

Religious Extremism (*Ghuluw*), Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran: 1501–1722*

It is a well-known fact that pre-Safavid Iran was predominantly Sunnī. It is also common knowledge that the fifteenth century was a period marked by the flourishing of a number of millenarian movements. These religious movements, the last of which gave birth to the Safavid empire, combined Sufism with Shi'ite "extremism" (*Ghuluw*). However, what is not so commonly appreciated is that beyond the recognition of the Twelve Imāms, the fifteenth century Shi'ite *Ghuluww* had little in common with Twelver Shi'ism or the doctrine of the Imāmī sect. Furthermore, though Imāmī scholarship developed freely—notably in Hilla—contrary to expectation, there is no evidence of missionary activity and spread of Imāmī Shi'ism in Iran in the period preceeding the establishment of the Safavid empire.¹ According to the earliest chronicle of his rule, when, in Tabriz in 1501/907, despite the trepidation of his entourage, Shāh Ismā'īl proclaimed Twelver Shi'ism the state religion, that city, like the rest of Iran, was predominantly Sunnī. It was only after much searching that a book containing the basic tenets of Imāmī Shi'ism, the *Qawa'id al-Islām* by Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Hillī (1250–1326) was found in the library of a *qādī*, and was made the basis of the new religion.² Not even in Kashan, referred to by the sources as the *dar al-mu'minīn* (realm of the faithful; a designation reserved for the old centers of Imāmī Shi'ism), was a competent Shi'ite jurist to be found for over a decade.³

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1 See E. Glassen in *Die frühen Safawiden nach Qazi Ahmad Qumi*, (Freiburg, 1968), pp. 86–91. See also A. E. Mayer's review of M. M. Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safavids: Shi'ism, Sufism and the Ghulat*, (Wiesbaden, 1972) in *Iranian Studies*, VIII. 4 (1975), in which she points out the evidence produced from the sources by Mazzaoui, and in contradiction to his implicit argument, shows that Ismā'īl was the first of the Safavids to become an (Imāmī) Shi'ī, that "his fathers were Sunnites . . . and none except Shāh Ismā'īl has shown *rafq* (Shi'ism)." (p. 274).

2 Ross Anon., ff. 74a–75b. It was not until the reign of Tahmāsp that this book was translated into Persian. Cf. H. R. Roemer, "Problèmes de l'histoire safavide avant la stabilisation de la dynastie sous Šah 'Abbās," *Turcica*, VI (1975), p. 408.

3 M. M., II, pp. 233–34.

In addition to the importation of the Twelver Shi'ite theologians, from the Arab lands, notably Jabal 'Āmil, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the prolonged task of conversion of Iran to Twelver Shi'ism required the persistent adherence of the Safavid state to a ruthless religious policy carried out on four fronts. It consisted in the eradication of millenarian "extremism" (*Ghuluw*), persecution of Sufism, suppression of Sunnism, and, finally, the propagation (of Twelver Shi'ism). The spread of the Shi'ite doctrine among the population of Iran did not decisively change the religious outlook of the country until after the virtual completion of the first three processes over nearly two centuries. What follows is an account of the religious persecutions instituted by the propagators of Shi'ism in Iran: the Safavid rulers, for the most part, and the Shi'ite hierocracy, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. These attempts to purge the Safavid dominions of heterodoxy, consisting of the suppression of millenarian "extremism," of Sufism and of Sunnism, preceded and paved the way for the definitive establishment of Twelver Shi'ism.

1 Suppression of Millenarian "Extremism"

1.1 *Turkmen Ghuluw*

The political and religious aspects of the millenarian "extremism" of the Safavids at the time of their conquest of Iran have been dealt with by Mazzaoui⁴ and Melikoff⁵ respectively; and a summary seems superfluous. Suffice it to say that from the time of Ismā'īl's grandfather, the heads of the Safavid Šūfī order were worshipped as saviors and incarnations of God by their Turkmen followers, the Qizilbash. Under Ismā'īl I (1501–1524), the anthropolatric *Ghuluw* of the Qizilbash continued unabated. The missionary activity of the Safavid order of which he was the supreme head—*murshid-e kāmīl* (the perfect guide), and which was conducted through a network of his *khalīfas* (deputies) in Anatolia, remained of crucial importance. The *khalīfas* directed enthusiastic missionary activities in Anatolia. These culminated in the serious pro-Safavid rebellion of Bābā Shāh Qulī in Qaraman against the Ottomans in 1511/917,⁶ and eventually provoked the Ottoman Sultan Selim's massive decimation of the Qizilbash in Anatolia. Ismā'īl continued to use the *khalīfas* not only to mobilize his worshipful Turkmen supporters in Anatolia and Azerbaijan, but also, on occasions,

4 See the work cited in n. 1 above.

5 I. Melikoff, "Le problème Kizilbaş", *Turcica*, VI (1975), esp. pp. 58–65.

6 Gh. Sarwar, *History of Shah Isma'il Safavi*, (Aligarh, 1939).

to lead the Qizilbash military forces in campaigns in Iran.⁷ The prominence of the *khalīfas* under Ismāʿīl indicates the thorough permeation of the military pillar of his state with “extremist” religion in the form of millenarian savior worship.

Nevertheless, there were signs of unease on the part of the monarch. The Italian merchant who saw Ismāʿīl in Tabriz tells us: “But I have heard that Ismael is not pleased with being called a god or a prophet.”⁸ In fact, Ismāʿīl put to death several of his disorderly fanatical devotees who came to Iran after Bābā Shāh Qulī’s rebellion, on charges of highway robbery and murder.⁹ But it was above all through the broadening of the social support for his regime—that is, through the incorporation of the Persian notables into the patrimonial bureaucracy of his empire¹⁰—that Ismāʿīl paved the way for his successors’ suppression of Qizilbash *Ghuluw*.

Despite the continued missionary activity of the *khalīfas* in Anatolia and the arrival of Turkmen adherents to the foot of the new shah’s throne,¹¹ Ṭahmāsp (1524–1576), whom they continued to venerate as God,¹² took firm steps to suppress the *Ghuluw* of the Qizilbash. Later copies of Shāh Ismāʿīl’s *dīvān* omit verses where he proclaims himself to be the Mahdi or his precursor.¹³ Shāh Ṭahmāsp ordered the bloody suppression of the presumably “extremist” Turkmen tribe of Sārūlū on account of their “irreligion” (*ilḥād*) (1531–2/938),¹⁴ and put down the heresy of a group of Ṣūfīs who proclaimed him the Mahdi (1554–1555).¹⁵ Finally, in 1565–6/973, the members of another irreligious (*murtadd*) Turkmen clan were put to death or imprisoned in the fortress of Alamūt.¹⁶

With the adherence of the devout Ṭahmāsp to the Imāmī doctrine and his abandonment of Ṣūfī practices, the religio-ritualistic functions of the order

7 R. M. Savory, “The Office of *Khalīfat al-Khulafāʾ* Under the Safavids”, *Journal of American Oriental Society*, LXXXV (1965), p. 497.

8 Narrative, p. 206.

9 Sarwar, p. 66.

10 J. Aubin, “Shāh Ismāʿīl et les notables de l’Iraq persan”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, II (1959), pp. 37–81.

11 T. M., Minorsky’s Commentary, p. 126.

12 Narrative, p. 223.

13 J. Aubin, “La politique religieuse des Safavides”, in *Le Shiʿism imāmīte*, (Colloque de Strasbourg), (Paris, 1970), p. 239.

14 T. Akh., III (third *ṣahīfa*), pages unnumbered; *Memoirs of Shah Tahmasp*, (Calcutta, 1912), pp. 16–17.

15 Aubin, “Politique religieuse”, p. 239.

16 Kh. T., f. 213.

must have devolved increasingly on the *khalīfas* of the Turkmen tribes, and especially on their leader the *khalīfat al-khulafāʾ*. It is therefore not surprising that, after Ṭahmāsp's death and the succession of his son Ismāʿīl II, whom the Qizilbash were not so wont to invest with divine charisma, the *khalīfat al-khulafāʾ* should appear to an Italian diplomat (an admittedly casual observer) as the chief hierophant ("*persona principale della fede*").¹⁷ The loyalty of the Qizilbash to the *khalīfat al-khulafāʾ*, Ḥusayn Qulī Khān, made Ismāʿīl II (1576–1577) highly apprehensive.¹⁸ After a series of clashes, Ismāʿīl blinded the *khalīfat al-khulafāʾ* and massacred a large number of his Ṣūfis in Qazvin.¹⁹

During the unstable reign of Sulṭān Muḥammad Khudābandeh (1577–1587) and the first years of ʿAbbās the Great (1587–1629), which were marked by internecine Qizilbash tribal warfare, appeals were repeatedly made on the shah's behalf to the *ṣūfigarī* (Ṣūfi probity) of the Turkmen (usually coupled with *ikhhlāṣ* and *ʾitiqād*) as meaning sincere loyalty and unquestioning obedience to the king as the supreme spiritual leader (*murshid*).²⁰ But after consolidating his rule, ʿAbbās carried out a series of momentous centralizing reforms which included the introduction of a new slave corps of (largely Georgian) royal *ghulāms*. The composition of the military forces of his empire was thus drastically altered. This enabled ʿAbbās I to secularize his military organization by dispensing with the anthropolatric spirit of *Ghuluw*; the Qizilbash military forces were reorganized as *qurchīs* (pretorians).²¹ To assure their loyalty, appeals came to be made to *shāh-sevanī* or *shāhi-sevanī* (the quality of those who love the king, with highly secular connotations) instead of the quasi-religious *ṣūfigarī*.²²

In 1614–15/1023–24 ʿAbbās ordered the massacre of the Ṣūfis of Qarajadāgh—also known as the “old Ṣūfis of Lāhijān,” a designation denoting their priority over other Ṣūfis as the oldest adherents of the Safavid order. They were accused

17 T. Balbi, “Relazione di Persia, del clarissimo messer Teodoro Balbi console veneto nella Siria dell'anno 1578 al 1582,” in G. Berchet, *La Repubblica de Venezia el a Persia*, (Torino, 1865), p. 282.

18 Savory, p. 500.

19 Kh. T., f. f. 265a–266, Nq. A., p. 34, Ah. T. pp. 486–87.

20 ʿAbdulḥusayn Navāʾī, ed., *Asnād va Mukatibāt-e Tārīkhī: Shāh ʿAbbās-e Avval*, (Tehran, 1973/1352), I, p. 125, and II, p. 17; Naṣrullāh Falsafi, *Zindigāni-ye Shāh ʿAbbās-e Avval*, (Tehran, 1960/1339), I, pp. 184–85; H. R. Roemer, *Der Niedergang Irans nach dem Tode Ismaʿīls des Grausamen 1577–1581*, (Würzburg, 1939), p. 65.

21 *The Cambridge History of Islam*, I, pp. 418–19.

22 This trend is unmistakable. From about the year 1000 AH (1591–2 AD) we find the term *ikhhlāṣ* (sincerity) and similar terms increasingly coupled with *shāh-sevanī* (e.g., Nq. A., pp. 288–9, T. A. Ab., I, p. 431 and II, pp. 617, 655, 734, 1000; Ab. N., p. 109).

of collaboration with the Ottomans, and of failing to place “acquiescence to the will of the *murshid* (supreme leader) before all worldly interests.”²³ As for the rest of the hard core of practicing Turkmen Šūfis, who were distinguished by still wearing the traditional headgear (*tāj*), ‘Abbās had already been ruthlessly exploiting their blind loyalty to the supreme leader, not only in using them as guards and gatekeepers for his palace, but also in giving them ever baser types of employment as jailers, executioners, and hangmen.²⁴ Some of them were even induced to make a profession out of one of the more gruesome elements of their central Asiatic heritage, and formed a small special group of cannibalistic executioners whose function was the “live-eating” (*zindeh-khwārī*) of the disgraced upon ‘Abbās’ order.²⁵

As often happens with traditional relics, and not unlike the shamans and the lamas of the Il-Khānids after their conversion to Islam,²⁶ the *khalīfat al-khulafā’*, and a number of religiously anomalous ceremonies associated with his office,²⁷ survived to the very end of the dynasty; and the *khalīfa* is mentioned in the *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* among the high functionaries of the Safavid court.²⁸ Nevertheless, the sharp decline in the status and occupational position of the Qizilbash of Šūfis continued. In 1660, Du Mans would find the title of Grand Sophi, attributed to the Safavid monarch by Europeans truly puzzling, and surmised that the shah would consider it an insult.²⁹ He points out that the Šūfis, still wearing their traditional headgear (*tāj*),³⁰ are regarded as the riff-raff (*bī sar va pā*) and besides being the royal guards, carry out the most menial functions—like sweeping—in the royal buildings.³¹ Some three decades later another Christian missionary, Sanson, confirms Du Man’s

23 T. A. Ab., II, p. 882.

24 Falsafi, I, pp. 184–86, and II, pp. 123–27, 407.

25 Falsafi, II, pp. 125–27. In his *Tārīkh-e ‘Abbāsī*, ‘Abbās’ astrologer reports that in 1602/1010, an Uzbek guard was brought before ‘Abbās for interrogation in the vicinity of Balkh. “He looked down, did not reply and remained silent. [The executioners] . . . upon the universally incumbent royal order, ate him alive.” (Cited by Falsafi, II, pp. 126–27).

26 Minorsky, Tk. M., Commentary, p. 126.

27 These include a confessional ceremony (*ī’tirāf*) (Falsafi, II, p. 407) and the distribution of bread, halva, and sweets among the congregation, in addition to the Šūfi service of *dhikr-e jalīy* (the loud *dhikr*) conducted on Friday evenings in the “House of [the confession of] Unity”—*tawhīd-khāneh*—adjoining the royal palace (Tk. M., p. 55).

28 Tk. M., p. 55.

29 Du Mans, pp. 16–17.

30 Curiously enough, the word *tāj* means ‘crown’ in Persian.

31 Du Mans, pp. 16–17, 86–87.

account.³² The "Society" of the Šūfis is now said to "serve for nothing else but Porters, Bailiffs, and Common Executioners of Justice."³³

The above account of the suppression of "extremism" and the decline of the Qizilbash element in Safavid polity confirms Aubin's conclusion that there was "a parallel development between the elimination of the characteristically Safavid element and the consolidation of Twelver Shi'ism in Iran."³⁴

1.2 *The Nuṣṭavī Heresy*

The military chiliasm of the Qizilbash was not the only religious movement born out of the Shi'ite-tinged Šūfī *Ghuluw* of the fifteenth century. Another kindred movement with a literate, urban following was the Ḥurūfism, a cabalistic mystery religion. The Nuṣṭavī doctrine, formulated by Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī, was a later offshoot of Ḥurūfism.³⁵ Maḥmūd's follower, the Nuṣṭavīyya, preserved the Ḥurūfis' numerological cabalistic emphasis as well as the central belief in gnostic union with God through spiritual perfection, while adding a pronounced belief in metempsychosis or transmigration of souls.³⁶ In the sixteenth century, the doctrine spread in the Persian Iraq.³⁷ Ṭahmāsp took active measures to suppress the Nuṣṭavī movement during the last decade of his reign. The Nuṣṭavī poet Abu'l-Qāsim Amrī was blinded in 1555–6/973;³⁸ a Nuṣṭavī community near Kashan was massacred in 1575–6/983, and a number of the Nuṣṭavīs of Qazvin were imprisoned.³⁹

Nevertheless, Nuṣṭavism appears to have flourished after Ṭahmāsp's death. We hear of the Nuṣṭavī presence in Kashan during the Qizilbash interregnum; and of a Nuṣṭavī rebellion under the leadership of the blind poet, Amrī, in Shiraz a few years after 'Abbās I's ascension (1590–91/999).⁴⁰ By the sixth year of 'Abbās's reign, the Nuṣṭavīs, under the leadership of Darvīsh Khusraw, were well established in the capital Qazvin. According to *Nuṣṭawāt al-Āthār*, some two hundred persons were constantly present in their *takiyeh* (meeting place, *tekke*) which was frequented by 'Abbās himself and, consequently, by

32 Sanson, pp. 27–29.

33 Ibid. p. 29.

34 Aubin, "Politique religieuse", p. 240.

35 S. Kiyā, *Nuṣṭavīyān yā Paṣīkhānīyān, Irān kūdeh*, xiii, Tehran, (n. d.) esp. pp. 74–75.

36 Kiyā's article contains the most comprehensive account of Nuṣṭavī beliefs. For a briefer but more accessible account see Falsafi, iii, pp. 40–51.

37 Nq. A.: p. 515.

38 Kiyā, p. 36 [source *Tārīkh-e Afī*].

39 Falsafi, iii, pp. 43–45.

40 Falsafi, iii, p. 45.

a number of generals and high government functionaries.⁴¹ Despite the subsequent rationalizations of the chroniclers, it is clear that ‘Abbās was for a time keenly interested in the Nuṭṭavī doctrine.⁴² In fact, they considered him the “perfect trustee” (*amīn-e kāmīl*) whose initiation was complete under the instruction of two dervishes who had attained unity with God.⁴³ At the turn of the year 1002 (1593), the Nuṭṭavīs, on the basis of their numerology, predicted the coming of the Lord of the Age whose most likely incarnation was ‘Abbās himself. However, ‘Abbās’s official astrologer had a different prediction based on the appearance of a certain star. The astrologer’s opinion finally prevailed upon ‘Abbās. He put one of the leading Nuṭṭavīs on the throne as king and had him assassinated after three days, thereby fulfilling the astrologer’s prediction.⁴⁴ Thereupon ‘Abbās embarked on a policy of ferocious suppression of the Nuṭṭavīs. Darvīsh Khusraw was tried for heresy by an inquisitorial gathering of the ‘*ulamā*’ and hanged. A prominent Nuṭṭavī physician, Mawlānā Salmān was also condemned to imprisonment by the ‘*ulamā*’ but put to death by ‘Abbās’s order.⁴⁵ ‘Abbās also sent orders to Kashan and Isfahan for the extirpation Khusraw’s followers⁴⁶ and killed the leader of the Kashan community with his own hands.⁴⁷ Some years later, he killed the two dervishes who had allegedly initiated him to the secret Nuṭṭavī teachings.⁴⁸

The suppression of the Nuṭṭavīyya indicated ‘Abbās’s definitive rejection of “extremism” and the adoption of an unmistakably anti-millenarian religious policy in favor of the Shi‘ite hierocracy. In 1594/1003, a large number of the ‘*ulamā*’ and theological students were lavishly entertained in Qazvin. Special royal favor was bestowed upon the eminent ‘*ālim* Shaykh Bahā’ al-Dīn ‘Āmīlī.⁴⁹ (Shaykh Bahā’ al-Dīn was later commissioned to prepare a Shi‘ite legal compendium which was issued under the title *Jāmi‘ ‘Abbāsī*, and which has remained one of the fundamental texts in Shi‘ite jurisprudence.)

As was pointed out, the Nuṭṭavī heresy, like its Ḥurūfī parent, was an urban religious movement adhered to by literate craftsmen, artists and poets. With

41 Nq. A., pp. 516–517; T. A. Ab., I, p. 474.

42 See the testimony of a Nuṭṭavī ‘trustee’ who had migrated to India to the author of the *Dabistān al-Madhāhib* (reproduced in Falsafi, II, p. 48) as well as the account of ‘Abbās’s astrologer (reproduced in Kiyā, p. 42).

43 Falsafi, III, pp. 48–49.

44 Nq. A., pp. 518–522; Falsafi, II, pp. 340–42.

45 T. A. Ab., I, p. 476; Falsafi, III, p. 47.

46 Nq. A., pp. 523–24.

47 Kiyā, pp. 40–41.

48 Falsafi, III, p. 47.

49 Nq. A., pp. 565–66.

the persecutions initiated by Ṭahmāsp and vigorously resumed by ‘Abbās, many Nuṭṭavīs, including a truly impressive number of poets, fled to India, Emperor Akbar’s land of religious freedom.⁵⁰ Even though years later, in 1660, we still hear of a certain despised dervish-type group in Isfahan referred to as the Maḥmūdīs, with ideas akin to the *Ghuluw* of the Nuṭṭavīyya,⁵¹ it is clear that the increasing prominence of the Shi‘ite hierocracy in the polity had left relatively little room for aberrant sectarian groupings.

2 Suppression of Sufism

In the words of the author of *Rawḍāt al-Jinān va Jannāt al-Janān* Ismā‘īl I “crushed all the *silsilas* (Šūfī orders); the graves of their ancestors were destroyed, not to mention what befell their successors.”⁵² Shaykh ‘Alī al-Karaki, the Imami jurist from Jabal‘Amil who led the conversion of Iran to Imami Shi‘ism and the replacement of Sunni by Shi‘ite law, endorsed the suppression of Sufism, as he did the Safavid religious policy more generally. As the highest authority of the new Shi‘ite state religion, the Mujtahid of the Age sanctioned this persecution by a number of legal injunctions.⁵³ In an undated *fatwā*, he rules that it is incumbent not only on the government but also upon every believer to suppress whoever from among “people of ignorance” (*ahl al-jahāla*) (the gloss makes it clear this means the Sufis) puts himself forward as leader of the Muslims.⁵⁴ Shah Ismā‘īl “made despondent and eradicated most of the *silsilas* (orders) of *sayyids* and *shaykhs*.”⁵⁵ One such was the order of Abū Ishāq Kāzīrūnī in Fars. In 1503/909, only some two years after the conquest of Tabriz, the order was extirpated after the massacre of four thousand persons and the desecration of the tombs of Šūfī *shaykhs* in that region. Although Ismā‘īl did compromise with some of the Šūfī *shaykhs*—notably those of the Ni‘matullāhī

50 The names of the Nuṭṭavī literati are exhaustively compiled from the sources by Kiyā.

51 Du Mans, pp. 87–88.

52 R. J. J. J., I, p. 490.

53 On Karaki and this title see Chapters 6 and 7 above.

54 Shaykh ‘Alī b. al-Husayn al-Karaki, *Rasā’il al-Muhaqqiq al-Karaki*, Muhammad al-Hassun, ed., Qom, 1991/1412, 3:112, #74.

55 R. J. J. J., II, p. 159. In addition to the instances of reported eliminations of individual Šūfis (e.g., R. J. J. J., I, pp. 481–82, and II, p. 88; T. Hq., III, p. 119), the effective suppression of Sufism under Ismā‘īl can be inferred from the following fact. Roughly four times as many Šūfis whose date of death is mentioned in R. J. J. J. (written 1582/990) died between 1496/900 and 1536/940, as compared with those who died after 940 or were still alive at the time of writing. (Bear in mind also the well-known longevity of the Šūfī *shaykhs*.)

order, out of political expediency, there can be no doubt about his relentless hostility towards the rival Šūfī orders, a policy continued by his successors.

While the Safavid order became highly militarized in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, other important orders continued their religious activities in the mystical tradition. Of these, the Naqshbandī, the Khalvatī, the Ni‘matullāhī orders and the two branches of the Kubravīyya: the Dhahabīyya and the Nūrbakhshīyya, are the most important. Sooner or later, each of these was to undergo a sharp decline; and by the end of the Safavid era, they had all disappeared from the Iranian scene, except for the Kubravī branches—Nūrbakhshīyya and Dhahabīyya—which, though greatly enfeebled, persisted. What follows is a brief but, I hope, fairly comprehensive account of this decline.

2.1 *The Naqshbandīyya*

Not surprisingly, the Naqshbandīs who trace their spiritual descent to Abū Bakr (the first of the Rightly-guided Caliphs, ritualistically cursed by Ismā‘īl’s followers) were the first order to be ferociously suppressed. The Naqshbandīs were particularly strong in eastern Iran and Herat,⁵⁶ but also important in Azerbaijan.⁵⁷ There is also evidence of Naqshbandī presence in Isfahan and Qazvin.⁵⁸ After Ismā‘īl’s conquest of Herat in 1510, the tombs of the famous Naqshbandī mystics, Kāshgharī and Jāmī, were desecrated.⁵⁹ The Naqshbandī *shaykh*, Mawlānā ‘Alī Kurdī (d. 1519) who had been particularly active in Qazvin, was also killed.⁶⁰ Though we hear of one individual, the *sayyid* Amīr ‘Abd al-Ghaffār (d. 1521/927), who was favored by Ismā‘īl despite his Naqshbandī affiliation,⁶¹ there can be little doubt that the Naqshbandīyya were effectively extirpated in western and central Iran. The vehemence of the hostility towards the Naqshbandīs is reflected in a polemical exchange which took place in late sixteenth century. The Sunnī polemicist accuses the Shi‘ite jurists not only of general hostility to Sufism, but also, more specifically, of considering the shedding of the blood of a Naqshbandī incumbent.⁶² This accusation is affirmed

56 R. M. Savory, “A 15th Century Safavid Propagandist at Harat”, in D. Sinor (ed.) *American Oriental Society, Middle West Branch. Semi-Centennial Volume*, (Bloomington Indiana, 1969), pp. 196–97.

57 R. J. J. J., I, pp. 98–104, 214–216, 416–18, 602; J. E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Federation Empire*, (Minneapolis and Chicago, 1976), p. 153.

58 H. Algar, “The Naqshbandi Order: A Preliminary Survey of its History and Significance”, *Studia Islamica*, XLIV (1976), p. 139.

59 Ibid., p. 142.

60 Ibid., p. 139.

61 R. J. J. J., I, pp. 214–16.

62 *al-Nawāqīd li-Bunyān al-Rawāfīd*, British Library MS, Or 7991, f. 96b.

and defended by his Shi'ite opponent.⁶³ The sources consulted on Ṭahmāsp's (1524–1576) reign contain no mention of the Naqshbandīs.

2.2 *The Khalvatīyya*

Like the Naqshbandīyya, the Khalvatīs were Sunnī, and like the former, they were important in eastern Iran⁶⁴ and in Azerbaijan. Dede 'Umar Rawshanī (d. 1486/891 or 892) and his brother Mawlānā 'Alā' al-Dīn, *shaykhs* of the Khalvatī order, were highly respected by the Aqqūyūnlū rulers under whose protection their order flourished.⁶⁵ Dede 'Umar's *zāwiya* (convent) in Tabriz was frequently visited by Sulṭān Ya'qūb (d. 1490).⁶⁶ Already by the last decades of the fifteenth century 'Alā' al-Dīn had left Tabriz for Istanbul where the Ṣūfī Sulṭān Bayezīd (1481–1511) was to shower favors upon the Khalvatīs. Dede 'Umar's disciple, Ibrāhīm Gulshanī (d. 1534/940), succeeded him after his death. In the Safavids' eyes, Gulshanī was particularly suspect because of his close ties with the Aqqūyūnlū dynasty and left Tabriz after Ismā'īl's conquest and "declaration of Shi'ism," proceeding first to Diyārbakr, then to Jerusalem and finally to Cairo where he built his famous convent around 1520/926.⁶⁷ The Khalvatī order flourished in Egypt and in the Ottoman capital.⁶⁸ It appears to have become extinct in Safavid Iran after its adherents left for these much more congenial Ottoman domains.

Before proceeding to consider the orders which survived longer, mention should be made of the Ismā'īlīs who, by the time of Ismā'īl I, appear in Ṣūfī garb.⁶⁹

2.3 *The Ismā'īlīyya*

Shāh Ṭāhir (d. 1545 or 49/952 or 56) was the Imām of the Muḥammad Shāhī branch of Ismā'īlism, who, according to the historian Firishteh, as the Khwāndīyya *sayyids*, were respected Persian notables engaged in the spiritual

63 *Maṣā'ib al-Nawāṣīb*, Library of Majlis (Tehran), MS 2036, Section (*jund*) IV, subsection (*tā'ifa*) 14.

64 Savory, esp. p. 196.

65 R. J. J. J., I, p. 472, Woods, pp. 153, 166.

66 R. J. J. J., I, p. 602 (notes).

67 R. J. J. J., I, p. 476; T. Yazici, "GULSHANI", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 2:1136–37.

68 B. G. Martin, "A Short History of the Khalwati Order of Dervishes", in N. R. Keddie, ed., *Scholars, Saints and Ṣūfis*, (California, 1972), pp. 286–96, 279–86, 295–97.

69 The inclusion among the heresies of the "Bāṭinīyya, stemming from Ismā'īlism" as one of the Ṣūfī groups, in addition to Firishteh's evidence cited below (note 69), may be cited as indicative of the transformation of Ismā'īlism from a militant sect to a Ṣūfī order in the centuries following the fall of Alamut (H. Sh., p. 585).

guidance of the populace as Šūfī *shaykhs* in the region close to Qazvin. Shāh Ṭāhir was forced to give up his position as a Šūfī *shaykh* and, after remaining in Ismā'īl's court for some time, was appointed to a professorship in Kashan in 1510–11/916, where many of his followers appeared to have followed him. This made Ismā'īl apprehensive, and he issued an order for the execution of Shāh Ṭāhir. Informed about this menace ahead of time by another Persian notable, Shāh Ḥusayn Iṣfāhānī, who was Ismā'īl's chancellor at the time, Shāh Ṭāhir fled to India in 1520/926, and settled in the Deccan.⁷⁰ After Ismā'īl's death, he sent his son Ḥaydar to the court of Shāh Ṭahmāsp.⁷¹ He seems to have intended to return to Iran himself.⁷² Evidently, however, his son Ḥaydar received no encouragement from Ṭahmāsp either personally or regarding his father's intention. He returned to India after Shāh Ṭāhir's death to succeed him as the *shaykh* of his Šūfī order (*ṣāhib-e sajjādeh*) in India⁷³ and as the Imām of the Muḥammad-Shāhī Nizārīs.

Another branch of Nizārī Ismā'īlism, the Qāsim-Shāhī branch whose Imāms resided in Anjūdān near Kashan, survived somewhat longer, that is, to the end of Ṭahmāsp's reign. In 1574–5/982, Ṭahmāsp massacred the Ismā'īlī community in Anjūdān and imprisoned their thirty-sixth Imām, Murād,⁷⁴ who was subsequently executed under Shāh 'Abbās.

2.4 *The Dhahabīyya*

The order branched off from the Kubraviyya when Shaykh Hājī Muḥammad Khabūshānī refused to follow Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, and founded his own order. *Rawḍāt al-Jinān va Jannāt al-Janān* mentions twenty-eight of his *khalīfas*, and asserts that some of them or their successors were still active at the time of his writing (ca. 1582/990), but it is clear from his tone that their activities—which are not mentioned in detail—could not have been all that lively.⁷⁵ Perhaps the most important of Khabūshānī's *khalīfas* was the author's great-grandfather, Amīr Sayyid Aḥmad Lāleh (d. 1507/912), who settled in Azerbaijan where he acquired considerable following. The Lāle'īs continued

70 W. Ivanow, "A Forgotten Branch of the Ismā'īlīs", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, xiv, (1938): 57–79, esp. 61. Firishte's biography of Shāh Ṭāhir is cited at length in T. Hq., III, pp. 134ff. See esp. pp. 136–38. See also M. M., II, pp. 234–37.

71 'Abdullhusayn Navā'ī, ed., *Asnād va Mukatibāt-e Tārikhī: Shāh Ṭahmāsp-e Ṣafavī*, (Tehran, 1970/1350), pp. 73–77.

72 Ibid., p. 101: In a letter to his former teacher, Shams al-Dīn Khafī, Ṭāhir expresses the hope to see him in person and continue the discussion verbally.

73 T. Hq., III, p. 149.

74 Falsafī, III, p. 44 [source *Tārikh-e Alfī*].

75 R. J. J. J., II, pp. 241–2.

to profess Sunnism. Shāh Ismā'īl appears to have spared this order⁷⁶ and even appointed Sayyid Aḥmad's son, Amīr Shih-ab al-Dīn Lāleh (d. 1540/947) to the office of the *ṣadr* for a very brief period.⁷⁷ Though the author does not supply us with any specific details, the sharp decline in the activities of Dhahabī Ṣūfis under the leadership of the Lāleh family can be inferred from the fact that no list of *khalīfas* and disciples are mentioned for Amīr Shihāb al-Dīn and the subsequent generation. Furthermore, Shihāb al-Dīn's brother, Amīr Khalīlullāh is reported to have died in Isfahan in 1548–9/955,⁷⁸ indicating (forcible) displacement from the seat of the Lāle'ī order. We may also note that Ḥāfiz Ḥusayn Karbalā'ī himself was writing the book after many years of exile.

Nevertheless, as Karbalā'ī asserts, some of Khabūshānī's thirty-seven *khalīfas* must have remained active, and the Dhahabī order subsisted. One of their *shaykhs*, Shaykh Muḥammad 'Alī Mu'adhdhin Khurāsānī, even acquired some prominence amongst the literati of the reign of 'Abbās the Great.⁷⁹ Under 'Abbās II, Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, the Elder (d. 1660/1070), subscribed to the Dhahabī tradition. We also hear of the renowned Shaykh Ganj-'Alī Tabrizī, a disciple of Hājj Mīr Muḥammad Lāleh of Tabriz.⁸⁰ The Dhahabī order has survived in Fars to this day, but despite its (temporary) vitality under the eminent Shaykh Quṭb al-Dīn Sayyid Muḥammad Shīrāzī (d. 1757 or 1771/1170 or 1185),⁸¹ its decline as an organized supra-local order was not reversed. Already in 1832 the author of *Bustān al-Sīyāḥa* would deplore the absence of an illuminated spiritual master among them for generations.⁸²

2.5 *The Nūrbakhshīyya*

In 1500, the Shi'ite order founded by Nūrbakhsh was continuing to flourish under his son, Shāh Qāsim (d. 1511/917), the *Fayḍ-bakhsh*.⁸³ Ismā'īl showed no hostility to the aged and highly respected *shaykh* and even assigned to him a prosperous estate near Rey.⁸⁴ However, his son, Shāh Bahā' al-Dīn joined the Ismā'īl's entourage after the death of his Timurid patron, Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqarā'; but, within two or three years "was, according to the dictates of Fate,

76 R. J. J. J., II, p. 159.

77 R. J. J. J., III, p. 186.

78 R. J. J. J., II, p. 171.

79 T. Hq., III, pp. 164–5.

80 Q. Kh., f. 160a.

81 T. Hq., III, pp. 216–9.

82 Zain al-'Ābidīn Shīrvānī, *Bustān al-Sīyāḥa*, (Shiraz, 1923–4/1342 Q), p. 194.

83 H. S., IV, p. 611; J. M., III, Pt. 1: pp. 104ff.

84 H. S., IV, p. 611; T. A. Ab., I: p. 145; M. M., II: p. 149.

interrogated; and died.”⁸⁵ The eminent Nūrbakhshī *shaykh* of Shiraz, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhijī (d. 1515/921), appointed *khalīfa* by the founder himself, and the author of a very influential commentary on *Gulshan-e Rāz*, appears to have narrowly escaped liquidation by a subtly sycophantic reply to Ismāʿīl’s peevish questions about his reason for wearing black clothes.⁸⁶ Another Nūrbakhshī *shaykh* in Shūshtar also tenuously managed to survive Ismāʿīl’s conquest of southwestern Iran.⁸⁷

The death of Ismāʿīl and the ascension of his ten year old son Ṭahmāsp, in 1524, temporarily halted the decline of the Nūrbakhshīyya. Amīr Qavām al-Dīn, the great-great-grandson of Nūrbakhsh, consolidated his power in the region near Rey.⁸⁸ But in 1537/944 he was summoned to Ṭahmāsp’s camp near Tehran to answer for his “astonishing pride,”⁸⁹ for overstepping the boundaries of dervishhood, and for behaving “in the manner of exalted kings.”⁹⁰ In the presence of Ṭahmāsp, a certain Qāḍī Muḥammad asked him whether he was a king or a dervish. Qavām al-Dīn replied he was a dervish. The Qāḍī then asked him: “What is the reason for fortress building, and for gathering arms and armors?”⁹¹ Failing to produce a satisfactory answer, Qavām al-Dīn was imprisoned, his beard burnt on the spot, and put to death.⁹² The fate of the subsequent generations of Nūrbakhshī *sayyids* is obscure. Sometime during Ṭahmāsp’s reign an eminent Nūrbakhshī *sayyid*, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Alī moved from Bam to Yazd to become a *qāḍī*.⁹³ Much later, in the 1650’s and 1660’s, members of his family reappear as local notables in the city of Yazd.⁹⁴ With regard to Shūshtar and southwestern Iran—the emigration of Qāḍī Nūrullāh Shūshtarī (d. 1610/1019) to India can be taken as indicative of the decline of the order’s activities.⁹⁵

85 H. S., iv, p. 612.

86 M. M., II, pp. 153–3. We know that a disciple of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad’s in Khurasan was killed by the order of Ismāʿīl’s prime minister, Amīr Najm II, (T. Hq., III: p. 119).

87 M. M., I, p. 521.

88 H. S., iv, p. 612.

89 T. Akh. III.

90 Ah. T., p. 279.

91 Ah. T., p. 280. The family feud between Ṭahmāsp’s minister, Qāḍī Jahān, and the Nūrbakhshs also appears as an important factor in the suppression of Qavām al-Dīn (Ah. T., p. 374).

92 T. J. A., pp. 292–3; Ah. T., pp. 279–80; Kh. T., ff. 121a–122.

93 T. A. Ab., I, p. 150.

94 Mīrzā Muḥammad Taqī, son of Shāh Ḥisām al-Dīn Nūrbakhshī held an important land assignment for two or three years, ca. 1656/1065, and his son Mīrzā Shāh Ḥisām al-Dīn is simply mentioned as living in the ancestral home in 1671/1082. (J. M., III, pt. 1, pp. 106–7).

95 T. Hq., I, p. 254.

According to the spiritual genealogy of the order given in *Ṭarāʾiq al-Ḥaqāʾiq*, the leadership of the Nūrbakhshī mystical tradition passes out of the founder's family (even Bahāʾ al-Dīn and Qavām al-Dīn's names are struck from the list of spiritual leaders).⁹⁶ It would, therefore, be safe to take the elimination of Qavām al-Dīn by Ṭahmāsp in 1530–1/937 to mean the liquidation of the Nūrbakhshīyya as an organized supra-local order. The mystical tradition, however, survived. Two highly interesting names appear in the chain of the Nūrbakhshī spiritual genealogy: Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿAmilī (d. 1621/1030), and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ (d. 1680/1091).⁹⁷ Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿAmilī was the most eminent of the *ʿulamāʾ* of the reign of ʿAbbās I;⁹⁸ Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ, of the reign of ʿAbbās II.⁹⁹ Both were greatly respected and highly favored by their respective monarchs. Here, as is often the case with the chains of Ṣūfī *shaykhs* forming *silsilas*, spiritual filiation does not denote any organizational continuity of an order as congregation. In fact, there is no evidence of the emergence of a reorganized Nūrbakhshī order in the eclectic “high” Sufism of the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁰⁰ But the Nūrbakhshī mystical tradition was kept alive, and we hear of the writings of an important exponent of this tradition, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Damāvandī, ca. 1747/1160, some two decades after the overthrow of the Safavid dynasty.¹⁰¹

2.6 *The Niʿmatullāhīyya*

Long before the advent of Ismāʿīl I, India had proved a congenial region for the expansion of the Niʿmatullāhī order, founded by Shāh Niʿmatullāh Valī (d. 1431/834), whose successors as the *shaykhs* of the order had moved to

96 T. Hq., II, p. 322.

97 S. Nafīsī, *Aḥvāl va Ashʿār-e Shaykh-e Bahāʾī*, (Tehran 1937/1316), pp. 28–46. Despite the subsequent apologetics of the Shiʿite hierarchy, there can be no doubt about Shaykh-e Bahāʾī's Ṣūfī inclinations, which are fully confirmed by his poetry [see *Kulīyyāt-e Shaykh-e Bahāʾī*, Gh. Javāhiri (ed.), (Tehran, n. d.), esp. pp. 4–7, 16–19, 29–33, 46–7].

98 Nafīsī points out (pp. 51–52, 62–63) that even Bahāʾī's prayer books are permeated with the spirit of Ṣūfī mysticism.

99 Ab. N., pp. 186, 221; R. S. N., VIII, pp. 475, 483.

100 Having enumerated his twenty “sects”, Ardabīlī, The Muqaddas, tells us that he is deliberately leaving out the Nūrbakhshīyya, the Naqshbandīyya and the Barzakhīyya “Because they are all in appearance Sunnī sinners”! (H. Sh., p. 600). In view of this statement, organized presence of the Nūrbakhshī in Iran in the late sixteenth century is very unlikely. The section on the Nūrbakhshī order in Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qumī's book against the Ṣūfis contains no information whatsoever on the organization or continued activity of the order in the seventeenth century. (Tuh. A., pp. 202–07).

101 T. Hq., III, p. 163.

the Deccan in the mid-fifteenth/ninth century.¹⁰² The order remained very active in Kirman, Bam, Yazd, Shiraz and parts of Khurāsān throughout the fifteenth century,¹⁰³ some of Nī'matullāh's numerous great-grandsons settled in Yazd,¹⁰⁴ which became the order's Iranian center. After the advent of Ismā'īl, the order declared itself to be Shi'ite¹⁰⁵ and made a lasting alliance with the Safavids. A descendant of Shāh Nī'matullāh, Mīr Niẓām al-Dīn 'Abd al-Bāqī (d. 1514/920) who was the *murshid* of the order in Yazd, was appointed *ṣadr* by Ismā'īl I in 1511–2/917,¹⁰⁶ and subsequently became his plenipotentiary deputy with the title *vakīl-e nafs-e humāyūn*.¹⁰⁷ 'Abd al-Bāqī's family tied themselves to the Safavids through a number of marriages¹⁰⁸ and rose to great prominence among the Safavid elite.¹⁰⁹ Of these, the most notable is Mīrmīrān Yazdī (d. 1591/999) who emerges as one of the most influential and wealthiest of the provincial notables in the second half of the sixteenth century.¹¹⁰

The order does not seem to have fared so well in the seventeenth century. During the first troubled years of 'Abbās I's reign, the aged Mīrmīrān suffered considerable indignity at the hands of one of 'Abbās' generals, Ya'qūb Khān, with whom, however, Mīrmīrān's son, Shāh Khalīlullāh, allied himself temporarily.¹¹¹ But Ya'qūb Khān rebelled in Fars and was suppressed by 'Abbās who then visited Yazd and was entertained lavishly by Shāh Khalīlullāh in 1591/999.¹¹² This visit marks the height of Nī'matullāhī prominence in Safavid national politics. Shāh Khalīlullāh entertained Shāh 'Abbās in his capacity as the political head of the Nī'matullāhī family, while his brother, Shāh Nī'matullāh IV, received him as the spiritual representative of the head of the order.¹¹³ After this year, there seems to be only one other reference to

102 T. Hq. III, pp. 93ff.; J. M., III, Pt. 1, pp. 47–8.

103 T. Hq. III, pp. 49ff., 99.

104 J. M. III, Pt. 1, p. 49.

105 See H. Farzām "Ikhtilāf-e Jāmī bā Shāh-e Valī", *Nashrīyeh-ye Dānish kadeh-ye Adabīyyāt-e Isfāhān*, 1 (1964/1343). See also his *Shāh-e Valī va Da'vī-ye Mahdavyīyāt*, (Isfahan, 1969/1348), pp. 23–24.

106 T. Akh. III, Ross Anon., f. 208b; T. Hq., III, p. 100; J. M. III, Pt. 1, pp. 54–6.

107 In 1513/919 (T. Akh., III).

108 T. Hq. III, pp. 100–101; J. M. III, Pt. 1, pp. 57, 62–3, 67.

109 'Abd al-Bāqī's son mediated between Ṭahmāsp and his rebellious brother Alqāš in 1549/956 (T. Akh. III), and the burial of Ṭahmāsp's favorite sister in 1563–5/971–2 was entrusted to Shāh Nūr al-Dīn Nī'matullāh (T. Akh. III; T. J. A., p. 299; Ah. T., p. 422).

110 Kh. T. 433a; J. M. III, Pt. 1, pp. 62–5; T. A. Ab., I, p. 145.

111 T. A. Ab., I, pp. 425, 431.

112 T. A. Ab., I, p. 437; J. M., III, Pt. 1, pp. 68ff.

113 Nq. A., p. 366.

the activities of the Ni'matullāhīyya as a Ṣūfī order. Shāh Khalīlullāh moved to Isfahan and remained the most eminent *sayyid* of the realm. But 'Abbās I set out to curb his power as soon as he felt secure enough; and in 1593/1001, Khalīlullāh is reported to have become resentful, when 'Abbās showered favors upon the rival *sayyid*, Mīrzā Muḥammad Amīn of Isfahan. Though 'Abbās is said to have "pulled him out of sulking" (*ū rā az kūft bīrūn āvard*) on one public occasion,¹¹⁴ Khalīlullāh received no further appointments, and must be presumed to have continued to sulk to his death in 1607–8/1016. His sons sank into obscurity.¹¹⁵ Khalīlullāh's younger brother Shāh Sulaymān Mīrzā (d. after 1640–1/1050), who also lived in Isfahan very probably forcibly), appears to have controlled some of the religious endowments traditionally entrusted to his family¹¹⁶ and is the last important spiritual leader of the order in Iran.¹¹⁷ While his sons were allowed to return to Yazd (presumably when they no longer represented a threat) by Shāh Safī (1629–1642), *Jāmi' Mufīdī*, a contemporary local history of Yazd and our main source, gives no indication of their Ṣūfī activity. The offices of *kalāntar* (alderman) and of *naqīb* (leader of the *sayyids*) of Yazd remained in the hands of Shāh Sulaymān Mīrzā's descendants, at least down to 1671–2/1082, but in contrast to references to Shāh Sulaymān Mīrzā's spiritual guidance (*irshād*) and gnosis (*'irfān*),¹¹⁸ the author of *Jāmi' Mufīdī* repeatedly mentions his descendants' zeal in the consolidation of the foundations of Sacred Law (*taqvīyat-e arkān-e shari'at*,¹¹⁹ *tashyīd-e qavā'id-e Shar'*),¹²⁰ and their conscientiousness in looking after the interests of the *sayyids* and the *'ulamā'*.¹²¹

The Persian Ni'matullāhīs representing the mystical tradition are mentioned in genteel intellectual occupations in India, to where they migrated. One of them, Mīr Hāshim Shāh, son of the calligrapher Mīr 'Abdullāh (1073/1662–3–1151/1738), was to become the founder of the Hāshim-Shāhī branch of the order in Delhi.¹²² The Ni'matullāhī Ṣūfīs did not return to Iran until the very end of the eighteenth century.

¹¹⁴ Nq. A., pp. 456–7.

¹¹⁵ J. M., III, Pt. 1, pp. 70–71.

¹¹⁶ J. M., III, Pt. 1, p. 73.

¹¹⁷ J. M., III, Pt. 1, p. 72.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ J. M., III, Pt. 1, p. 76.

¹²⁰ J. M., III, Pt. 1, p. 84.

¹²¹ J. M., III, Pt. 1, pp. 75–85.

¹²² T. Hq., III, p. 101.

In the sixteenth century, the Ni'matullāhīs were very probably the most highly organized of the Šūfī orders, which goes a long way towards explaining why their alliance with the Safavids lasted for over a century. Their *tekke* in Tabriz (in northwestern Iran, far from their center) is one of the two or three supra-local ones (as distinct from the local *khāniqāhs*, usually associated with families of *sayyids* with landholdings in the area) mentioned by Karbalā'ī.¹²³ They had *tekkes* in many other cities too. Circumstantial evidence suggests that 'Abbās I turned these *tekkes* increasingly over to the youth and recreational organizations of the city quarters they were located in. Fights between the city quarters were of course an old phenomenon. In Tabriz, where both the Ni'matullāhīs and the Ḥaydarīs had *tekkes*, such conflicts appear to have clustered around these respective *tekkes* in the latter part of Ṭahmāsp's reign.¹²⁴ There probably was some tendency for the pattern to repeat itself in other cities. Be that as it may, 'Abbās is known to have greatly encouraged and manipulated faction fights, and, specifically, as early as 1594–5/1003, in Qazvin, he is reported to have watched a fight between the Ni'matis (Ni'matullāhīs) and the Ḥaydarīs.¹²⁵ With the eclipse of the Ni'matullāhīyya as a Šūfī order, their *tekkes* were increasingly taken over as the headquarters of neighborhood organizations, and were used especially for the Muḥarram ceremonies of flagellant processions. Inter-factional conflicts occurring during the Muḥarram processions, starting from and returning to these *tekkes*, represented an extremely serious problem for the maintenance of law and order in cities in the late Safavid period, one which remained unsolved until the fall of the dynasty, and beyond.¹²⁶

Thus, once the cultural activity of the Ni'matullāhīyya—the perpetuation of its mystical tradition—definitely shifted to India as a result of 'Abbās' religious policy, its organizational base was taken over by the city-quarter communes, and harnessed to a particularly destructive form of communal sport—faction

123 R. J. J. J., I, p. 165.

124 In 1570, Alessandri mentions a particularly prolonged and ferocious faction fight between the "Nausitai"—presumably Ni'matis—and the "Himicai"—presumably the Ḥaydarīs, who control five and four districts respectively, and whose mutual hatred has lasted for over thirty years (Alessandri, p. 224).

125 Falsafi II, p. 328 (source: *Tārīkh-e 'Abbāsī*).

126 "A Voyage Round the World by J. F. Gemelli-Careri" [visited Iran in 1694] in J. Churchill, ed., *A Collection of Voyages*, (London, 1704), Vol. IV, p. 131; T. J. Krusinski, *The History of the Late Revolutions of Persia*, (London, 1740), I, pp. 92–93. I realize that the above is a bold hypothesis regarding an unexplored but crucially important issue in the social history of Iranian cities—i.e., the origins of the Ni'matī-Ḥaydarī feuding factions. As such it should be considered tentative.

fight—fused with the Muḥarram ceremonies mourning the martyrdom of the third Shi'ite Imām, Ḥusayn.

2.7 *Qalandariyya/Malāmatīyya and the Sufism of the Ascetic Virtuosi*

The ecstatic and antinomian Sufism of the hirsute Qalandars—roaming dervishes—and the quasi-eremitical Sufism of the ascetic virtuosi are polar opposites from the viewpoint of religious discipline. But what they have in common is the strong capacity for survival under persecution owing to the absence of congregational organization and the emphasis on the individualistic mode of activity.

In addition to individual dervishes, Karbalā'ī also mentions the *tekke* of the Ḥaydarīs belonging to the Qalandariyya in Tabriz.¹²⁷ Throughout the Safavid era, sporadic references to Qalandars attest to their presence on the religious scene. On a number of occasions, especially in periods of political instability and collapse of central power, we meet them as leaders of local uprisings. A number of local rebellions occurred during the chaotic period following the death of Ismā'īl II in 1577. According to the *Nuqawat al-Āthār*, after Ismā'īl's death rumors spread that he had not died but had gone into "concealment" (*ghā'ib shudeh*) and would soon reappear (*zuhūr khāhad kard*) in Anatolia or India.¹²⁸ For the first time in Sabzavar a Qalandar dervish claimed to be Ismā'īl, and then another in Hamadan.¹²⁹ Then came the most important of the Pseudo-Ismā'īls, another Qalandar in Kūh Gīluyeh, resembling Ismā'īl II in appearance, who rose (*khurūj kardeh*) with ten thousand men who had accepted his claim to being Ismā'īl.¹³⁰ He became known as Shāh-e Qalandar and also as Shāh Ismā'īl-e Qātil,¹³¹ captured territory bordering on Dizfūl and Shūsh-tar, struck coins in his name,¹³² and ruled "with utmost ease and felicity"¹³³ for some years until he was captured and decapitated in 1582/990.¹³⁴ His head was sent to the capital upon a spear, and his territory retaken.¹³⁵

127 R. J. J. J., I, pp. 467–8.

128 Nq. A., pp. 113–14.

129 Ibid., pp. 114–16.

130 Kh. T., f. 301, T. A. Ab., I, p. 261.

131 Nq. A., p. 118.

132 Kh. T., f. 309.

133 Nq. A., p. 119.

134 Nq. A., p. 120, Kh. T., f. 317a; T. A. Ab., I, pp. 272–74.

135 Kh. T., f. 317a. One interesting fact contained in the otherwise very uninformative diatribe against the Ṣūfis in the *Ḥadiqat al-Shī'a* (written in the second half of the sixteenth century) is the existence of the Jūrīyya order, which appears to have survived into the Safavid period long after the collapse of their local states in Mazandaran (the Mar'ashi *sayyids*) and in Sabzavar (the Sarbadārs), both of which had flourished in the fourteenth

Under the events of the year 1616/1025, Iskandar Munshī cites a *rubāʿī* from Babā Sultān Qalandar-e Qumī who is said to be one of the “*tekke*-holding dervishes.”¹³⁶ In the accounts given of the city of Isfahan of the mid-seventeenth century by European travellers, shaggy, ill-clad dervishes hanging out in the streets and around coffee-houses appear as an element of the social scene. Olearius mentions “a certain type of ecclesiastics who are called *abdāl* for whom the king has built a *tekke*” (1637).¹³⁷ Du Mans describes the dervishes, the *duʿā-gūs* (those who pray for the alm-giver’s health and salvation) and the Qalandars together (1660),¹³⁸ and Sanson talks of the “Derviches or Abdals,” who preach austerely on street corners and coffee-houses, tell stories, and are not highly regarded.¹³⁹

We have so far concentrated on organized popular Sufism, and have omitted to consider the ascetic Šūfī virtuosi. What emerges clearly from *The Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, a book of unusual documentary interest,¹⁴⁰ is the great importance of virtuoso Sufism, even in the pre-Safavid period. Roughly speaking as many Šūfī virtuosi and intellectuals as members of identified orders, with a definite rank or relationship within them, are mentioned.¹⁴¹ More

century after the disintegration of the Īl-Khānid Empire. (I. P. Petrushevsky, *Kishāvarzī va Munāsibāt-e Arḍī dar Irān-e Ahd-e Mughul* (Persian tr. by K. Kishavarz of *Zemledelie i agrarnie otnošenija v Irane XIII–XIV vekov*), (Tehran 1355/1977), II, pp. 818–916.) Furthermore, the author may even be right in presenting the Jūrīyya as undisciplined Malāmatī dervishes (those bent on attracting others’ “blame” through socially disapproved modes of behavior) even though they are said to dress well whenever possible. Other similar Šūfī groups who are naturally accused of charlatanry but also of worldliness, orgiasticism and “Sunnī *ghuluw*” are also mentioned. (H. Sh. 578–92. Except for the Jumhūrīyya and Ismāʿīlīyya, the other Šūfī sects mentioned by Ardabīlī do not seem to correspond to organized groups, but appear to relate to presumed doctrinal attitudes and outlooks.)

136 T. A. Ab., II, p. 910.

137 Olearius: pp. 382–3.

138 Du Mans, pp. 216–7.

139 Sanson, pp. 153–54.

140 This unusual documentary interest is due to the fact that, unlike the typical Šūfī resources, it is not a chronicle of a famous *shaykh* or order, and its author moves from tomb to tomb in the cemeteries of Tabriz.

141 A detailed study of R. J. J. J. and other sources is needed for the correct identification of many of the persons named, and especially of their affiliation. Pending the appearance of such a study, and on the basis of a very rough count and impressionistic assessment, Table 1 divides the readily identifiable Šūfī’s among persons whose date of death is given into five categories, each category being chronologically subdivided by the year of Ismāʿīl I’s death (1524/930):

importantly, even in cases where order affiliations are mentioned, the center of attention is usually the Şūfī virtuosi—i.e., individual mystics, their spiritual attainment, their absorption of divinity (*jazaba*), intuition of revelations (*mukāshafa*), and ascetic, contemplative or visionary qualities. Their affiliations to orders, and the frequenting of specific masters appear only of secondary importance. The Şūfī virtuosi could be accomodated by a variety of social niches, ranging from supra-national orders to local orders dominated by landowning notables (*sayyids*), a single *khanīqah* (convent), crafts, and finally voluntary support by admiring laymen.¹⁴²

Therefore, the demise of the Şūfī orders did not put an end to virtuosos Sufism. Among the persons mentioned in *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, virtually all of the fifteen or twenty easily identifiable sixteenth century Şūfis who died during Ṭahmāsp’s reign or later (after 1524/930) are either dispossessed *sayyids* of former local orders, or fall into the virtuosos and literati categories.¹⁴³ Ascetic

Table I

A	B	
d. 900–930*	d. 931–980's	
1494–1524	1525–1570's	
I. Sufis with specified affiliation:		
1. With <i>sayyids</i> and local orders	10	6
2. With large (supra-local) orders only	6 (or 7)	2
I. Total	<u>16 (or 17)</u>	8
II. Sufis of unspecified affiliation:		
3. Craftsmen & artisans	2 (or 3)	1 (or 3)
4. Literati (calligraphers, painters, scholars, etc.)	6	4 (or 5)
5. Mystic virtuosos	10	5
II. Total	<u>18 (or 19)</u>	10 (or 13)
TOTAL	34 (or 36)	18 (or 21)

* Permanent exiles are also included among the dead!

The similarity of the underlined totals of affiliated and unaffiliated Şūfis Column A, confirms our statement regarding the importance of “unaffiliated” Şūfis even before the suppression of the orders.

142 See table I.

143 Table II

A	B	
d. 900–930	d. 931–980's	
1494–1524	1525–1570's	
I. <i>Shaykhs</i> of Sufi orders	16 (or 17)	2*
II. Prominent “Unattached” Sufis: Craftsmen, “dispossessed” local <i>sayyids</i> **, literati and virtuosos.		
	18 (or 19)	16 (or 19)

virtuosi and mystic literati figure prominently among the Šūfī masters of the period. Shaykh Khidr, for instance, was an eminent Šūfī to whom ‘Abbās I wrote a respectful letter.¹⁴⁴ The famous philosopher Mīr Findiriskī (d. 1640–1/1050) was another Šūfī, who travelled to India to study asceticism, and became a recluse for seven years.¹⁴⁵ Among the mystic literati, we may name the royal scribe Āqā Abu’l-Faṭḥ Iṣfāhānī (d. 1611–2/1020), and his grandson Khwāja ‘Alī Akbar.¹⁴⁶ In the latter part of the seventeenth century, too, the ascetic virtuosi continued to remain among the important representatives of Sufism. *Jāmi’ Mufīdī*, written in the early 1670’s/1080’s, devotes a chapter to brief biographies of some six prominent contemporary ascetic and hermetic Šūfis of the city of Yazd.¹⁴⁷ The chapter of *Qīṣaṣ al-Khāqānī* (written in 1660/1070) on the eminent men of ‘Abbās II’s reign includes a section on the ascetic Šūfis which contains bibliographical entries on nineteen nationally renowned ascetic virtuosi.¹⁴⁸

As already pointed out, the bearers of the ascetic and the contemplative Sufism share one characteristic with the Qalandars: the absence of any congregational organization. In fact, they are much more radically individualistic; and their eremitical individualism and uncompromising rejection of the world makes them quite tolerable to political powers who perceive no threat from their direction. Despite the demise of the orders, the Šūfī virtuosi survived, acting as the transmitters of the mystical tradition which, after nearly a century and a half of latency, in the mid-seventeenth century, bloomed briefly but with dazzling brilliance and in a highly intellectual form.

2.8 *Revival of Sufism in Mid-seventeenth Century*

‘Abbās the Great whose religious policy accounts for the eclipse of the Ni‘matullāhiyya, the last of the organized Šūfī orders, tolerated the individualistic and apolitical Sufism of the literati and of the mystic virtuosi. These,

(Based on Table 1).

* This of course is an underestimate as the *shaykhs* of the then surviving Ni‘matullāhi order are not represented.

** Such as the family of the author, the Lāleh *sayyids*. In period B, those Šūfis who are affiliated to local *sayyids* (represented by the figure in Row 1, column B) become “unattached” in the second period after the disestablishment or suppression of the local orders.

144 T. Hq., III, p. 162.

145 T. Hq., III, pp. 158–9. S. J. Ashtiyani, ed., *Anthologie des philosophes iraniens depuis le XVII^e siècle jusqu’à nos jours*, (Tehran, 1972), I, French Introduction (H. Corbin), p. 31.

146 T. A. Ab., II, p. 851.

147 J. M., III, Pt. 1, pp. 506–510.

148 Q. Kh., f. 160ff. Twenty-five men of learning and ninety-nine poets are mentioned in the other categories of the eminent men of the period.

of course, often preserved their spiritual affiliation to the Šūfī traditions. However, these links no longer corresponded to membership of organized congregations, but rather denoted the variety of mystical tradition brought by individual mystics to a common and remarkably eclectic forum. In this manner, Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Alī Mu’adhdhin Khurāsānī, who dedicated a book to Shāh ‘Abbās, represented the Dhahabī tradition;¹⁴⁹ and one of ‘Abbās’s secretaries in the Bureau of Royal Domains (*khāṣṣeh*), Āqā Abu’l-Faṭḥ Iṣfāhānī appears as a *shaykh* of the Dhu’l-Nūnī tradition.¹⁵⁰

In the reign of Shāh Šafī (1629–1642) we witness the beginnings of a brilliant philosophical renaissance, consisting of the revival of philosophy, heavily influenced by the currents in the intellectualized mysticism of the literati and the ascetic *shaykhs*, which produced the tradition of *‘irfān*—or gnostic philosophy.

The reign of ‘Abbās II (1642–1666) marks the apogee of “high” Sufism and of gnostic philosophy (*‘irfān*). In 1645/1055, Sayyid Ḥusayn, Sulṭān al-‘ulamā’, who had also intermittently held the office of vazir under ‘Abbās I and Safī, was appointed the grand vazir by ‘Abbās II. Sulṭān al-‘ulamā’ (d. 1654/1064) was an outstanding student of the mystically inclined Bahā’ al-Dīn ‘Āmilī¹⁵¹ and, as such, belonged to the circle of Persian *‘ulamā’* who sought to unify the Shi‘ite religious lore and gnostic philosophy. This circle enjoyed the patronage of Sulṭān al-‘ulamā’ and, after his death, that of the monarch, ‘Abbās II. It included Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, the Elder, Mullā ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ (d. 1680/1090), Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzavārī (d. 1680/1090)—a student of Sulṭān al-‘ulamā’ and a close friend of Majlisī the Elder¹⁵²—and Sabzavārī’s student and brother-in-law Āqā Ḥusayn Khwānsārī (d. 1689/1099).¹⁵³ ‘Abbās II appointed Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzavārī the *shaykh al-islām* of Isfahan.¹⁵⁴ He also commissioned Majlisī the Elder, the leading religious dignitary of Isfahan,¹⁵⁵ to write a commentary in Persian on Ibn Babawayh’s *Man la-Yaḥḍuruḥu’l-Faqīh*. Above all, he lavished royal favors on Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ, for whom he ordered his physician, Sa‘īd Qumī—himself another member of the circle of gnostic philosophers—to build a Šūfī *tekke*

149 T. Hq., III, pp. 164–5.

150 T. A. Ab., II, p. 851.

151 T. Hq., III, pp. 163–4.

152 T. Hq., I, p. 267.

153 Ibid. Khwānsārī was also a student of Majlisī the Elder (Ibid., 269), and of Sulṭān al-‘ulamā’ himself (T. Hq., III, p. 164).

154 T. Hq., I, p. 267.

155 Du Mans, p. 58.

in Isfahan in 1658/1068.¹⁵⁶ The Šūfī virtuosi were also respected and favored by ‘Abbās II, whom his official historian at one point *calls shāh-e darvīsh-dūst* (the dervish-loving shah).¹⁵⁷ In 1660/1070, he visited the recluse Šūfī and philosopher, Mullā Rajab-‘Alī Tabrizī and the mystic Darvīsh Muḥammad Šāliḥ Lunbānī.¹⁵⁸ In 1663/1073, he paid another visit to the convent of Darvīsh Muḥammad Šāliḥ.¹⁵⁹

The microscopic picture of the society of the city of Yazd in the second and third quarters of the seventeenth century found in *Jāmi‘ Mufidī* allows us to appreciate the incidence of Sufism among the ascetics¹⁶⁰ and among the literati.¹⁶¹ Consonantly, with the outlook of its bearers, Sufism in this period consisted of an intellectualized eclectic blending of various mystical traditions. Two of these have already been mentioned. But the influence of the Nūrbakhshī tradition, of which Bahā’ al-Dīn ‘Āmilī, Qāḍī Sa‘id Qumī, and certainly Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ are eminent representatives,¹⁶² was very probably the strongest. *Gulshan-e Rāz*, (the Garden of Secrets), on which an authoritative commentary was written by Nūrbakhshī’s disciple Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhijī, appears to have been the basic Šūfī text of the period.¹⁶³ However, we can plausibly infer from a passage in Majlisī the Younger’s *‘Ayn al-Ḥayāt* that the place of Nūrbakhshī in the spiritual genealogical chain was played down (because of his claim to Mahdihood), and that the mid-seventeenth century representatives of the Nūrbakhshī tradition must have considered it safer to single out a historically more remote figure, the eighth/second century Šūfī, Dāwūd Tā’ī, as their spiritual “patron saint.”¹⁶⁴

There is also very strong circumstantial evidence of the presence of the Mawlawī (Mevlevi) tradition.¹⁶⁵ Chardin cites the *Mathnavī*—which he takes

156 Ab. N., p. 256.

157 Ab. N., p. 321.

158 Ab. N., pp. 254–55.

159 Ab. N., p. 321.

160 J. M., III, Pt. 1:506–510. It should be pointed out that both reclusiveness (*gūsseh-gūrī*, *‘uzlat*) and asceticism (*zuhd*, *rīyāqat*) were highly valued, albeit not easily realizable, ideals; that they find incidence not only among the mystics, but also among the learned and the pious in general (J. M., III, Pt. 1, pp. 319, 332–3, 342–3, 351–2; T. A. Ab., II, p. 805).

161 J. M. III, Pt. 1, pp. 315–17, 327, 336, 343–51.

162 T. Hq., II, p. 322. Mullā Šadrā and Mīr Findiriskī are also said to belong to the Nūrbakhshī tradition (Ibid.; also T. Hq., I, p. 183).

163 H. Sh., p. 591; Chardin, IV: ch. 11.

164 Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *‘Ayn al-Ḥayāt*, (Tehran, 1954/1333), p. 238.

165 The Mevlevi order was founded by the great mystic and poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) in Konya.

to be a commentary on *Gulshan-e Rāz*—as the second basic Šūfī book, and refers to the non-Qizilbash Šūfīs as the “*Soufys tourneurs*” for which he gives *Tcharkyi* [*Charkhī*] as the Persian term.¹⁶⁶ *Charkhī* dervishes are also referred to in other sources,¹⁶⁷ which allows us to infer the influence of the “Whirling Dervishes” of the Mevlevi tradition. During the reign of ‘Abbās II, a travelling Šūfī from Anatolia, Darvīsh Muṣṭafā, was enthusiastically received in Iran and very respectfully treated by the monarch, who occasionally sought his advice during the dervish’s stay.¹⁶⁸

These mystical traditions merged together into a unified form of “high” Sufism which bore the imprint of its bearers: the ascetic virtuosi and the literati, the most prominent among whom were a group of philosophically oriented ‘ulamā’. Their attempt to unify Sufism and Shi‘ism, however, before long brought down on them the wrath of the more rigid religious scholars who came to form the late Safavid Shi‘ite hierocracy.

In his brief *Risāla-ye Tashvīq-e Sālikīn*, Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, the Elder, having professed spiritual allegiance to the Dhahabī tradition, cites Ḥaydar Āmulī’s dictum regarding the identity of Shi‘ism and Sufism, and Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā‘ī’s statement: there is no difference between the mosque and the *khanīqāh*; and finally invokes the authority of his renowned teacher Shaykh Bahā’ al-Dīn ‘Āmilī to defend Sufism and mystical gnosis against the “formal science” (*‘ilm-e rasmi*) (of the dogmatic ‘ulamā’).¹⁶⁹

Majlisī’s older contemporary, the great philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1640/1050) can be said to be the representative *par excellence* of both the gnostic/philosophical¹⁷⁰ and the eremitic/ascetic¹⁷¹ Šūfī outlook of the period. In *Kasr Aṣnām al-Jāhiliyya* (Breaking the Idols of Ignorance), he poses as the spokesman of “high” Sufism and fulminates against the “low” Sufism of the Qalandars whose ignorance, thaumaturgy and charlatanry,¹⁷² worldliness,¹⁷³ and orgiasticism¹⁷⁴ are vehemently denounced. Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ is said to have made similarly sharp criticisms of “low” Sufism.¹⁷⁵

166 Chardin, IV: ch. 11. The importance of the *Mathnavī* and the *Gulshan-e Rāz* is borne out by the numerous critical references to them in Tuh. A.

167 Sources occasionally speak of the *charkh-zadan* of the Šūfīs (H. Sh., p. 596, Tuh. A., p. 153.).

168 R. S. N., VIII, pp. 480–1.

169 Printed together with *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā* etc., (Tabriz, 1953/1332), pp. 12–28.

170 K. A. J., pp. 41ff., ch. 3: esp. 44–5, 53, 79–80, 92.

171 K. A. J., pp. 27, 48, 51, 92, and ch. 4.

172 K. A. J., the title itself; pp. 3, 8, 60.

173 K. A. J., pp. 16, 31, 49, 63, 85, 92, ch. 4: esp. 106–129, 130–1.

174 K. A. J., pp. 3–6, 16, 27–30.

175 T. Hq., I, p. 183.

The Safavid state had no political motive for suppressing the individualistic ascetic, antinomian or intellectualist Sufism of the second half of the seventeenth century, and, under 'Abbās II, greatly encouraged it. However, these varieties of Sufism came under the heavy attack of the emergent Shi'ite hierocracy, which greatly consolidated its institutional position under the leadership of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, the Younger (d. 1699/1110), whose outlook was characterized by dogmatic rigidity.¹⁷⁶ Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qumī, one of the members of the Shi'ite hierocracy most actively hostile to the Ṣūfīs, attacks not only the Sufism of the antinomians¹⁷⁷ but also that of the ascetic virtuosi.¹⁷⁸ Majlisī the Younger, fulminates not only against Sufism¹⁷⁹ but also against philosophy (the other essential component of *'irfān*).¹⁸⁰ Clashes between the dogmatic *'ulamā'* and the Ṣūfīs, already underway during the reign of 'Abbās II, became sharper during Suleymān's reign (1666–94).¹⁸¹ Chardin relates the incident of an *'ālim*, who declared the shedding of the blood of Ṣūfīs to be lawful from the pulpit, and was dragged down and beaten by four or five Ṣūfīs from the audience.¹⁸²

The final triumph of the hierocracy over the gnostic philosophers and the Ṣūfīs (who according to Chardin bestowed their pantheistic love upon all creatures and men) did come with the accession of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn (1694–1722). The persecution of the Ṣūfīs was instituted by the official head of the hierocracy, Majlisī the Younger,¹⁸³ who obtained a decree from the shah for the expulsion of all Ṣūfīs from the city of Isfahan. The persecution was

176 The appointment of the Sulṭān al-*'ulamā'*, a proponent of "high" Sufism was resisted by the *Shaykh al-Islām* of Isfahan, Mīrzā Qāḍī who was dismissed in 1645–6/1055. (Q. Kh., f. 52) The dismissal of Mīrzā Qāḍī signified the onset of the decline of the influence of the dogmatic *'ulamā'*. The unmistakable predominance of the philosophically-oriented proponents of *'irfān* over the dogmatic religious scholars under 'Abbās II emerges clearly from the biographies of the twenty-five eminent scholars of his reign in a contemporary chronicle. (Q. Kh., ff. 156–59) The climate changed under Suleymān whose reign was marked by the rise of Majlisī the Younger, who renounced his father's Sufism and took over the leadership of the dogmatic camp.

177 Tuh. A., pp. 74–75.

178 Ibid., pp. 36–39.

179 Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Risāla-ye Su'āl va Jawāb*, printed together with *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* etc., (Tabriz, 1953/1332), p. 4.

180 Ibid., pp. 5–11.

181 Ibid. T. Hq., I, p. 179.

182 Chardin, IV: ch. 11.

183 Q. U., pp. 205, 323; L. Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia*, (Cambridge, 1958), p. 38. The details of this suppression are obscure and need further research.

continued by his son-in-law and successor Mullā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khātūnābādī,¹⁸⁴ a man of a similarly rigid and dogmatic frame of mind who was apparently not even loath to commit acts of violence personally.¹⁸⁵ Though written much later in the nineteenth century Riḍā Qulī Khān Hidāyat's statement on the suppression of Sufism and of *'irfān* is worth quoting for its identification of the salient elements of the late Safavid "high" Sufism. After reporting the destruction of the *khaniqāh* of Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ and the massacre of its Ṣūfis by the order of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, Hidāyat remarks:

As the foundation of the livelihood of the Men of the Path came to an end, they called the Lords of Asceticism dry-headed, and named the Men of Investigation, imitators, the Philosophers, innovators, and the Men of Gnosis (*'urafā'*) inventors. They prevented the Men of Reflection from the remembrance (of God)—*dhikr*, and tore asunder the books of the Ṣūfī *silsilas*.¹⁸⁶

With the decline of gnostic philosophy taught in the *madrasas* of Isfahan and Shiraz, and the devastation of the cities by the Afghan invaders after 1722, recluse Ṣūfis remain on the scene as the only surviving bearers of the mystical tradition of "high" Sufism.¹⁸⁷

3 Decline of Sunnism

Scarcia-Amoretti aptly uses the phrase "religiously promiscuous ambiance" to refer to the late fifteenth century.¹⁸⁸ As she points out, for example, the staunch Sunnī opponent of the Shi'ite Safavids, Rūzbihān Khunjī, wrote a poem in praise of the twelve Shi'ite Imāms. Khunjī also held the martyred Imām Ḥusayn, in greatest respect and admiration.¹⁸⁹ In this atmosphere of relative

184 Mj. T.: p. 25; Shaykh Bahā' al-Dīn, a plaintive against early Afghan depredation from Khurasan is expelled from Isfahan, accused of Sufism; accusations are levelled against a number of literati (Tk. H. L., pp. 52–3).

185 Mj. T., pp. 49–50.

186 R. S. N., VIII: 493; "Innovators" (*muḥtadī'*) and "inventors" (*mukhtari'*) are pejorative terms. See also Shīrvānī, pp. 51–52.

187 See the autobiography of the mystic and poet Ḥazīn Lāhijī written in 1154/1741 or 2: Tk. H. L., pp. 85–6, 189–190, 192.

188 B. Scarcia-Amoretti, "L'Islam in Persia fra Tīmūr e Nādir", *Annali della Facoltà di Lingue e Letterature Straniere Di Ca'Foscari*, XIII, 3 (1974), p. 68.

189 Ibid., p. 69; Aubin, "Notables": 55, n. 2.

religious eclecticism, devotional attachment to 'Alī in particular, and to the House of the Prophet (his daughter Fāṭima and the twelve Imāms) in general, was widespread among the population. 'Alī was often considered the model of the *fatā'* or *futuwwa*: the moral quality most highly valued by urban associations and guilds. It was natural for guilds, in view of their characteristic attachment to the House of the Prophet, to adopt 'Alī, or another Shi'ite Imām as their "patron-saint" alongside the prophets and other figures in sacred history.¹⁹⁰

The widespread pro-'Alī and pro-House of the Prophet sentiments of the population facilitated the propagation of Shi'ism after Ismā'īl's conquest of Iran. Despite some resistance, especially in eastern Iran and Fars,¹⁹¹ the *formal* profession of Shi'ism spread speedily. However, the conversion achieved by Safavid propagandists does not seem to have involved anything beyond publicly cursing (*la'n*) the first three Rightly-guided Caliphs, and exalting 'Alī and his descendants.¹⁹² A number of passages in *Ross Anonymous* clearly show the superficiality of the sudden conversion to Shi'ism. For instance, we are told that in 1509/915, the inhabitants of Sarakhs (in Khurāsān) uttered "the slogan of the Imāmī religion" (*shi'ār-e madhhab-e imāmīyya*), and were immune from depredation by Ismā'īl's army.¹⁹³ There are indications that even some of *ṣadrs* did not possess adequate knowledge of Twelver Shi'ism. Thus in the year 1514/920 Amīr Shiahāb al-Dīn Lāleh, of the above-mentioned Lāle'-ī Sunnī branch of the Kubravīyya in Azerbaijan, was appointed *ṣadr*, but was soon removed from office, replaced by Mīr Jamāl al-Dīn Shirangī Astarābādī, of whom the author of

190 *Haftād va Seh Millat* (copied in 1482/887) presents the Lā'inīyyā and the Rajā'īyyā as two sects intensely devoted to the memory of 'Alī, on the account of which, the first are said to curse 'Alī's enemies ritualistically, and the second, to believe in his return with his disciples to avenge himself against the usurpers. This account is corroborated by *Ma'rifat al-Madhāhib* (copied in 1634–5/1044). See M. J. Mashkūr, ed., *Haftād va Seh Millat yā I'tiqādāt-e Madhāhib*, (Tehran, 'Aṭā'i Press, 1976/1355), pp. 64–65 and 78–79. Ḥusayn Vā'iz Kāshifī, *Futuwwat-nāmeḥ-ye Sulṭānī*, M. J. Maḥjūb, ed., (Tehran, 1971/1350), pp. 286–87. 'Alī and the sixth Imām, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq are mentioned in a fabric-maker's code—*futuwwat-nāmeḥ*—probably dating from the fifteenth century. See the "Futuwwat-nāmeḥ-ye Chitsāzān" in *Rasā'il-e Javān-mardān*, ed., M. Ṣarrāfi, intro., H. Corbin, (Tehran, 1973/1352), p. 226.

191 See the accounts of the conquest of Herat—e.g., *Ross Anon.* 194b ff.; T. Akh. 111 under the year 916. As was pointed out above in the subsection on the Naqshbandīyya (p. 10), in 1503–4/909 there was a massacre of Sunnī Ṣūfis in Fars. In the course of this massacre, the *khaṭībs* (preachers) of Kāzīrūn were also killed because of Sunnism (T. Akh., 111).

192 See E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, vol. IV, (Cambridge, 1924), pp. 52–53.

193 *Ross Anon.*, f. 183a. See also f. 270b, H. S., IV, p. 508.

Takmilat al-Akhbār tells us revealingly: “in whose Shi‘ism there was no doubt.”¹⁹⁴ It is not until the arrival of Shaykh ‘Alī al-Karākī al-‘Āmilī, who paid intermittent visits to the court of Ismā‘īl¹⁹⁵ but does not appear to have left the Arab Iraq definitely until the reign of his successor, that an eminent Shi‘ite *mujtahid* embarked on an authoritative religious instruction in Iran.¹⁹⁶

It is therefore not surprising that Sunnism was eradicated only gradually. Under Shāh Ṭahmāsp, Sunnism persisted in no less central a city than Qazvin, where those members of the Sunnī community who had never cursed the Rightly-guided Caliphs were awarded remuneration from the royal treasury by Ṭahmāsp’s pro-Sunnī son Ismā‘īl II.¹⁹⁷ In a *qaṣīda* in criticism of the people of Qazvin the poet Mawlānā Ḥayratī claims to have “found Sunnism among the dignified and the notables” (of Qazvin).¹⁹⁸ Dickson adduces enough evidence to suggest that Qāḍī Jahān, one of the most eminent of Qazvin’s notables, who held the Grand Vazirate under Ṭahmāsp twice (1524–6 and 1535–50) was a crypto-Sunnī.¹⁹⁹

Ismā‘īl II attempted to reestablish Sunnism during his brief reign (1576–1577),²⁰⁰ but was forced to give up the project in the face of Qizilbash opposition.²⁰¹ The failure of Ismā‘īl II’s religious policy of course attests to the preponderant strength of Shi‘ism in Iran by the third quarter of the sixteenth century. But what is even more instructive, apart from the very fact that such a policy could be undertaken with some expectation of success, is its assessment by the contemporary or near-contemporary historians. The aim of the policy is stated as the winning over of the Sunnī elements by making possible their peaceful coexistence and cooperation with the Shi‘is. Though they may have considered its execution imprudent or miscalculated, neither

194 T. Akh., III, reproduced as f. 250b in O. A. Efendiev, *Obrazovanie Azerbajdžanskogo gosudarstva Sefevidov*, (Baku, 1961); H. S., IV, pp. 549–50.

195 Ross Anon., ff. 113a, 198a; Kh. T., ff. 102a–103.

196 See E. Glassen, “Schāh Ismā‘īl I und die Theologen seiner Zeit”, *Der Islam*, (1971–2), pp. 254–268. Glassen rightly emphasizes the superficiality of the initial conversion to Shi‘ism (ibid., esp. p. 263).

197 Falsafi, I: 26.

198 Ah. T.: 385.

199 M. B. Dickson, “Shāh Ṭahmāsp and the Uzbeks”, Ph. D. dissertation, Princeton (1958), pp. 192–3.

200 Balbi, p. 282.

201 Falsafi, I, pp. 27–8. Among the sources, the best account—and one may add a highly analytical one—of Ismā‘īl II’s religious policy is to be found, T. A. Ab., I, pp. 213–7.

the Sunnī historian Bidlīsī,²⁰² nor the Shi'ite historians Qādī Aḥmad Qumī²⁰³ and Iskandar Munshī²⁰⁴ considered this policy intrinsically unrealistic. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Ismā'īl II could enlist the active support of some of the Persian notables—for instance Mīr Makhdūm Shīrazī²⁰⁵ and Shāh 'Ināyatullāh Iṣfāhānī, formerly the *qādī mu'askar*, whom he appointed *sadr*²⁰⁶—and presumably rely on the tacit sympathy of many more.

The reign of 'Abbās the Great, decisive for the establishment of Shi'ism, also witnessed instances of persecution of the Sunnis. At the beginning of his reign, Sunnism was still fairly strong in eastern Iran. Thus after the Uzbek conquest of Herat in 1588, “many *tāzīks*—Persians, non-Turks—despite the congruence of their religion [with that of the Sunnī Uzbeks] were also killed with the Qizilbash dignitaries.”²⁰⁷ 'Abbās's astrologer and historian reports the violent persecution of the Sunnīs of Surkheh in northwestern Iran in 1599.²⁰⁸ Finally, in 1608/1017, 'Abbās executed the alderman (*kadkhudā*) of Hamadan (in western Iran), who was also the leader (*ra'īs*) of the Sunnī community, for ill-treating the Shi'īs of that town.²⁰⁹ The confirmation of a *farmān* by 'Abbās I, by his successor Shāh Šāfi in 1630/1039 shows that the persecution of 1599 resulted in the spread of Shi'ism in the area surrounding Surkheh—Simnan—though not so much in Surkheh itself.²¹⁰

The final wave of persecution of Sunnism comes at the very end of the seventeenth century with the final triumph of the Shi'ite hierocracy under Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn. Its official head and spokesman, Majlisī pursued a vigorous policy of suppression of Sunnism and the conversion of Sunnīs and other religious minorities. Persecutions are reported in the Sunnī region of Lāristān²¹¹ and elsewhere.²¹² The sources make it clear that not all the 70,000 non-Shi'īs,

202 W. Hinz, “Schāh Esmā'īl II. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Safaviden”, *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen*, WS. XXVI, (Berlin, 1933), p. 77.

203 Kh. T., f. 339.

204 T. A. Ab., I, pp. 215–6.

205 Ibid., p. 214.

206 Kh. T., f. 269a; Ah. T., pp. 491–2.

207 T. A. Ab., I, p. 388.

208 J. Aubin, “Les Sunnites du Lārestan et la chute des Safavids”, *Revue de études islamiques*, XXXIII (1965), p. 152.

209 Ibid.; Falsafi also mentions the massacre of a Kurdish Sunni tribe, the Mukrī, and a number of instances of use of violence against other Sunni communities, but there is no evidence that these were carried out as *religious persecutions*. (Falsafi, III, pp. 36–39).

210 Falsafi, III, pp. 36–39.

211 Ibid., p. 156.

212 Lockhart, pp. 70–79.

whom the author of *Qīṣaṣ al-‘Ulamā’* accredits Majlisī with having converted,²¹³ accepted Shi‘ism non-violently, and merely by reading the massively voluminous (popularized) religious writings bearing his name.²¹⁴ In fact, the repression he instituted can be counted as an important cause of the discontent of the Sunnī population of Afghanistan, which led to the Afghan invasion and the overthrow of the Safavid Dynasty.²¹⁵

4 Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from our survey of the long prelude to the definitive establishment of Shi‘ism in the form in which, having survived Nādir Shāh’s (1736–48) “pan-Islamic” experiment, it is found in contemporary Iran:

- 1 This prelude consisted in the suppression of three fairly distinct religious trends which follows a sequential, though very widely overlapping, chronological pattern. Two factors stand out as the causal determinants of this process of religious evolution: “reasons of state” or the political interests of the Safavid rulers, and the dogmatic and institutional interests of the nascent Shi‘ite hierocracy. The first factor was operative from the outset; the second became so mainly in the latter part of the Safavid period.
- 2 The suppression of *Ghuluw* was determined almost entirely by reasons of state, which were two-fold. The first motive for this suppression was the need to rationalize the form of political domination into an enduring and stable structure suitable for the administration of a centralized empire which was incompatible with intense and therefore volatile millenarian expectations associated with “extremism.” The second related political motive underlying the suppression of “extremism” was the need for the institutionalized domestication of the sedentary as well as the nomadic

²¹³ Q. U., p. 205.

²¹⁴ Ibid.; *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, (anonymously edited), (London, 1939), I, pp. 473–74. It is important to note that, with the establishment of the Shi‘ite hierocracy, the initiator of a major religious policy is, for the first time, not the monarch guided mainly by the “reason of state”, but by the hierocracy in pursuit of its doctrinal interests. That the weak Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn did not initiate this religious policy is borne out by the evidence of his lenient and more favorable disposition towards religious minorities after Majlisī’s death. (Ibid., pp. 522, 558).

²¹⁵ Muḥammad Mahdī Iṣfāhānī, *Niṣṣe Jahān fi Ta’rīf al-Iṣfāhān*, M. Sotūdeh, ed., (Tehran, 1961/1340, [1891/1308 H. Q.]), pp. 185–6; Lockhart, op. cit., pp. 70–79.

tribal masses, which in turn required a more dogmatic and other-worldly type of religion than the this-worldly millenarianism of *Ghuluw*. Though the Shi'ite '*ulamā*' would doubtless have doctrinal objections of their own—and in fact did instigate the killing of the blind Nuḡṭavī poet Abu'l-Qāsim Amrī—their objections did not cause any repressive action as their institutional power became enhanced *after* 'Abbās's decisive suppression of "extremism" in the last decade of the sixteenth/first decade of the eleventh century. It is true that 'Abbās did enlist the support of the Shi'ite '*ulamā*' who, at his request, condemned the leading Nuḡṭavīs of Qazvin, Darvīsh Khusraw and Mawlānā Salmān. However, the more lenient sentence imposed by the '*ulamā*' on Mawlānā Salmān, as compared to 'Abbās's order that he be put to death, interestingly illustrates the unmistakable primacy of reasons of state in the suppression of *Ghuluw*.

- 3 The suppression of Sufism took place in two distinct stages. The first, completed under 'Abbās the Great, consisted in the suppression of popular Sufism. It took the form of the eradication of the organized Ṣūfī orders which presented a political threat to Safavid supremacy. The Safavid state, however, could afford to, and did, tolerate—and, under 'Abbās II actively encouraged—the apolitical "high" Sufism of the ascetic virtuosi and the mystically-oriented literati.

The second stage of the suppression of Sufism, beginning under Suleymān and gathering momentum under Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, took the form of the repression of 'high' Sufism or '*irfān*'. In marked contrast to the political motivation of the first stage, its motivating force was the dogmatic and institutional interest of the emergent Shi'ite hierocracy.

- 4 The suppression of Sunnism, dictated by reasons of state, at the beginning of the sixteenth century was achieved very rapidly by Ismā'īl I. It constituted a basic principle of the Safavid state policy, and took the form of insistence on the formal profession of Shi'ism which met with little resistance because of the prevalent religious eclecticism which accounts for the absence of any powerful political motive for the rigorous eradication of Sunnism. For over one and a half centuries following the establishment of the Safavid dynasty, while the gradual dissemination of the Shi'ite doctrine continued, the persecution of Sunnism occurred only sporadically and on a limited local scale with no signs of general alarm and apprehension on the part of the state. The vigorous attempt at the systematic eradication of Sunnism, whose motivation was dogmatic and which proved politically disastrous, came much later. The massive repression of Sunnism, aiming at the imposition of doctrinal uniformity over the Safavid dominions, was initiated by the Shi'ite hierocracy in the closing decade of the seventeenth century, and was vigorously continued until the fall of Isfahan in 1722.

Sociology of Shi'ite Islam

Collected Essays

By

Saïd Amir Arjomand



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