

THE ROLE OF SYED ALI HAMDANI IN THE REFORMATION OF BALTISTAN SOCIETY: A HISTORICAL AND ANALYTICAL REVIEW

*Professor Dr Muhammad Hussain Azad¹, Saira Batool²

¹Deen of Social Sciences, Professor and Head, Department of Islamic Studies, NCBA&E, Lahore (Multan Sub-Campus), Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

²PhD Scholar Islamic Studies, NCBA&E, Lahore (Multan Sub-Campus), Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.



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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of Syed Ali Hamdani in the reformation of Baltistan society, tracing his profound influence on the region's religious, cultural, and socio-political landscape. Syed Ali Hamdani, a revered Sufi scholar and missionary of the 14th century, played a pivotal role in introducing Islam to Baltistan, shaping its spiritual and societal structure. His teachings and missionary work laid the foundation for Islamic practices, leading to the gradual transformation of the local population from their earlier religious beliefs to Islam. His successors, including Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh and Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi, further propagated his teachings, solidifying Islamic influence in the region.

The research provides a historical and analytical review of Hamdani's contributions, highlighting his establishment of mosques, Khanqahs, and educational institutions that became centers for religious learning and governance. His emphasis on Sufi principles of justice, morality, and spiritual enlightenment significantly altered the cultural and ethical framework of Baltistan. Additionally, the study examines the socio-political changes triggered by his influence, including the rise of Islamic jurisprudence and governance models that reshaped the traditional structures of power in Baltistan.

By drawing from historical manuscripts, local traditions, and scholarly works, this paper underscores the lasting impact of Syed Ali Hamdani's efforts in shaping Baltistan's identity. His role in promoting literacy, economic self-sufficiency, and social harmony through Islamic teachings remains a cornerstone of the region's historical evolution. The study concludes that his legacy continues to be a defining element of Baltistan's cultural and religious heritage, with his teachings still resonating in contemporary religious and social practices.

*Corresponding Author's Email: drmhazad56@gmail.com

HISTORICAL AND ANALYTICAL REVIEW

Baltistan is located at the northernmost tip of Pakistan, geographically positioned between two of the world's most renowned mountain ranges. One of these ranges includes the highest mountain in the world, the Himalayas, and Mount Everest, which towers at 8,848 meters. The second range is the Karakoram, which houses K2, the second-highest peak on Earth, attracting tourists from all over the world. The Karakoram range, starting from the northernmost tip of the Hindu Kush, extends for about 300 miles before ending in the east. The area between the source of the Gilgit River and the mouth of the Nubra River is called the Balor Range. The section of the Karakoram that stretches from where the Nubra River originates to where the Shyok River flows into it is commonly known as the Karakoram (Hussain Abadi, 2019).

The third significant range is the Hindu Kush, which lies half an hour away from the meeting point of the

Karakoram and Himalayas near the road that leads from Jaglot to Skardu. Thus, Baltistan and Gilgit form a unique geographical region where these three major mountain ranges meet. The Karakoram is also home to the second-largest glacier in the world after the poles, the Siachen Glacier, which is located in this region, making it of great strategic importance. While all three ranges are individually significant, the Himalayas remain the largest among them, stretching from the banks of the Indus River in the Diamer Valley to Assam's Brahmaputra (Hussain Abadi, 2019). Most of Baltistan consists of towering mountains, with rivers, streams, and waterfalls carving out valleys. In some areas, there are plateaus. The world's highest plateau, "Ghyabarsa/Deosai," is part of Baltistan, where three large and several smaller lakes are located. Deosai's Sheosar Lake is famous worldwide for its natural beauty. The road from Deosai to Gultari eventually leads to Srinagar, passing through Minimarg. Baltistan is bordered by occupied Kargil and Ladakh in the east, the valleys of Gilgit and Diamer in the west, and a vast area of China and Russia in the north, which was once known as Turkestan. Turkestan was historically divided into two parts, Eastern and Western Turkestan. Eastern Turkestan is now part of China, and the Xinjiang province lies within this region, with its major cities of Kashgar and Yarkand. The Karakoram range forms the boundary between Baltistan and China (Hussain Abadi, 2019).

Western Turkestan was part of Russia and is now comprised of the independent Muslim states of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. This region was also referred to as "Mawara'unnahr," now known as Central Asia. To the south lies the Indian-occupied Kashmir, with one-third of Baltistan having been forcibly taken by India. This area consists of sky-high mountains and dangerous deep gorges. Baltistan is situated at an altitude of approximately 7,500 feet above sea level (Hussain Abadi, 2019).

The snow-covered peaks of Baltistan melt into rivers, streams, and waterfalls that flow down into the Indus River, which is the largest river in Baltistan and is considered one of the great rivers of the world. Its source is the Kailash Mountain in Tibet. Tibetans call it "Senge Khabab," meaning "the lion's mouth." The Balti people used to refer to it as the Attock before it was called Sindh. After flowing 390 miles from its source in Mount Kailash, the river passes through Ladakh, where it is joined by the Zaskar River (from Kargil) at Nimo. It then enters Baltistan at Wachar

and is joined by the Shingo, Shigar, Dras, Suru, and Wakha rivers near the village of Morol. The Shyok River, which flows out of the southeast of the Karakoram Pass and is known as "Sumo" (meaning "female river") or "Khamdan," flows 170 kilometers to reach Shyok village. After an additional 80 miles, it joins the Nubra River at Hunder, and after traveling 400 miles, it merges into the Indus at Keris. At the confluence of the Shyok and Indus rivers, a bridge connects Kharmang, Skardu, and Khaplu. From this point, the Indus flows 58 kilometers westward to enter Skardu. Before reaching Skardu, the Shigar River joins it near Hussainabad. The river then flows through the valleys of Rondo, Haramosh, and into Gilgit. It continues past Nanga Parbat, where the locals refer to it as "Abasin." From Nanga Parbat, it turns westward again, exiting the region of Baltistan and Gilgit, flowing through Tarbela, where the world's largest earth-filled dam is located on the river. The rivers Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, and Sutlej join the Indus at the confluence of Punjand. This 2,880-kilometer-long river finally reaches Sindh and merges into the Arabian Sea (Hussain Abadi, 2019). Historians and researchers often compare the Indus River to the Tigris, Euphrates, and Nile, considering the Balti civilization as ancient as Babylon, Nineveh, and Mohenjo-Daro in Sindh. They believe that the source of the Indus River lies in Baltistan. Nomadic people settled along the banks of the Indus and founded the region. Masudi, in his history, mentions the source of the Indus and the rulers and inhabitants along its banks. He writes that the river "Buraid" flows through these mountainous regions and enters the Kabul River near Attock, before heading towards Multan, where it merges with five other rivers. It then flows into Sindh and is called Mehran al-Sindh, before finally flowing into the Arabian Sea near the city of Shakrah in Mansurah. The river also receives water from Kashmir, with rivers like Neelum, Kunhar, and Jhelum merging into it. Kashmir, which was once part of Sindh, was a significant kingdom. Its ruler was called Raja, and the queen was known as Rani. The neighboring kingdom of Kannauj, which spanned 120 leagues, also bordered Sindh and Multan (Masudi, 1985).

In conclusion, Baltistan is a unique geographical and cultural region, with a rich history shaped by its natural environment and ancient civilizations. The area's rivers, mountains, and cultural heritage have all contributed to its historical significance, making it a vital part of the broader historical narrative of South and Central Asia.

Some scholars believe that the people who settled here are of diverse ethnicities, including Aryan, Turkish, Tatar, Mongol, Egyptian, Sindhi, Iranian, Dardic, Khwar, and Kashmiri origins. Until the eighth century Hijri, all the residents of this region were far removed from Islam. They were nature worshippers, idolaters, and superstitious (Wazir Ahmed Ghazwā, 2000). They wandered in the darkness of ignorance and polytheism, indulging in oppression and wicked habits. Pride and vanity were their norms, while dancing, drinking alcohol, and violence were commonplace (Syed Iraqi Shigar, 2001). The reality is that ninety percent of the population in this area is ethnically Tibetan-Balti and religiously Shia. All of them speak the Balti language. The remaining ten percent are non-Balti and belong to other religions. The Balti language is not derived from any other language but is instead the mother tongue of the Balti people. The language spoken in Baltistan is divided into two dialects. In Skardu, Shigar, Khaplu, and Keris, pure Balti is spoken. The second dialect is a mix of Dardic/Gilgit language, which is spoken in Rondou, Kharmang, Gultari, and parts of Skardu (Hussain Abadi, 2019). Baltistan and Skardu are known for the two great mountain ranges (Himalaya and Karakoram), with K2, the second highest peak in the world after Mount Everest, the second largest glacier after the poles, Siachen, the Deosai Plains, the Cold Desert, and lakes like Sheosar and Shangrila, along with natural mineral resources, waterfalls, beautiful valleys, and the great Indus River (Hussain Abadi, 2019). The Markhor is the national animal, and polo is the national game.

As the population of the area grew and valleys formed, a governance system called "Tarangpa" emerged. Chiefs of the valleys were appointed, and the local Balti people called them "Chou." Notable among these chiefs were Kaiser, Pulola, Shahi, Rigyalbu, Stralbu, Maqpon, Yabgo, and Amacha (Hasno, 2023). When did Islam arrive in Baltistan, and who was the first preacher of Islam? These are questions that demand research. As for the neighboring countries of Baltistan, Islam had already been introduced there. Turkestan, now known as Central Asia, was previously called Mawarannahr, which included present-day Xinjiang province of China, Kashgar, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. In Kashmir, which includes present-day occupied Jammu and Kashmir, Azad Kashmir, the Pothohar Plateau, and the Hazara Division, Islam had already arrived. The trade caravans from the Arab world and other countries passed through the

famous passes of Baltistan, including Karakoram, Hispar, Mustagh, Zoji, and Burzil (Hasno, 2023). South of Baltistan lies Kashmir, where Islam arrived at the beginning of the first century Hijri, and Hameem bin Samah al-Shami built a mosque there (Salim Khan Gami, 2003).

When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) declared his prophethood and, at the request of the people of Mecca, the miracle of splitting the moon (Shaq al-Qamar) occurred, the ruler of Malabar (Kerala State), Chakrawati Farmas, saw the moon split with his own eyes. This event filled his heart with the light of faith. He traveled to Mecca, where he embraced Islam. Following the Prophet's (PBUH) instruction, he left Mecca for India but passed away in Yemen and was buried there. Even before the establishment of the State of Madinah, Arabs had established trade relations with India, China, Turkestan, and Iran. When the State of Madinah was founded, the Prophet (PBUH) created a department dedicated to the propagation of Islam (Hussain Abadi, 2019).

According to historians such as Ibn Jarir in *Tareekh al-Tabari*, Baladhuri in *Futuh al-Buldan*, and Ibn al-Athir in *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, the first Islamic expedition to Sindh occurred in 15 AH during the reign of Caliph Umar (RA), led by the ruler of Bahrain, followed by another led by Mughira on the port of Debal (Hussain Abadi, 2019). During the reign of Caliph Uthman (RA), Azerbaijan was conquered in 35 AH (Hasno, 2023). After the conquest of Khurasan, Abdullah bin Amir appointed Abdur Rahman bin Samura to conquer Zarang and the border city of Baltistan, Kishtar Khaj, where Islam was spread, and mosques were built (Hussain Abadi, 2019). During the caliphate of Ali (RA), his commander Qasim bin Muhammad led an expedition, followed by another attack by Harith bin Murra al-Abdi in 37 AH on Sindh and parts of India. By the reign of Amir Muawiyah in 42-44 AH, Mahallab bin Abi Safra had launched a full-scale campaign in Sindh. Hajjaj bin Yusuf, during the Umayyad reign of Abdul Malik bin Marwan, continued these conquests (Hussain Abadi, 2019).

By 96 AH, Qutaiba bin Muslim had consolidated Islamic rule in Central Asia, including the cities of Samarkand and Kashgar, which are close to Pakistan and Baltistan. He sent an envoy to the Chinese Emperor, demanding the acceptance of Islam. However, after the death of Walid bin Abdul Malik in 96 AH, the campaigns slowed down (Hussain Abadi, 2019).

In 132 AH, the Umayyad rule ended, and the Abbasids took over. In 142 AH, Caliph Al-Mansur appointed Umar bin Hafs as the governor of Sindh,

who successfully established Islam in the region (Hussain Abadi, 2019). According to *Tareekh Aqwam Khaplu*, Turk rulers periodically controlled parts of Baltistan from the tenth to the twelfth centuries. During this period, the Yabgo dynasty of Khaplu came from the province of Tokharistan in Turkestan (Hasno, 2023).

Historians agree that the first person to convert to Islam in Baltistan was Ibrahim. When he arrived in Skardu, Rigyalpo was the ruler, and Ibrahim married the daughter of Shagri, the ruler, becoming known as Ibrahim Maqpoon (Hasno, 2023). He ruled Skardu from 1190 to 1220 AD. However, his descendants later reverted to the mixed teachings of Lamaism, a blend of Bonchos and Buddhist doctrines (Hussain Abadi, 2019).

In the fourteenth century, during the reign of Sultan Shihabuddin, Mir Syed Ali Hamdani arrived in Baltistan from Kashmir in 783 AH. He spent one and a half years here before heading to Yarkand (Hussain Abadi, 2019). Although Islam had been introduced in Kashgar and Yarkand centuries before, it had not taken firm root due to Tatar oppression. Syed Ali Hamdani's efforts played a significant role in solidifying Islam in these regions (Hasno, 2023).

According to the research by Yusuf Hussain Abadi, Amir Kabir Syed Ali Hamdani conducted his preaching activities for a total of five years in Baltistan and Turkestan. The first time he arrived in Baltistan was through the Zoji Pass. The second time, he reached Skardu via Ghbiarsa (the elevated plateau of Deosai in Pothohar) and presented Islam to the ruler of Skardu. He constructed a mosque in Khari Dong and invited people to Islam. He then built a congregational mosque in Gumba and organized Friday prayers. In the village of Hussain Abad (formerly known as Khifchon), adjacent to Skardu, he built a mosque that still exists today. After that, he traveled to Shigar (Hussain Abadi, 2019).

Ghulam Hassan Hasno is a significant figure in Baltistan who has done remarkable work on the teachings of Shah Hamdan. He possesses manuscripts and works of Amir Kabir Syed Ali Hamdani. Hasno has particularly focused on the teachings and missionary services of Shah Hamdan while writing the history of Baltistan and has acknowledged his limitations, stating that the written record of his preaching activities is nearly nonexistent. He references several important books such as "Tuhfat al-Ahbab" by Maulvi Muhammad Ali Kashmiri, "Chuq Chuqn Khaplu" by Maulvi Muhammad Ibrahim, and "Gharbo Ching Khaplu,"

which provide insights into Shah Hamdan's life. Hasno mentions an incident about Shah Hamdan's preaching activities in Shigar, where he arrived during a traditional fair, and people were playing polo. Amir Syed Ali Hamdani took this opportunity to deliver the message of Islam to the crowd and invited them towards the oneness of Allah. The people of Shigar requested him to remove a dangerous rock present in their polo ground. They stated that they would embrace Islam if he could move the rock. He recited Bismillah and struck the rock with his staff, causing it to sink into the ground until it became level with the earth. Ghulam Hassan Hasno further explained that when he inquired about this rock, the people confirmed the story's accuracy. One person mentioned that a year later, when they came to play polo, there would be a depression where the rock used to be, which they would fill with dirt each year (Hasno, 2023).

After introducing Islam in Shigar, he traveled to the village of Thalay via the Thalay Pass, where he preached to the local people. In the village of Daltir, there is a willow tree, which the locals believe is the staff of Shah Hamdan that turned into a tree. The people consider this tree sacred and respect it, claiming that regardless of whether its branches are upright or hanging, if they plant it in the ground, it will flourish. A mosque has also been constructed here, and due to the presence of hydropower, there is an abundant water supply. The residents of Thalay embraced Islam due to his preaching. The mosque and Khanqah built by Shah Hamdan still exist at the confluence of Chandu (Hasno, 2023).

From here, he reached Bulgar, which is located only 18 kilometers from Khaplu, on the banks of the Indus River. He invited the local chiefs and people of Bulgar to Islam, and they accepted it willingly. Maulvi Ibrahim wrote that a dragon used to reside at the border of Bulgar, and the locals were very frightened by it. They requested him to free them from it. He took his staff and went there, striking the black snake with it and killing it (Hasno, 2023). Amir Kabir Syed Ali Hamdani traveled from Bulgar to the village of Doghni and then to Khaplu. At that time, Zhe Thang was the largest city in Khaplu, and the rulers resided in the capital of Sailing. He began preaching Islam from the capital and presented it to Raja Muqim Khan, who accepted it gladly. In Khaplu, there was a famous Buddhist stupa at Chuchan. The lama of this stupa was known for his cunning and deceptive skills. Shah Hamdan engaged in discussions and lengthy debates with the lama,

fulfilling every request made by him in front of the people of Khaplu. Witnessing his miracles, the people accepted Islam. He demolished the temple on the mountain of Chuq Chuq and built a Khanqah and mosque there, residing and spreading Islam in all directions. The mosque constructed in Chuq Chuq still stands today, where the Nurbakhshiya followers perform Friday prayers and congregational prayers five times a day. The remnants of the Khanqah are still present. The mosque has a large hall behind it where students are taught Quran and Hadith and the teachings of Shah Hamdan (Hasno, 2023).

Next to the Chuq Chuq mosque is the Raja's palace, with a large waterfall flowing from the snow-capped mountains. To the south of Khaplu lies the Himalayas, and to the north is the Karakoram range. Beyond the Himalayas is Kashmir, and on the other side of Karakoram is the well-known city of Kashgar and Yarkand in China. This region is where Islam had already reached during the time of the Companions. The Karakoram Pass has remained the only route for reaching Baltistan. Trade caravans from Arabia, Iraq, Syria, and Central Asia would come to India through this route. Among these trade caravans, there were Muslim merchants, scholars, reciters, and Sufi missionaries. Therefore, it can be confidently stated that, like the people of Turkistan, the people of Baltistan had a pure understanding of Islam. The style of preaching by Shah Hamdan and the manifestation of his miracles inspired their thoughts, leading them to accept Islam without hesitation (Hasno, 2023).

Ghulam Hassan Hasno has described these days in such words that when Amir Kabir Syed Ali Hamdani arrived here, the ruler of Khaplu was special Alday, and his capital was on top of present-day "Hala Zharay," at "Haltak Raw." The source of water supply in the capital was a spring flowing at the foot of the hill, and an underground path was constructed for access to that place. He invited the Raja to Islam, which he accepted, and he became known among the people as Saleem Alday (Hasno, 2023).

Maulvi Muhammad Ali Kashmiri mentions a similar incident in "Tuhfat al-Ahbab" regarding a yogi, stating that it occurred in the Aladdin Pura neighborhood of Srinagar. The yogi claimed that he could disappear and challenged the people to find him. If they succeeded, he would accept their teachings; otherwise, they would have to accept his. Due to his deceit, the yogi vanished from sight. Shah Hamdan found him in a state of divine visibility, which led the yogi and all the people of the neighborhood, along with the local ruler, to embrace

Islam. Shah Hamdan established a Khanqah and mosque there, making it a center for the promotion and dissemination of Islam (Hasno, 2023).

Hasno mentions in reference to Maulvi Ibrahim's manuscript that he traveled from Shigar to Khaplu via Keris. After some time preaching in Khaplu and the local tribes, he went to Churbat. While staying there, he had a debate with a Buddhist lama named Taqshi, who he brought to the right path, and also delivered the message of Islam to the rest of the people. He then decided to travel to Kashmir, advising his disciples before leaving to be content with divine pleasure and the pursuit of knowledge while avoiding excess in all other matters. He warned them not to remain ignorant and indifferent under the pretext of contentment regarding education and divine pleasure. He advised them not to cause any harm to anyone, avoid hurting anyone's feelings, and not to waste resources on food and clothing nor be miserly. He cautioned against negligence regarding religious matters and sharia laws, encouraging regular remembrance and reflection, and the construction of mosques at every appropriate location. He stressed that contentment in all matters is better since it leads to divine pleasure, but in terms of knowledge, complacency is a mistake. He emphasized the importance of adhering to the knowledge and the learned in order to find benefit in both this world and the next, while also insisting on being not complacent about spiritual knowledge and not subject to one's whims. He advised not to be negligent in observing fasts, prayers, and the payment of Zakat and Fitra. He encouraged adopting patience, humility, and gratitude in pursuit of divine pleasure while avoiding oppression, adultery, lying, deceit, and gossip (Hasno, 2023).

Shah Hamdan's journey ultimately led him to Kashmir. He set out for the pilgrimage of Baitullah Sharif but passed away at Pakhli (Manshera's new township) on 6th Zul-Hijjah, 786 AH (19th January 1385 AD) (Hasno, 2023).

In the ninth century Hijri, the caliph Syed al-Aarifin Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh, 65 years after the passing of his mentor Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, arrived in Baltistan from Iran in 850 AH (1426 AD). At that time, the rulers of Khaplu were Yabgo Azim Azzam Khan bin Muqim Khan and Raja Ghota Cho Sangay was ruling in Skardu and Shigar (Hasno, 2023). He first arrived in Khaplu and invited the Raja there to Islam, who accepted his invitation. He established the Nurbakhshiya order here and became involved in the propagation of Islam from the Chuq Chuq mosque. The people of Khaplu had already embraced Islam

through Shah Hamdan, and the rest accepted his invitation and entered the fold of Islam (Hasno, 2023). After staying here for some time, he traveled via Churbat to the Thalay Pass (Kargil/Zanskar), where he spread Islam in Kargil, Kharmang, Soot, and Pushkum. After a six-month stay, he returned to Khaplu. Through his preaching, the light of Islam spread in all directions. He then went to Yarkand (in Chinese Turkistan) via Sulturu and returned to his homeland in Iran. He passed away in 869 AH and was buried in Iran (Hasno, 2023).

Maulvi Hashmatullah, differing from the aforementioned historians, stated that Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh was the first preacher of Islam in Baltistan, who invited people to Islam and took the oath in the name of his mentor, Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (Hasno, 2023). He established the Nurbakhshiya order in Khaplu and built the Chuq Chuq mosque. He then moved from Khaplu to Skardu and from there to Shigar. He invited Raja Ghazi Tham of Shigar to Islam, and he accepted Islam, taking the name Ghazi Mir. He also built the Amborch and Chhe Brunji mosques, which were likely attributed to Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (Hasno, 2023).

In my view, Yusuf Hussain Abadi, Ghulam Hassan Hasno of Khaplu, and other historians of Baltistan who regard Shah Hamdan as the first preacher of Islam in Baltistan are correct. During the ministry of Maulvi Hashmatullah, the Amborch mosque, which bore the inscription of Surah Al-Muzzammil, was said to have been named after Mir Syed Ali Hamdani according to his own writings. The mosques in Hussain Abad and Gumba in Skardu that still exist today are reminders of Shah Hamdan. Sixty-five years after Shah Hamdan, Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh, and nearly forty years later, Mir Syed Shamsuddin Iraqi, the iconoclast, arrived in Baltistan during the reign of Muqpon Khan Bukha in 911 AH (1505 AD) along with his fifty disciples/sufis via Kashmir to promote the spread of Islam (Hasno, 2023). In Skardu, Raja Bukha, in Shigar Abdullah Khan, in Khaplu Raja Bahram Khan, and in Poriq (Kargil) Habib Chu were ruling. All these rulers were invited to Islam, and they accepted it. These rulers greatly respected Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi. After residing there for six months, he called upon the people of Khaplu and its surrounding areas to Islam and promoted the Nurbakhshiya order. Although the people of Skardu had already embraced Islam, their hearts had not yet firmly accepted it. Raja Muqpon Bukha had a decorated idol in his palace that he secretly worshiped. When Mir Shamsuddin learned

of this, he went to the Raja's palace and broke the idol (Hasno, 2023).

Maulvi Muhammad Ali Kashmiri has written in his book that during that time, the people of Baltistan had forgotten Islam. The regulations of sharia were nonexistent, and neither the rulers nor the common people mentioned Islam. All were idolaters, immoral, and hypocritical (Hasno, 2023). From Kashmiri's writing, it seems as if Islam had never reached this area, but this is not accurate. Maulvi Muhammad Ali wrote that when Mir Shamsuddin arrived in Skardu, the Raja and the people of Skardu came out of the city to welcome him (Hasno, 2023). It is likely that after Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh's departure, the people's inclination towards Islam diminished compared to when he was present. Another point is that not everyone may have embraced Islam, and they might have continued their previous practices. If everyone were idolaters, they would not have come out to welcome Mir Shamsuddin. According to Qudratullah Baig, before traveling to Skardu, he preached Islam in Shamsal and performed some miracles there. Mamu Singh and his wife embraced Islam and received his counsel. Hence, it can be concluded that Islam spread in Shamsal due to his preaching (Hasno, 2023).

After this, he reached the fortress of Kharfuche in Skardu from Khaplu. The Raja of Khaplu, Bahram Cho, requested him to leave a representative for the preaching of Islam. He entrusted this duty to his disciple Haidar Darwish and two local (Kamal and Zairak) darwishes, and he himself went to Skardu. Upon arriving at the Kharfuche fortress in Skardu, it became known that the rule of Syed Bihqi had ended in Kashmir, who had expelled him from Kashmir, and Syed Bihqi was replaced by his disciple Malik Musa Raina, who became the new prime minister of Kashmir. He decided to return to Kashmir. Meanwhile, Malik Musa sent a delegation under Baba Ali to bring him back, which reached Skardu. He traveled to Kashmir with them and arrived in Srinagar in 912 AH (1506 AD) at the onset of spring. He spent a long period of twenty years from 912 to 932 AH in Kashmir. He built mosques and Khanqahs in Kashmir and its surroundings, promoting the teachings of Islam and the Nurbakhshiya order (Hasno, 2023).

The appointed representatives (Haidar Darwish, Kamal, and Zairak) played an essential role in the propagation of the Nurbakhshiya order. The descendants of Haidar Darwish are still present in the Baqarpi neighborhood of Khaplu and are actively

involved in propagating the religion in Nawa, Sitronpi, Yuchang, Talis, Sarmun, and Abadan. The descendants of Darwish Kamal reside in the Thong neighborhood of Khaplu, while the whereabouts of the descendants of Darwish Zairak are unknown (Hasno, 2023).

Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi was a great Sufi missionary of the Nurbakhshiya order. After Syed Noor Bakhsh, he built Khanqahs and mosques of the Nurbakhshiya order in Baltistan and Srinagar, making substantial efforts to spread their teachings. Observing his growing following and influence, the ruler of the time, Mirza Haider Dughlat Beg, accused him of Shi'ism in 957 AH and initiated a campaign against him. He demolished the Khanqahs and began oppressing the Sufis. The historians of the current regime declared him a corruptor, initiating a crackdown on his followers. Mir Shamsuddin's son Mir Daniyal was captured and killed in Skardu. In response, the Nurbakhshis launched a vigorous movement that resulted in the downfall of his government, after which the Mughals established their presence there (Hasno, 2023).

Mirza Dughlat's oppressive actions greatly harmed the Nurbakhshiya order. Their mosques and preaching centers were destroyed. Another loss was that Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi, a humanitarian Sufi of the Sunni community, became a controversial figure. Dr. Aafaqi has stated that Mir Shamsuddin was the one who sowed the seeds of hatred between Shia and Sunni brothers in Kashmir (Hasno, 2023).

The historical truth is that the growing influence of the Sufis has always made the government fearful, although the Sufis have remained distant from it until now. The Sunni-Shia conflicts in Srinagar began after the death of Mir Shamsuddin in 932 AH during the reign of Mirza Dughlat. Mirza Dughlat, in his frustration, vented all his anger on the Nurbakhshiya people. Among the family of Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi, Mir Aarif (d. 1162 AH) and Mir Abu Sa'id (d. 1195 AH) left Kashmir and came to Baltistan. Mir Aarif stayed in Thags, built a mosque there, and spread Islam in the surrounding areas. He passed away in 1162 AH in Thags and was buried next to the grand mosque. The tomb of Mir Ishaq is also near his shrine (Hasno, 2023).

Mir Abu Sa'id resided in Keris, promoting Islam and the Nurbakhshiya order, and passed away there, being buried at the same location (Hasno, 2023). After their deaths, their descendants continued their preaching activities. The sons of Mir Abu Sa'id, Syed Yahya and Syed Mukhtar, endowed all their

properties in Kashmir to the Khanqah of Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi in 1115 AH and permanently migrated to Baltistan, settling in Keris (Hasno, 2023). After some time, they left Keris and settled in Shigar. Mir Yahya propagated Islam in Shigar and passed away there, being buried in Shigar. Mir Mukhtar returned from Shigar to Keris. His eighteen sons and grandsons faced martyrdom; three of his sons (Syed Abdullah, Baqar, Muhammad Noorani) were martyred in Shigar, and their shrines are present at the Aastana Masoomin in Shigar. He sent his remaining sons to various locations in Baltistan for the propagation of Islam. He entrusted the responsibilities to Mir Ibrahim in Gumba Skardu, Mir Muhammad in Khaplu, Mir Ali Raza in Sarmak, Mir Jalaluddin in Shigar Chur, Mir Shamsuddin in Poriq/Kargil, Mir Abdullah in Shigar Khas, Syed Muhammad Baqar in Shigar, and Mir Ishaq in Thags. Most of the Sayyids in Baltistan are their descendants. Mir Mukhtar is known among the Nurbakhshis by the title "Ikhyaar." He wrote a commentary on the Fiqh "Ahwat" in Persian, which has been published under the name Siraj al-Islam (Hasno, 2023).

Mir Mukhtar passed away at the age of 67 in 1131 AH in Keris and was buried there (Hasno, 2023).

The Shia-Sunni conflicts actually arose in 1045 AH (1635 AD) during the Mughal era when Zafar Khan was the governor of Srinagar. After that, sectarian disputes persisted from time to time (Hasno, 2023). The beginning of Shi'ism in Baltistan was through Nasir al-Islam (d. 1930) of Skardu and Agha Syed Abbas Chhotron (d. 1928) in the nineteenth century (Hasno, 2023). The arrival of the Shia school of thought is not more than a century and a half old here; however, the Shia religion has rapidly spread. Currently, seventy percent of the inhabitants of Baltistan are Shia (Hasno, 2023).

In the present era, Baltistan has become a center for Shia Muslims. I met with the historian of Baltistan, Muhammad Yusuf Hussain Abadi, and I asked him about the propagation and spread of Islam here. He told me that our ancestors embraced Islam under the hand of Shah Hamdan, Amir Kabir Syed Ali Hamdani, because they were Imami, and we of Baltistan also follow the Imami faith, with ninety percent of the people in Skardu being Imami Shia (Hasno, 2023). I posed the same question to Ghulam Hassan Hasno, the author of the history of Baltistan. He mentioned that Shah Hamdan, Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, and his lineage, Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh, and Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi were all Ahl al-

Sunnah wal-Jama'ah. Most of the people in Khaplu still belong to the Nurbakhshiya order and are all Sunni (Hasno, 2023). I inquired about the presence of Ismailis in Hunza and Nagar, with some claiming to be affiliated with Shah Hamdan and Syed Noor Bakhsh. He informed me that the Ismailis came to Hunza through the Mughal regime. After them, Nurbakhshiya missionaries arrived and began propagating their order. Subsequently, Ismailis from Badakhshan started to migrate toward this area and settled here over time. This area of Hunza, which was previously Mughal, has now been referred to as Mawlai due to the Ismaili preaching. The reality is that the age of the Shia religion here is not more than one hundred and fifty years (Hasno, 2023).

Maulvi Hashmatullah also wrote similarly in his history of Jammu that the Mughal regime assigned Gilgit to Trakhon (1310–1335) and reached Hunza, where they seized control. The Raja of Hunza adopted the religion of the Mughal (Ismaili) to preserve his reign. Since then, the people of Hunza have continued to practice Ismailism (Hasno, 2023). The ruler of Hunza, Ayashu, married the daughter of Ali Sher Khan Anchan and summoned laborers from Baltistan for construction. Along with them, a few missionaries from the Noor Bakhshiya order also arrived and played a significant role in the propagation of Islam in the region. According to Munshi Azizuddin, when he wrote the history of Chitral, he described the Noor Bakhshis as Shia, noting that their beliefs and practices differ from those of the Shia community. There are three groups of Noor Bakhshis (Noor Bakhshi, Ali Illahi, and Dwaazda). However, at that time, both non-Muslims and Muslims were present. Ismailis, Shia, and Sunni Muslims existed, but no one belonging to the Noor Bakhshiya order was found. From Hunza to Chitral, the missionaries from Baltistan made vigorous efforts to spread Islam, and they were all connected to the Noor Bakhshiya order. After some time, the connection of the Noor Bakhshiya order was lost, leading people to deviate from their beliefs, and eventually, with time, the Noor Bakhshiya order became extinct in this area.

The lamp of Islam that Shah Hamdan ignited in the land of Baltistan was kept burning by his successors, Syed al-Aarifeen Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh, Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi, and other missionaries who came periodically. Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi's two Tibetan disciples, Darwish Kamal and Darwish Zairak, along with Hazrat Haider from Khaplu and his son Ismail, sustained the Noor Bakhshiya order in

Khaplu, Skardu, and Kashmir and played a significant role in the propagation of Islam. Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi's son, Mir Daniyal, promoted Islam and the Noor Bakhshiya order in Skardu, where he was martyred at the hands of Mirza Haidar Dughlat while he was initiating a campaign to eradicate the Noor Bakhshiya order, starting from Kashmir.

After the martyrdom of Mir Daniyal, Shah Nasir and the Tusi brothers, Syed Ali and Syed Tusi, arrived in 1012 AH from Kashgar via Saltoro, during the reign of Yabgu Ibrahim, the ruler of Khaplu, and promoted Islam in the Shigar area. According to Maulvi Hashmatullah, the Tusi brothers and Shah Nasir were followers of Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh. Shah Nasir spread Islam in Chotrone, while Syed Ali (m. 1091 AH) did so in Skardu, where both died and were buried. According to Hussain Abadi, their two other brothers, Syed Mahmood and Haidar Ali, remained in Skardu and established a khanqah in Kashobagh, Skardu, promoting Islam. They passed away in 1070 AH and were buried there. Haidar Ali's mausoleum is in Qumrah, Skardu.

The early missionaries of Islam—Shah Hamdan, Syed Noor Bakhsh, and Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi—built khanqahs, mosques, and zawiyas, which still exist today. After their passing, their successors continued the propagation and spread of Islam without interruption. Up until the 10th century AH, Kargil was part of Baltistan. Syed Noor Bakhsh had already introduced Islam while traveling from Khaplu to Kargil. In 1948, the people of Baltistan seized control during the freedom struggle. However, due to the incompetence and shortsightedness of the commanding officer, General Jilani, it fell under Indian control. Kargil is now a city and district in Jammu and Kashmir. The only land route to Ladakh and Srinagar passes through here. The route from Kargil to Siachen remains covered with snow and is only open for two months a year. This is the only route for the military transport and supplies of the Indian army. According to Maulvi Hashmatullah, Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh and his successors spread Islam here, and their name is still mentioned with respect by the locals. A scholar from Ladakh wrote that the arrival of Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh is well-documented, and he was the first to introduce Islam in Kargil. After him, Syed Noor Bakhsh and later Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi came to this region with fifty disciples from Iran to Kashmir, Baltistan, and from there to Kargil and Ladakh, where they established centers for the propagation of Islam, leading many people to adopt the Noor

Bakhshiya sect. Maulvi Hashmatullah noted that not only in Kargil but also in its surrounding areas—Soot, Chakhtan, Pushkium, Soru, and Kartse—Islam was propagated and the Noor Bakhshiya order was promoted. Until 1936, the number of Shia Muslims was very low here. After 1936, Agha Syed Ali Krisi incited a split among the Noor Bakhshis, leading to conflict among them while adopting the Shia faith himself, thus converting many people to his side. Consequently, most of the people in Kargil, Kharmang, Narawar, and Gol embraced Shia Islam. However, even today, a large number of Noor Bakhshis are present in Kargil. Hasno wrote, referring to manuscripts and letters from that time, that during those days, the Namgyal family, who practiced Buddhism, ruled Kargil. The ruler of the Maqpon family, Shah Murad, gave his sister's hand in marriage to them on the condition that they convert to Islam. Khari Namgyal accepted this condition and embraced Islam. When Shah Murad sent his sister to Soru Kartse, he also dispatched a Sufi from the Noor Bakhshiya order, Akhund Muhammad Sharif, along with several scholars, to propagate Islam there. They reached the village of Kartse in Kargil, constructed mosques and khanqahs, and tirelessly spread Islam in all directions. Although Maulvi Hashmatullah merely referred to them as Muslims, Syed Abbas Kazmi noted that they were, in fact, Ithna Ashari Shia.

In the southwest of Baltistan lies the area of Gurez. The main valley of Gurez is in occupied Kashmir, with some border areas included in Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. The people of Baltistan refer to Gurez as Khicholi Guawari, and the entire population of Guawari is Muslim. The Noor Bakhshis spread Islam in these regions. When Mirza Haidar Dughlat made the life of Noor Bakhshis difficult in Kashmir, they fled to Guawari. They brought with them the well-known book "Mashjar al-Awliya" by Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh. Abu al-Baqir Ali Grizi published it here. All the people of Gurez and its surroundings are of Dardic ethnicity. The Dard people inhabit the districts of Gilgit and Diamer and were once known as Dard or Dardistan.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the introduction of Islam in Baltistan and the construction of mosques were primarily the efforts of Shah Hamdan, Amir Kabir Syed Ali Hamdani. Muslim scholars and missionaries who came with the victorious Muslim armies in the neighboring countries of Srinagar, Kashmir, Turkestan, and the conquered

areas of Mawarannahr had already established Islam through mosques. However, the first individual to propagate Islam and establish it in Baltistan was Syed Ali Hamdani, who arrived in Khaplu via Kashmir in 783 AH. He returned again in 785 AH. He passed away during his pilgrimage in 786 AH. Sixty-five years after his death, his successor Syed Muhammad Noor Bakhsh arrived in Khaplu, Baltistan, in 850 AH via Kashmir, establishing and promoting the Noor Bakhshiya order. Syed Noor Bakhsh particularly promoted Islam and the Noor Bakhshiya order in Baltistan and Srinagar. He passed away in Iran in 869 AH and was buried there. Approximately forty years after his passing, Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi arrived in Baltistan in 911 AH, and after only six months, he traveled to Kashmir, where he spent twenty years propagating Islam and spreading the Noor Bakhshiya order from 912 to 932 AH. In 1012 AH, Syed Nasir Tusi, Syed Ali Tusi, and two other brothers, Syed Haidar and Syed Muhammad Tusi, also arrived in Baltistan and promoted the Noor Bakhshiya order. This means that the arrival of the Tusi brothers occurred approximately 229 years after Shah Hamdan's arrival. These three figures introduced Islam and spread the Noor Bakhshiya order in Baltistan. Mirza Haidar Dughlat, the ruler of Srinagar, took harsh measures against the Noor Bakhshiya order. He demolished their khanqahs and imprisoned their followers. Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi's son Daniyal was captured and killed in Skardu when he initiated the campaign to eradicate the Noor Bakhshiya order from Kashmir. The propagation of Islam was significantly affected by the actions against the Noor Bakhshiya order. In this context, Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi's followers, including Mir Arif (m. 1162 AH) and Mir Abu Said (m. 1195 AH), migrated from Kashmir to Baltistan. Mir Arif settled in Thags, constructing a mosque and spreading Islam, while Mir Abu Said resided in Kries, also promoting the Noor Bakhshiya order, and they both passed away and were buried in their respective locations. After their deaths, their descendants continued the propagation of this mission. The sons of Mir Abu Said, Syed Yahya and Syed Mukhtar, settled in Shigar, where Mir Yahya spread Islam and passed away, being buried there. Mir Mukhtar returned from Shigar to Kries. His eighteen sons and grandchildren experienced his demise at the age of sixty-seven in 1131 AH, being buried there.

In conclusion, the spread of Islam in Baltistan is the result of the efforts of Shah Hamdan, Syed Ali Hamdani, and their successors. The roles played by Syed al-Aarifeen Muhammad Noor Bakhsh and subsequently by Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi of the Noor Bakhshiya order and their descendants are commendable.

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K2: It is the second highest peak in the world, standing at 28,250 feet. It is located in the Karakoram range, 125 miles from Skardu. In the Balti language of Baltistan, K2 is referred to as **Chogori**, which means "big mountain." There are three hundred peaks in this range, with one hundred peaks reaching heights between 20,000 and 28,000 feet. When these peaks were measured, the tallest were named **Karakoram No. 1** and **Karakoram No. 2**. Thus, the peaks **Mashabrum**, **Wun**, and **Chogori** were designated as K2. K2 is situated on the border of Baltistan and Xinjiang, above the **Godwin-Austen Glacier**. It was first summited on July 31, 1954, by two Italian climbers (Hussain Abadi, History of Baltistan: 28).

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