untraditional outcomes. Recognizing Western technological superiority, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan[26] established Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College (later Aligarh Muslim University) in 1875 to preserve the Muslim community by promoting science and technology. While emphasizing the English education model and values aside from imperial superiority, he was a self-proclaimed Indian Wahhabi reformer. At the same time, he maintained a reverence for classical Sufism combined with a disciplined puritanical lifestyle that conformed to Islamic orthodoxy. The fluidity of Sufism as the vibrant inner life of Islam was exhibited with diverse individual expressions of what it means to be a Muslim individual in a struggling community. At Deoband and Aligarh, voluntary involvement channelled impulses from traditional sacred symbols toward collective action for both conservative and liberal Muslim identity.

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[25] Ibid., 214-220.
[26] Ibid., 204-214.

Preserving the self from alienation meant accommodation through discovering the sacred in open scriptures. Resignation to the technologically superior West became an inner *jihād* of disciplined faith in the venerated Word. Without the patronage and legitimacy of the Islamic state, divine nearness faded, and God became increasingly distant and transcendent. In order to account for this historical change within a religious framework, the faint reflection of the higher Will required a more autonomous human and communal will. Social change engendered a sense of dynamic history requiring goals and purpose at times expressed militantly but most often politically.

Religious reformation in Islam is a centuries-old historical process that was shaped and encouraged by technology as much as Western culture. From Islam Observed[27] in Indonesia, an anthropologist some time ago noticed the emergence of Scripturalism in Islam. The current claim that a new reformation is now necessary ignores the history of Islam as well as violent conflicts readily apparent in Christian history. Portraying Muslims as inherently violent only through the filter of Islamic doctrine ignores human nature, culture and history—neglecting oppressive colonial experience and ongoing religious reformation in the Islamic world. Liberal forces of individualism, tolerance and scientific inquiry have emerged in both worlds to balance conservative tendencies of tradition and literalism. Religious reformation centred on sanctified scripture is often accompanied by puritanism.

Islamic Puritans

The published Qur'ān was the symbolic expression of the supreme Word selectively interpreted to preserve a threatened identity. The search for a pure religious model hearkens back to historical origins derived from founding texts. The resulting backward-looking view of a golden age was often apocalyptic and ascetic. In India, the prolonged demise of the Islamic Mughal Empire created a communal threat leading to a visceral reaction that would sometimes lead to rebellion. However, repressive British rule and religious pluralism prevented Islamic reform in India from taking on the harsh Wahhabi/Salafi doctrine imposed from above in the Arabian Peninsula. Puritanical clergy there were critical in top-down legitimation of authoritarian regimes that spread fundamentalist

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[27] Geertz, *Islam Observed.*

doctrine. Even when sharing the same Qur'ān, different historical situations and cultural environments produced divergent beliefs, practices and institutions.

Throughout the Islamic world, disillusionment combined with a puritanical impulse can help explain iconoclastic attacks on Sufi shrines and historical sites. The earliest Arab Wahhabis violently opposed shrine worship as a violation of God's unity and even demolished the tombs of Islamic founders in their holy cities. Recent destructions of historical sites and prominent shrines by militants from Syria to Timbuktu demonstrate similar tendencies. These violent expressions of outer *jihād* are desperate attacks against a belief-defined cultural enemy. The wide online availability of scriptural polemics from classically trained scholars presents a captivating narrative of a legendary golden age. Reinforcing traditional hierarchical symbols and institutions, charismatic leaders proclaim a compelling message and story that symbolically resonates with the frustrated and alienated, even among the seemingly unreligious. Iconoclasm is the hallmark of purification movements and shrine destruction is a reactionary flashpoint.

Religious terrorism stems from an ascetic puritanical faith justifying iconoclasm and indifference to social norms. Within a perverted belief system, even rape can be regarded as sexual *jihād*. Asceticism—derived from the Greek word to exercise or train—in its puritan form is the unemotional austerity of the physical body and patriarchal lifestyle dependent on literal scriptural beliefs. Rather than participating in a divinely sanctioned social order, the adept must struggle against an alien opponent—the Other—who does not acknowledge a certain version of scriptures as the essential faith. In South Asia, where a warrior tradition of fakirs sometimes overlapped with Sufi ascetics, reformist Muslims channeled Sufi warrior discipline to protect their traditional identity without directly confronting adversaries. Exclusive beliefs and practices further reinforce a faithful elite—a reformed elect destined for salvation even through martyrdom. For some, the heart of Islam could only be replaced with a physical, puritanical adherence to scripture even if only as a concretized symbol.

Reaction against popular Sufi shrine worship is comparable to the Protestant opposition to Catholic veneration of relics and pilgrimage sites. Just as the English Puritans participated in the

Revolution of the Saints,[28] Muslim saints acted within the world and history. They defended the faith from uncontrollable external forces as well as internal perils of superstition and diversions from the pure faith. Even without power, Indian Muslims could view themselves as the elect—the puritan saints—by virtue of their noble and divine heritage. As individuals acting in the world, they moved from the all-encompassing harmonious universe to conscientious and political religious-mindedness.

Alienation and frustration with the world and history produced the reactionary mind of extreme conservatism. Interpretations of Islamic and Christian scriptures created similar sectarian divisions and ideologies ranging from liberal secular to conservative, reactionary and apocalyptic. While attempting to sanctify with rigid beliefs and authoritarian practices, puritans destroyed meaningful symbols and restricted the emotional urge of the embodied heart.

The Embodied Mind and Literal-Metaphorical Religion

By emphasizing hierarchical body-family metaphors to understand the historical evolution of religion, the proposition here is that the literal veneration of written text is an inherent human tendency in history. Sacred scripture is not just the material book but rather a symbolic embodied experience—a process of enaction. The Embodied Mind reflexively enacts culture through unique customs, practices, and rituals. Individual interpretation is a personalized and socialized version of the truth at a point in history. Rejecting sacred change and historical-critical scholarship as a threat to the pure faith, literalism denies metaphorical, emotional embodiment.

In a misleading quest for certainty and absolute truth, literalism claims that language can precisely represent everything. Mapping out the world with literal terms is actually an objectivist position on meaning. Just as the written word is an abstract symbolic representation of language, printed scripture is an objectified symbol internalized individually and shared communally as a sacred artifact. The concretized sacred symbol is a problematic proposition that establishes a tradition with an inflexible web of belief. A solidified image becomes an idol; the fossilized symbol becomes unemotional and hard-hearted. Devotion to the selected and literal interpretation

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[28] Michael Walzer, *Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

of scriptures characterizes puritan fundamentalism in Christianity and Islam.

Reformist Muslims clearly displayed values identified as loyalty to religious community, authority of the hierarchical family and society, along with the sanctity and purity of religious traditions and scripture. These universal conservative Moral Foundations—loyalty, authority, and sanctity—transform historically with the decline of the divine central state and technological change. Perhaps reformation is simply a religious expression of conservative and liberal social politics in forming identity. Current politics in the West are religiously contentious even though Christian dominance masks underlying divisions. When even a founding state constitution requires literal interpretation as a revered original document, it suggests a basic human inclination to elevate a written document to sacred symbol.

The impulse to interpret language literally yielded intensified fragmentation of competing belief systems and powerful myths. Literalist puritans ironically viewed history as an extended metaphor—an allegory featuring an ailing community. With hopes of salvation, they figuratively defended faded communal glory in battle with the evil forces of occupation. Revitalization in the passionate Muslim mind developed through varying degrees of allegiance to the tangible symbol of the Qur'ān and written traditions. Religious practices such as prayer, fasting or even militant *jihād* have no significance without connection to felt experience—revealing patterns of organism-environment interaction.

Religion of the Heart and Love in History

Conservative scripturalism is not just fanatical fundamentalism, but rather resembles a foundational body-family social arrangement such as marriage. The Protestant Reformers did not regard doctrinal belief as an abstraction. Martin Luther even compared faith to the love of an unworthy and passionate bridegroom in a royal marriage. By borrowing the imagery of marriage, in *The Freedom of a Christian*,[29] Luther recalls the Christian Mystics and the Old Testament Song of Solomon in the Bible, which likens God's affection for Israel to the powerful attraction of two lovers. The covenant of marriage between the divine and human at Mount Sinai produced the Torah. The

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[29] Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian: Luther Study Edition*, edited by Mark Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 9.

relationship of a person and belief is not abstraction; it is an emotional human matter of the heart. Numerous writings with variations of titles on the Heart of Islam, Christianity and other religions emphasize the continuing interplay between the literal and metaphorical. The growing emergence of the romantic heart and love in Western culture might also exhibit a sign of modernity and saintly individualism.

The Sufi saint is the perfect man and the microcosm of the Universal Man manifested as spiritual royalty. The renowned al-Ghazali advised worldly rulers in a genre called "Mirrors for Princes" that the pure heart of the Sufi becomes a polished mirror reflecting divine light and knowledge.[30] For Sufis, the divine was manifested in the heart at the highest level in the emotion of love (*mohabbat*, *maḥabbah*). Love was the essence of all true religion as Ibn al-Arabi expressed in a famous poem:

> *My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for*
> *gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,*
> *And a temple for idols, and the pilgrims Ka'ba, and the tables*
> *of the Tora and the book of the Koran.*
> *I follow the religion of Love, whichever way his camels take.*
> *My religion and my faith are the true religion.*
> *We have a pattern in Bishr, the lover of Hind and her sister,*
> *And in Qays and Lubna, and in Mayya and Ghaylan.*[31]

The romantic lovers in the last lines provided a model of love at a lower level for Ibn al-Arabi, however, since they loved a phenomenon, whereas "I love the Real." The reference in the poem to a camel is cultural but the message of spiritual love is universal.

Religion of the heart and romantic love are the emotional expressions of a feeling of humanity even if this may seem irrational, reductive and trivial to serious scholars. Even as consciousness remains a subject of scientific discussion, the human unconscious is organically connected in the world through the body, family and society. People exist with the understanding of the emotional heart, capable of love from social interaction, care and compassion beyond individual needs and desires. Sufis embodied this love of the feeling

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[30] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ghazali's Book of Counsel for Kings (Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk)*. Translated with an Introduction by F.R.C. Bagley (London: Oxford University Press, 1964). See Pearson, *Islamic Reform*, 17.

[31] Quoted in Reynolds A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (1914; reprint ed., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 105. Pearson, *Islamic Reform*, 17.

heart for the Muslim community by socially expressing human religious aspirations. The emotional inner religion of the heart, both individually and collectively helps to explain the popular appeal and elite respect for Sufism. Diffuse and amorphous Sufism was a collective expression of embodied spirituality transcending the limited human form and instilling the community with a higher purpose.

Concluding Remarks

When a Christian missionary stepped into a Muslim shrine more than two centuries ago, he entered a religiously vital place of a once-dominant but crumbling Islamic empire. Protestant religion introduced the idea of religion as belief enshrined in the written scripture. Rising mercantile supremacy in the guise of a trading company accompanied the missionaries followed by the imposition of colonial rule. But the political vacuum did not mean religious collapse. For the elite family of Shah Waliullah, the decline of the Mughals was already undermining the holistic religious worldview. From that time the vast majority of Muslims have lived in the midst of continuing Islamic Reformation.

Islam began with an oral tradition reaching fruition with the technology of writing before progressing with printed sacred scriptures in popular languages open to diverse interpretations. Muslim followers of Islam—symbolically connected as the organic embodied mind, family and community—express human emotions of love and disciplined constraint but also are capable of protective violence. Fragmented religious expressions, including sporadic *jihād* have persisted along with shrine worship. The exuberance of popular worship continues to the present day as a vital religious force throughout the Islamic world except where suppressed by puritanical and authoritarian politics. By channelling emotional worship at Sufi shrines—the popular and continuing religion of the heart—reformers shifted from an unchanging organic worldview to an identity in a volatile world based on the certainty of faith in written sacred scripture. Devotion to scriptural belief characterizes religious reformation and continues to stimulate human history.

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