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## Poetry as history: Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani and the Ahl-i Hadith movement in Kashmir

Suvaïd Yaseen

Department of History, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States of America  
Email: [suvaïd\\_yaseen@brown.edu](mailto:suvaïd_yaseen@brown.edu)

### Abstract

The Ahl-i Hadith in South Asia has largely been studied as a textualist, puritan movement as a result of its exclusive emphasis on the Quran, Hadith sources, and connection with a variety of radical political and armed groups. In contrast, poetry has largely been associated with Sufi movements. This article questions this distinction and makes a historiographical intervention by examining the poetry of Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani (d. 1940) in the Kashmiri, Persian, and Urdu languages. Through a close analysis of Shopiani's biography and poetry, the article complicates the hitherto available picture of the Ahl-i Hadith movement which Shopiani helped to take root in Kashmir. Doing so draws attention to the movement's novel literary aspect that engages with regional Sufi and sympathetic Hanafi thinking as well as with the broader Persianate literary traditions and transregional currents of revivalist thinking on the basis of the principle of *taḥqīq*, research. Even as Shopiani's message remains committed to a 'factual' iteration based upon Quran and Hadith sources, it is the concept of love, both in its spiritual and worldly manifestations, that emerges as central to his thought. It is through this that the paradox between the actual historical distance from Prophet Muhammad's time and the Ahl-i Hadith's ideological desire to revive that time by a literal enactment of the sunnah is resolved. In doing so, the article makes a methodological case for employing poetry as a source for writing an intellectual history from below which examines Islamic movements on their own terms.

**Keywords:** Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani; Ahl-i Hadith; intellectual history from below; Islam in South Asia; poetry as history; Islamic movements in Kashmir

This article examines the life and extraordinary poetic production of Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani, a leading ideologue of the revivalist Ahl-i Hadith movement (hereafter Ahl-i Hadith) in Kashmir. From about 1883 until his death in around 1940, Shopiani wrote extensively in his native Kashmiri language, along with some works in Persian and Urdu which consecutively served as the official languages of the Dogra-ruled princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in colonial South Asia.<sup>1</sup> The analysis

<sup>1</sup> Urdu replaced Persian as the official language of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in colonial South Asia in 1889. This coincided with the adoption of Urdu for court proceedings in Jammu province. It was not until 1907 that steps were taken to adopt Urdu as the court language in Kashmir province, even as Urdu was already increasingly being used as the language of communication. See Old English Records, Jammu and Kashmir State

of Shopiani's life and works is significant for three related purposes. First, by closely examining the Ahl-i Hadith's literary production in verse, it contributes to the historiography on the movement, as well as, more broadly, on Islamic revivalism, and interrogates the status of Kashmiri as a language of reform in colonial South Asia. Secondly, the article complicates the dichotomies in academic scholarship between reformist and popular, foreign and vernacular, and Wahhabi and Sufi versions of Islam by demonstrating the intellectual connections of the Kashmiri Ahl-i Hadith to local Sufi trends and jurisprudential Hanafi thinking as well as to broader Persianate literary and narrative traditions and transregional currents of Islamic thought. Finally, by closely examining Shopiani's biography and his hitherto unexplored poetic record as a primary source, the article makes the case for a methodological intervention in writing the history of Islamic movements *on their own terms* to bring forth an intellectual history from below.

The Ahl-i Hadith features in the historiography of nineteenth-century movements for Islamic revival and reform in South Asia as one of the major competing strands of thought.<sup>2</sup> Some studies elaborate on the cosmopolitan lives and thought of its leading thinkers.<sup>3</sup> The textualist emphasis of its ulema elicits the question of their (in)compatibility with modernity, and socially conservative and elite doctrines.<sup>4</sup> It also provides the intellectual background for some contemporary institutions of learning.<sup>5</sup> But most writings about the Ahl-i Hadith in recent decades portray an ideologically puritan, dogmatic movement which nevertheless negotiates with local and foreign governments and fundraises to build mosques and institutions while working both covertly and overtly with extremist political and armed groups.<sup>6</sup> This article contests this historiographical picture as inadequate.

The fixation about the Ahl-i Hadith's relationship with extremism has much to do with the origins of the movement in the famous jihad against the Sikh empire led by Sayyid Ahmad Barelawi and Shah Ismail Dehlawi in the early nineteenth century. An arc from Balakote of 1831, a town in the north-western borderlands of the Indian subcontinent where Barelawi and Dehlawi died to live as glorious martyrs in the South Asian jihadist folklore, to contemporary flares of attacks by Muslim militant groups is endlessly repeated. The Ahl-i Hadith, especially alongside the Deobandis, figures prominently in such narratives as an intervening link in an example of historical figures and events

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Archives, Jammu, File No. 27/2-6 of 1907; M. Ashraf Bhat, *The Changing Language Roles and Linguistic Identities of the Kashmiri Speech Community* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2017), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> See Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *The Wahhabi Movement in India* (Calcutta, 1966); Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964* (London, 1975), pp. 113-122; Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Delhi, 2002), pp. 264-296; Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge, 2008); Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan: A History* (Princeton, 2018), pp. 14-53.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Riexinger, *Sanâ'ullâh Amritsari (1868-1948) und die Ahl-i Hadîs im Punjab unter britischer Herrschaft* (Würzburg, 2004); Seema Alavi, 'Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832-90) and the creation of a Muslim cosmopolitanism in the 19th century', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54 (2011), pp. 1-38; Caroline Keen, 'The rise and fall of Siddiq Hasan, male consort of Shah Jahan of Bhopal', in *The Man Behind the Queen: Male Consorts in History*, (eds) Charles Beem and Miles Taylor (New York, 2014), pp. 185-204.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Riexinger, 'How favourable is puritan Islam to modernity? A study of the Ahl-i Hadis in late nineteenth/early twentieth century South Asia', in *Colonialism, Modernity and Religious Identities: Religious Reform Movements in South Asia*, (ed.) Gwilym Beckerlegge (New Delhi, 2008), pp. 147-165.

<sup>5</sup> Usha Sanyal, *Scholars of Faith: South Asian Muslim Women and the Embodiment of Religious Knowledge* (Oxford, 2020), pp. 267-300.

<sup>6</sup> Mariam Abou Zahab, 'Salafism in Pakistan: the Ahl-e Hadith movement', in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, (ed.) Roel Meijer (New York, 2009), pp. 126-142; Tariq Mir, 'Kashmir: the rise of a hard faith', Pulitzer Center, December 2011; Claudia Preckel, 'Ahl-i Hadith', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, (eds) Kate Fleet et al., [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_0107](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0107); Jalal, *Jihad in South Asia*, pp. 278-281; Charles Allen, *God's Terrorists: The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad* (New York, 2009).

'more often cited than understood'.<sup>7</sup> Allied to such hasty readings is the dichotomy between a foreign, legalist, sharia-based thinking and an indigenous, tolerant Sufi mysticism. Significant recent scholarship has pushed back against such dichotomies to emphasise a historical and intellectual contextualisation within an Islamic discursive tradition.<sup>8</sup> This article follows such intellectual directions through the example of the Ahl-i Hadith in Kashmir to decipher a transregional history of ideas, an intellectual geography spanning the north-western frontiers through directly ruled British India and the princely states to Kashmir, and historical continuities that draw upon wider Persianate literary and narrative traditions.<sup>9</sup>

Sayyid Ahmad's death in the frontiers halted his plans for Kashmir, a Muslim-majority region which he intended to liberate and use as a permanent base for his jihad.<sup>10</sup> His followers, who kept up attacks against the Sikhs as well as the British, were often labelled 'Wahhabi' for their parallels with Arabian Wahhabism.<sup>11</sup> The movement's participation in the rebellion of 1857 led to their widespread persecution during the Wahhabi trials in the 1860s.<sup>12</sup> This general suspicion of 'Wahhabi rebelliousness' also spread among the princely states' rulers, and in Kashmir, Maharaja Ranbir Singh (d. 1885) took active steps to suppress such trends.<sup>13</sup>

In this context of widespread hostility, leading Ahl-i Hadith ulema such as Sayyid Nazir Hussain Dehlawi (d. 1902) actively argued for a path of apolitical quietism. In 1887, Sayyid Muhammad Hussain Batalvi petitioned the British for the group to be formally called Ahl-i Hadith to avoid the consequences of Wahhabi ascription.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Ahl-i Hadith coalesced into a prominent Islamic movement in late nineteenth-century South Asia. As a principle, they 'denied the legitimacy not just of all practices lacking a basis in scriptural texts, but even of the classical schools of law, and stringently insisted on the Quran and *hadith* as the exclusive and directly accessible sources of guidance'.<sup>15</sup> To disseminate their stance, prominent figures of the Ahl-i Hadith wrote extensively. Sayyid Nazir Hussain Dehlawi (1805–1902) did so while teaching at the famous Madrasa Miyan Sahib in Delhi, while Nawab Siddiq Hassan Khan (1832–1890) published widely as he rose through the ranks in the princely state of Bhopal. Batalvi and Sanaullah Amritsari published newspapers such as *Isha'at us-Sunnah* and *Ahl-i Hadith* from Lahore and Amritsar respectively while also participating in public refutations, *manāzirah*, with the ulema of competing intellectual formations. Even as the movement sought to expand among the masses, by publishing in Urdu, the new lingua franca of Muslims in North India that replaced

<sup>7</sup> See Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed, *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* (Karachi, 2010), pp. 3–20.

<sup>8</sup> Muhammad Qasim Zaman, 'Political power, religious authority, and the caliphate in eighteenth-century Indian Islamic thought', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30.2 (2020), pp. 313–340, doi:10.1017/S135618632000022X; SherAli Tareen, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity* (Notre Dame, 2020), pp. 1–34; Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland* (London, 2007), pp. 33–64; Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Sunil Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia* (Harvard, 2017); Nile Green, 'From Tehrangeles to Kashmir', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2 November 2015, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/from-tehrangeles-to-kashmir/> (accessed 11 January 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Ahmad, *Wahhabi Movement*, pp. 50–53; Jalal, *Partisans*, p. 96.

<sup>11</sup> For an account of the context, emergence, and development of Wahhabism, see Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*; Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Jalal, *Jihad in South Asia*, pp. 64, 114–117.

<sup>13</sup> Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir* (London, 1895), p. 285.

<sup>14</sup> Jalal, *Jihad in South Asia*, p. 145; Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, p. 281.

<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Qasim Zaman, 'Print and patronage: "hadith" and the madrasas in modern South Asia', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 62.1 (1999), p. 61. For a detailed exposition on hadith literature and its importance in the modern world, see Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (London, 2018).

Persian, most of their writing seemed directed at the elite and professional classes. In fact, the Ahl-i Hadith was also at the forefront of writing commentaries on hadith in the Arabic language, thus aiming not only to establish itself as an ‘authentic’ interpreter of faith, but to also forge ties with scholars in the Near East to shore up its local authority.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, in the final decades of nineteenth-century Kashmir, the Ahl-i Hadith started charting its own trajectory as it incorporated broader influences into a poetic medium attuned to Kashmiri oral and narrative traditions.

The next section introduces the significance and range of Shopiani’s poetry, followed by a biographical account that demonstrates his role in the consolidation of the Ahl-i Hadith in Kashmir. Afterwards, three sections expand upon significant themes in Shopiani’s poetry, followed by an appraisal of his influence on Kashmiri literary culture. The article concludes with thoughts on an intellectual history from below and employing poetry as a source.

### Shopiani and the Ahl-i Hadith in Kashmir

Ahl-i Hadith literary production in Kashmir presents a stark contrast to the movement elsewhere in colonial India. Shopiani’s writings provide an exclusive primary record, complemented by some detail given in internal histories and more recent commentaries, which establish him as the leading ideologue of the movement.<sup>17</sup> Shopiani wrote extensively and elegantly in his native Kashmiri language to disseminate the ideas of the Ahl-i Hadith and complex juristic principles among the masses. In doing so, he differed from the movement elsewhere: his medium was poetry and his content, eclectic.

Poetry as a medium to connect with people has largely been associated with Sufi and devotional forms of Islam.<sup>18</sup> Poetry is also associated with the thinkers of Islamic reform and revival in colonial India such as Altaf Hussain Hali (1837–1914)<sup>19</sup> and Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938).<sup>20</sup> The Ahl-i Hadith is mostly known for its ideological inflexibility and dense treatises about theology and Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh*.<sup>21</sup> Shopiani disrupts this assumption. In terms of content, he largely repackages into Kashmiri vernacular the insistence of reformist trends in nineteenth-century Islamic intellectual thought—which eventually crystallised into separate identities such as the Deobandis or the Islamic modernists—to return to the foundational sources such as the Quran and the hadith. Thus, he emphasises *tawhīd*, Allah’s unity and oneness; vehemently rejects *shirk*, ascribing partners to Allah; and rallies against *bid‘ah*, cultural and religious innovations. Like the Ahl-i Hadith elsewhere, he rejects the finality of the four major

<sup>16</sup> Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, p. 278; Zaman, ‘Print and patronage’, pp. 61–63.

<sup>17</sup> No one else mentioned in the histories of the Ahl-i Hadith or who were associated with Shopiani left behind any available or significant writing.

<sup>18</sup> See Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975); Richard M. Eaton, ‘Sufi folk literature and the expansion of Indian Islam’, *History of Religions* 14.2 (1974), pp. 117–127; Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, ‘Exploring time cross-culturally: ideology and performance of time in the Sufi *qawwālī*’, *Journal of Musicology* 12.4 (1994), pp. 491–528; Michel Boivin and Rémy Delage (eds), *Devotional Islam in Contemporary South Asia: Shrines, Journeys and Wanderers* (New York, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> See Taşadduq Ḥusain Kḥālīd, *Hali: As a Poet, Critic and Biographer and His Influence on Urdu Literature* (Lahore, 2017); Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley, 1994); Mushirul Hassan, ‘Muslims and the Indian National Movement: present-day stereotypes have roots in the colonial era’, *India Abroad* (1997).

<sup>20</sup> See Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel’s Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*, vol. 6 (Leiden, 1963); Javed Majeed, *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism* (India, 2020); Iqbal Singh Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> This is the case despite some Ahl-i Hadith ulema having written poetry in other contexts. See verses by Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832–1890) quoted in Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, p. 264.

schools of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh*, whenever a decision can be arrived at directly based on the Quran and/or the hadith.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while the principle of *taḥqīq*, research or investigation, makes common cause with wider reformist trends, rejection of *taqlid*, following by imitation, locates his thought squarely within the fold of the Ahl-i Hadith. Yet, Shopiani goes further to complicate such generalisations by not only engaging with local Sufi and Kashmiri literary cultures but also with broader, transregional Persianate narrative traditions. Moreover, his literary acumen was acknowledged by some of the finest writers in the Kashmiri language in the twentieth century.

There has been no scholarly attention given to Shopiani's writings. The limited scholarship about the Ahl-i Hadith in Kashmir has been largely reductive. The early Ahl-i Hadith movement in Kashmir has been regarded as 'an advanced school of Muslim thought'<sup>23</sup> whose members were, however, primarily both overt and covert participants in regional Muslim sectarian disputes and fervently against the concepts of saints and shrine worship.<sup>24</sup> While credited with being 'the first reformist movement of its kind in Kashmir', it is thought to have lacked a 'sociological perspective' in its decision to rail against existing beliefs and practices.<sup>25</sup> As with the Ahl-i Hadith elsewhere, the movement in Kashmir is often mentioned in works and reportage about fundamentalist Islam.<sup>26</sup> Significantly, the Ahl-i Hadith is largely absent in the institutional archives and a few rare mentions in the context of surveillance by the Dogra state are unavailable for routine scholarly consultation.<sup>27</sup>

Shopiani's life and poetry call for examination. As a leading figure who helped establish the Ahl-i Hadith in Kashmir's religious and political landscape, Shopiani emerges not only as a deeply knowledgeable scholar but also as an astute and pragmatic activist and preacher. His choice to write most of his poetry in his native Kashmiri language is clarified by internal histories and commentaries on the Ahl-i Hadith as a response to the general context of literary production in Kashmir during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Building on local oral traditions, Kashmiri poetry was a significant medium due to its accessibility among the Muslim masses, despite of their low literacy levels, and circumvented restrictions on print under the oppressive Hindu Dogra regime.

<sup>22</sup> These include the *Ḥanafī*, *Mālikī*, *Shāfi'ī*, and *Ḥanbalī* schools of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) after the four *imāms* Abu Hanifa (699–767), Malik Ibn Anas (711–795), Al-Shafi'i (767–820), and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855).

<sup>23</sup> Mohammad Ishaq Khan, *History of Srinagar 1846–1947: A Study in Socio-cultural Change* (Srinagar, 2013), pp. 112–113.

<sup>24</sup> Chitralakha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir* (New York, 2004), pp. 118–168.

<sup>25</sup> Bashir Ahmad Khan, 'The Ahl-i-Hadith: a socio-religious reform movement in Kashmir', *The Muslim World* 90 (2000), pp. 133–157.

<sup>26</sup> Yoginder Sikand, 'Islamic militancy in Kashmir: the case of Lashkar-i Tayyeba', 20 November 2003, <http://www.sacw.net/DC/CommunalismCollection/ArticlesArchive/sikand20Nov2003.html> (accessed 12 January 2023); Yoginder Sikand, 'The emergence and development of the Jama'at-i-Islami of Jammu and Kashmir (1940s–1990)', *Modern Asian Studies* 36.3 (2002), pp. 705–751; Praveen Swami, 'Politics of hate', *Outlook*, 16 July 2008, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/politics-of-hate/237928> (accessed 12 January 2023); Praveen Swami, 'The sunset of Kashmir's Jihadist patriarch, Syed Ali Shah Geelani', *News18*, 29 June 2020, <https://www.news18.com/news/politics/the-sunset-of-kashmir-jihadist-patriarch-syed-ali-shah-geelani-2692929.html> (accessed 12 January 2023).

<sup>27</sup> See 'C. I. D. Diary for 22nd April 1937', Political Records, Jammu and Kashmir State Archives, Jammu, File No. 140/Sp-3 of 1937; 'Ghulam Nabi Mubarki in Bhadarwah Sub-jail', Political Records, Jammu and Kashmir State Archives, Jammu, File No. 65 of 1933. Such records, which mention people associated or allegedly associated with 'oppositional movements', fall under the absurd shadow of 'confidential' labelling in the archives and remain difficult to access for routine scholarly consultation. Such institutional control and rationing of archives, especially regarding modern Kashmiri history, remains an endemic challenge for research. In a remarkable example of surveillance and control mimicked across colonial and supposedly post-colonial contexts, the original 'confidential' labelling of files by the administration of the Dogra princely state continues to inform the official practices of the Indian state that presently rules the region.



With its reach not limited to a particular caste or class, it provided a way into popular forms of socialisation and entertainment. While taking advantage of such cultural practices, Shopiani sought to produce what he considered to be authentic narrations adhering to the Quran and hadith, instead of employing flights of imagination supposedly the domain of worldly poets. As such, Shopiani's poetry was intended to be more fact than fact-inspired-but-inauthentic narration.

Shopiani's poetic oeuvre is not just significant for its choice of language and as a unique example of form, but also for the eclectic nature of its contents. His poetry touched upon a range of 'expected themes': ideological principles, intellectual influences, and a trenchant critique of the traditional religious elite. But he also drew upon multiple religious and linguistic landscapes, not only to adapt them into a Kashmiri setting but also to defy the textualist tenor associated with the Ahl-i Hadith.

Thus, Shopiani compiled manual-like works such as *Ta'lim-e Sunnat* detailing the necessity and procedure of hadith-based rituals, while drawing from figures such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292–1350) and Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (1703–1762). In his *Divān*, he praised Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), Abdul Qadir Jeelani (1078–1166), Sayyid Nazir Hussain Dehlawi, and Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan, while polemicising against the founder of the Ahmadiyya, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. He wrote *Bashārat-ul Mu'minin* to reflect upon and defend Ahl-i Hadith principles and figures like his mentor and friend Sayyid Hussain Shah. And he composed *razmiyah* on the battles at Badr and Uhud from early Islamic history.

But he also pushed his repertoire further. He compiled *Nasihat-un Niswān*, a book of *vanvun*, Kashmiri wedding songs sung by women. At various points, he employed the Sufi mode of addressing God in a feminine voice. He wrote heartfelt ghazals to express Zuleikha's love and longing for Prophet Yusuf. And he drafted the story of Sheikh Sanan told by the famous twelfth-century Persian Sufi Farid ud-Din Attar in *Mantiq-ut-Tayr*, Conference of the Birds.

While Shopiani remained committed to a factual iteration based upon the Quran and hadith sources throughout his works, his literary production for the Ahl-i Hadith movement in its early form in Kashmir spills over the boundaries of its supposed coherence. In fact, it is the concept of love, both in its spiritual and worldly manifestations, that emerges as central to Shopiani's thought. It is precisely through this notion of love that the paradox is resolved between the actual historical distance from Prophet Muhammad's time and the Ahl-i Hadith's ideological desire to revive that time through a literal enactment of the sunnah. As such, the Ahl-i Hadith is best studied not as an exclusive category, but in relation to the historical and contemporaneous trends of local and transregional Islamic thinking.

### Shopiani's life and the consolidation of the Ahl-i Hadith

Born around the middle of nineteenth century in Kanipora village in south Kashmir's Shopian to a peasant family of meagre means,<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Anwar Bhat would become famous as Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani. Some of his followers saw his life as the biography of the Ahl-i Hadith movement he helped root in Kashmir.<sup>29</sup> It is perhaps

<sup>28</sup> Shopiani's date of birth is provided by various sources as between 1849 and 1854. For his suggested date of birth as 1849, see 'Aghāz-i Sukhan', in Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani, *Divān-i Anwar Shopiani* (Srinagar, 2011), p. 8. Betaab suggests 1269 Hijri corresponding to 1852/1853. See Muhammad Ayub Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', in *Neerī Posh*, (eds) Muhammad Ayub Betaab and Muhammad Abdullah Taari (Srinagar, 1967), p. 11. G. M. Shad suggests 1854. See G. M. Shad, *Maulvi M. Anwar Shuppyani* (New Delhi, 2001), p. 15. Munawwar and Shauq suggest 1853. See Naji Munawwar and Shafi Shauq, *Kāshir Zabān tu'Abduk Tavārikh* (Srinagar, 2018), p. 246.

<sup>29</sup> Cited by Maulvi Abdul Hameed ibn Maulana Anwar, 'Hargiz Namīrad...', in *Ta'leem-e-Sunnat*, Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani (Srinaga, 2015), p. 5.

apt for a person who mastered Kashmiri verse and wrote many works of poetry, and yet remained absent from any institutional archival record, that many of his biographical details can only be gleaned from his own poetry and some of his family, friends, and followers. Shopiani was writing poetry as far back as 1882/1883, which he alludes to as follows:

The year of thirteen-hundred is behind us<sup>30</sup>  
 Anwar is the reciter of poems today  
 The famous destination of believers of Unity  
*Shirk* has been ruined ever since<sup>31</sup>

Shopiani's descent was versified by his son Maulana Abdul Ghani Shopiani, who noted that one of their ancestors was a brahmin convert to Islam a few generations before.<sup>32</sup> The eldest of the three children of his father Mukhtar Bhat, Shopiani was adopted at an early age by Muhammad Khan, a soldier, who nicknamed him Sher Khan. The adoption possibly provided Shopiani with a chance for an education.<sup>33</sup> It was perhaps with Muhammad Khan that Shopiani went to live in Punjab for many years.<sup>34</sup> Or it was in search of work as a labourer that Shopiani travelled to Punjab where he became acquainted with Ahl-i Hadith ideas, which he propagated in Kashmir whenever he returned.<sup>35</sup>

With cities like Lahore and Amritsar as the cosmopolitan centres nearest to Kashmir, Punjab was a significant site in the late nineteenth century, where diverse ideas about Islamic reform had started taking root. These intellectual trends would eventually cohere into separate formations such as the Deobandis, the Barelawis, and the Ahmadiyya, alongside the Ahl-i-Hadith. Shopiani is supposed to have lived in Sialkot, Lahore, and Amritsar for varying periods of time, and met and learned from numerous followers of Sayyid Ahmad Barelawi and Shah Ismail Dehlawi as well as Nazir Hussain Dehlawi. He is supposed to have trained with Maulana Muhammad Yaqoub Dinajpuri, and possibly met and learned from Hafiz Abdul Manan Muhadith Wazirabadi and Maulana Sanallah Amritsari.<sup>36</sup> Who he actually met and for how long is not clear, but what is amply evident in his works is the extensive training and intellectual depth he gained in the study of the Quran, hadith, *tafsīr*, and *fiqh*, alongside his familiarity with the broader currents and methodologies of Islamic thought.

By the 1880s, the Ahl-i Hadith had started gaining followers from the Kashmiri lower and middle castes and classes, including peasants, petty traders, and skilled groups.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>30</sup> 1300 Hijri is equivalent to 1882/1883 CE.

<sup>31</sup> Shopiani, *Dīvān*, p. 82; Shad, *Shupyani*, p. 70.

<sup>32</sup> Maulana Abdul Ghani Shopiani (d. 1965), Anwar Shopiani's son, speaks about the conversion of Shopiani's brahmin Pandit great-grandfather at the hands of a certain sheikh in a poetic verse.

<sup>33</sup> His two siblings did not receive an education. See Mohammad Nazir Fida, 'A Brief Account of Ahlihadith in Jammu and Kashmir', unpublished manuscript.

<sup>34</sup> Betaab suggests that Shopiani stayed in Punjab for seven years, whereas Shad suggests 22 years. See Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', p. 13; Shad, *Shupyani*, pp. 16–17. Whatever the duration, it is most likely that Shopiani was travelling back and forth between Punjab and Kashmir, and finally returned for good in 1894, as confirmed by his own statement in court in 1924. See Sofi Muslim, *Tārikh-i Ahl-i Hadith Jammu va Kashmir* (Srinagar, 1984), pp. 180–182.

<sup>35</sup> Munawwar and Shauq, *Kāshir Zabān*, p. 246.

<sup>36</sup> 'Āghāz-i Sukhan', p. 8; Shad, *Shupyani*, pp. 16–18.

<sup>37</sup> For a list of people supposed to have joined the Ahl-i Hadith during this time, and whose approximate social status might be gleaned through their castes/surnames, see Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 108–110. Among the 71 people mentioned on the list, only one, Hassan Shah, clearly belonged to an *ashraf* caste, while others have lower or middle caste surnames often denoting their family trade. These include surnames such as Nadāf, Darzī, Misgar,

Shopiani saw his work as the reform of Kashmiri society, which he considered to be enveloped by religious dogma and superstition and unaware of the true Islamic message. Like many reformists elsewhere in the subcontinent, Shopiani's diagnosis of the supposed ills of his society coincided with the views of colonial administrator-historians who sought to understand and write the history of Kashmir's natives. As such, the depiction of Kashmiri Sunnis as Hindus 'in their heart' and 'only Musalmáns in name' by Sir Walter Roper Lawrence, the British Settlement Commissioner in the princely state from 1889 until 1894, was articulated by Shopiani in his poetry even as he marshalled his own understanding of normative Islam to support the argument.<sup>38</sup>

To promote his cause, Shopiani undertook long and arduous journeys, often on foot, to preach in the Kargil and Ladakh regions, to Bhaderwah, Kishtwar, and Doda in Jammu, besides routinely travelling within the Kashmir Valley.<sup>39</sup> Shopiani noted:

The nightingale crazily roams the cities and villages  
Mornings and evenings, I lamented about your love, O Eternal one<sup>40</sup>

Such lamentations of divine love in his poetry complement the accounts in internal histories of the Ahl-i Hadith about the mundane travails of his journeys, miraculous encounters, his keen eye for opportunities to spread his message, and the risks that doing so posed. Shopiani made pit-stops wherever he could, in the homes of friends and acquaintances, new and old, who replenished his supplies, or he rested alongside caravan routes praying for company. He preached in mosques and homes, sometimes recruited people to his cause, at other times annoyed them so much that they complained to the authorities and forced him to leave.

Shopiani's first trip to Ladakh, where he spent two years, probably between 1896 and 1898, was demonstrative of such struggles, as noted in internal histories of the movement. He set out for the eastern side of the princely state which had a small Muslim minority, while the Ahl-i Hadith was still in its infancy in the Kashmir Valley. Initially accompanied by a friend, he continued alone on foot for days until, with diminished supplies, he stopped to rest in a jungle and fell asleep. A trading caravan en route to Ladakh found and fed him and took him along with them. On reaching Kargil, a Shia Muslim region, Shopiani stopped to preach in a mosque, where an enamoured local invited him to his house and hosted him for a month. When Shopiani left Kargil, his host wrote him a letter of introduction to a Srinagar resident, Ahmadullah Ganai, who lived in Ladakh. His preaching attracted people who routinely arrived at Ganai's house, among them an influential trader, Muhammad Shahdad, who became an ardent follower and also promised to meet Shopiani at his home in Srinagar.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, opposition increased too. In a story often repeated, a mob once followed as police escorted Shopiani in chains after his arrest following complaints by locals. Shopiani noticed a Muslim burial where a cleric was reciting the Quran. He obtained permission to speak to the person and supposedly lamented: 'What an effort you are making to recite Quran to the dead, who can neither hear it, nor respond to it. Look at my condition for I recite Quran to the living!'<sup>42</sup>

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Wāni, Naqāti, Āhangar, Sofī, Sheikh, Ganāi, Gilkar, Mīr, Attār, Bhat, Dār, and so on. Similar patterns can be seen among the list of 355 names of people who deposed in front of the Dogra court in the 1920s in favour of the Ahl-i Hadith during a dispute with a section of ulema claiming to defend traditional Islamic practices against the Ahl-i Hadith. See Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 200–208.

<sup>38</sup> Lawrence, *Valley of Kashmir*, p. 286.

<sup>39</sup> Munawwar and Shauq, *Kāshir Zabān*, p. 246.

<sup>40</sup> Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani, *Nasīhat-un Niswān* (Srinagar, 2011), p. 31.

<sup>41</sup> Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 106–107.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101–105.



Shopiani's lament was as much about his own fate as about what he felt to be the indifference of people to his interpretations of the true path. His critique of locally embedded practices sent him to prison not just in Ladakh, but also in his hometown of Shopian, and other places like Islamabad, Yaripora, Khudwaen, Pampore, and Lolab.<sup>43</sup> In a Persian verse, he likened this to the imprisonment of Prophet Yusuf:

Anwar is happy on the flower-bed of the garden of Sunnah  
Even as he is chained in prison, he desires to see God<sup>44</sup>

On the way back from Ladakh, Shopiani spent a few weeks at Shahdad's house in Srinagar. But prison awaited him again when he returned to Shopian. Following local complaints, he was detained by the police. In court, the presiding judge enquired about his *'aqidah*, faith, and beliefs. To his detailed response, Shopiani is supposed to have appended a poem in Urdu which began thus:

His radiance lights every direction, I swear by the Beloved  
Rise up to see His glow, I swear by the Beloved

In the rest of the verses, Shopiani praised God's attributes: sitting on his raised throne, *'arsh-e mu'allā*, in manifest glory, *lammā tajallā*, his light encompassed everything that exists. He employed the Sufi-influenced attribute of *yār*, the beloved, for God who was 'sovereign over the entire world'.<sup>45</sup>

Shopiani's choice to recite Urdu verses, of which there were very few in his entire collection of at least 21 works, portrayed a keen awareness of context.<sup>46</sup> The majority of his verses are in Kashmiri and a substantial number are in Persian. When he stood in court, Urdu was already the language of formal discourse, and Shopiani's eloquent expression apparently convinced the judge to let him go.<sup>47</sup>

Shopiani's efforts to consolidate the Ahl-i Hadith in Kashmir were particularly aided by Muhammad Hussain Shah, noted as another leading contemporary figure of the movement. Shah helped to establish the Ahl-i Hadith in Srinagar city while Shopiani was doing the same in his hometown about 30 miles south. Unlike Shopiani, Shah did not leave any written record. Shah's family were custodians of the revered Dastgeer Sahib shrine at Khanyar.<sup>48</sup> Like Shopiani, his formative intellectual training began outside Kashmir as a student of Maulana Ghulam Ali Amritsari in 1872 and during his two years at Sayyid Nazir Hussain's Madrasa Miyan Sahib in Delhi.<sup>49</sup> But it was only after Shah's expulsion from Srinagar city for preaching 'seditious doctrines' by Maharaja Ranbir Singh that he decided to meet up and take refuge with his ideological ally. Shah became Shopiani's mentor and friend, and the two often preached and travelled together from about the 1880s.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, as Srinagar remained out of bounds for Shah, except for occasional secretive visits, Shah's friend and mentee Sabzar Shah continued his work in the city.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>44</sup> Maulvi Abdul Hameed, *'Hargiz Namirad...'*, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 106–107.

<sup>46</sup> The complete list of Shopiani's works, taken from Shad, is given in the appendix. See Shad, *Shupyani*, pp. 29–30.

<sup>47</sup> Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 106–107; Shad, *Shupyani*, pp. 21–22. By the time of this court appearance in around 1898/1899, Urdu was already increasingly being used as the language of communication. Also see footnote 1.

<sup>48</sup> The shrine is dedicated to the famous jurist and founder of the Qādiriyyā Sufi order, Sayyid Abdul Qadir Gilani (1078–1166).

<sup>49</sup> Khan, 'The Ahl-i-Hadith', pp. 136–137.

<sup>50</sup> This was during the last days of Mirwaiz Yahya Shah's (1835–1891) life. See Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, p. 101.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

Shopiani and Shah also built upon the efforts of the ulema from the Mirwaiz family who preached at Kashmir's largest mosque, the Jamia Masjid in Srinagar. The Mirwaiz ulema upheld the reformist cause that argued for an Islam based on the Quran and hadith and opposed traditional practices like saint worship. While this made for substantial common ground with the Ahl-i Hadith, they did not reject the historical jurisprudence of Hanafi *fiqh*. Nevertheless, Mirwaiz Yahya Shah (1835–1891) was often associated with the movement. In a petition by the caretakers of Khanqah-i-Mualla, a mosque-shrine complex dedicated to Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani (1314–1384) and managed by another branch of the Mirwaiz family with whom they competed for religious leadership, Yahya Shah was accused of 'preaching Wahhabi doctrines under the guise of being Hanafi' which 'he had imported from Hindustan'. In 1888, an order by the governor banned Yahya Shah from preaching at 22 shrines in the city.<sup>52</sup> Both Hussain Shah and Sabzar Shah directly benefitted from Yahya Shah's teachings and Shopiani himself used to pray behind the Mirwaiz at Srinagar's Aali Masjid.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, among the Mirwaiz family, only Maulana Hasan Shah gave up his claim to his hereditary title and joined the Ahl-i Hadith under Hussain Shah's influence.<sup>54</sup>

Growing in numbers, the Ahl-i Hadith felt the need for exclusive spaces of worship. At the first place for regular collective prayers—the courtyard of Abdul Aziz Wani's house which also served as the 'first central office' of the movement—Shopiani was made the *imām*.<sup>55</sup> He addressed worshippers from a makeshift pulpit, a mortar, *kanz*, and his sermons came to be known as *kanzi k̄hut̄bah*. The internal histories note many travails, after which a plot of land at Zaldagar was bought as a place of prayer, probably in around 1904, where Shopiani was appointed the *imām*.<sup>56</sup> A basic structure for the mosque had been erected by 1912. At Zaldagar, Shopiani started translating the Friday sermons into Kashmiri, in addition to the conventional Arabic recitation. While the regular assembly allowed followers to gather, it also invited opposition and ridicule.<sup>57</sup> In 1920 another mosque a few miles away at Gawkadal saw a curious dispute with a group of marijuana smokers.<sup>58</sup> Many other mosques were brought into the Ahl-i Hadith fold, at times cordially due to a need for caretaking, sometimes handed over by the Mirwaiz family, and other times after some conflict.<sup>59</sup> Eventually in 1923 the movement was formally promulgated as the Anjuman-e Ahl-i Hadith with Muhammad Shahdad as its first president.<sup>60</sup>

Ever since the Ahl-i Hadith started attracting followers from about the 1880s, it had faced opposition. In considering many faith-based practices centred around shrines as *bid'ah* and arguing for an Islamic practice unmediated by saints and holy men, it railed against hereditary modes of religious authority. Such ideas were especially attractive to people from the lower and middle castes and classes, as they provided a route for social and intellectual mobility hitherto unavailable to them. In a competition for influence among the wider masses, sections of the ulema associated with shrines often engaged in a terse polemic against the Ahl-i Hadith. This also took other forms such as fatwas prohibiting the burial of Ahl-i Hadith members in Muslim graveyards or entering into marriage alliances with them, and often the support of the state was sought.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Zutshi, *Languages*, pp. 132–134.

<sup>53</sup> Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 180–182.

<sup>54</sup> Khan, 'The Ahl-i-Hadith', p. 139.

<sup>55</sup> Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, p. 110.

<sup>56</sup> 1904 is confirmed from Shopiani's statement in court in 1924 where he recalled that he had been leading prayers at Zaldagar for about 20 years. See Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 180–182.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111–114.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117–124, 209.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125–126.

<sup>61</sup> Khan, 'The Ahl-i-Hadith', p. 139.

Things came to a head in the 1920s around the time the Anjuman-e Ahl-i Hadith was formed. A section of ulema issued a fatwa against the Ahl-i Hadith, accusing it of 'throwing arrows in the dark' and creating 'doubts in the hearts of those who know less'. The fatwa disputed the authenticity of Ahl-i Hadith practices, calling them 'signs of chaos', *āṣār-e fitnah*, and maintained that they did not adhere to the Prophetic example, *ʿiqāmat-e sunnah*.<sup>62</sup> As a consequence, the governor issued an order prohibiting the Ahl-i Hadith from spaces of worship. The situation became serious when 'people suspected to be Ahl-i Hadith' were stopped from praying at Srinagar's Aali Masjid on the occasion of Eid-ul-Adha, in response to which the Ahl-i Hadith filed a case in court.

Three hundred and fifty three people were deposed in court over the next four years as the movement used this opportunity to disseminate its message to the larger public.<sup>63</sup> The final decision favoured the Ahl-i Hadith and secured it a legal right to mosques and public spaces of worship. The case proceedings, *rūdād*, published as a journal in 1926, were named *Fath-e Ahl-i Hadith*, Victory of the Ahl-i Hadith, signalling what they saw as a significant step for the movement.

The case records are a significant archive of debates about Islamic reform in the early twentieth century. In their extensive depositions, Ahl-i Hadith leaders from Punjab—Sanaullah Amritsari and Mohammad Ibrahim Sialkoti—and ulema from the Mirwaiz family—Mirwaiz Ahmadullah, Maulana Ateequllah, Maulana Yusuf Shah, and Maulana Hassan Shah—made arguments in favour of the Ahl-i Hadith. The case also records the only surviving statement of Shopiani in prose, dated 1924.<sup>64</sup>

Identifying himself as a sunnah prioritising Ahl-i Hadith, Shopiani noted he had been preaching in Kashmir for 30 years and leading prayers at Zaldagar for 20 years. He affirmed his rejection of any practice, or consensus in the form of *ijmāʿ* or *ijtihād*, that were contrary to the Quran and hadith. In contrast to Amritsari, who mentioned his willingness to participate in prayers led by those who might indulge in *shirk*, Shopiani refused to make such a commitment. In recalling his prayers at Aali Masjid behind Yahya Shah, Shopiani signalled his openness towards adherents of a school of *fiqh* if they stayed away from *shirk* and *bidʿah*. He argued as long as Hanafis followed the hadith, they were also Ahl-i Hadith. It was evident, he argued, that not all of the hadith reached *imāms* who consolidated the *fiqh*, and hadith must take precedence over traditional legal opinion wherever they were available.<sup>65</sup>

Sometime afterwards, Shopiani oversaw the formation of a separate Anjuman-e Ghurabā Ahl-i Hadith with Muhammad Abdullah Ahangar as president due to a dispute with the Anjuman-e Ahl-i Hadith.<sup>66</sup> The massacre of 22 Muslim protestors in Srinagar by Dogra forces on 13 July 1931 heralded a new era of mass protest and politics, and a year later the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference was formed.<sup>67</sup> Shopiani was

<sup>62</sup> Such as 'additional' raising of hands during prayers, *rafiʿ al-dayn*, and reciting the *āmīn* loudly, *āmīn bil-jahr*. See Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 131–133.

<sup>63</sup> The proceedings of the court case are noted verbatim in Sofi Muslim's history of the Ahl-i Hadith. The copying was done by the author in person in 1981. See Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 127–209; Other documents of the court case, *Jamāt-e Ahl-i Hadith v. Maulawi Sharfuddin et al.*, Case No. 73 are dated 1978 Samvat/1921 CE. The document filed by Abdul Aziz, Joint Secretary of the Anjuman-e Ahl-i Hadith, also records their organisational stance on the issue.

<sup>64</sup> The only other surviving prose of Shopiani is a handwritten letter in Persian to a family member. The document is available in Mohammad Nazir Fida's personal collection.

<sup>65</sup> Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 180–182.

<sup>66</sup> The Ghurabā was probably formed in consonance with its formation in Delhi by Maulana Abdul Wahhab who had a dispute with the ulama of Ahl-i Hadith Hind. See Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 210–211.

<sup>67</sup> See Ian Copland, 'Islam and political mobilization in Kashmir, 1931–34', *Pacific Affairs* (1981), pp. 228–259; Yasir Bashir, 'From Muslim conference to national conference: Sheikh Abdullah's quest for secularism', in *Society and Politics of Jammu and Kashmir*, (ed.) S. Hussein (London, 2021), pp. 119–140.

supposedly nominated as a member but refused the invitation in favour of focusing on his religious work.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, new faces gained prominence as the movement slowly moved in new directions. Ahl-i Hadith leaders like Shahdad and Maulana Mubarki, who preached at Bazar Masjid, worked closely with Muslim Conference leaders Sheikh Abdullah and Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah respectively. In 1938, Mubarki became the president of Bazm-e Tawhid in Srinagar, an organisation formed in response to Sanaullah Amritsari's call through his newspaper *Ahl-i Hadith*.<sup>69</sup> Mubarki himself had been publishing the weekly *Tawhīd* since 1936 and in 1940 became the first editor of the monthly *Muslim*, which continues to serve as the official organ of the Ahl-i Hadith.<sup>70</sup> By 1945, *Bazm* and *Ghurabā* had joined together under the collective banner of Jamiat-e Ahl-i Hadith with Mubarki and Abdul Ghani Shopiani as president and vice-president.<sup>71</sup> In 1947, the Jamiat would publish a resolution in favour of accession to Pakistan.<sup>72</sup>

By the late 1930s, Shopiani's health was failing, yet he continued to versify. In 1940, he composed his 'final ghazal, on the death bed'—*ghazal ākhir, ya'ni bar bistar-i wafāt*:<sup>73</sup>

My heart is calm and happy  
 He will bestow me full freedom  
 Today all my sickness will be healed  
 I lie in wait for Him  
 That one and only is enough for me  
 What will I say in hospitals?  
 Does loyalty precede the desire for world?  
 I lie in wait for Him  
 My desire for Him, He will sustain  
 With mercy, He will calm my body  
 Then He will reveal Himself to me  
 I lie in wait for Him  
 Listen to Anwar's final word  
 Await only the one and only  
 Send prayers on the Prophet  
 I lie in wait for Him

After his death, Malik Ghulam Rasool Mulhim, an ardent Hanafi follower, composed a Persian *marsiya* in Shopiani's honour:<sup>74</sup>

Oh luxurious ornament of happiness  
 and pride of the secret points

<sup>68</sup> Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', pp. 14–15.

<sup>69</sup> *Muslim, Ahl-i Hadith*, pp. 214–215.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312. *Tawhīd* was published by the Muslim Printing Press of Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah whereas *Muslim* was published by Brokaz Press.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>73</sup> Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani, *Salām-i Anwar m'a Kalām-i Anwar* (Srinagar, 2006), pp. 27–28; '*Āghāz-i Suḵhan*', p. 15. For the suggested date of Shopiani's death as 1939, see '*Āghāz-i Suḵhan*', p. 16; Betaab, Shad, and Munawwar and Shauq suggest 1940. See Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', p. 15; Shad, *Shupyani*, p. 68; Munawwar and Shauq, *Qāshir Zabān*, p. 248.

<sup>74</sup> Different lines from the *marsiya* are quoted in *Dīvān*, and by Betaab and Shad, with the final two verses that 'calculate' the year of Shopiani's death as 1359 Hijri. See '*Āghāz-i Suḵhan*', pp. 16–17; Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', pp. 15–16; Shad, *Shupyani*, pp. 68–69.

Oh Shibli of our times, the Rumi of our era  
and Jami and Sadi of age  
In the understanding of Quran and Hadith  
no one was born your equal  
Quoting the year of soul's departure  
Oh no one was so knowledgeable?

### Faith and method: *tawhīd* and *taḥqīq*

Shopiani emphasised faith in the unity of God, *tawhīd*, and belief in his Oneness, *waḥdat*. God was the 'sole sovereign ruling over all the realms', whose *kuniya*, literally 'loneliness', pointed towards his singular and self-sufficient existence.<sup>75</sup> Shopiani exhorted his followers to accept and declare God's attributes even at the cost of the animosity of the entire world.<sup>76</sup> God's sovereign power could not be shared by saints who had no power to intervene after their death. Any such belief was *shirk*, ascribing partners with Allah, which, along with *bid'ah*, innovatory practices, were unforgivable sins. While *tawhīd* is the fundamental tenet of faith for all Muslims, the Ahl-i Hadith particularly emphasised its centrality to the prescriptions of the Quran, hadith, and sunnah.

The Quran, taught by 'the great teacher' Prophet Muhammad through his sunnah, was 'the best guide' towards the true path of *tawhīd* and did not leave any scope for *qiyās*, analogy.<sup>77</sup> As long as believers fulfilled the *farḍ* and the *sunnah*, they would 'hold onto the true promise' they had made with their Creator.<sup>78</sup>

Shopiani's two texts—*Usūl-i Hadith* and *Ta'lim-i Sunnat*—dealt directly with the hadith and the sunnah. *Usūl-i Hadith* engaged with the principles of reading and interpreting the hadith, a robust field related to Islamic theology and jurisprudence. Shopiani wrote *Ta'lim-i Sunnat*—a collection on the pattern of classical Persian *maṣnavi*—to convey the path of salvation, *najāt*, as shown by the Prophet. This was the path of the early generations of Muslims—the Ahl-i Hadith forerunners—which included the companions, *ṣaḥāba*, and their immediate successors. Having lived closest to Prophet's time, their interpretations were the most authentic and a model for *sharī'a*.<sup>79</sup>

Shopiani emphasised *taḥqīq*, research aimed to verify, as a method to arrive at the best possible interpretation of *sharia*. In contrast, the methodology of *taqlīd*, imitation, which prioritised the historical opinions noted in the schools of *fiqh* often ended up normalising *shirk* and incorporating *bid'ah* at the cost of real *sharia*.<sup>80</sup> Shopiani argued that *taqlīd* was a blind imitation, which, like a 'disease overshadows critical enquiry'.<sup>81</sup> Thus, practices such as supplicating to the graves or *khatmu'h* gatherings deadened peoples' hearts and led them astray.<sup>82</sup> But blind imitation, which distorted the Islamic message by basing it upon selfish desires, does not hold when the self discovers the spirit of enquiry and employs sunnah as a critique.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Shopiani, *Dīvān*, p. 95, nazm 77, lines 1–4.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', p. 18.

<sup>77</sup> Shopiani, *Dīvān*, p. 83, nazm 61. Although *qiyās* (analogy) is among the four sources of law that Ahl-i Hadith in general maintain as the basis of its legal thought, alongside the Quran, hadith, and *ijmā'* (consensus). See Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, p. 271.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85–86, nazm 64. *Farḍ* refers to the obligatory worship and rituals.

<sup>79</sup> Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani, *Ta'lim-i Sunnat* (Srinagar, 2015), p. 13; Shad, *Shupyani*, pp. 29–30; Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', p. 18, line 1.

<sup>80</sup> Shopiani, *Sunnat*, pp. 13–15, nazm 'dar bayān-i āghāz-i maẓmūn', lines 18–21.

<sup>81</sup> Shopiani, *Dīvān*, p. 83, nazm 61.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85, nazm 64, lines 9–12.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83, nazm 61.

While Shopiani rallied against *taqlid*, he did not reject it methodologically. In fact, the Ahl-i Hadith aimed to *literally imitate the example of early Muslims*. Thus, it was still *taqlid* but of the generations temporally closest to the Prophet and, arguably, taught by him. In so arguing, Shopiani considered the possibility of misunderstanding and deviation in interpretations and opinions of the later composers of *fiqh*.

However, the more immediate issue was to rally against the authority of the religious elite of his time which was reinforced by the weight of castes and pedigrees. Shopiani noted that the wrong path must not be considered authoritative, even if it comes dressed in a religious and apparently respectable attire.<sup>84</sup>

As such, the Ahl-i Hadith insistence on *taḥqīq* was not free for all and did not lead to all believers interpreting for themselves, as Zaman points out. The emphasis on *taḥqīq* and sunnah as critiques aimed to shore up the authority of the Ahl-i Hadith ulema against others by portraying them as closest to the divine spirit of the *sharīʿa*.<sup>85</sup>

As a method, Shopiani also employed *taḥqīq* to narrate the authentic Quran and hadith-based versions of significant events from Islamic history. He penned two stories related to wars, *razmiyah*, about the battles at Badr and Uhud from 624 and 625 CE respectively. The aim was to narrate the ‘conditions and goals’ and ‘a correct event map’ of these battles to provide historical lessons.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Shopiani retold the story of the Prophet Muhammad’s ascension to the heavens, *Miʿrāj*.<sup>87</sup> In writing such religious stories, Shopiani aimed to generate hadith-based factual content for oral recitations at social gatherings that could replace narratives compiled by poets and writers who relied more on popular narrations than religious sources.<sup>88</sup>

### Scar of distance: a time-space conundrum

Much like any other revivalist movement that looks to a distant, idealised past for its inspiration, the Ahl-i Hadith in Kashmir faced a conundrum: how does one retrieve, reproduce, or interpret a distant past for the immediate present? The idealised past was the Prophet’s time, the primary receiver of the Quranic revelation, and the Ahl-i Hadith fore-runners, who learned and lived the truest interpretation of the *sharīʿa*. Shopiani expressed the anxiety of historical distance from the time of the Prophet by employing the term *dūr*, distance,<sup>89</sup> as in the lines of one famous poem:

The scar of distance burdens our hearts  
 May I be sacrificed for your ways  
 We repent following the innovatory traditions  
 May I be sacrificed for your ways<sup>90</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Cited in Betaab, ‘Maulvi Anwar’, p. 18, lines 3–4.

<sup>85</sup> Zaman, ‘Print and patronage’, pp. 60–81. In contrast to this, *taḥqīq* has also been seen historically by some ulema as fundamental to the very Islamic creed that must be attained through ‘reasoning’ (*nazar*) as opposed to a reliance on imitation, *taqlid*. For a comprehensive discussion, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 129–232.

<sup>86</sup> Shad, *Shupyani*, p. 60.

<sup>87</sup> Similar to his intentions in compiling the *razmiyah*, Shopiani mentions his reason for writing the story of *Miʿrāj* on account of a friend’s suggestion to pen down the event in simple verse based upon well-regarded sources. Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani, ‘Sabab-e Taṣnīf’, in *Al Qawl ul Maqbūl fī Miʿrāj-ur Rasūl* (Srinagar, 2005), pp. 16–17.

<sup>88</sup> Shad, *Shupyani*, p. 43.

<sup>89</sup> Dana Sajdi has shown how ulema in sixteenth-century Damascus tried to deal with such anxieties of temporality through newer hadith practices and by providing chronotopic solutions that shortened the chain of narration and thereby diminished ‘temporal distance to be closer to the Prophet’. See Dana Sajdi, ‘Reclaiming Damascus: rescripting Islamic time and space in the sixteenth century’, *History and Theory, Theme Issue 57* (2019), pp. 68–85.

<sup>90</sup> Shopiani, *Nasihat-un Niswān*, p. 8, nazm 7.



This scar of distance, *dūriruk dāgh*, is an oft-expressed anxiety found across Shopiani's works. The anxiety about overcoming temporality remains in spite of methodological suggestions of following the hadith and sunnah or, when the directions are not clear, of employing *ijtihād*.<sup>91</sup> Significantly, the emphatic solution for overcoming the scar of distance, evidenced in a keen intent in proximity to the Prophetic guidance, is offered through the notion of love. Shopiani argues that love for the Prophetic sunnah is at the heart of believers' faith, which leads them into the sacred space of the 'blooming garden of sunnah' where the divine revelation is actualised:

The scar of distance will go, Garden will bloom, oho  
The lovers will be healed, Garden will bloom, oho<sup>92</sup>

Love is an antidote to conquer historical distance. It is through intense love and sacrifice that the secrets of oneness, *asrār-i waḥdat*, are revealed.<sup>93</sup> Love is employed, not towards the Sufi path, resulting in an eventual decimation of the ego, but to seek the true spirit of the Prophetic way. The 'ego' which believers must give up is of blind adherence to accrued traditions. So, while the correct practice of sunnah is important, it is not the sole end. The love for the Oneness of God and Prophet's sunnah must prevail:

Do not become a *mushrik* out of spite, read, there is no God but Allah  
Anwar is mad about the beloved, this story of love is my letter  
Follow the Prophet, sins will be forgiven, read, there is no God but Allah<sup>94</sup>

Closely tied to the spiritual possibilities opened up by the love of the Prophetic path is the vision of a future heaven in life after death and resurrection. Therein, the believers of Oneness will all be united in the heavens as God will reveal his 'magnificent sight' unto them and the 'burning pain of distance', *dūriruk tāv*, shall be healed.<sup>95</sup> While such imagery of heaven denotes a future vision of salvation, it is also contemporaneously present and accessible to the faithful as the 'resplendent garden of sunnah'.<sup>96</sup> This garden of sunnah presents a metaphorical space where the believers reside in the immediate present through their sunnah-based actions while also seeking a reward in the future.

The temporal anxiety about historical distance is thus healed by following the sunnah in the present. But this present also transcends temporality by conjoining with the past, which is sought to be recreated in a contemporaneous cohabitation of the present. Moreover, this also serves as a vision of the future. Shopiani notes: 'Anwar is in the garden of sunnah, there is no God but Allah!'.<sup>97</sup>

## Love and longing

Shopiani employs many conventional tropes of Sufi poetry and makes full use of the affective power of the poetic form. While he does so in tune with his Ahl-i Hadith ideological repertoire, language and meaning often tend to extend beyond the expected

<sup>91</sup> *Ijtihād* refers to independent reasoning by a jurist on issues where no clear guidance from the Quran or hadith might be available.

<sup>92</sup> Cited in Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', p. 20. This poem, among Shopiani's other works, continues to circulate in the oral sphere in Kashmir through recitations by the *Na'at khvān*.

<sup>93</sup> Shopiani, *Dīvān*, p. 102, nazm 85, line 3.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102, nazm 85, lines 10–12.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92, nazm 73, lines 9–10.

<sup>96</sup> Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani, *Guldastah-i Anwari* (Srinagar, 1999), p. 4, nazm 2.

<sup>97</sup> Shopiani, *Dīvān*, p. 99, nazm 81, line 16.

framework. Speaking about distance from and longing for the beloved in *Nasihat-un Niswān*, Shopiani employs the Sufi poetic trope of seeking the union with the divine beloved in a feminine voice:

You stole my heart, you hid by the shadows, you enveloped me with love, my dearest  
The arrows of separation hit my heart, you enveloped me with love, my dearest<sup>98</sup>

In this poem, love for the beloved and separation from God, his beauty and the believer's devotion, grief, and waiting for the beloved's arrival are all combined in verse to sketch emotions that lay on the path of faith.<sup>99</sup> In a poem from his *Dīvān*, Shopiani speaks of the effect of the beloved in making the feminine-seeker a wanderer, *āvāru*, whose 'heart is aflame' with 'the pain of love':

I will see, Him, who made me a wanderer, and therefore I will beseech Him  
The pain of love embeds in the chest, as if the heart is aflame, O beloved<sup>100</sup>

Thus, the believer seeks to envision her God by following the path of faith. Elsewhere, Shopiani's verses about love seem to spill beyond spiritual longing into the domain of the worldly desire for a human beloved. Shopiani's versified commentary on the twelfth chapter of the Quran in *Tafsīr-i Surah Yūsuf*, which recounts the story of Prophet Yusuf and Zuleikha, is an apt example.<sup>101</sup>

As noted earlier, Shopiani aimed to recount historical events based upon the Quran and hadith sources. However, on the question of love between Zuleikha and Yusuf, he relinquishes his exclusive fidelity to such foundational sources. In doing so, the narrative moves beyond the believer's love for her God to articulate the desire for another human being, even if divinely ordained. The beginning of *Tafsīr-e Surah Yūsuf* notes Zuleikha's perturbation as a child when she wakes up from her dream about Yusuf long before she would eventually get to know him in person.<sup>102</sup> Zuleikha's longing is further depicted in the ghazals that follow, where her love, even if spiritually blessed, is worldly.<sup>103</sup> Shopiani apparently wrote this in 1907 during his trip to the picturesque village of Batkote in Pahalgam.<sup>104</sup>

In recounting Zuleikha's restless desire to meet Yusuf, Shopiani uses compelling imagery. As the object of her desire remains an unknown human being—even if he turns out to be a prophet later—the love can be read as romantic in a conventional sense:

When will I get to see my beloved  
Would that wish of mine be fulfilled  
Lost in thoughts I have turned crazy  
Would that wish of mine be fulfilled  
You revealed your sight in my dream  
I am caught up in restlessness  
I neither know your name nor sign  
Would that wish of mine be fulfilled  
I will tell you the pains of my heart, my beloved

<sup>98</sup> Shopiani, *Nasihat-un Niswān*, p. 40, nazm 27, lines 1–2.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40, nazm 27.

<sup>100</sup> Shopiani, *Dīvān*, p. 90, nazm 70, lines 1–2.

<sup>101</sup> Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani, *Tafsīr-i Surah Yūsuf* (n.d.).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 10.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, footnote p. 11; Shad, *Shupyani*, pp. 46–47.

My chest has been pierced a hundred times  
 Provide my remedy, take me in with you  
 Would that wish of mine be fulfilled  
 You Anwar, tell that beloved  
 I will be devoted to that wanderer  
 He is knowing of my heart's condition  
 Would that wish of mine be fulfilled<sup>105</sup>

In another instance, Zuleikha's desire is expressed as a fervent feeling of 'the torment of the fire of separation':

When will I see my alluring beloved  
 The fire of separation is my torment  
 He is the salve of my abscesses  
 The fire of separation is my torment<sup>106</sup>

And elsewhere, as an explicitly embodied feeling of the 'fire of love burning the body':

Come, tell that sweet-heart  
 My body is burning with love  
 I am devoted to his name, you tell him  
 My body is burning with love  
 I long for the moment when I see him  
 My delights are embittered  
 It's been tedious, dissipated my each part  
 My body is burning with love  
 The wealth of love is like an ocean  
 If you covet it, it retreats: this I will meditate on  
 When will this story end?  
 My body is burning with love<sup>107</sup>

Popular versions of Zuleikha and Yusuf's story have circulated across time in multiple languages.<sup>108</sup> Shopiani acknowledged the Persian and Kashmiri versions by Abd ar-Rahman Jami (1414–1492) and Mahmud Gami (1765–1855):<sup>109</sup>

In Persian it was said by Hazrat Jami  
 In Kashmiri narrated by Mahmud Gami<sup>110</sup>

Gami's nineteenth-century rendition, expressly written in the romantic genre and the first *maṣnavi* in the Kashmiri language, seems to have influenced the form and content of Shopiani's version.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Shopiani, *Tafsīr-i Surah Yūsuf*, p. 6; Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', pp. 26–27.

<sup>106</sup> Cited in Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', p. 19.

<sup>107</sup> Shopiani, *Tafsīr-i Surah Yūsuf*, p. 10. Cited in Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', p. 28.

<sup>108</sup> These include iterations in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Bengali, Punjabi, and Urdu.

<sup>109</sup> Munawwar and Shauq, *Kāshir Zabān*, pp. 167–168. Wahab Khar (d. 1912) had also written a nineteenth-century Kashmiri version.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Shad, *Shuḡyāni*, p. 48.

<sup>111</sup> Gami had also written stories about Sheikh Sanan, Shirin Khusrao, and Laila Majnu, in addition to the tales of Mahmud of Ghazni and Harun Rashid.

A knack for romantic ghazals problematises the repertoire that might be conventionally expected of an Ahl-i Hadith preacher of Shopiani's stature wedded to iterations based upon foundational sources. As might be expected, the reception of such tendencies has diverged among commentators on his life. Muhammad Ayub Betaab was 'convinced that if instead of writing poetry for religious preaching, he (Shopiani) had written romantic poetry as was the fashion of the time, he would have been no less than Rasul Mir, Mahjoor, and Mahmud Gami'.<sup>112</sup> For Betaab the fact that Shopiani did not write more such poems was a loss:

Anwar was a born poet. But his vision was limited to a specific circle. If he had pondered more about the aspects and secrets of life, he would not have been any less than Rasul Mir and Mahjoor. But for his beliefs even hearing the sound of an instrument was sinful which came with big punishment. But even then his 'religious poet' rebelled. After hearing some of his poetry, it becomes evident that if Anwar had pursued such a path, he would have been another Mahmud Gami of Kashmir.<sup>113</sup>

G. M. Shad took a different tone. As the author of Shopiani's sole biography, he credits the preacher with defying traditional expectations by employing poetry for *tabligh* and remaining focused on *tawhīd* and *sunnah*. Shopiani's ghazals about Zuleikha and Yusuf are, however, framed as an 'inadvertent slip' into 'baseless sources' which 'was not expected of one of the first preachers of the Salafi *maslak* and poet'.<sup>114</sup> Yet despite 'incorporating fictitious elements', Shad writes that 'in any case, even after some of these shortcomings in narration, this *maṣnavi* is very pious, very elegant from a literary perspective, robust and organized with poetic beauty'.<sup>115</sup>

As much as Shopiani defied expectations by preaching Ahl-i Hadith ideas through poetry, he also did so by incorporating elements from Kashmiri Sufi as well as broader Persianate literary cultures.<sup>116</sup> Shopiani's Persian work *Ḥalīmā* was directly modelled on Sheikh Saadi's (d. 1292) *Karīmā*.<sup>117</sup> However, his complex engagement with Sufi genres is particularly heightened in his choice of recounting *Qiṣṣa-e Sheikh Sanan*, which, like *Yusuf-Zuleikha*, was written immediately before by Gami.

The story of Sheikh Sanan was made famous by the twelfth-century Persian Sufi Farid ud-Din Attar in his *Manṭiq-ut-Ṭayr*, Conference of the Birds. In Attar's story, the pious Sheikh Sanan falls in love with a Christian woman and strays from his path after going through a series of intense phases of uncertainty and doubt which are not only tortuous for him personally but also disturb his committed disciples. Eventually, however, their hearts are eased as the mysteries of faith and belief are revealed to them.

As Persian poetry arrived in Kashmir in the fourteenth century, Attar was among those, such as Sarfi, Rumi, and Firdausi, whose works received much attention in Kashmir throughout the period of Mughal rule from the late sixteenth until the late nineteenth centuries. Even before Gami, Attar's poems in particular were a standard in Kashmiri Sufi literature.<sup>118</sup> Kashmiri poets such as Habibullah Ghanai (1556–1617)

<sup>112</sup> Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', p. 26.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>114</sup> Shad, *Shopyani*, p. 48.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6, 49.

<sup>116</sup> In fact, many *qiṣṣa*, either in original Persian or their Kashmiri iterations, by various authors have been a historical part of Kashmir's literary culture.

<sup>117</sup> The 1947 print has a verse-by-verse translation in Urdu. It is unclear who wrote the Urdu text, but it was most likely Shopiani's son Abdul Ghani Shopiani, who compiled and published a number of his works posthumously.

<sup>118</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 305.

referenced Attar in his works, while after a vision Mirza Beg Akmal Kamil (1645–1719) declared himself to be Attar and Rumi's disciple.<sup>119</sup> While Shopiani's rendition of *Qiṣṣa-e Sheikh Sanan* remains unavailable, Betaab comments:

The book has not been published yet. Anwar is an outright romantic poet in this book. It is difficult to believe after reading this book that this is the same Anwar who has written texts such as *Dīvān-e Anwar*, *Mi'raj-ul Rasūl*, and *Ḥalīmā*. (The story of) Sheikh Sanan has also been written by Mahmud Gami but when both these renditions are compared, Anwar's text is found to be of a higher calibre...<sup>120</sup>

Betaab's remarks may or may not be on point and cannot be verified independently given the fact that the text does not seem to be available in the public domain. But Shopiani's decision to engage with and rephrase a classic Sufi story about love with a non-Muslim beloved is nevertheless significant as it contextualises the vast scope of his intellectual involvement. Shopiani thus reveals a deep engagement with a spectrum of local and transregional strands of Islamic thought. In particular, his keen interest in the concept of love, in both its divine and human iterations, makes him an eclectic character who must not be confined within the narrow scripturalist emphasis commonly associated with the Ahl-i Hadith.

### A master of Kashmiri verse

In employing the versified 'principles of religion' for 'direct preaching' of Islam, Shopiani also followed an illustrious legacy that began with Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani, the fifteenth-century Sufi and founder of the indigenous Rīshī order in Kashmir popularly known as Sheikh-ul-Alam or Nund Rishi. In fact, he is noted as next only to Noorani in presenting the principles of religion, *aḥkām-i dīn*, in simple yet elegant language. Moreover, the standards and vast volume of his Persian and Kashmiri poetry are seen to compel a recognition of the greatness of his poetry.<sup>121</sup> While Shopiani created an example for Ahl-i Hadith poetry in Kashmir, taken further by his son Abdul Ghani Shopiani, among others,<sup>122</sup> the scope and influence of his works was felt beyond the genre of religious poetry.

By the time Shopiani started writing in the late nineteenth century, Kashmiri had already emerged as a textual language. His works followed that of figures such as Mullah Hamidullah Shahbadi (d.1848), Mahmud Gami (1765–1855), Maqbool Shah Kraalwari, and Wahab Pare.<sup>123</sup> Kashmiri writing during his time, as we have seen through Shopiani's works, incorporated

<sup>119</sup> G. L. Tikku, *Persian Poetry in Kashmir 1339–1846* (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 4, 99–105, 124–140.

<sup>120</sup> Betaab, 'Maulvi Anwar', p. 29. The book still remains unavailable even though the manuscript seems to have been saved.

<sup>121</sup> Munawwar and Shauq, *Kāshir Zabān*, p. 247. For an analysis of the poetry and politics of Nund Rishi, see Abir Bashir, 'The Negative Theology of Nund Rishi (1378–1440): Poetry and Politics in Medieval Kashmir', (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2016), <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/201080> (accessed 12 January 2023); Abir Bazaz, 'Vernacular apocalypse in medieval Kashmir: the mystical poetry of Nund Rishi (1378–1440)', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 44.4 (2021), pp. 617–633, doi: [10.1080/00856401.2021.1954755](https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2021.1954755).

<sup>122</sup> Besides editing and publishing his father's texts, Abdul Ghani Shopiani published many works of his own. For an introduction to his life and works, see Muhammad Abdullah Tari, 'Maulvi Abdul Ghani Shopiani', in *Neeri Posh*, (eds) Betaab and Taari, pp. 30–45.

<sup>123</sup> Chitralekha Zutshi, *Kashmir's Contested Pasts: Narratives, Sacred Geographies, and the Historical Imagination* (New Delhi, 2014), pp. 134–138.

translations and adaptations of Persian classics; ...folk stories... from the Kashmiri, Sanskrit, and Persian textual and oral traditions recast into Kashmiri; and ... *Naat* (eulogies of the Prophet) and other topics drawn from the history of Islam such as *razmiya*, or combat poetry, that recounted the battles fought by the Prophet...<sup>124</sup>

Such forms were embedded within what Chitrlekha Zutshi has called ‘the Kashmiri narrative public’ where ‘historical memory was created and maintained in Kashmir’.<sup>125</sup> Shopiani contributed to all of these. In fact, like Wahab Pare and Mahmud Gami, he wrote Kashmiri ghazals following the same patterns of Persian ghazals, albeit using them as a medium of *tabligh*, and better than many Sufi poets who dealt with similar themes.<sup>126</sup> Significantly, he was the first to write *rubā’ī* in the Kashmiri language.<sup>127</sup> For his works and influence, Shopiani is noted as an influential figure in compendia on Kashmiri and Islamic poetry, and his mastery over language was recognised by some of the finest Kashmiri writers of the twentieth century such as Akhtar Mohiuddin (1928–2001) and Abdul Ahad Azad (1903–1948).

Akhtar Mohiuddin, the first novelist in the Kashmiri language and one of its finest short-story writers in the twentieth century,<sup>128</sup> was born to a Srinagar-based Ahl-i Hadith family. As a child, Mohiuddin studied the Quran with Shopiani himself and learned the style and mannerisms of the Kashmiri language through Shopiani’s *Ta’lim-i Sunnat*. He noted Shopiani, alongside the progressive writers’ movement, as a major formative influence.<sup>129</sup> In a rare commentary about Shopiani, the following is attributed to Mohiuddin:

A significant poet preacher of the period is Molvi Anwar Shah of Shopian. He belonged to the Wahabi sect of Muslims. His poetry is, therefore, devoted to the subjects relating to religion and more especially to his creed. While he versified Hadith and Muslim code of social conduct, he denounced the grave worship and forms of superstition. He exhorted the people to rise above the world of petty gains and fear none but Allah. He wrote better satires against outmoded customs. His targets were Mullahs who, he thought preached superstition instead of true religion.<sup>130</sup>

Abdul Ahad Azad, renowned as a famous modernist poet in Kashmiri, recognised Shopiani’s literary style, depth, and acumen in his book *Kashmīrī Zabān Aur Shā’irī*.<sup>131</sup> He particularly praised Shopiani’s rendition of the pattern of a Kashmiri poem—*bāgh-i nishāt kē gulō, nāz karān karān valō*—written by the renowned poet Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor (1887–1952) which the latter presented at a major multilingual *mushā’irah* in Srinagar in 1934. The poem immediately became all the rage on account of its simple yet elegant meter. It began thus:

<sup>124</sup> Zutshi, *Kashmir’s Contested Pasts*, p. 136.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>126</sup> Munawwar and Shauq, *Kāshir Zabān*, p. 247.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>128</sup> Ghulam Nabi Khayal, ‘On Akhter Mohiuddin’, from *Sheeraza*, in *Kashmir Life* 39.10 (2018), <https://kashmir-life.net/on-akhter-mohiuddin-issue-39-vol-10-196247/> (accessed 12 January 2023); Mudasar Ahmad, ‘Kashmiri Writer Khayal Returns Sahitya Akademi Award’, *The Wire*, 14 October 2015, <https://thewire.in/books/kashmiri-writer-khayal-returns-sahitya-akadem-award> (accessed 12 January 2022).

<sup>129</sup> Shafi Shauq, *Akhtar Mohiuddin* (New Delhi, 2012), pp. 9–11.

<sup>130</sup> Cited in ‘*Āghāz-i Sukhan*’, p. 14. The quote is apparently from a volume on ‘Indian literature’ published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, p. 85. Due to the very general nature of the citation and the absence of the year of publication, it was difficult to locate and confirm the original paragraph.

<sup>131</sup> Abdul Ahad Azad, *Kashmīrī Zabān Aur Shā’irī: Jild Saum* (Srinagar, 1963).



O the flower of Nishat bagh  
Come with graceful-pride<sup>132</sup>

Many poets, including Azad himself, tried to replicate the rhythm of Mahjoor's verses.<sup>133</sup> But Azad bestowed the highest praise on Shopiani's attempt as 'a combination of beautiful words and meaning'.<sup>134</sup> He emphasised that no reply other than Shopiani's 'was worth considering a reply... (and he) wrote his reply in a religious tone and with such beauty'.<sup>135</sup> For Azad, Shopiani was 'an elder and a great scholar with mastery over the science of hadith' who had 'a correct understanding of poetry and language'.<sup>136</sup>

These were the final years of Shopiani's life. While staying true to Mahjoor's rhyme, he transposed both the subject and the setting into 'the flower of the garden of faith'—*bāgh-i yaqīn kē gulō, kalimah parān parān valō*—a vivid imagery of the salvation he strived for throughout his life:

O the flower of the garden of faith  
Come while you recite the *kalmia*  
Into the soil, you hyacinth  
Enter while you prostrate<sup>137</sup>

### Conclusion: poetry as history

Lawrence noted with some consternation the introduction of 'Wahhabi doctrines' by the 'propagandists' in Shopiani's hometown.<sup>138</sup> In doing so, he was echoing his friend, the noted Kashmiri historian, Peer Hassan Shah Khuihami (1833–1898), who, possibly on account of his embeddedness in Sufi lineages, tersely critiqued the 'Wahhabi sect' in his magnum opus *Tarikh-i Hassan*.<sup>139</sup> Yet, Khuihami predicted, albeit a bit grudgingly: 'the sparks of this movement would travel far off, *'anqarīb shu'la' āñ sar bar falak khvāḥad kashīd!*'.<sup>140</sup>

The shared anxiety of a British Orientalist and a Kashmiri historian in the late nineteenth century about a 'foreign' idea inevitably gaining ground continues up to the present day to encapsulate the academic and policy conundrums about Islamic movements such as the Ahl-i Hadith. It is often asked how such movements espousing, almost exclusively, what are seen as fundamentalist doctrines that rally against local religious and cultural practices could possibly draw people into their ranks. This concern is replicated in the dichotomy between the 'good' versions of Islam as popular and vernacular, or Sufi, versus its 'bad' versions as reformist, foreign, or Wahhabi.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211–212.

<sup>133</sup> Azad, *Kashmīrī Zabān*, pp. 250–252. Others who attempted to replicate the rhyme include Ghulam Qadir, Asim Malarati, and Ghulam Ahmad Fazil.

<sup>134</sup> Cited in 'Aaghaz-e-Sukhan', p. 12.

<sup>135</sup> Cited in Azad, *Kashmīrī Zabān*, p. 251, footnote 1.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>137</sup> Additional verses cited in 'Aaghaz-e-Sukhan', p. 12.

<sup>138</sup> Lawrence, *Valley of Kashmir*, p. 285.

<sup>139</sup> Pir Ghulam Hassan Khuihami, *Tarikh-i-Hassan: jild awwal dar bayaan-e jugraafiyay-e-Kashmir*, pp. 428–442, <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/tareekh-e-hasan-volume-001-peer-ghulam-hasan-khuyehamii-ebooks> (accessed 12 January 2022).

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442.

<sup>141</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (Harmony, 2005).

This article goes beyond such dichotomies by paying attention to the Ahl-i Hadith literary output in Kashmir on its own terms and charting *an intellectual history from below*. Doing so has significant historiographical and methodological foundations which take their cue from Talal Asad's suggestion to historically situate and listen to the indigenous voices that *actually participate* in an Islamic discursive tradition.<sup>142</sup> At the same time, an intellectual history from below broadens the locus of discursive authority to include ideas and figures which, in spite of being significant in their contexts, are marginal or unknown in the historiography of Islam in South Asia and beyond. Thus the specificity of varied articulations of ideas and their reception in local contexts need to be taken seriously even as they draw on 'central' or 'universal' ideas, figures, or movements. The discursive tradition, as Asad argues, is not static but constantly evolves in response to changing social and political conditions. As such, disagreements and debates do not necessarily indicate a crisis but are essential to its working, and even if the tradition does not seem homogenous, it aspires coherence.<sup>143</sup> As shown in this article, an analysis of Shopiani's poetic works is apt for such a line of enquiry. Shopiani not only sought to introduce and disseminate Ahl-i Hadith ideas in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kashmir, and thereby intervene in debates about the real meaning of faith and Islamic practice, but also engaged with local modes of articulation as well as a transregional history of ideas centred around Islam in Kashmir.

Shopiani's poetic record also allows significant methodological interventions in thinking about and writing the history of Islam in Kashmir specifically, as well as an appraisal of the relationship between poetry and history more broadly. Poetry is not considered an obvious source for historical writing and presents challenges. Employing religious poetry to examine rhetorical engagements between the Wahhabi-influenced Saalihiyah and Qadiriyya Sufi orders in the East African coastal city of Brava from 1890 to 1920, Muhamad Kassim notes how the use of poetry in history writing must contend with bringing out 'the emotional charge of the discursive tradition of religious poetry'.<sup>144</sup> Robyn Creswell argues that an intellectual history of the modern Middle East that does not take into account the works of its poets remains 'partial and abstract' and must make use of 'a largely unexplored archive for intellectual historians, as well as the necessity for poetry critics of doing intellectual history'. Creswell notes the reason for such an exclusion is the fact 'that historians of ideas are rarely trained to analyze the specialized rhetoric and formal conventions of poetry'.<sup>145</sup>

Yet there is much to think about, beyond such a challenge centred on affect and formal literary analyses. While pointing out the prevalence of a 'restricted conception of the social and political functions of poetry' in histories of modern Europe and the United States, which 'has not been widely shared by historians and literary critics of the modern Middle East', Kevin M. Jones makes a compelling case for a consideration of the poetry of late 1940s and early 1950s Iraq as a social act and thereby employs it for writing social history.<sup>146</sup> Ali Khan Mahmudabad does so in making a case for employing Urdu 'poetry and its practice as a historical archive' to understand the articulations of nationality and political choices made by prominent Muslim intellectuals in colonial North India,

<sup>142</sup> Talal Asad, 'The idea of an anthropology of Islam', *Qui Parle* 17.2 (2009), pp. 1–30.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Muhamad Kassim, 'Sufism, Salafism, and the discursive tradition of religious poetry in Brava', in *Translocal Connections across the Indian Ocean: Speaking Swahili Networks on the Move*, (ed.) Francesca Declich (Boston, 2007), pp. 70–91, here pp. 70–72.

<sup>145</sup> Robyn Creswell, 'Modernism in translation: poetry and intellectual history in Beirut', in *Arabic Thought Against the Authoritarian Age*, (eds) Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 113–137.

<sup>146</sup> Kevin M. Jones, "'A horizon lit with blood": public poetry and mass politics in Iraq', *Social History* 39.4 (2014), pp. 443–461.

key questions in South Asian Muslim historiography. While placing poetry and its performance ‘in the context of [a] longer history of orality within the wider Muslim world’, Mahmudabad notes that the use of poetry as an archive does not necessarily need to contend with the quality of verses, but can be employed ‘to constantly locate broader themes and questions’. As such, ‘poetry, then, is approached as a vehicle through which history is reconstructed and merged with the present. In other words, writers reconstruct history through poetry, which in turn informs the context in which they found themselves.’<sup>147</sup>

Ayesha Jalal shows how Urdu poetry, alongside the press, was a significant vehicle through which a communitarian Muslim identity was articulated in nineteenth-century South Asia. In contrast to Benedict Anderson’s ‘technological determinism’ about print and the novel, it was the press and poetry as the product of knowledge communities that enabled the political articulation of the Muslim community in colonial North India.<sup>148</sup> Jalal writes:

Both entertaining and evocative, Urdu poetry’s capacity to influence a predominantly unlettered population cannot be overemphasized. Not all of the poetry had to be published to reach a receptive audience, more steeped in the oral than the literate tradition represented by the press. Once heard, the favourite poems were recorded in memory, frequently quoted and even rendered as songs. A conscious recasting of poetry for communitarian purposes in the late nineteenth century had an electrifying effect on psyches—be it the literate or the illiterate, the aristocratic or the lowly, in urban or rural areas.<sup>149</sup>

Poetry also forms a significant archive for alternate histories and articulations which are unavailable in institutional records. In thinking about the twentieth-century historical representations of the city of Shiraz in Iran, Setrag Manoukian argues that the ‘past that is perceived as unavailable in the local histories is found in poetry’ and provides ‘the language through which history is enacted’. As such, ‘history and poetry... (are) no two opposite discursive formations... people read history in search of poetic images and (consider) poetry as potential evidence both for the events verses record as well as for the situations they (evoke)’.<sup>150</sup> Michael A. Marcus shows how oral poetry in late nineteenth-century Morocco was an ‘important vehicle for imaginative expressions of history and group identity within Islam’ and that ‘local knowledge conveyed through tribal poetry contrast(ed) significantly with an official version of events and challenge(d) its authority on Islamic grounds’. Accessible to a ‘largely illiterate audiences’, it was ‘a major means of making, becoming aware, and arriving at an understanding of history’.<sup>151</sup> Making a case for a reevaluation of historical sources, Marcus writes:

‘history’—both as content and symbolization—is not solely the possession of the literate, elite sectors of the society. What appears as a purely individual product, the orally-transmitted poem, makes up for its relative lack of ‘inscription’ by providing,

<sup>147</sup> Ali Khan Mahmudabad, *Poetry of Belonging: Muslim Imaginings of India 1850–1950* (Oxford, 2020), pp. 1–42.

<sup>148</sup> Ayesha Jalal, ‘Forging a Muslim community: press, poetry and politics in the late nineteenth century’, in *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (London, 2002), pp. 43–101.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>150</sup> Setrag Manoukian, ‘History and poetry’, in *City of Knowledge in Twentieth Century Iran: Shiraz, History and Poetry* (London, 2012), pp. 170–202, here p. 173.

<sup>151</sup> Michael A. Marcus, ‘History on the Moroccan periphery: moral imagination, poetry, and Islam’, *Anthropological Quarterly* (1985), pp. 152–160.

once heard, a source of indigenous discourse about self and society alternative to that conveyed by socially dominant groups.<sup>152</sup>

Shopiani's poetry is circulated primarily in the oral domain. He wrote verses in vernacular Kashmiri, Persian, and Urdu languages that he could recite in sermons and that were amenable to oral dissemination and recall by, and within, a largely unlettered Muslim audience. During his lifetime, a follower named Muhammad Abdullah Mir from the Doda region of Jammu travelled from place to place reciting his poetry so much that he came to be known as *kastūr-e anwar*, the musk of Anwar.<sup>153</sup> Shopiani's poems continue to be remembered and recited in contemporary Kashmir, signalling his continued relevance not only as a historical figure who helped consolidate the Ahl-i Hadith in Kashmir, but also as one who continues to shape the world view of the movement's followers as well as the general Muslim audience in the region. An examination of Shopiani's vast poetic record allows us an insight into the ideas of the early Ahl-i Hadith movement in Kashmir that portrays a complex canvas of articulation and modes of engagement. By no means an exhaustive account of Shopiani's vast poetic oeuvre, this article hopes to open up a direction in the study of Islam and history of Kashmir. In combining unknown and unexamined poetic records of locally significant, yet unknown, figures in the historiography with available internal histories and local receptions will not only allow scholars to circumvent the limitations of institutional records in writing history, but also to deepen our understanding of significant religious, social, and political movements in order to better understand their intellectual and political foundations.

### Conflicts of interest

None.

### Appendix: Full list of Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shopiani's texts

	Text	Main language	Date of compilation	Date of first publication	Date of latest edition
1.	<i>Divān-i Anwar Shopiani</i>	Kashmiri, Persian, Urdu	1883	1938/1941	2011
2.	<i>Qīṣṣa-e Sheikh Sanan</i>	Kashmiri	1890		
3.	<i>Tafsīr Pāra Alif Lām Mim</i>	Kashmiri	1899		
4.	<i>Wird-ul Muwwahhidin</i>	Kashmiri, Persian	1899		
5.	<i>Usūli Ḥadīth</i>	Kashmiri	1904		
6.	<i>Maṣnavī Ḥāl Fārsi</i>	Persian	1905		

(Continued)

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>153</sup> Muslim, *Ahl-i Hadith*, p. 209.

**Appendix:** (Continued.)

	Text	Main language	Date of compilation	Date of first publication	Date of latest edition
7.	<i>Bashārat-ul Mū'minin</i>	Kashmiri, Persian	1905	1942	2002
8.	<i>Ḥalimā</i>	Persian	1906	1947	
9.	<i>Tafsīr-i Surah Yūsuf</i>	Kashmiri	1907	1970/71	
10.	<i>Jang-i Badr</i>	Kashmiri	1915	1973	
11.	<i>Jung-i Uhud</i>	Kashmiri	1916–1925	1973	
12.	<i>Guldastah-i Anwari</i>	Kashmiri, Persian	1919	1932	1999
13.	<i>Nasihāt-un Niswān</i>	Kashmiri	1922	1938	2011
14.	<i>Al Qawl ul Maqbūl fī Mi'rāj-ur Rasūl</i>	Kashmiri	1922	1940	2005
15.	<i>Gulshan-i Na'at</i>	Kashmiri	1923		
16.	<i>Ta'lim-i Sunnat, Vol. 1</i>	Kashmiri	1924	1933	2015 Volumes 1, 2 and 3 combined
17.	<i>Ta'lim-i Sunnat, Vol. 2</i>	Kashmiri	1925	1934	
18.	<i>Ta'lim-i Sunnat, Vol. 3</i>	Kashmiri	1927	1939	
19.	<i>Qalmī Masūd'-i Ghazliyāt</i>	Kashmiri	1935		
20.	<i>Salām-i Anwar m'a Kalām-i Anwar</i>	Kashmiri	1940	1940	2006
21.	<i>Nahr-ul 'Irfān</i>	Kashmiri, Persian			

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