

What has been the role of 'local collaborators' in creating and sustaining European colonial empires? In this book, Dr Sarah Ansari addresses this question by examining the system of political control constructed by the British in Sind between 1843 and 1947. In particular, she explores the part of the local Muslim religious élite, the *pirs* or hereditary sufi saints, who had long acted as mediators between rulers and the ordinary people of the region.

Using a wealth of historical material, Dr Ansari looks at the development of the institution of the *pir*, its power base and the mechanics of the system of control into which *pirs* were drawn. The overall success of the political system depended on the willingness of the élite to participate and the author argues that, on the whole, it worked well in Sind. This enabled the British to govern while allowing the *pirs* to adapt to colonial rule and later independence without serious damage to their interests. Dr Ansari demonstrates how, only in the heightened nationalist atmosphere of the 1940s, did the system seriously break down. Then, the most powerful *pir* rejected the notion of shared interests on which collaboration was based and only force could reimpose law and order.

This is the first major work to explore the relationship between Muslim religious leaders and the colonial state in a region of India that was distant from the main centres of British power. It also contributes considerably to our understanding of the history of Sind – an area of growing historical and contemporary interest. *Sufi Saints and State Power* will therefore be of interest to students and specialists of South Asia, of Muslim politics and of the history of colonialism.



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SUFI SAINTS AND STATE POWER

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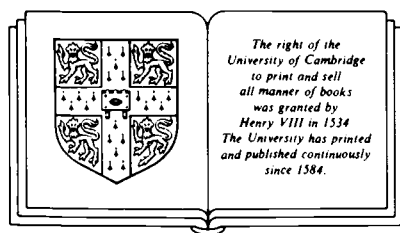
# SUFI SAINTS AND STATE POWER

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The *pirs* of Sind, 1843–1947

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**To Akbar**





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## A note on spelling

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It is often difficult to maintain consistency in spelling partly because Indians themselves have used a variety of spellings, and partly because of phonetic problems. To achieve a satisfactory compromise, and at the risk of losing a certain amount of linguistic precision, I have used spellings which reflect the way in which names are pronounced in the subcontinent, with all diacritical marks omitted. Place names, on the whole have been spelt according to the *Gazetteer of Sind* B, vols. I–VII (Bombay, 1919–26); however, where spellings used today differ from those in the volumes of the *Gazetteer*, the former have taken precedence.

# Abbreviations

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AIML	All-India Muslim League
BP	Bombay Proceedings
Com-Sind	Commissioner-in-Sind
Conf.	Confidential
CSR	Commissioner of Sind Records Office, Karachi
CSAC	Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge
FMA	Freedom Movement Archives, Karachi University, Karachi
GMSP	G. M. Syed Papers, Sann, District Dadu, Sind
H/A	<i>History of Alienations</i>
HCP	Home Confidential Proceedings
INC	Indian National Congress
IOL	India Office Library and Records, London
IS	Institute of Sindhology, Jamshoro, Sind
LP	Lambrick Papers
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
n.d.	not dated
n.p.	not paginated
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
PFR	Panjab Fortnightly Report
PSFR	Panjab States Fortnightly Report
QAC	Quaid-i Azam Cell Papers, Quaid-i Azam Academy, Karachi
SFR	Sind Fortnightly Report
SHC	Shamsul Hasan Collection, Karachi
SPML	Sind Provincial Muslim League

## *Abbreviations*

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UP	United Provinces
USNA	United States National Archives

# Glossary

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*afriinama*: certificate of appreciation  
*ahl-i-kitab*: people of a revealed book or scripture; in Islamic law such non-Muslim peoples are to be publicly tolerated in the *dar al-Islam* on the acceptance of the status of *dhimmi*  
*alim*: Islamic theologian, jurist, religious teacher (pl. *ulama*)  
*aman sabha*: peace association  
*anjuman*: assembly, meeting, association, usually of Muslims  
Anjuman-i Khuddam-i Kaaba: Society of the Servants of the Holy Places  
*auqaf*: plural of *waqf*, property which cannot be transferred and which is therefore inalienable  
*azad*: free  
*badshah*: emperor, king  
*barakat*: blessing power; spiritual charisma  
*bagh*: garden  
*baiat*: a vow of spiritual allegiance to a *pir*, usually accompanied by a simple ceremony  
*bait al-mal*: lit., 'house of wealth'; the public treasury in Islamic lands  
*bania*: Hindu trader, merchant; often acted as moneylender

*batai*: division of produce of land between *zamindar* and *hari*  
*be-piri*: the state of being without a *pir*  
*bhajan*: Hindu religious poetry  
*bigah*: land measure standardised by the British as five-eighths of an acre  
*biradari*: lit., 'brotherhood'; used to refer to patrilineal kinship groups  
*bund*: embankment  
*burqa*: garment worn by Muslim women incorporating veil to cover the face  
*charka*: spinning wheel  
*chauki*: watchman or guard duties  
*chauth*: levy imposed upon inheritance of a *jagir*, the purpose of which was to assert the Government's right to a partial assessment on *jagir* lands  
*crore*: one hundred *lakhs*  
(= 10,000,000)  
*dai*: Ismaili missionary  
*dali*: offering, gift  
*dar al-harb*: lit., 'land of war', a territory in which the *Sharia* is not observed  
*dar al-Islam*: lit., 'land of Islam', a territory in which the *Sharia* is observed  
*dar al-Ulum*: lit., 'the abode of



- sciences', hence used to describe Muslim seminaries. Also name of seminary at Deoband, UP
- darbar*: public audience held by native prince or high-ranking British official
- darbari*: one entitled to a chair at a *darbar*
- dargah*: tomb, shrine
- dastar bandi*: ceremony at which turban is tied on the head of person succeeding to a position or title
- dawa*: Ismaili missionary organisation
- deh*: sub-division of land
- dhand*: geographical depression, often filled with water
- dharamsala*: sanctuary, refuge, with religious connections
- dhimmi*: non-Muslim, living in Muslim state
- fakir*: religious (usually Muslim) mendicant, ascetic; in context of the Hur Union, refers to leading members of the brotherhood
- faraq*: separate, distinct
- farman*: imperial proclamation
- fatwa*: opinion on a point of Islamic law given by a *mufti*
- gadi*: seat, throne; refers to sufi shrine
- ghazi*: one who fights for Islam against infidels; conqueror, hero
- ghi*: clarified butter
- ginan*: devotional Ismaili poetry
- haj*: annual pilgrimage to Mecca
- haji*: one who had performed *haj*
- hari*: landless labourer
- hazri*: roll-call
- hidayat*: guidance
- hijrat*: migration, especially to a Muslim country from enemy territory
- id*: Muslim religious festival
- Imam: religious leader, one who leads prayers in the mosque
- inam*: grant of land held rent- or revenue-free
- Ismaili: member of the Shi'i sect which believes that the descendants of Ismail ibn Jafa al-Sadiq (died c. 765), the seventh in line of the Shi'i Imams, should lead the community and communicate both the exoteric and the esoteric truths of divine revelation to mankind
- izzat*: honour
- jagir*: assignment to a person of state revenue derived from a specified area or estate
- jagirdar*: one who holds a *jagir*
- jamiat*: association
- janaza*: funeral
- Jazirat al-Arab: lit., 'island of Arabia'; Arab lands bounded by Mediterranean, Tigris-Euphrates, Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean and Red Sea
- jihad*: holy war
- jizya*: tax paid by non-Muslims living under Muslim rule
- johukum*: sycophant
- juma*: Friday
- kachcha*: makeshift, raw, temporary
- kachcheri*: Indian magistrate's office or courthouse; audience with official
- kafir*: one who is ungrateful to God, unbeliever
- kalunghi*: long coat
- karamat*: miracle
- khadar*: handspun and handwoven cloth
- khairat*: charitable grant in form of revenue- or rent-free land, money or goods
- khairatdar*: one who holds a *khairat*
- Khalifa: Caliph, line of succession to the Prophet Muhammad as head of the Muslim community; title given to leading followers of a sufi saint or *pir*
- Khilafat: 'Caliphate', the office filled by the Khalifa
- khilafat*: lit., 'successorship' – permission granted by a *pir* to a disciple to go out and induct others in the name of the sufi order
- khanqah*: hospice
- kot*: fortress
- kursi*: chair, for example at a *darbar*
- kursi nashin*: one who sits on a *kursi*
- lakh*: one hundred thousand

*lathi*: long wooden stick  
*lorha*: guarded settlement  
*lunghi*: form of male clothing, consisting of a single piece of cloth tied around the body  
*madrassa*: a higher Muslim school or college  
*makhdum*: learned religious man  
*malamati*: unorthodox style of religious mendicancy  
*mashir*: expert in (religious) law  
*masjid*: mosque  
*maulana*: title used by an *alim*  
*maulvi*: title equivalent to *maulana*  
*mela*: fair  
*mir*: ruler (Muslim)  
*muafi*: grant of land free of revenue  
*mufti*: one who is qualified to give a *fatwa*  
*muhajir*: one who performs *hijrat*, an emigrant (pl. *muhajirin*)  
*mujahid*: one who wages *jihad*, holy warrior (pl. *mujahidin*)  
*mujawir*: guardian of a tomb  
*mukhtiarkar*: local revenue official  
*mullah*: form often used in British India for a Muslim religious man, often a leader  
*murasilla*: message, letter  
*murid*: disciple, follower of a sufi *pir*  
*murshid*: spiritual guide  
*nazrana*: offering in money or kind made by *murid* to *pir*  
*pag*: turban  
*panchayat*: caste or village council  
*pardah*: custom of veiling and secluding women  
*pargana*: a revenue sub-division of a *tahsil*  
*pattadar*: one who holds land on which the payment of the revenue demand is apportioned by the proprietary kin group according to ancestral shares  
*pattadari*: system of tenure in which the land revenue is apportioned by the kin group according to ancestral shares  
*Pesh Imam*: chief prayer leader at mosque

*pir*: spiritual guide, religious preceptor, a sufi or descendant of a sufi saint; in Sind, powerful landholding religious figures associated with sufi shrines  
*pir bhai*: spiritual brother; fellow initiates of the same *pir*  
*piri-muridi*: relationship between *pir* and *murid*  
*qazi*: Muslim judge according to religious law  
*rais*: person of high rank, headman, chief  
*raj*: rule, empire, kingdom; used loosely to denote British Indian Empire  
*Ramadan*: Muslim month of fasting  
*ryotwari*: system of revenue collection based on individual cultivator (*ryot*)  
*sabha*: association  
*sadat*: descendants of the Prophet Muhammad  
*saiyid*: descendant of the Prophet Muhammad  
*sajjada nashin*: lit., 'one who sits on the carpet', head of *pir* family  
*salaam*: greeting  
*salaam parwana*: certificate of greeting  
*sanad*: certificate  
*sangat*: group, sub-division  
*sardar*: chief or leading man  
*sarkar*: government, authority  
*satyagraha*: lit., 'soul force' or 'truth force', non-violent resistance, a form of political agitation which became known inaccurately as 'passive resistance'  
*satyagrahi*: one who performs *satyagraha*  
*Shaikh*: title used by Muslims possessing or wishing to suggest Arabic descent; in Sind, title often assumed by recent converts to Islam  
*shalwar kamiz*: traditional dress consisting of long shirt and baggy trousers  
*shahid*: martyr  
*Shams ul-Ulama*: lit., 'sun of the *ulama*'; honorific title  
*Sharia*: sacred, divinely revealed law of Islam  
*sharif*: holy  
*shamana*: Buddhist place of worship

## Glossary

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**Shia:** general name for all those Muslims who regard Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, and his descendants as the only legitimate leaders of the Muslim community after Muhammad's death  
**shikar:** hunting  
**shuddhi:** 'purification', the re-conversion to Hinduism of those who have embraced other faiths  
**silsila:** sufi order  
**sipara:** chapter of the Quran  
**subah:** province of the Mughal Empire  
**subedar:** governor of a *subah*  
**sufi:** Islamic mystic  
**susi:** kind of cotton cloth produced in Sind, distinguished by its striped pattern which includes many colours  
**Sunni:** lit., 'one who follows the trodden path'; orthodox Muslim  
**swaraj:** self-government, self-rule  
**tahsil:** administrative sub-division of a district  
**taluqa:** administrative sub-division of a district  
**taluqadar:** a large landholder in Oudh  
**tapa:** administrative sub-division of a *taluqa*

**tauhid:** the doctrine of Divine Unity; in which God is perceived to be without qualities or attributes  
**tazkira:** biographical work recording the lives and works of Muslim holy men  
**than:** length of forty yards  
**thanadar:** officer in charge of a local police station  
**ulama:** Islamic theologians, jurists, religious teachers (sing. *alim*)  
**urs:** annual celebration of the death of a *sufi* saint and the occasion for a pilgrimage to his tomb  
**vakil:** representative, for example of an Indian ruler  
**vazir:** minister  
**wadero:** Sindhi term for big landowner  
**wah:** canal  
**wahdat al-wujud:** philosophy of the Unity of Being  
**zamindar:** lit., landholder; under British law, designated as a person recognised as possessing proprietary rights over land  
**zenana:** female quarters or those areas where they remain secluded from the gaze of men outside the family  
**ziarat:** visit to a tomb, sacred place or *pir* himself



# Introduction

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A major area of historical concern in recent years has been the investigation of how European powers established and maintained their colonial empires. As research has probed further, western rule itself has come to be portrayed in a new light. Interest has shifted from identifying metropolitan 'responsibility' for empire-building to specific local factors which 'encouraged' and 'sustained' colonial rule. While a combination of economic, military and technical factors is seen to have made empire possible, other factors are thought to have made it a working proposition. Theories of peripheral imperialism have appeared to challenge so-called 'Eurocentric' explanations: rather than regarding colonial expansion as primarily the outcome of processes within the various European states involved, they instead place the origins of and main impetus for formal imperialism in crises which occurred in the overseas territories themselves.

Robinson and Gallagher led the way in the late 1950s when they observed that theorists of imperialism had been looking for answers in the wrong places by scanning Europe for causes when it was in Africa that the crucial changes had taken place. Fieldhouse subsequently transformed this observation into a theory with his argument that full-blown colonial rule resulted from the need to fill the vacuum of power which followed the collapse of more-or-less informal methods of cooperation between native élites and Europeans. Robinson reinforced this trend by outlining a model of imperial control which, just as emphatic in its rejection of traditional Eurocentrism, stressed the importance of the relationships which colonial rules established with indigenous powerholders both before and after empire was made formal. By actively seeking out and winning over influential intermediaries, it was argued, colonial administrations constructed systems of

political control which rested in large part on the collaboration of powerful local interests.<sup>1</sup>

This 'peripheral' school of thought appears in some senses to be a defensive one. It can be interpreted as an attempt to absolve European states of ultimate responsibility for the building of empire. Equally it plays down the fact that much of the territory which came to comprise empire was conquered and controlled through the application of force.<sup>2</sup> All the same, meeting the challenge which it poses involves acknowledging the importance of the part played by local 'collaborators' in 'determining the objectives and timing of imperial annexation' as well as their subsequent rôle in the systems of control introduced by the colonial powers in order to rule their empires.<sup>3</sup> Collaborating groups together with systems of local cooperation based on the 'bargains' made with their European rulers can be traced across the entire span of the British empire, from the supposed 'cradle' of indirect rule in northern Nigeria, to Kenya and its neighbours on the opposite side of the African continent and further east in the massive example of modern colonialism at work in India.<sup>4</sup> Such relationships were not limited to British spheres of interest and the 'politics of collaboration' can be found operating in settings as far flung as French Morocco and the Philippines under United States control.<sup>5</sup>

The very word 'collaboration' is heavy with ambiguous and derogatory connotations which conjure up images of 'submission, defeat or resignation'.<sup>6</sup> Yet, while power lay ultimately in European hands, it was often in terms of 'an active policy of cooperation' and 'compromise' that local groups viewed participation in systems of colonial control. For, just as the theory of collaboration can be

<sup>1</sup> R. E. Robinson and J. A. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians* (London, 1959, 2nd edn., 1981); D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830-1914* (London, 1973); R. E. Robinson, 'Non-European Foundations of Imperialism', in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London, 1972), pp. 117-40.

<sup>2</sup> A. E. Atmore, 'The Extra-European Foundations of British Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Imperialism', in Owen and Sutcliffe, *Studies*, pp. 106-25.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang J. Mommsen, trans. P. S. Falla, *Theories of Imperialism* (London, 1981), p. 411.

<sup>4</sup> For non-Indian examples, see Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria* (London, 2nd edn., 1966), pp. 235-6; R. E. Robinson, 'European Imperialism and Indigenous Reactions in British West Africa, 1880-1914', in H. L. Wesseling (ed.), *Expansion and Reaction (Essays on European Expansion and Reaction in Asia and Africa)* (Leiden, 1978), pp. 141-63; John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, 'Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1885-1914', *Journal of African History*, 20 (1979), pp. 487-505; Edward Steinhart, *Conflict and Collaboration: The Kingdom of Western Uganda, 1890-1907* (Princeton, 1978); Robert C. Gregory, 'Cooperation and Collaboration in Colonial East Africa: The Asians' Political Role, 1890-1964', *Asian Affairs*, 80, no. 319 (April 1981), pp. 259-73; for examples drawn from the Indian subcontinent, see later.

<sup>5</sup> Robin Bidwell, *Morocco under Colonial Rule: French Administration of Tribal Areas, 1912-56* (London, 1973); Robin W. Winks, 'A System of Commands: The Infrastructure of Race Contact' in Gordon Martel (ed.), *Studies in British Imperial History: Essays in honour of A. P. Thornton* (London, 1986), pp. 8-48.

<sup>6</sup> Steinhart, *Conflict*, p. vii.

Eurocentric if European political and economic processes are projected in a haphazard fashion on to extra-European societies, similar dangers exist if the social, economic and political positions of collaborators are not taken into account when analysing their responses: collaborators were often 'groups of people who muddled and lurched from one compromise to another in relation with the legions of imperialism' while 'the imperialists [too] had to dodge from one compromise to another when they were not using brute force'.<sup>7</sup>

Understanding why collaboration came to be seen as a relatively attractive option can shed valuable light on the responses of certain groups whose reasons for reacting in this way appeared, at least initially, to run counter to their position in local society. Indigenous religious leaders, for instance, represented one potentially valuable source of collaboration for colonial powers wherever empire was established; their long-held rôle as intermediaries between powerful outside forces, earthly or unearthly, and ordinary men and women offered colonial authorities a potent means of securing control over large sections of the population. But like other possible 'allies', religious leaders had to weigh up the balance of advantages and disadvantages to be gained from entering into such a relationship. To Muslim religious leaders in particular, the balance at first must have appeared weighted very much against collaboration. European colonialism represented infidel rule, threatening the Muslim way of life and their own position in society. Yet, paradoxically, a significant number of them came to support European governments which could claim no direct Islamic legitimacy and which introduced changes that seemed to make their existing functions increasingly irrelevant. In supporting the state, these Muslim religious leaders were but continuing a tradition of respect for rightly constituted authority which had been their hallmark from the earliest days of Islam, even though it often meant conflict between the earthly ends of monarchs and the Godly ends of faith. In supporting the vigorously 'modernising' colonial state, of course, the potential for such conflict was much greater.

Colonial rulers also experienced conflicting feelings when it came to their policies towards their new Muslim subjects. The French, for example, sought a 'controlled', 'malleable', 'pliable' Islam which 'they could twist and bend to serve their purposes' and, hence, Muslims were sometimes given special privileges. But, at the first 'hint of opposition', they dealt forcefully with the offenders, harassing, imprisoning and even deporting them. In French-controlled Morocco, indirect rule meant 'a coalition of interests' with the local aristocracy, tribal and religious leaders headed by the Sultan who commanded spiritual as well as temporal respect. The British pursued a similarly pragmatic policy designed to secure the maximum cooperation from Muslims in the task of administering large territories where European personnel and financial resources were inadequate.

<sup>7</sup> Atmore, 'Extra-European Foundations', pp. 123, 125.

But, like their French counterparts, they viewed Muslims, and more specifically Muslim religious leaders, as likely opponents to colonial rule. Hence, a sense of suspicion, periodically reinforced by outbursts of opposition, dogged relations between colonial administrators and sections of the Muslim hierarchy which had linked their interests to the new imperial status quo.<sup>8</sup>

The description 'Muslim religious leader' requires further clarification. In western contemporary minds, Islam has come to be identified with the ayatollahs of Iran, *burqa*-clad women, and row upon row of Muslim men praying in unison in the mosque: that is, with a strong emphasis on the *Sharia*, or holy law, as interpreted by the *ulama* or Muslim 'clerics'. But Islam encompasses another tradition which, although less prominent today than in the past, still exerts a strong hold over many Muslims. This is the tradition of the sufi saint as mediator between God and Man, his shrine as the focus of religious activity and a strong emphasis on the development of spiritual understanding. Rigid distinctions have been drawn between *ulama* and sufis. They have been portrayed as antithetical, irreconcilable representatives of the same truth and consequently very different from the point of view of their relationships with governments of the day. As guardians of the *Sharia*, *ulama* were officially appointed as *muftis* and *qazis* to interpret and administer God's Law. They often came to rely on the state for their livelihood in the form of stipends and grants; they tended to become involved in worldly interests, which could lead them both to be distracted from essentially spiritual matters and to identify with the concerns of rulers rather than those of ordinary Muslims. Sufis, on the other hand, sought to gain knowledge of God in their hearts. By following the path, which meant observing various techniques of spiritual development, they aimed to obliterate self in unison with God. Because they placed greater emphasis on spiritual growth rather than on the letter of God's law, they were often able to reach out to people of other faiths, indeed to draw them towards Islam. For these reasons, and because they depended on the offerings of the pious rather than the gifts of kings, they often tended to stand aloof from state power and its representatives.<sup>9</sup>

These distinctions between *ulama* and sufis, however, have not always remained as clear cut either in doctrinal terms or in terms of their relations with secular authority as their popular images suggest. From as early as the ninth century AD, attempts were made to integrate orthodox Islam and sufism. They reached their apogee in the work of al-Ghazzali (d. AD 1111) who succeeded in reconciling the two forms of religious understanding by showing that the intellectual rationalism of the *ulama* and the intuitive knowledge of the sufis need not be in conflict. From then onwards, the rôles of guardian of the law and

<sup>8</sup> Peter B. Clarke, *West Africa and Islam: A Study of Religious Developments from the 8th to the 20th Century* (London, 1982), pp. 189–93; Bidwell, *Morocco*, pp. 9, 16–20.

<sup>9</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago, 2nd edn., 1979), pp. 128–32, 150–2; Aziz Ahmad, 'The Sufi and the Sultan in Pre-Mughal Muslim India', *Der Islam*, 38 (1963), 142–53.



cherisher of souls could be united, albeit usually in varying proportions within the same individual.<sup>10</sup>

The Indian subcontinent provides a good context for studying the relationships between different kinds of Muslim religious leader and state power, indigenous as well as European, for 'one of the most persistent problems' of the Indian Islamic tradition has been 'the definition of the proper relationship between religious and political authority'.<sup>11</sup> Thus, while the majority of Indian *ulama* enjoyed a tradition of collaborating with local, often Muslim, rulers, supporting and propping up the fortunes of the ruling powers, a significant minority never sought help or recognition from the state. Similarly, while certain sufis maintained a strict separation from the affairs of state, others became famous for the good relations which they established with governments of the day. Members of the Suhrawardi *silsila*, for instance, mingled enthusiastically with Muslim rules and accumulated great wealth and landed interests in the process. The traditions of the sufi and the *alim* were drawn even closer together by the emergence of the Naqshbandi *silsila* in the seventeenth century and during the Chishti revival of the eighteenth century. Increases in the number of multiple initiations also meant that differences between the various sufi orders became far less distinct, including differences in attitudes towards their involvement with holders of state power. More generally, the institutionalisation of the *dargah* led to the emergence of powerful sufi families whose landed interests often led them to support the established order. As Richard Eaton's *Sufis of Bijapur 1300–1700: Social roles of Sufism in Medieval India* (Princeton, 1978) shows, sufis could develop a variety of rôles, quite different from the limited rôle too often ascribed to them as religious ascetics with few if any worldly cares.

Muslim rulers in India resolved problems of stability by drawing on the support of local notables. The British, their Indian empire expanding and faced with the dilemma of how to control their newly acquired territories with limited manpower resources, likewise turned to local powerholders, including members of Indian Islam's religious élite. Under these circumstances, those who were prepared to cooperate found their position in society bolstered by the authorities. Consequently, mutually advantageous relationships developed between powerful indigenous groups and the British, as illustrated, for instance, in T. R. Metcalf's *Land, Landlords and the British Raj: Northern India in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1979) which examines the nature of such a relationship in the context of the *talukadars* of Awadh. Other studies, such as J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal* (Berkeley, 1968), E. Leach and S. N. Mukherjee, *Elites in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1968), Anil

<sup>10</sup> Rahman, *Islam*, p. 140.

<sup>11</sup> David Gilmartin, 'Shrines, Succession and Sources of Moral Authority', in Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley, 1984), p. 221.

Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1971), Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1973) and C. A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880–1920* (Oxford, 1975) explore some of the political repercussions of this colonial policy of control.

Some investigations in the Indian setting have looked specifically at the responses of local Muslim powerholders to British rule, most notably P. Hardy's *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, 1972), Francis Robinson's *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Province's Muslims 1860–1923* (Cambridge, 1974) and David Lelyveld's *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (New Jersey, 1978). But none of these has taken the reactions of Muslim religious élites as the principal subject of its investigations. The resulting imbalance has been corrected to some extent by more recent examinations of the ways in which such leaders responded to the introduction of the modern state so threatening to the foundations of their status and power. Barbara Metcalf has analysed the way in which sections of the *ulama* at Deoband coped with the imposition of British rule. Likewise, Farhan Nizami, concentrating on Delhi and the Upper Doab, has examined the attitudes of its Muslim religious leaders and institutions towards the British presence in the first half of the nineteenth century, while Francis Robinson has looked at the reactions of *ulama* and sufis in a comparative article dealing with North India and Indonesia.<sup>12</sup> Little work has been done on understanding the relationship between religious élites and the British in those regions of the subcontinent where sufis rather than *ulama* had established themselves as the main source of religious leadership for local Muslims. Only in David Gilmartin's *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley, 1988) has the relationship between the British and leading sufi shrines been systematically analysed, while Ian Talbot in *Punjab and the Raj, 1849–1947* (New Delhi, 1988) has concentrated on the political activities of these Panjabi religious élites largely during the later stages of colonial rule in the context of the decline of the Unionist Party and the rise of the Muslim League. But the Panjab was of central importance to the administration of British India because of its economic and military resources and its strategic position. So, although these researches form a valuable addition to our knowledge on the subject, a considerable gap still remains concerning our knowledge of the relationship between the colonial state and Muslim religious élites in regions further away from the centre of British power.

Sind, lying on the western fringes of the Indian subcontinent and nowadays a

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton, 1982); Farhan Ahmad Nizami, 'Madrasahs, Scholars and Saints: Muslim Responses to the British Presence in Delhi and the Upper Doab 1803–1857' (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1983); Francis Robinson, 'Ulama, Sufis and Colonial Rule in North India and Indonesia', in C. A. Bayly and D. H. A. Kolff (eds.), *Two Colonial Empires* (Dordrecht, 1986), pp. 9–34.

province in Pakistan, represents just one such region. Strategically important from an all-Indian perspective, it was administered nevertheless as an outpost of Bombay Presidency for most of the duration of the British *raj*. Under these circumstances, the maintenance of British control over the region would have been very difficult without the active cooperation of local Sindhi élites, the province's tribal *sardars* and great landholders or *waderos* who owned some of the largest estates in British India. Overwhelmingly Muslim in religious belief, Sind also possessed a very well-established sufi élite in the form of landed *sajjada nashin* or *pir* families. Not perhaps as wealthy in terms of land as their non-spiritual counterparts, these families nevertheless exerted such great religious influence over Sindhis, high and low, that the British could not afford to ignore their combined spiritual and temporal power. Thus, *pirs*, like *sardars* and *waderos*, became intermediaries for British rule and did very well for themselves in the process.

The history of Sind has attracted very little attention outside the region itself: it has generally been perceived by historians as 'marginal' in relation to the rest of the Indian subcontinent. Apart from the works of former administrators-turned-scholars such as Sorley and Lambrick,<sup>13</sup> there have been only a handful of studies on the region made in English. Among the more important are R. A. Huttenback, *British Relations with Sind: 1799–1843* (Berkeley, 1962); Hamida Khuhro, *The Making of Modern Sind: British Policy and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century* (Karachi, 1978); David Cheesman, 'Rural Power in Sind' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1980); and Allen Jones, 'Muslim Politics and the Growth of the Muslim League in Sind 1935–1941' (PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1977). Annemarie Schimmel has tackled the subject of sufism in Sind but mostly from a literary and philosophical angle, focusing on the pre-British period.<sup>14</sup> So, despite some work on the position of *waderos* and other holders of rural power under British rule, there has been as yet no proper exploration of the relationship between the British and the local religious élite of the region – the *pirs* of Sind.

This work, therefore, seeks to fill these gaps as well as to offer some thoughts on the wider question of various kinds of Muslim response to colonial rule. It sets out to examine the British system of political control in relation to the institution of the hereditary sufi saint within the framework of Sind under British rule from 1843 until 1947. Chapter 1 looks at why sufism as opposed to more 'orthodox' forms of Muslim practice came to dominate Sind. The connection between the rise to predominance of sufi saints and the tribal nature of Sindhi society is

<sup>13</sup> H. T. Sorley, *Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit: His Poetry, Life and Times* (repr. Karachi, 1966); H. T. Lambrick, *Sir Charles Napier and Sind* (Oxford, 1952), *Sind: A General Introduction* (Hyderabad, Sind, 1964), *Sind Before the Muslim Conquest* (Hyderabad, 1973), and *The Terrorist* (London, 1972).

<sup>14</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Pain and Grace: A Study of Two Mystical Writers of Eighteenth-Century Muslim India* (Leiden, 1976) and 'Shah Inayat of Jhok: A Sindhi mystic of the Early Eighteenth Century', in *Studies in Honour of Prof. C. J. Bleeker* (Leiden, 1969).

discussed; while the consolidation of their influence is linked to the gradual expansion of the agriculture which took place as irrigation became more efficient. The physical and political distance of Sind from centres which wielded state power, meant that *pir* families came to control social and economic resources to an extent not possible in more centralised regions. As a result, rulers looked to them for cooperation.

With the arrival of the British in 1843, Sind again came under the control of a distant state power. *Pirs* were faced with the problem of coping with the change of administration and its impact on their overall position in Sindhi society, while the British had to work out ways in which to deal with this influential religious élite in order not to alienate their valuable support. Chapter 2, therefore, discusses the foundations on which relations between the *pirs* and the British were based: it looks at the British system of political control based on patronage and the public distribution of honour, and analyses the *pirs*' often 'enthusiastic' participation within it.

The following two chapters take up the question of the precarious balancing act on which the British system of control depended. They examine two crises during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which reveal with great precision the inner workings of the system of control: in both cases, they demonstrate how *pirs* were pushed to a large extent from underneath into taking a stand against the British. Chapter 3 investigates the first crisis which consisted of conflict between an individual *pir* and the authorities during the 1890s while chapter 4 takes up the second crisis which involved a larger number of *pirs* in an all-India protest against British policy. Their involvement in the Khilafat movement between 1919 and 1924 represented the first real collective challenge issued to British rule by Sind's religious leadership. Both chapters illustrate the way in which the system of control helped the British to retain ultimate authority over the countryside.

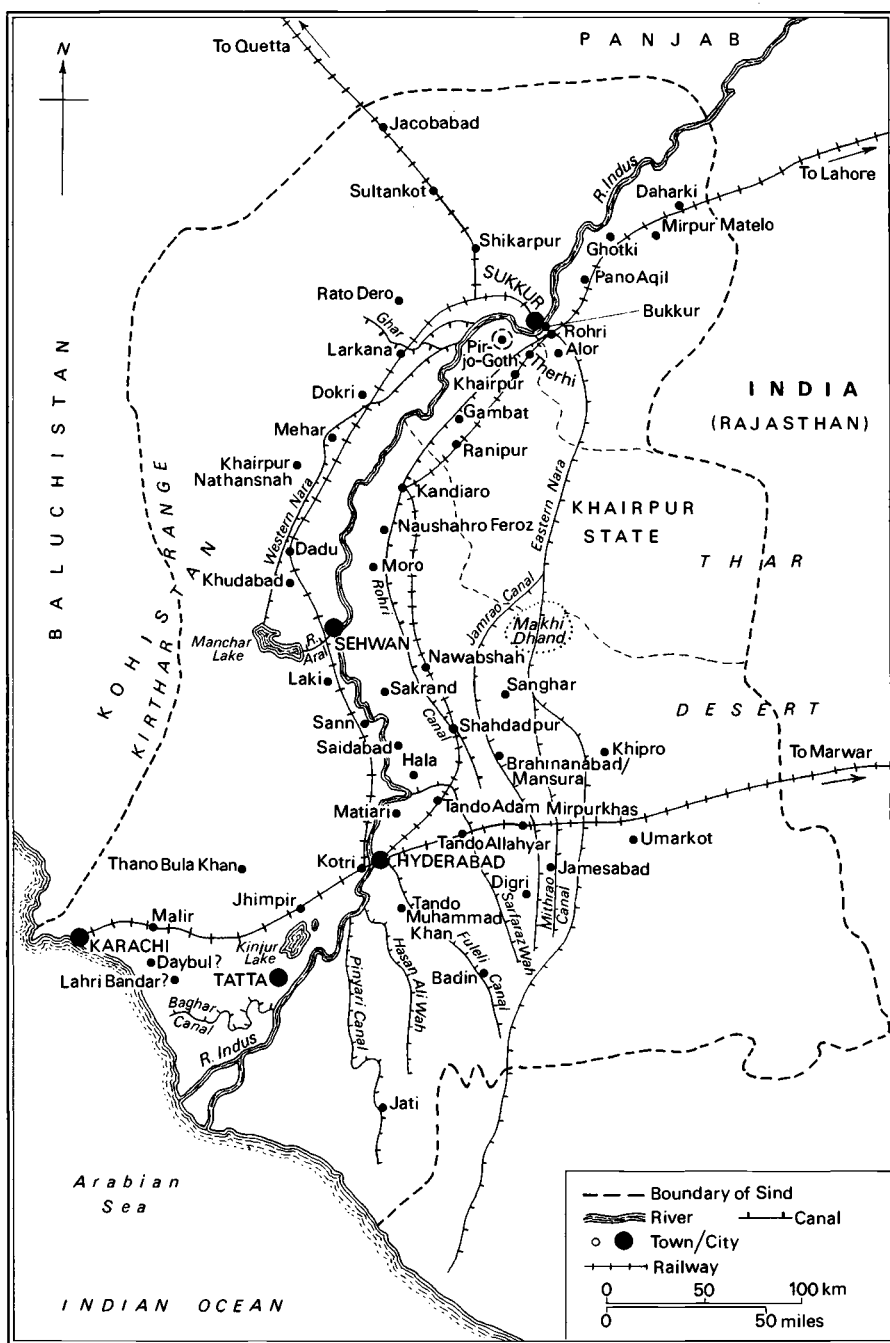
Chapter 5 considers the general flexibility of the institution of the *pir* as reflected in the way in which it was able to adapt quickly as new political arenas developed. It highlights the extent to which *pirs* remained motivated by parochial concerns, even though, as independence grew nearer, it was their influence which proved decisive in helping to swing the support of the province's Muslims behind the Muslim League's Pakistan demand. Chapter 6 addresses what happened when relations between an individual *pir* and the British broke down altogether in the 1940s and law and order was seriously threatened. On this occasion, the authorities could not rely on the *pir* to cooperate as he was largely responsible for instigating the trouble in the first place, and so, in the final instance, the British fell back on the use of force in order to restore the balance of interests so essential to their system of controlling Sind. Finally, the epilogue continues the story into the post-independence period by looking at policies of the new Pakistani state towards the institution of the *pir* and the extent to which they have affected the position of *pirs* in the Sindhi countryside.

## Sind and its *pirs* up to 1843

*Of what use are Saints? Dead perhaps they are not of much avail, but Saints in the East are living as well as dead, and those who are still incorporate, are of use.*<sup>1</sup>

Islam in Sind has long been popularised and sustained by the sufi saints or *pirs* who fill the province's history and whose shrines still dominate the Sindhi countryside. These religious personalities have acted as 'hinges' or 'mediators' between God and Man. Supreme and sublime, they have presented models of perfect behaviour to successive generations of ordinary Sindhis. To an overwhelmingly unlettered following, they came to symbolise what it meant in practice to be a Muslim. As a direct consequence of their influence and the popular loyalty which they inspired, these religious leaders also became 'mediators' between the rulers and the ruled. Kings and governors drew on their cooperation, and, in return, the position of *pirs* in Sindhi society was strengthened through the economic and political repercussions of official patronage. By the time of the British arrival in Sind in the middle of the nineteenth century, *pirs* formed a very substantial section of the local élite with whom the new rulers negotiated their system of imperial control and *sajjada nashin* families belonging to the province's leading shrines came to occupy a privileged position under British rule. To a great extent, the religious and political infrastructure created over preceding centuries provided the foundations on which the relationship between the British and the *pirs* of Sind later rested: in many ways this relationship was a direct continuation of a state of affairs which had existed in Sind for hundreds of years.

<sup>1</sup> E. B. Eastwick, *A Glance at Sind before Napier or Dry Leaves from Young Egypt* (repr. Karachi, 1973), p. 128.



Map 1 General map of Sind

### **Sind – the land and its people**

Sind, from the point of view of the rest of the Indian subcontinent, has always been a fairly 'marginal' area. It is also a region of important internal contrasts. Geographically, Sind is located on the western edge of the Indian subcontinent between 23° and 29° north and 67° and 71° east. It forms a transitional or 'buffer' zone between the great riverain tracts and deserts of northern India and the mountainous regions further west. The basin watered by the lower Indus, it is divided longitudinally into three distinctive physical regions which run virtually the entire length of the province: the broad valley of the Indus is bordered in the east by the Thar Desert and in the west by the mountainous Kohistan which eventually turns into Baluchistan.

Climatically, Sind is a land of extreme temperatures and little rainfall. It is barely affected by the annual south-west monsoon which brings little rain due to the insufficient height of the local Kirthar mountain range. As a result, the river valley, made extremely fertile by countless layers of alluvial loam, has always depended very greatly on the annual inundation of the Indus for irrigation. In contrast, both the desert and the mountains have had to rely on occasional rainfall of short duration or artesian wells and springs to supply their demand for water. Here pastoralism in the shape of tending large numbers of cattle, camels, sheep, goats and horses remained the predominant occupation and herdsmen supplemented their livelihood by also producing milk, *ghi* and hides.<sup>2</sup>

It was not until the waters of the Indus started to be harnessed in a relatively organised way through the exploitation of natural irrigation channels and the creation of new ones that even the inhabitants of the valley itself shifted from nomadic pastoralism to more settled agricultural occupations. The history of the thousand years leading up to the British annexation in 1843 was marked by the gradual transformation of Sind from an overwhelmingly nomadic pastoral society into one which remained rural but whose inhabitants followed an increasingly settled agrarian lifestyle as irrigation released more land for cultivation.<sup>3</sup> The use of a range of different criteria to define the nature of a 'tribe' has resulted in a popular misconception that tribesmen are essentially if not always pastoral nomads.<sup>4</sup> But tribes, as demonstrated in Sind, have often been made up of settled cultivators. While Sind remained by and large a tribal society, the nature of what it meant to be a member of a tribe altered in response to the process of sedentarisation. Just as the passing centuries saw the inhabitants of Sind gradually take up the plough, the same years witnessed a slow but steady loosening of tribal ties. This was combined with a steady stream of new arrivals who needed to be integrated into the evolving life of the region. Sind repeatedly acted as a kind of

<sup>2</sup> H. T. Lambrick, *Sind: A General Introduction* (Hyderabad, Sind, 2nd edn., 1975), pp. 12, 48.

<sup>3</sup> A. Z. Khan, *History and Culture of Sind* (Karachi, 1980), pp. 145–6, 154.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Tapper (ed.), *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (London, 1983), p. 6.

‘melting pot’ into which wave after wave of Baluchi mountain tribesmen as well as nomads from the eastern desert were drawn and incorporated. Initially attracted by the prospects of plunder or equally the need to escape from famine and drought, many of these tribes settled permanently in the valley. Their arrival intensified the process of settling taking place along the banks of the Indus forcing old loyalties to adjust and adapt in the face of the new pressures and demands of settled life.

The predominantly rural character of Sind did not prevent the establishment of important pockets of urban development which grew up as administrative centres closely linked to trade. The River Indus led the outside world deep into the heartland of northern India and central Asia. Astride its lower reaches, Sind was automatically drawn into wider networks of communication and trade. Daybul near the mouth of the Indus was once one of the most important ports on the Indian Ocean. After the eleventh century, it declined as silt obstructed the arm of the Indus on which it stood, but others, such as Lahri Bandar and much later Karachi, grew up to take its place. The importance of the Indus as a major channel of commerce through Sind, in turn, encouraged towns and cities to establish themselves along the river. This connection was clearly illustrated in the way in which changes in the course of the Indus triggered the foundation and abandonment of towns; places vanished once the river took away their ‘life blood’ and great cities, such as Mansura and nearby Brahmanabad, Alor and Khudabad, were reduced to insignificant ruins. Lines of communication in Sind also ran from east to west, linking the subcontinent with western Asia through the Bolan, Mula and Lak Phusu passes which led from Sind into Baluchistan and beyond. Well-trodden caravan routes also crossed the Thar desert to destinations in the Rajputana States and the coastal regions of Kacch, Kathiawar and Gujarat, and towns developed along them acting as entrepôt centres as well as ‘refuelling stations’ for traders.<sup>5</sup>

All the same, the ranges of Kohistan together with the eastern desert proved effective barriers, and Sind was relatively isolated from events taking place elsewhere in northern India. This isolation was reflected in the way in which Sind was never fully drawn into the wider political framework of northern India during the period of the Delhi Sultanates or the Mughals. Sind was ruled either by local tribes such as the Sumros and the Sammas who continually jostled with each other for local supremacy or by the semi-independent representatives of governments whose centres of power lay far away. To Kabul and Delhi, Sind was a distant frontier province. The preservation of ‘stability’ along its borders remained their main concern, and so they delegated authority to local holders of power in order to achieve their aim. This pattern of political control remained

<sup>5</sup> A. W. Hughes, *A Gazetteer of the Province of Sind* (Karachi, 1876), p. 85.



virtually unchanged right up to the time of the British arrival: the Talpur Mirs, who ruled Sind at the time of the British conquest in 1843, were nominally under the suzerainty of the Afghan kings, but in practice they, like their eighteenth-century Kalhora predecessors, ruled as 'independent' chiefs.

Sind's relative isolation was important from the religious point of view. As a 'marginal' region located away from the main centres of orthodox Hinduism, and influenced only indirectly by strongly centralised Muslim states, Sind developed its own quite distinctive religious character. Before the advent of Islam, religion in Sind was dominated by a mixture of Buddhism and Hinduism. Combined with the fact that the bulk of Muslim conversions were eventually performed by sufis, this meant that popular Islamic practice in Sind came to display strongly mystical and syncretic trends. While the province became predominantly Muslim, Hindus and Muslims continued to share much of the same cultural framework and many of their religious practices overlapped.

By the nineteenth century, Sindhi Muslims outnumbered Hindus by three to one. With the exception of local Ismaili and Memon groups, Hindus made up the bulk of the trading and commercial community. Most Muslims lived in the rural areas, earned their livelihood from the land and were largely illiterate. Although many *saiyid* families lived in towns, it was the countryside which provided the basis of the power of Sind's religious élite. *Pirs* belonging to important shrines wielded enormous influence over the religious lives of the inhabitants of the province. They also possessed substantial material power in terms of landholdings and political influence. Just as no man would dream of being seen bare-headed, virtually every Sindhi Muslim had his or her *murshid*. To be *be-pir*, without a *pir*, was almost unthinkable and was equated with being a *kafir* or non-believer. Thus it was the *pir* and the *dargah*, rather than the *alim* and the mosque, that provided the main transmission belt along which Islam reached the people of the region. This process of conversion made such a deep impact that intense devotion for sufi saints and their lines of descendants became the hallmark of religious practice in this land.

### **Muslims arrive in Sind: the first five hundred years**

Islamisation in Sind was not achieved 'overnight'. Rather it took place over a period spanning a thousand years. It was a lengthy process of attrition, of continuing interaction between the carriers of Islam and the local Sindhi environment. Pre-existing religious beliefs and the changing social and economic structure of Sindhi society combined to influence the way in which Islam was adopted. The early years during which Sind started on the path towards becoming a predominantly Muslim province can be divided into two main phases: the period of Arab control, at its height between the eighth and tenth centuries, during

which the main carriers of Islam were orthodox Sunnis; and the campaigns of Ismaili missionaries from the tenth to fourteenth centuries.

Arab control followed the conquest of Sind by Muhammad bin Qasim during 711–12. It signified the beginning of a period of uninterrupted Muslim rule in Sind, lasting over 1,100 years, which no other part of the Indian subcontinent experienced to the same degree. Sind's Arab rulers do not seem to have been 'fanatical missionaries', interested in securing mass conversions to Islam. Instead, their conquest of the region was motivated largely by economic reasons.<sup>6</sup> Sind had proved attractive on account of the richness of its lands and the base which it provided on the Indian Ocean. It was the first port of call for vessels heading eastwards out of the Persian Gulf and Arab merchants keen to take on board 'valuable goods supplied from the prosperous province of Sind' would often stop at the great commercial port of Daybul.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Arab occupation took the form of garrison towns dependent on the cooperation of local élites. It would have been virtually impossible for such a small minority of Muslims to have imposed new religious and social patterns upon a country of a very different culture. Sind's new rulers devised a compromise by which the local population of Buddhists and Hindus were regarded as equal to the *ahl-i kitab* (or 'People of the Book') and expected to pay *jizya* like Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians in other Muslim-controlled countries. Non-Muslims were allowed to practise their own religions unmolested; there was no interference in the jurisdiction of their personal laws; and as *dhimmis* local women could marry Muslims without needing first to convert to Islam.<sup>8</sup>

The Arab conquest proved a turning-point in the history of Sind's long-term religious development. The same commercial considerations which prompted conquest in the first place meant that the province was increasingly opened up to Muslim traders who bridged the gap between the islands of administration and the surrounding sea of countryside. While a handful of local chiefs converted to Islam in order to preserve their political power, many conversions which took place during this early period were the result of contact between local people and Muslim men of commerce who travelled the length and breadth of the Indus valley in pursuit of their business interests. Trade brought with it 'access to knowledge about Islam'. As in other parts of the expanding Muslim world, it established networks of communication along which new religious beliefs travelled. Its presence helped to attract 'professional men of religion', the active

<sup>6</sup> John Jehangir Bede, 'The Arabs in Sind, 712–1026 A.D.' (PhD dissertation, University of Utah, 1973), p. viii.

<sup>7</sup> K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 49–50.

<sup>8</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent* (Leiden, 1980), pp. 4, 5; Bede, *The Arabs*, p. 150.

agents in the process of Islamisation, to the province.<sup>9</sup> Muslim rule, together with increased trading links between Sind and other centres of the Muslim world, attracted significant numbers of religious and legal experts. Many were *saiyids* who claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad himself. They settled along the banks of the Indus, often married locally and produced the 'stock' from which many indigenous sufis later emerged. Towns such as Bukkur, Rohri, Matiari and Tatta became famous on account of the high concentration of *saiyids* who lived in them.<sup>10</sup>

It was during the Arab period that signs of religious syncretism emerged. Sind, before the arrival of the first Muslims, lay on the edge of the 'great' cultural and religious tradition of northern India. The beliefs of its population comprised a mixture drawn from Buddhism and Hinduism. There was no distinct caste structure. Sind's tribes considered themselves independent, free of 'masters', and paid their allegiance to Buddhist *shamanas*.<sup>11</sup> Under Muslim rule, this heritage remained strong. The distance which separated Sind from the centre of the new Islamic religious and cultural framework meant that the province remained, in religious terms, a 'marginal' region. Instead of destroying the famous Temple of the Sun in Multan, an important centre of Siva worship, the Arabs founded a mosque nearby. Indigenous local beliefs and traditions were gradually absorbed into local Muslim practice and an atmosphere developed which encouraged an overlapping of religions in the popular mind. Khwaja Khizr, the patron saint of waterways and travellers, for instance, was integrated into more than one religious frame of reference. As Ilyas, he belonged to wider Islamic traditions. More locally, he was a member of the Panj Pir, a group of five Muslim saints widely respected throughout the riverain plains of Northern India. In Sind, he was known as the Zinda, or ever-living, Pir, and a shrine was established in his honour on the island of Bukkur near the city of Rohri in Upper Sind. The saint was also revered by Hindus, for his association with water linked him to local Hindu worship of the River Indus itself. The annual migration of *palla* fish upstream only as far as Bukkur was widely interpreted as the performance of

<sup>9</sup> Nehemia Levtzion, 'Towards a Comparative Study of Islamisation', in Nehemia Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam* (New York, 1979), pp. 15–16; in an earlier work, in which Levtzion explores the impact of trade patterns on the process of conversion to Islam in West Africa, he describes the first stage of Islamisation when Islam was confined to foreign immigrants as 'the dispersion of Muslims' rather than 'the spread of Islam'. This was followed by a second stage which began with the building up of communications between 'hospitable chiefs and their Muslim guests', see *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa: A Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-Colonial Period* (Oxford, 1968), p. xxv.

<sup>10</sup> Aijaz al-Haq Quddusi, *Tazkira-i Sufia-i Sind* (2nd edn., Karachi, 1975), pp. 109, 112.

<sup>11</sup> The eighth-century Sindhi chronicle, the *Chachnama*, noted an absence of social hierarchy among these Jat groups, see Irfan Habib, 'Jatts of Punjab and Sind', in A. Singh and N. G. Barrier (eds.), *Punjab Past and Present: Essays in Honour of Dr Ganda Singh* (Patiala, 1976), pp. 94–5.

*ziarat* at his shrine. Thus he possessed both a Muslim and a Hindu identity but distinctions between the two were often blurred in his person.<sup>12</sup>

The early stages of the lengthy process of Sind's conversion followed the Arab conquest of the province. The first real breakthrough in terms of numbers, however, was carried out by Ismaili missionaries who started to arrive during the tenth century and dominated religious developments in Sind for the next 300 years. Like their more 'orthodox' Muslim predecessors, their arrival was not initially motivated by religious considerations alone. It formed part of a wider contest between the Abbasids and the Fatimids for supremacy within the Muslim world. To deprive their rivals of lucrative trade, and simultaneously to gain their own foothold on the Indian coast, the Fatimids despatched Ismaili missionaries with the task of undermining Abbasid influence.<sup>13</sup> By the tenth century, Arab rule in Sind had devolved into the hands of local ruling families who had obtained a high degree of independence. Ismailis were able to consolidate control over the north of the province by winning its Sumra rulers to the Ismaili cause, and by 1025 Ismaili political control extended to the southern city of Mansura.

Ismaili missionary work can be considered 'one of the most subtle and effective means of politico-religious propaganda' ever experienced by the world of Islam.<sup>14</sup> Its most penetrating tool was the *dai* or missionary himself. As the accredited agent of the Imam, he was commissioned to teach and to accept oaths of allegiance.<sup>15</sup> The Ismailis did not use force to win converts. Instead they adopted a policy of constructing links between faiths. Conversion consisted of a 'journey' along which remnants of former religious beliefs were slowly jettisoned. At first, there had been an Ismaili attempt to destroy the Sun Temple at Multan, but intolerance was soon replaced by tactics which involved assimilating local religious beliefs. The tendency of the Ismailis to allow and even encourage syncretism strengthened further. With the loss of political power after Mahmud of Ghazni's final victory in 1025 and the resulting persecution at the hands of the new authorities, the Ismailis increasingly fell back on the use of *taqiya* (the practice of precautionary dissimulation of one's faith). Accordingly, Ismaili missionaries began systematically to devise the art of conveying doctrine in

<sup>12</sup> Schimmel, *Islam*, p. 5; H. T. Sorley, *Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit: His Poetry, Life and Times* (Karachi, repr. 1966), pp. 168–9; J. Abbott, *Sind: a Reinterpretation of the Unhappy Valley* (London, 1924), pp. 101–2.

<sup>13</sup> Sind held various attractions in terms of Fatimid plans for expanding their influence: its geographical position in relation to the operational *dawa* centre of the time in Yeman combined with the relative independence and remoteness of Sind from Abbasid control; and the fact that Indian trade was becoming the 'backbone' of the Muslim world's international economy, see B. Lewis, 'The Fatimids and the Route to India', *Revue de la Faculté des Sciences Economiques de l'Université d'Istanbul*, 14 (1953), pp. 50–4, and Abbas Hamdani, 'The Fatimid–Abbasid Conflict in India', *Islamic Culture*, 41 (1967), pp. 185–91.

<sup>14</sup> P. K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (New York, 1970), p. 443.

<sup>15</sup> W. Ivanow, 'The Organisation of Fatimid Propaganda', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 15 (1939), p. 6.

symbolic terms so as to camouflage it within the heterogeneous fabric of Indian Muslim society. By not being able to win converts as openly as it would have preferred, the *dawa* or Ismaili missionary organisation responded with a reformulation of doctrine in which its ideals acclimatised themselves to the local environment and so appealed very directly to indigenous converts. Then, from the thirteenth century onwards, Ismailis in Sind moved steadily closer to Hindu ideas in order to avoid being submerged under an oncoming tide of sufis. This reaction reached its climax in the person of Pir Sadruddin who is credited with the conversion of members of the Sindhi Lohana tribe (known afterwards as Khojas) during the first half of the fifteenth century. The *pir* is supposed to have been the author of a literary work known as the *Das Avatar* which correlated Islamic and Hindu religious personalities. In it the Prophet Muhammad was identified with Brahma, Ali with the tenth incarnation of Vishnu, Adam with Shiva and Pir Sadruddin himself with Balram.<sup>16</sup>

By the sixteenth century, Ismailism had begun to die as an expanding movement in Sind. Pir Sadruddin's own descendants, for instance, migrated to Gujarat. It was the work of the sufis which was largely responsible for the Ismailis' losing ground and moving eastwards. But the connections between these two groups of 'missionaries' were closer than this apparent 'usurpation' would suggest. The *ginans* or mystical writings of the Ismailis display considerable parallelism of thought with sufism as well as with the Hindu *bhakti* tradition, sharing markedly similar themes and motifs. This did not necessarily imply direct borrowing but served to emphasise the interaction which was taking place at various levels of society at the time. Moreover, many of the *dai* were continuing a trend developed by Nizari Ismaili Imams in Iran during the later Safavid period of cautiously expressing their ideas within a sufic framework, and so entered the subcontinent already carrying within their repertoire a strain of mysticism rooted in Ismailism but tinged with the sufi terminology of the time.<sup>17</sup> Also important in relation to bridging the gap was the legacy of love and respect for the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad left by the Ismailis. The emotional esteem which Ismaili missionaries generated for the institution of the saintly individual may go some way towards explaining the subsequent intensity of devotion for sufi saints in Sind.

### **Sufis re-draw the religious map of Sind**

When Hallaj travelled through Sind at the beginning of the tenth century, the region was already well known for its scholarship. The early Muslim world owed a debt to Sindhi men of science who relayed westwards to its heartland their

<sup>16</sup> Khan, *History*, pp. 274–5.

<sup>17</sup> Azim Nanji, *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (New York, 1978), pp. 126, 134.



*Map 2 Location of important Suhrawardi shrines*

knowledge of Indian mathematics and astrology. It was not until after the twelfth century, however, that Sind acquired a reputation for its mystical leanings. Sufism as a distinct philosophical tradition can boast a history almost as old as that of Islam itself. An important watershed in this history took place during the twelfth century when much of sufism's early 'spontaneous' individuality was shed in favour of a more institutionalised form of organisation, the sufi order or *silsila*.<sup>18</sup> The arrival of the early sufis in Sind coincided with the transformation of sufism into an organised popular movement with the institutional mechanisms required for the creation of strong sufi networks.

The first sufis to challenge the Ismaili hold over Sind were members of the Suhrawardi *silsila*. Unlike their Chishti counterparts in other parts of India, Suhrawardis acquired a reputation for maintaining good relations with local rulers which often helped them to accumulate great material wealth and power.<sup>19</sup> The order was formally introduced by Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya (died 1266) who established a thriving Suhrawardi centre in his native Multan which lay just to the north of present-day Sind. The subsequent transformation of nearby Uch into a second important centre under Makhdum Jahaniyan (died 1383) reinforced the local strength of the *silsila*. Suhrawardi saints spread out all over Sind. Shaikh Nuh, buried at Bukkur, was one of the earliest to arrive.<sup>20</sup> Saiyid Usman Shah Marwandi, better known as Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (died *circa* 1274) settled in the ancient city of Sehwan. It cannot be proved that he received his *khilafat* directly from Bahauddin at Multan but the two were contemporaries and became closely linked in the hagiography which enveloped their lives. Together with Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i Shakar of Pakpattan and Saiyid Jalaluddin Shah Surkh-posh of Uch, they reputedly formed a group of 'Four Friends' who travelled around the Muslim world as well as India. Other Suhrawardi saints dating from this period include Pir Patho (died *circa* 1300) whose tomb lies a few miles south of Tatta, Saiyid Sajjan Sarwai who is buried near the small town of Talhar and Pir Haji Mango whose shrine can be found in the hills just north of Karachi.<sup>21</sup>

Many of these early saints were endowed with Hindu personalities, and the places where they settled and were buried possessed strong pre-Islamic connections. Lal Shahbaz Qalandar was known to his Hindu followers as Raja Bhartari; Pir Patho became Raja Gopichand; and Pir Haji Mango was called Lala Lasraj.

<sup>18</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Berkeley, 2nd edn., 1979), pp. 132, 137, 150.

<sup>19</sup> Simon Digby has pointed out the dangers of wholeheartedly adopting this explanation of Suhrawardi practice in view of the fact that most of the sources reflect a Chishti interpretation of events; in addition, he highlights the Suhrawardi need to accumulate independent resources as a result of Multan's exposed position on an insecure western frontier, see his article 'The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Mediaeval India', in Marc Gaborieau (ed.), *Islam and Society in South Asia*, Collection Purusartha (Paris, 1986), pp. 63–4.

<sup>20</sup> Qaddusi, *Tazkira*, pp. 274–5.

<sup>21</sup> Syed Dinal Shah Darbelvi, *Hazrat Shahanshan Lal Shahbaz Qalandar* (n.d.), pp. 3–19, 149; T. G. Carlass, 'Memoir on the Bay, Harbour and Trade of Karachi', V/22/231, pp. 205–8, IOL.

Both Pir Patho and Mango Pir were centuries-old centres of Hindu pilgrimage. At Mango Pir, crocodiles living in tanks fed by a warm-water spring were dedicated to the saint and became the object of a cult which was repeated elsewhere in Sind.<sup>22</sup> Later Suhrawardi sufis did not retain the same connections with Sind's pre-Islamic past but this did not prevent many of them from acquiring Hindu followers in part as a result of the religious tolerance engendered by their belief in the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*.<sup>23</sup>

The second wave of sufis arrived in Sind after the fourteenth century, and was composed of a variety of *silsilas*. Suhrawardis continued to be drawn to the region largely by the existence of a network through which to work. Some, however, did move on to Gujarat and Burhanpur during this period as a result of falling temporarily out of favour with Sind's Arghun rulers. Makhdum Ishaq of Halah-Kandi, his son, Makhdum Bilawal of Talti (died *circa* 1522) and grandson Makhdum Nuh of Hala (died *circa* 1592) were the foremost local representatives of the order who gained pre-eminence at this time. The small town of Hala became the leading centre of Suhrawardi activity, while other important Suhrawardi 'satellites' grew up at places such as Bukera, Matiari, Bulri and Sann.

Meanwhile members of the Qadiri order began to arrive in increasing numbers. Qadiri sufis are said to have first entered Sind as early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in order to stem the 'rampant' tide of Ismailism. Shaikh Ahmad Baghdadi and his brother Shaikh Muhammad are reputed to have come to Sind with forty disciples for that purpose.<sup>24</sup> It was not until the fifteenth century, however, that the Qadiri order really took firm root in the province. The missionary work of some of the most important of these Qadiri sufis, such as Shaikh Yusuf al-Din (arrived *circa* 1430) and Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth (arrived *circa* 1482) took place at the same time as the renewed proselytising efforts of Pir Sadruddin and his sons, and turned Uch into an important Qadiri stronghold. It has even been suggested that there was a 'transformation' of Ismaili *pirs* and *dargahs* into sufi, in particular Qadiri ones in Uch at this time.<sup>25</sup>

The overall result was the establishment of other Qadiri centres at places such as Bukkur, Nasarpur, Tatta and Badin. Sehwan produced the famous Qadiri sufi, Miyan Mir, disciple of Shaikh Khizr Siwestani, who travelled to Lahore where

<sup>22</sup> David Ross, *The Land of the Five Rivers and Sindh: Sketches Historical and Descriptive* (London, 1883), p. 47; *Gazetteer of the Province of Sind*, B, vol. I (Karachi, 1927), p. 101; T. Postans, *Personal Observations on Sindh* (London, 1843), p. 6; G. E. L. Carter, 'Religion in Sind', *Indian Antiquary*, 46 (1917), p. 206.

<sup>23</sup> *Wahdat al-wujud* or the doctrine of Unity of Being represented a pantheistic strand within sufism introduced by the sufi scholar, Ibn al-Arabi (died 1240), which facilitated the gradual conversion of peoples with no strong monotheistic traditions, see J. P. Gulraj, *Sindh and its Sufis* (Lahore, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> Disciples of Abdul Qadir Jilani, they were buried at Makli near Tatta, see Ali Sher Qani, *Tuhfat al-Kiram* (Hyderabad, Sind, 1971), vol. III, p. 251.

<sup>25</sup> A. Z. Khan, 'The role of the Qadiri Sufis in the Religious Life of Sind', in Hamida Khuhro (ed.), *Sindh Through the Centuries* (Karachi, 1981), p. 119; W. Ivanow, 'The Sect of Imam Shah in Gujarat', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 12 (1936), pp. 19-70.





Map 3 Location of important Qadiri and Naqshbandi shrines

his disciples developed very close relations with the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan and his son Dara Shikoh. Many *saiyids* already living in Sind joined the order. Apart from the Lakiari *sadat*, *saiyids* at Rohri and Bukkur were numbered amongst the order's leading exponents, and the tombs of Qadiri saints sprang up all over the countryside. The huge popularity of the order was reflected in the intense enthusiasm with which many of the Qadiri shrines celebrated the *urs* (on 11 Tabi II) of Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, after whom the order was named.

Naqshbandi sufis were likewise attracted to Sind during the fifteenth century as a result of the stand taken by its rulers against the Suhrawardis and the 'heresy' being spread by the Ismailis. The most notable early Naqshbandis were Pir Murad (died 1487) and his brother Mian Saiyid Ali Shirazi Kalan. But it was not until the seventeenth century that the order really began to flourish as it did elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent under the inspiration of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. Ideological differences became much more important. The Naqshbandis now firmly opposed the widespread belief in *wahdat al-wujud*, for to them it seriously undermined Islamic orthodoxy. But, during the eighteenth century, the popularity of pantheistic ideas reached its climax in the mystical poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (died 1752), who has been placed on a par with Hafiz. His *Risalo*, known as the *Masnawi* of Sind, stimulated a concerted Naqshbandi 'counter-offensive' against the emotional and enthusiastic support generated by its mysticism.<sup>26</sup>

The new group of Naqshbandi sufis, with centres at Tatta and Rohri, was led by Makhdum Adam Tattawi and included Mian Kabir, Makhdum Muhammad Siddiq, Khwaja Masum and Makhdum Ibrahim. It was out of this atmosphere that famous Naqshbandi saints such as Makhdum Muhammad Zaman of Luari (died 1774) and his disciple, Shaikh Abdur Rahim Girori (died 1778), emerged. Influenced by the prevailing religious atmosphere, both eventually distanced themselves from mainstream Naqshbandi activities. Muhammad Zaman's mystical poetry possessed 'a deep feeling of living unity, quite different from the scholarly writings of his colleagues at Thatta [*sic*]', while Girori's verses, like those of Shah Abdul Larif Bhitai, made use of folk tales and local heroines.<sup>27</sup>

By the end of the eighteenth century, it had become virtually impossible to travel more than a few miles in Sind without coming across the shrine of one saint or another. The 'map' of sufi shrines and networks had grown complex with layer upon layer of different orders superimposed upon each other. The outline was further complicated by the general weakening of distinctive features which had

<sup>26</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Pain and Grace: A Study of two Indo Muslim Mystical Poets of the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden, 1976).

<sup>27</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Sindhi Literature* (Wiesbaden, 1974), pp. 19–20; Chaudhuri Shamshad Ali Warsi, *Tazkira-i Auliya-i Kiram Naqshbandiyah* (Luari Sharif, Sind, 1980).

tended to keep the orders apart. More individuals were initiated into several orders at the same time. Towns and cities such as Rohri, Sehwan, Nasarpur and Tatta became leading centres of more than one *silsila*, often claiming to have 'sawa lakh' or 125,000 saints buried in their graveyards.<sup>28</sup> Sufi saints had emerged as the predominant religious group within Sind. They were not simply the 'carriers' of Islam but the very embodiment of the Islamic message, softening the stark boundary which separated Heaven from Earth and linking local Muslim society with the wider Islamic tradition. For local tribes, temporal authority was a distant force with which they had little direct contact. They tended to see God in the same way, accepting the need for others to intercede on their behalf. Sufi saints, therefore, acted as 'hinges' between local religious needs and the wider world of Islam. Their shrines became symbolic outposts of Muslim culture and Islamic spiritual authority.<sup>29</sup> Their nearness to God enabled *pirs* to intercede with Him on behalf of others. As they had direct access to God's blessing and were in charge of seeing that the world was maintained in its proper order, followers appealed to them when things went wrong. Through the exercise of *karamat*, *murids* saw a means of overcoming or at least confronting the problems which they faced in everyday life.

In time, the rôle of sufi saints was institutionalised. Their *barakat* or spiritual charisma began to adhere to their burial place, making their *dargahs* into sites of special access to religious intercession and allowing their successors to offer the same mediatory religious leadership to subsequent generations of *murids*. The annual commemoration of a saint's death, or *urs*, was a celebration of his 'marriage' with God, and became the highpoint of the religious year. *Sajjada nashins* made access to the saints possible even when they were not men of the same spiritual calibre as their forebears, for saintliness became increasingly disassociated from personal piety.<sup>30</sup> And as the charisma associated with the original saint 'declined' into institutional permanence, support for his successors came to be founded less on belief in an extraordinary power and mission and more on belief in spiritual authority sanctified by tradition. Inherited charisma was used more and more to legitimise 'acquired rights' in terms of wealth and social position and gradually many *pirs* gained an almost regal power. Like a king, the *pir* was invested with a turban, the *pag*, and sat on a throne, the *gadi*. He was visited by his followers in *darbar*, 'received the offerings of his *murids*, settled their disputes', and sometimes would go out on tour among them when his progress resembled 'one of regal magnificence'.<sup>31</sup> The combination of a 'spiritual' rôle with

<sup>28</sup> Ross, *Land of Five Rivers*, p. 25; the Makli Hills ('little Mecca') near Tatta earned the reputation for being the largest necropolis in the Muslim world, covering an area of six square miles and containing over a million tombs, though not all of them saints!

<sup>29</sup> David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley, 1988), p. 41.

<sup>30</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971), p. 141.

<sup>31</sup> Sorley, *Shah Abdul Latif*, p. 167.

a 'regal' lifestyle protected *pirs* against some of the insecurities inherent in the relationship between a purely temporal master and his subjects.

### ***Pirs as mediators between tribes***

Spiritual factors by themselves, however, cannot totally explain why the institution of the *pir* grew so powerful in the region. Its increased strength was also closely related to the nature of Sind's social and economic structure, which changed quite considerably as tribes gradually settled on the irrigated plains of the Indus valley. In this context, the ability of *pirs* to mediate between tribes and to adapt to far-reaching structural developments which were taking place in Sind holds the key to the vitality as well as the enduring local strength of the institution of the *pir*.

Change of religion in Sind tended to follow tribal patterns. Tribes either remained Hindu or converted *en masse* to Islam. Only a handful of exceptions such as the Sumros, Sahtas and Lakhas divided along religious lines. Tribes often attributed their conversion to one particular saint. The Sammas, for instance, claimed that they were brought within the Islamic fold by Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya of Multan himself. Jats in Lower Sind maintain a tradition of having been won over by Badin's Shah Qadiri during the fourteenth century, while Sind's Memon community is supposed to be descended from Lohanas who were converted by Saiyid Yusufuddin, another Qadiri saint.<sup>32</sup>

Conversion in practice was much slower than these traditions of contact with a single saintly individual would imply. On the whole, it was gradual and piecemeal, 'a slow turning towards a new light'.<sup>33</sup> Research on other parts of the Indian subcontinent has shown that the whole process could stretch over many generations and hundreds of years. In Richard Eaton's example of the Siyals, for instance, it took four centuries and thirteen generations of interaction with the shrine of Baba Fariduddin at Pakpattan before this particular Panjabi tribe became thoroughly Islamised, at least as far as the names of its members were concerned. Social, economic and religious conditions in western Panjab shared many similarities with those in Sind during this period, and, therefore, it is not surprising to find the same sort of conversion timescale operating in both provinces. The transformation of the *dargah* into a permanent feature of the Sindhi landscape permitted and encouraged, as in the Panjab, the creation of enduring relations between *pirs* and the local population. Claims by tribes to have been converted by a particular saint can be seen as the product of their interaction with a series of subsequent *sajjada nashins* whose separate individual identities were less important than that of the original saint. Under circumstances in which

<sup>32</sup> S. Hellbusch Westphal and H. Westphal, *The Jats of Pakistan* (Berlin, 1964), p. 19; E. H. Aitkin, *A Gazetteer of the Province of Sind* (Karachi, 1907), pp. 174, 177.

<sup>33</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven, 1968), p. 105.

*sajjada nashins* came and went, tribes tended to identify with the founding spirit whose powerful *barakat*, like the shrine, was far more permanent.<sup>34</sup>

Yet religious sanctity flowing down a hereditary line of living saints again does not provide a complete explanation for the strong and enduring links between saints and local tribes. This was because saintly figures did more than simply provide religious leadership and guidance to generations of tribal followers. They also mediated between tribes. In this way the institutionalisation of the *dargah* developed in direct response to non-religious social and economic functions carried out by *pirs*. Nomadic pastoralism represented the age-old occupation of tribes in Sind whether they lived on the fringes of the eastern desert, amongst the western uplands or in the river valley. The annual vagaries of the inundation of the Indus were often more damaging than helpful from the agrarian point of view, and agriculture remained a hazardous pastime. The changing course of the river eroded banks, ate away fields and ruined large tracts of land. Just as tribes in Sind could be divided into those on the western side of the Indus, who were by and large Baluch, and those on its eastern bank, whose origins were predominantly Rajput, so they could also be divided along economic lines. Tribes either possessed fertile lands or they did not, and attempts to acquire fertile lands by the 'have-nots' at the expense of the 'haves' created a situation of 'perpetual conflict' in which *pirs* could play a valuable mediating rôle.

Two types of pastoral nomadism exist: horizontal nomadism or movement in search of pasture within roughly the same ecological region, and vertical nomadism, known as transhumance, which is the usually seasonal movement between complementary ecological zones such as lowlands and highlands.<sup>35</sup> In Sind, both kinds of nomadic activity occurred. On the one hand, tribes in the valley wandered from place to place seeking fresh pastures, while, in the mountains and desert, they competed with each other for grazing land. On the other hand, times of hardship and stress such as drought drew tribes from the desert and the mountains to the river valley where they had to jostle for access to water. The picture was further complicated by the fact that, although Sindhi society was predominantly nomadic, permanent settlements, which combined pastoralism with agriculture, had grown up where there were regular supplies of water for irrigation purposes. Most settlements were close to the Indus but the presence of streams and springs also led to permanent settlements in areas well away from the river. Settled communities, by their very nature, were acutely conscious of the threats presented by outside groups challenging for the control over limited resources.

Ernest Gellner, in his work on Morocco, has explored in great depth the clash

<sup>34</sup> Richard M. Eaton, 'The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid', in Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 346, 352-3.

<sup>35</sup> Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* (New York, 1981), p. 64.

of interests which can occur in this situation and the problem of maintaining order between competing groups of annual visitors and permanent inhabitants. To some extent, his conclusions may be applied to Sind. In Morocco, the need for 'professional neutrals' to balance opposing interests led to the emergence of hereditary saints who created a uniting force in society: their lineages connected them 'to the founder of the religion shared by both sides' and excluded them from 'identification with either'.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in Sind, inter-tribal friction meant that *pīrs* acquired great influence and power as local mediators. They were the arbitrators on whom different groups depended for peaceful co-existence, serving an essential function whether from the point of view of the nomadic herdsman or the more settled cultivator. Nomadic tribes were fairly self-contained units but they still depended on agricultural products and other goods which could be obtained from urban centres either through trade or by force. Trade itself could cause problems. At times of crisis, such as the serious failure of the rains, virtually the whole population of a particular area in the hills would migrate to precisely the centres in the adjoining plains where they traded their wools and leathers.<sup>37</sup> Saints, therefore, often came to be found in the places where competing sets of interests came into conflict with each other. This helps to explain the concentration of *pīrs* in riverside settlements such as Tatta, Nasarpur, Sehwan, Rohri and Alor, important both for local as well as longer-distance trade. Similar kinds of considerations accounted for the way in which the location of shrines coincided with permanent villages scattered throughout the valleys which bisect the Kohistan hills. Many of these settlements were prehistoric in their origins. The presence of springs meant that the sites had been inhabited for hundreds of years and the names of other settlements such as Pir Ari, Pir Ghazi Shah and Pir Lakha betray their connections with holy men of Islam. The same story was repeated in the desert areas where links with saintly figures were clearly illustrated by place names such as Pir Pithoro, Pir Kihori and Pir Saraho.

But the situation in Sind did not remain static. Throughout the period during which *pīrs* grew powerful, far-reaching social and economic changes were taking place. These revolved around the settling of tribes in the main valley of the Indus as nomadism gradually made way for a mixture of agriculture, cattle-breeding and sedentary peasant life. Important parallels emerged between changes in occupation and the way in which most of the major shrines in Sind eventually came to be located in the Indus valley. While some upland shrines such as Naing Sharif retained their significance, the importance of many others declined: either their lines of descent died out or more objective conditions militated against the practical continuation of the *pīr*ship. Often the reasons for their survival disappeared along with the migration of local tribes, and they effectively became

<sup>36</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London, 1969), p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> Lambrick, *Sind*, p. 48.

‘dead’ centres of worship, significant in spiritual terms only. The most important shrines in Sind, the ‘living institutions’, became those in the riverain areas to which the bulk of the population eventually moved.

The major reason for the demographic restructuring of Sind was the growing ability of cultivators to harness the Indus to greater effect. The waters of the river were capable of yielding crops of wonderful fertility but they could also do great damage.<sup>38</sup> Once cultivators started to exploit old river beds and overspill channels as natural irrigation arteries, the situation changed. Initially, as in the Panjab, they took advantage of these natural channels by digging small watercourses and using Persian wheels to lift the water to the level of the lands.<sup>39</sup> Later artificial canals were constructed and consequently the amount of flow irrigation increased. The *pargana* of Chandukah, for instance, was watered by two natural irrigation channels, the Ghar and the Western Nara, whose more effective use transformed it into an area of extensive rice cultivation, and earned it by the eighteenth century the title of the ‘Garden of Sind’.<sup>40</sup>

As land was opened up for growing crops, the focus of life shifted more firmly to the valley where the need for mediators to settle disputes continued to be acute. The necessity was probably even greater as conflict was no longer seasonal and intermittent but a constant reality for twelve months of every year. The valley’s growing reputation attracted many more tribesmen from outside the province, in particular Baluchis from the north-west who were gradually incorporated into the new agrarian framework. Baluchi tribesmen first started to put down proper roots in Sind in the fifteenth century. Four hundred years later, they were still arriving in large numbers. The problems associated with settling were prolonged by the repeated arrival of new groups who needed to be integrated into Sindhi society. As long as economic expansion was taking place, new groups could be absorbed relatively easily albeit with increased scope for tension. At times of economic crisis or recession, however, newly settled areas and people on the fringes would have been most precariously placed, exacerbating the possibility of considerable social unrest and thus heightening the need for effective mediators.<sup>41</sup>

A restructuring and general weakening of former ties meant that, although Sindhi society did not lose its tribal character, new communities were formed

<sup>38</sup> H. T. Sorley, *Gazetteer of West Pakistan: The Former Province of Sind (Including Khairpur State)* (Karachi, 1968), p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, groups of nomadic pastoralists known as Jats, having worked their way northwards from Sind, settled in the Panjab as peasant agriculturalists and, largely on account of the introduction of the Persian wheel, transformed much of western Panjab into a rich producer of food crops, see Habib, ‘Jatts’, p. 98.

<sup>40</sup> Lieutenant Hugh James, ‘Report on Chandookar’ (1847), V/23/214, p. 323, IOL.

<sup>41</sup> Chetan Singh has suggested that at least part of the unrest which neighbouring Panjab witnessed in the eighteenth century was linked to friction generated by processes which had been altering the structure of tribal societies in the region, see ‘Conformity and conflict: tribes and the “agrarian system” of Mughal India’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 23, 3 (1988), pp. 339–40.

with members of different tribes settling down together. As tribes spread out over the floor of the Indus valley, they found that they needed new sets of loyalties designed to meet their new way of life. Irrigation depended on the creation and maintenance of a system of canals and watercourses. But these were divided up into sections 'belonging' to different groups, tribal and non-tribal, who needed to work harmoniously together in digging new channels and clearing old ones of silt. Groups also had to cooperate over how much water they consumed: and *pīrs* provided one of the mechanisms by which this new cooperation could be achieved. Alternatives such as *biradari* ties were much less important in Sind than in neighbouring Panjab, and so the ability of *pīrs* to provide their followers with a supra-tribal nexus or parallel bonds to those of their tribal connections was all the more important. The peak of the power wielded by *pīrs* coincided quite neatly during the eighteenth century with the expansion of irrigation in Sind undertaken by the Kalhora rulers of the time.<sup>42</sup>

*Pir bhāi* links between *murīds* who shared the same *murshīd* grew strong. In a society no longer so clearly segmented into traditional tribal units, *pīrs* created a social order which revolved around new alternative tribe-like structures, based, at least initially, on association rather than on birth. Individuals could gain from being *murīds* of powerful *pīrs* for, if their *murshīd* was strong, they too were more secure and could count on wider support in difficult times. Tribal *sardars* themselves looked to *pīrs* for legitimacy: *pīrs* tied the all-important turban on the heads of new chiefs. By performing this *dastar bandī* or inauguration ceremony, they effectively signalled their authority over the leaders of the tribes who made up their following. The inequality of the relationship was reinforced by *pir* families taking the daughters of important *murīds* as brides but refusing to allow their own womenfolk to marry outside the family.

*Dargahs* provided a forum for inter-tribal trade as well as inter-tribal religious festivals. They were vital to nomadic and settled tribes alike as both needed places where they could dispose of their surpluses, be it cattle, crops or manufactured goods.<sup>43</sup> *Melas* which drew members of different tribes together became important economic events as well as religious occasions: the annual *urs* was not just a festival which marked out the shrine as 'a gate of mediation' but also the occasion for the exchange and redistribution of resources.<sup>44</sup> Shrines became arenas of economic activity, and huge quantities of commercial business were transacted at their fairs in the shape of luxury goods and everyday local products including gold and silver ornaments, brassware, cloths, silks and embroidery, oil, *ghī*, breads, meats and leather articles. Some developed reputations for particular items: the

<sup>42</sup> Sorley, *Shah Abdul Latif*, p. 129; E. H. Aitkin, *The Gazetteer of the Province of Sind* (Karachi, 1907), p. 310.

<sup>43</sup> Local villagers living near the tomb of Shakar Ganj Shah near Alor used to sell produce from their farms to votaries of the shrine, see Eastwick, *A Glance*, p. 45.

<sup>44</sup> Gellner, *Saints*, p. 78.



shrine of Shah Qadiri at Badin, for instance, became famous for the sale of camels during the time of its *urs*. The economic importance of these events can be judged by the number of people which attended them. The *urs* of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar at Sehwan regularly attracted over 30,000 people, while the *mela* at Pir Pithoro, probably the largest on the edge of the Thar desert, was similarly attended by thousands of visitors.<sup>45</sup>

As greater numbers of tribesmen settled down in Sind, the small towns dominated by important shrines drew town and countryside closer together by providing permanent market-places operating throughout the year. Towns relied on the countryside for raw materials: the countryside relied on urban markets for outlets for its products. By the seventeenth century, Sind had developed a flourishing export trade in cloths of a very high quality woven from the cotton of the Indus valley and from the wools of the desert and the mountains. Producers in places such as Hala, Nasarpur, Kandiaro and Gambat depended on the surrounding countryside for their supplies. All contained important shrines which helped attract vital raw materials from rural areas as well as helping to create a market for the finished goods. Nasarpur and Hala became leading manufacturing centres, producing high quality lacquer ware and glazed pottery and tiles in addition to their famous *susi* trouser material, while Gambat was a major manufacturer of cotton cloth. The distribution of sufi shrines came to mirror the major lines of communication which bisected the region. They were integrated into long-distance trade both between Sind and the outside world and between the outside world and the rest of the Indian subcontinent. Just as early saints had settled at points along camel routes through Kohistan, so later shrines grew up strung out along new routes entering and leaving Sind. In this way, shrines which had originally emerged in centres of potential conflict were gradually incorporated into mechanisms which regulated the wider economy of a changing Sind.

### ***Pirs as mediators between rulers and the ruled***

The rôle of *pirs* as intermediaries between different groups in Sindhi society was balanced and enhanced by their rôle as mediators between rulers and the ruled of Sind. The 'marginal' nature of Sind in political terms created conditions in which the institution of the *pir* flourished. *Pirs* controlled access to God and so commanded enormous influence which could be used for political purposes. Rulers accordingly sought their cooperation in ensuring the smooth running of their administrations. In return for 'collaboration', *pirs* were 'rewarded' with grants of land and other honours, thus greatly increasing the temporal power they wielded. In the absence of a strong, well-defined state framework, which would have

<sup>45</sup> Settlement Records of Tando Division of Hyderabad Collectorate, Sind (1889), V/23/271, IOL; *Gazetteer of Sind* B, vol. IV (Bombay, 1919), p. 48; General Dept. (1929) File No. 17044 G, n.p., CRS.

otherwise helped to regulate their power, *pīrs* grew to control huge resources and formed a central pillar in the structure of local political authority. They acted not so much as neutral arbitrators as was the case in Morocco and the North West Frontier but, more like their counterparts in south-western parts of Panjab, as spiritual landlords with a considerable stake in the status quo.

Relations between sufi saints and rulers in Sind were greatly affected by the early predominance of the Suhrawardi *silsila* in the region. Local Suhrawardi saints, in general, maintained good relations with kings and seemed to have little objection to accumulating great wealth even when this appeared to contradict their claims to be guardians of the spiritual welfare of the people.<sup>46</sup> One of the most well-known all-India examples of Suhrawardi intervention in political affairs concerned Sind. Between 1058 and 1520, control of the province was effectively delegated by the Delhi Sultanates first to the Sumros and later to the Sammas. Both were local Rajput tribes converted to Islam whose chiefs were disciples of Suhrawardi saints at Uch and Multan. Towards the middle of the fourteenth century, the Sammas displaced the Sumras as rulers, coming to power during the reign of Firoz Shah Tughluq. They hoisted the standard of local independence and set about harassing the Delhi authorities along the borders of the Panjab and Gujarat. The situation deteriorated to the extent that Firoz Shah Tughluq mounted a military campaign against the Samma headquarters at Tatta. A settlement was finally reached only through the intercession of Makhdum Jahaniyan 'Jahangasht' of Uch who reputedly travelled to Tatta where he used his influence over both sides to restore peace. In general, therefore, members of the Suhrawardi order put their 'weight on the side of the central authority and exercised a stabilizing and moderating influence on . . . Sindhi politics'.<sup>47</sup>

One of the functions assumed by saints as tribal authority weakened could be to provide united leadership against outside aggression. In 1520, resistance against the invasion of Sind by the Arghuns under Shah Beg was organised by another Suhrawardi saint, Makhdum Bilawal and his *khalifas*. The resistance failed and the saint was 'martyred', by being reputedly crushed in an oil press. Sind's new rulers at first reacted by withdrawing support for the *silsila*, and, to counteract its influence, they welcomed sufis belonging to the Qadiri and Naqshbandi orders. But it was not long before the Arghuns too began to give due respect to the Suhrawardi sufis, in order to make use of the latter's position for strengthening their own government. Suhrawardis, in turn, accepted the changed state of affairs and settled back into the reciprocal relationship that they had pursued with former rulers of Sind.

The attitude of Suhrawardi saints towards politics was articulated most clearly

<sup>46</sup> K. A. Nizami, 'The Suhrawardi Silsilah and its Influence on Medieval Indian Politics', *Medieval Indian Quarterly*, 3 (1957), pp. 109-49.

<sup>47</sup> Riazul Islam, 'The Rise of the Sammas in Sind', *Islamic Culture*, 22, no. 4 (Oct. 1948), pp. 362-3, 367, 371, 377.

by Makhdum Nuh of Hala, who belonged to the same family as Makhdum Bilawal. The *makhdum* lived during the reigns of both the Arghuns and their Central Asian successors, the Tarkhans, who ruled Sind from 1555 until the Mughals conquered the province in 1592.<sup>48</sup> In his advice to the rulers of the day, he pointed to three 'fortresses' on which the protection of the country depended. The first represented the public. It was constructed of mud and had to be strengthened with the 'mortar of justice' so that it would not be breached by tyranny. The second was made of iron and symbolised the army. Built on rewards and grants, it protected the country from sedition and riots. The third and most important fortress was fashioned from the hardest steel and consisted of the 'men of Allah'. It was the king's duty to ensure that they were well respected and received their rightful due from the *bait al-mal* (treasury) for, in reality, the administration of the country lay 'in their hands'.<sup>49</sup>

The Mughals, like preceding rulers of Sind, were equally aware of the importance of securing the cooperation of local *pirs*. Sind was a border region in Mughal eyes and needed to be kept secure. At the same time, there were still many nomadic pastoral tribes in the desert and the hilly tracts who raided settled localities but whom the Mughals found difficult to subdue.<sup>50</sup> The Mughals also transferred to local hands a great deal of the responsibility for the supervision of both the local revenue system and the irrigation network on which that revenue largely depended. Mughal administration in Sind relied greatly on the loyalty and cooperation of local power holders and this resulted in the 'wholesale creation of privilege' based on the Mughal system of land tenure. Many religious families received grants of land in *inam* under the Mughals, and, although there were already grants dating from the fourteenth century, the period of Mughal rule saw the vast extension of this practice.<sup>51</sup>

Sind formed the southern part of the Mughal *subah* of Multan for almost 150 years. But, by the first decades of the eighteenth century, Delhi's hold on the province had weakened considerably. Just as elsewhere in the empire, Aurangzeb's death in 1707 signalled the beginning of the breakdown of Mughal authority. Power passed more firmly into local hands. No longer were governors and other senior Mughal officials drawn from other parts of the subcontinent. Instead they gave way to Sindhi governors who exercised increasing independence. Power became concentrated in the hands of local élites and consequently rivalry between these powerholders intensified. Competition between religious figures had long constituted a feature of life in Sind. It could be theological, as in the case

<sup>48</sup> For details on the arrival and administration of the Arghuns and Tarkhans, see Mahmudul Hasan Siddiqi, *History of the Arghuns and Tarkhans* (Hyderabad, Sind, 1972).

<sup>49</sup> Quddusi, *Tazkira*, p. 292.

<sup>50</sup> Sunita I. Zaidi, 'Problems of the Mughal Administration in Sind during the First Half of the Seventeenth Century', *Islamic Culture*, 57, no. 2 (April 1983), p. 154.

<sup>51</sup> Sorley, *Shah Abdul Larif*, pp. 126, 154.

of rivalries between sufis of different orders and disputes between sufis and non-sufis. It could often however be more material than spiritual as the resources on which *pir* families depended were not without their limits.

The martyrdom of Shah Inayat Shahid of Jhok illustrates both the relationship between local *pirs* and the authorities at Delhi, and the basis on which local rivalries developed. Shah Inayat, known amongst other names as the 'Hallaj of Sind' and Sartaj-i Sufan (Crowned Head of Sufis), lived from about 1655 to 1718. He belonged to a family with Suhrawardi connections at Uch but he spent many years studying under Qadiri directions at Burhanpur and probably also Bijapur in the Deccan. He represented a rare Sindhi combination of these two *silsilas*. After returning to Sind, Shah Inayat took up rent-free lands which had been given to his ancestors near Jhok and worked on them together with his *murids*. The community gained a reputation for social and economic equality which attracted people from many surrounding villages. Local *saiyid* families found themselves losing *murids* to his 'greater spiritual bounty', as well as tenants and labourers who had previously worked their lands. Claiming that Shah Inayat was gathering troops with which to threaten the security of the Mughal Empire, and emphasising the dervishes' refusal to pay their taxes, his opponents were able to call upon the greater military might of Delhi to defend their own more local interests. The Mughal Court, in turn, was ready to respond because of the reliance which it placed on the cooperation of these élites. As a result, Jhok was besieged during late 1717 by an army which consisted of a combination of imperial and local troops. Shah Inayat finally surrendered at the beginning of 1718, and was taken to Tatta where he was executed. His efforts at 'social justice' had clashed unsuccessfully with existing landed interests and had thus highlighted the growing power of Sind's *pirs* who were in the process of changing from religious leaders into 'politically influential feudal lords'.<sup>52</sup>

The decline of the Mughal Empire, which resulted in the increase in the power of local Sindhi élites, led to the emergence of the Kalhoras who came to rule the province as *subedars* appointed by Delhi and later under Persian and Afghan suzerainty. During their administration, the position of *pirs* was further strengthened. The Kalhoras were themselves descended from a religious mendicant, Adam Shah Kalhora, who had been a leading follower of Saiyid Muhammad Mahdi of Jaunpur during the sixteenth century.<sup>53</sup> His influence survived his death, and, as his successors steadily accumulated *murids*, they began forcibly to take control of lands belonging to local *zamindars*. Delhi was alerted to the problem and sent troops to quell the disturbances. The Kalhoras were defeated

<sup>52</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, 'Shah Inayat Shahid of Jhok: A Sindhi Mystic of the Early 18th Century', *Studies in the History of Religions*, 17 (1969), pp. 156–63.

<sup>53</sup> The Kalhoras claimed to be Abbasids; in reality they were probably Jamot, or non-Baluchis, long settled in parts of Upper Sind which later became the districts of Larkana and Shikarpur, see Sorley, *Shah Abdul Latif*, pp. 27–8.

but the Mughals, recognising that they commanded wide support in Sind, offered an amnesty. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the leader of the Kalhoras, Yar Muhammad Kalhora, had been recognised as *subedar* of Upper Sind and awarded the title of *Khuda Yar Khan*. Following Yar Muhammad's death in 1719, his son, Nur Muhammad was also given the province of Siwestan and the governorship of Tatta. As a result, the Kalhoras could claim to be rulers of virtually the whole of Sind. After the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1737, sovereignty over Sind was transferred to the Persians to whom the Kalhoras now owed tribute. This situation did not last long for in 1747 the military successes of Ahmad Shah Durrani meant that the Kalhoras now had Afghan overlords. In practice, they remained fairly independent: tribute was gradually reduced in amount and was often in arrears.

The Kalhoras owed their position largely to the veneration which their family received. They combined religious legitimacy with worldly power to rule Sind. Since they themselves relied on claims to spiritual descent, they showed great respect for other religious families. Their practice of deferring to sufis has been cited as a major reason for the upsurge in reverence for *pirs* and *saiyids* during the eighteenth century when 'the great granting of privilege to religious persons began to be pronounced . . . as distinct from the ordinary Muslim system of wakf which had existed from the original Arab conquest'. Another key to Kalhora 'success' lay in their strengthening of the Baluchi element in Sind. They took pains not to antagonise the religious leaders to whom the Baluchi tribesmen looked for guidance. Without the might of the Mughal Empire behind them, the Kalhoras were even more dependent on the existence of privilege in society. While the revenue system instigated by the Mughals did not change greatly under the Kalhoras, there was no longer the same friction generated by conflict between the demands of the central government and those of the local authorities. The privileged position previously held by the Mughal 'aristocracy' was filled by local holders of power. Thus, the system of taxation, for instance, acknowledged even more than before the great respect with which *pir* families were regarded throughout Sind.<sup>54</sup>

The Kalhoras finally lost political power when they alienated support amongst the Baluchis and fell victim to the latter's superior military strength. Under their Baluchi successors, the Talpurs, little changed as far as the position of *pirs* was concerned. The new rulers continued to honour Sind's religious élite with grants of land and expensive gifts. In part, this was because the *mirs* were afraid to oppose their considerable influence. It was also partly because, the *mirs*, as Baluchis, were genuinely in awe of *pir* families. The *mirs* at Khairpur were enthusiastic followers of the Sufi poet, Sachal Sarmast of nearby Daraza. In spite of his harsh criticisms of the religious establishment and his warnings to people

<sup>54</sup> Sorley, *Shah Abdul Latif*, pp. 26, 141, 154, 161–2.

not to 'enter the Court of the King' for there they would be certain to find 'mischief', they protected him against the wrath of the orthodox and endowed his shrine with extensive lands.<sup>55</sup> While the Talpurs were not 'remarkable for generosity' in confirming the ordinary grants of their predecessors, former grants on religious grounds were hardly affected in this way. At the time of the British arrival, it was estimated that the revenue appropriated to 'ecclesiastical establishments' amounted to one-third of the revenue enjoyed by the Government, roughly 5,000,000 rupees a year.<sup>56</sup>

By the early years of the nineteenth century, *pirs* were accorded respect by the vast majority of Sindhi Muslims ranging from the mighty *mirs* down to the humble peasant. Their revenue-free gardens and lands combined with the *naz-rana* collected from their *murids* meant that they lived in relative luxury. *Pirs* assumed powers of life and death over their *murids* as justice lay mainly in the hands of local strongmen. Ordinary Sindhis would often take refuge in the villages belonging to *pirs* to avoid being prosecuted by the *mirs'* authorities.<sup>57</sup> *Pirs* acted as advisers to the rulers of the day. The Sirhindis of Shikarpur were chosen as the *mirs'* nominees during negotiations over the city of Shikarpur with the Afghan Dost Muhammad in 1834 while 'Mir' Fakhruddin Alavi, also from Shikarpur, was *vakil* or Chief Minister of the Khairpur Court.<sup>58</sup> *Pir* families, by virtue of their influence over the local population, in this way formed a very substantial part of the landed élite on whom the smooth running of the administration depended.

Sind was not alone within the Muslim world in its veneration and respect for sufi saints and their spiritual, usually lineal, descendants. Nor was the temporal power which *pirs* came to command unique. What was unusual, however, was the depth to which these aspects of popular Islamic practice became implanted in Sind and the extent to which *pir* families were drawn into the local structure of political authority. The process of Islamisation in Sind followed patterns experienced elsewhere in India but it was also influenced by circumstances and events peculiar to the region itself. The rise of *pirs* to prominence stemmed from the type of society which constituted Sind, and the developments which took place from

<sup>55</sup> Kazi Ali Akbar Darazi, *Diwan-i Ashkar: Sachal Sarmast Ka Farsi Majmua-i Kalam* (with Urdu translations) (Karachi, 1982), vol. II, p. 44; L. H. Ajwani, *History of Sindhi Literature* (New Delhi, 1970), p. 117; J. Gulraj, *Sind and its Sufis* (Lahore, 1979), p. 202. Sachal Sarmast is nowadays second only to his fellow *pir*, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, as a contemporary symbol of Sindhi identity.

<sup>56</sup> James McMurdo, 'An Account of the Country of Sindh, with Remarks on the State of Society, the Government, the Manners and Customs of the People', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1 (1834), p. 241; Richard F. Burton, *Sindh and the Races that Inhabit the Valley of the Indus* (repr. Karachi, 1973), p. 206.

<sup>57</sup> Lieutenant E. Del Hoste, *Selections from the Records of the Commissioner of Sind*, V/526, pp. 206-8, IOL.

<sup>58</sup> V/22/231, pp. 37, 44, IOL.

the time that sufi saints first started to arrive in the province. *Pirs* carried out a series of basic functions vital to the process by which tribesmen became peasants. They linked the nomadic and the settled worlds, and bridged the gap between countryside and town in a way that tribal chiefs increasingly could not. Social and economic changes may have weakened the tribal unit but they strengthened the bonds of *piri-muridi* connections, and, therefore, the world of the *pir* grew in large part as a result of the expansion of Sind's internal agricultural 'frontier'. Sind's 'marginal' position in geographical and political terms meant that *pirs* became mediators between governments and ordinary people and were able to control resources to an extent which would have been much more difficult under a more centralised state framework.

## Creating a system of political control after 1843

*The Commissioner has heard with much pleasure of the good service rendered by you in constantly supporting the Government. He presents you in darbar with this afrinama [sic] and trusts that you will continue to do good service in future whenever it may be required of you.<sup>1</sup>*

The British shattered Sind's relative isolation when they conquered the province using force in 1843. Just as elsewhere in India, they required an alternative source of 'legitimacy' to convert military power into civil power, and so proceeded to introduce a system of political control based on the integration of indigenous powerholders into the framework of local authority. It was a system which deliberately protected and promoted the privileges of these élites in return for cooperation. The landed interests which many *pirs* had acquired by this time, together with their spiritual influence and consequent special hold over very large sections of Sindhi society, made them ideal candidates for inclusion. The conquest had threatened to undermine the fortunes of *pir* families by replacing the Muslim Talpur *mirs* with an infidel ruler who had little apparent interest in prayers being offered in its name or even the fear of Allah to encourage due respect. Instead, as members of the body of large landholders which formed the backbone of local society, many were drawn to and became beneficiaries of the British practice of distributing patronage based on the preservation of landed interests and the public bestowal of honour. But, although the authorities bestowed patronage, they could also withhold it as a means of exerting pressure or even punishment; and rewards had to be earned, usually through conspicuous acts of loyal assistance. In this way, the relationship between the British and Sind's religious élite came to form part of the 'balancing act' which the authorities performed in order to maintain overall control in the Sindhi countryside. It was a

<sup>1</sup> Wording on *afrinnama* presented to Pir Rasul Bakhsh of Ghotki by the Commissioner-in-Sind on 12 February 1921.



question of mutual self-interest: the colonial administration sought ways of legitimising its rule and maintaining law and order, while *pirs* by and large took the opportunity to enhance and consolidate their position in society.

### **Constructing the system**

The British constructed a system of political control in India by preserving the landed interests of local élites. They realised that, without the help of these élites, it would be very difficult to maintain order and collect revenue successfully. They needed collaborators in the countryside whose interests coincided with those of the British *raj*. As far as the question of land settlement in general was concerned, the authorities introduced the concept of private property and conferred this proprietary right on those individuals whom they wished to remain powerful. A similar principle operated in relation to the holders of different kinds of revenue-free grants awarded by former rulers. While the British felt that the amount of alienated land would consume too large a proportion of potential land revenue, the administration did not want to antagonise the holders of these grants *en masse* by removing their privileges altogether. As a result, the British compromised by reducing the overall number of these grants, but were careful to confirm the grants of those élites whose cooperation they wished to retain. In both the North-Western Provinces and Bombay, a large number of alienated grants were resumed.<sup>2</sup> In both regions, however, this policy was tempered in the long run by the deliberate promotion of local powerholders such as the *taluqadars* of Awadh and the *jagirdars* of the Deccan.<sup>3</sup>

British policy in Sind followed this same basic pattern. The system which finally emerged was constructed so that the important became more important while the less significant faded away. *Pirs* as holders of alienated grants were directly affected by the way in which the settlement was carried out. Like their non-religious counterparts, the *mirs*, *sardars* and *waderos*, their fortunes were governed by whether or not officials considered them to be important enough to warrant sympathetic or preferential treatment. Their individual spiritual and temporal influence played a crucial part in determining the fate of the grants alienated in their names.

As a body, *pirs* had long been recognised by the British as a force with which to

<sup>2</sup> For instance, more than Rs. 2,300,000 – representing 17,500,000 acres of land – were resumed in the North Western Province by 1840, while in the Bombay Presidency the *Inam* Commission successfully reduced the amount of land revenue ‘lost’ from 132,500,000 rupees to 8,038,000 rupees, see Thomas R. Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj: Northern India in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1979), p. 68, and B. H. Baden Powell, *A Short Account of the Land Revenue and its Administration in British India in the Nineteenth Century: With a Sketch of Land Tenures* (Oxford, 1907), p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> For details about the active promotion of the *taluqadars* of Awadh, see Metcalf, *Land*, and P. D. Reeves, ‘Landlords and Party Politics in the United Provinces, 1934–7’, in D. A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History* (London, 1968), p. 262.

reckon: well before annexation had taken place, the British had identified the influential position which *pīrs* occupied in Sindhi society. From the end of the eighteenth century, Britain had grown increasingly interested in Sind for commercial and strategic reasons.<sup>4</sup> This interest meant that, during the early years of the nineteenth century, a number of British travellers visited the region, and gradually Sind was opened up to the outside world. Visitors wrote about their travels and the nature of the society which they encountered.<sup>5</sup> Nearly all remarked on the powerful position of *pīrs* and *saiyids*, and highlighted the great respect accorded to them by Sindhis ranging from the ruling *mīrs* to the humblest peasants. A British official visiting Hala where he met the hereditary representative of the famous Suhrawardi saint, Makhdum Nuh, found the *pīr* to be very 'cultured in outlook', and, as an indication of his wealth, his house was considerably more comfortable than the *mīrs*' palace at nearby Hyderabad. In Del Hoste's opinion, the *makhdum* exercised great influence over local people who were better treated in his village than in most other parts of Sind.<sup>6</sup> His comments were echoed by other British commentators who all pointed out the large amount of land and other kinds of wealth which had been alienated in support of *pīrs* and their shrines. Some of the finest portions of the country had been granted in *inam*, and it was claimed that no other country in Asia could boast so many 'ecclesiastical establishments'.<sup>7</sup>

At the time of the British conquest of Sind, *pīrs* held four different kinds of alienation. Some possessed 'ordinary' *jagirs* with no religious conditions attached. A far greater number had been awarded charitable grants or *khairats* on direct account of their piety and learnedness or in order to assist in the upkeep of shrines. These religious grants were often supplemented by revenue-free (*muafi*) plots of garden land. Finally, there was a handful of religious families who held *pattadari* rights around Shikarpur and Sukkur. These different grants, on the whole, were treated separately by the British. Individual sets of rules were drawn up to deal with them. But the basic principle which governed the whole operation came to rest on the age of the grants themselves: the older the grant, the more chance it had of being reconfirmed.

<sup>4</sup> See R. A. Huttenback, *British Relations with Sind: 1799–1843* (Berkeley, 1962), and M. E. Yapp, *Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran and Afghanistan, 1789–1850* (Oxford, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Nathan Crowe, sent to Sind as the East India Company's political and commercial agent when it reopened its factory at Tatta in 1799 left a detailed and powerful impression of Sindhi life. Sindhis, he declared, displayed 'no zeal but in propagating the truth, no spirit but in celebrating the Ede, no liberality but in feeding lazy Syuds, and no taste but in ornamenting old tombs', see Edward Archer Langley, *Narrative of a Residence at the Court of Meer Ali Moorad with Wild Sports in the Valley of the Indus* (London, 1861), vol. II, p. 68. See also Sir Alexander Burnes, *Travels to Bokhara* (London, 1834), and J. Postans, *Personal Observations on Sindh* (London, 1843).

<sup>6</sup> Lieutenant E. Del Hoste, *Selections from the Records of the Commissioner of Sind VI/526*, pp. 206–8, IOL.

<sup>7</sup> James McMurdo, 'An Account of the Country of Sindh', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1 (1834), p. 204.

Sir Charles Napier, conquering general and first British Governor of Sind, regarded *jagirdars* as Sind's 'natural aristocracy'.<sup>8</sup> He had no intention of letting them retain their huge powers uncurtailed, but equally he did not wish to humiliate them. Soon after his victory at the battle of Miani, therefore, Napier issued instructions to the holders of *jagirs* to 'rest in peace' and return to their homes. Their holdings, he promised, would be confirmed to them: the English Government was their friend and they would remain happy.<sup>9</sup> These instructions were followed by another proclamation which called for the *salaams* of all *jagirdars* to be delivered to the Governor by 24 May 1844. Everyone who made their submission in this way would receive a *salaam parwana* and have their lands confirmed to them in perpetuity.<sup>10</sup> Traditionally, *jagirs* lapsed at the death of the holder: Napier's proclamation effectively introduced at a stroke the principle of hereditary *jagirdar* rights. The 'folly' of such a generous step, which confirmed to existing holders nearly 170,000 acres of land in the Hyderabad Collectorate alone, was quickly realised, and the administration made concerted efforts to extricate itself from this dilemma. In doing so, however, officials had to make sure that their actions did not seriously injure the interests of the more influential local powerholders whose cooperation was essential to the British system of control. By 1845, the process of reducing the number of *jagirs* confirmed in this hasty way had begun. *Jagirs*, which had been granted in return for offices held under the *mirs*, were now to lapse automatically at the death of the incumbent. No *jagir* could be regranted without individual government sanction, and any *jagirdar* who failed to obtain a *salaam parwana* had his lands resumed.<sup>11</sup>

Officials continued to deal with *jagirs* in a rather *ad hoc* fashion well into the 1850s. Eventually, the need for a more organised approach became apparent. A Special Commissioner for Jagirs was appointed to carry out a systematic enquiry into the whole *jagir* problem. During his extensive investigations, he discovered that, in the final years of their rule, the *mirs* had dispensed *jagir* grants much more freely than had previously been the case. This had been due in large part to internal rivalries within the Talpur family which had encouraged individual *mirs* to use *jagir* grants as a means of winning support for themselves. Accordingly, the authorities felt that a 'lower' class of grantee had emerged during this period, and, since it was not considered in the best interests of the administration to support the interests of this group indefinitely, they decided not to confirm grants dating from this period beyond a second generation. On the other hand, *jagirs*, which were older than Talpur rule itself – that is predated 1783 – were deemed to be sufficiently authentic to warrant perpetual alienation. Most of the recipients of

<sup>8</sup> *A History of Alienations in Sind* (London, 1886), vol. I, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> Proclamation of 5 March 1843, pre-1857 File No. 251, n.p., CSR.

<sup>10</sup> Proclamation of 24 May 1843, *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> David Cheesman, 'Rural Power in Sind' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1980), p. 89.

these grants were the great Baluch tribal chiefs, men whose loyalty and cooperation the British were anxious to acquire.

The Special Commissioner's report, issued in 1858, divided *jagirs* into four classes based on the date when the original *sanad* for each grant had been issued. First-class *jagirs* and *sanads* dated back to before 1783. Together with second-class *jagirs*, awarded between 1783 and 1810, they were confirmed in perpetuity. Second-class *jagirs* on the whole belonged to individuals whose influence was sufficiently extensive to warrant special treatment but whose *sanads* were not old enough to be placed within the first category. Officials however felt that the wisest policy here would be to secure the grants by not letting them lapse with the death of their incumbents since their size did not bear a very large proportion to the whole assessable area of the province. Third-class grants dated from 1810 to 1833, and were automatically confirmed to their holders at the time of the British conquest. They were then to be reconfirmed to the holder's successor, and not finally resumed until the death of the new incumbent. Fourth-class regulations applied to *jagirs* granted during the last ten years of the *mirs'* rule, and effectively turned them into ordinary life-grants.<sup>12</sup> Of the religious families who held *jagirs*, the vast majority had their grants reconfirmed as third- or fourth-class alienations, while two *pir* families were honoured by being made into second-class *jagirdars*. Thus, as far as *jagirs* were concerned, *pirs* on the whole found themselves still in possession of their privileges albeit under a variety of different conditions.

A far larger number of *pirs* possessed charitable grants or *khairats*. In Sind, these were made up of money and grain allowances and alienations of land revenue either on lands which the grantee cultivated himself or on lands cultivated by someone else. They served a variety of necessary religious functions such as the upkeep of shrines, mosques and *madrasas*. *Khairat* grants were among the oldest alienations in Sind and were usually far older than ordinary *jagirs*. The most ancient was the *khairat* of land revenue of the *deh* of Aliwahan near Rohri which dated from the time of Allauddin Khilji and which had been reconfirmed by rulers, including the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, ever since.<sup>13</sup>

Napier made no initial distinction between ordinary *jagirdars* and *khairatdars* holding alienated lands. However, nearly all the money grants and grants in kind were discontinued automatically when the British took over. The authorities felt that their continuation would involve supporting a religion which they considered 'false'.<sup>14</sup> Most anyway were small in size, consisting of a donation of only a few

<sup>12</sup> Barrow Ellis, Report dated 3 July 1857, in *Summary of Proceedings Relative to the Settlement of Jagheer Holdings in the Province of Sind* (Bombay, 1862), Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, vol. LXVI (New Series), p. 54, V/23/231, n.p., IOL.

<sup>13</sup> *H/A*, vol. I, p. 333.

<sup>14</sup> Hamida Khuhro, *The Making of Modern Sind: British Policy and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century* (Karachi, 1978), p. 103.

rupees a year, usually towards the maintenance of a religious building or for the oil to burn in its lamps. The Commissioner-in-Sind, Bartle Frere, made the first step in the direction of a separate policy for *khairat* grants when he announced in March 1852 that charitable grants in the resumed districts would be continued for the life of the present holders only, provided they were in possession of them at the time of resumption, in all cases where the grantee was 'a real object of charity or of respect' and where there was 'nothing contrary to decency or public morality' in the grant.<sup>15</sup>

Up to this point, officials had generally agreed that the relatively small size of many charitable grants did not make it worth creating unnecessary discontent by discontinuing them.<sup>16</sup> From this point onwards, there developed a deliberate policy to confirm these grants in an organised way. The administration's earlier belief that it would be 'ungracious' to cancel charitable grants, preferring their gradual extinction as existing holders died, gave way to a set of rules based, like those governing *jagirs*, on the date when the *khairat* had first been granted. *Khairats* were now divided into two groups. First-class grants were those which had been enjoyed for at least sixty years in the case of an individual family or forty years in the case of a permanent institution before the British conquest. These grants were made hereditary, with a total value of nearly 12,000 rupees based on the alienation of 65,000 *bigahs* of land. Only a very small number were granted in the form of money awards. Second-class grants dated from the forty years before 1843. They, like third-class *jagirs*, were subject to reconfirmation at the holder's death, and, if regranted, were assessed at the rate of one-quarter of the holding's value.<sup>17</sup>

The religious character of the *khairat* grants did cause some problems for the authorities when issuing new *sanads*. They were not sure whether or not the wording on these *sanads* should continue to be explicitly 'religious'. Although the *khairatdar* was not discouraged altogether from praying for the *sarkar*, officials did not want this act to be seen as the condition of the grant itself. In 1859, therefore, the words on the certificates, which called upon the grantee to pray for the prosperity of the government, were changed for the less controversial 'seeking the welfare of the administration'. The change clarified that nothing was required from this group of alienated grant holders but loyalty and obedience.<sup>18</sup>

The rules covering *khairat* grants were also extended to *pattadari* grants. These grants were very few in number and were held almost exclusively by people of Pathan extraction living in the area around Shikarpur. They dated from the period of Afghan rule when semi-cultivated and waste lands were taken up by

<sup>15</sup> *H/A*, vol. I, p. 335.

<sup>16</sup> Pre-1857 File No. 248, comp. 1, pp. 1-2, CSR.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 337-8.

<sup>18</sup> Com-Sind to Assistant Commissioner for Jagirs, 7 May 1854, Pre-1857 File No. 240, comp. 27, p. 335, CSR.

holders who then petitioned the ruler for a light assessment. Under the *mirs*, *pattadaris* received a share of land revenue without reference to the possession of the land. As *pattadars* were often *zamindars* as well, they had the power to take the proceeds of the Government's share in addition to their own. Of the fifteen or so *pattadari* grants, two were held by religious families, the Alavi family of Shikarpur and the Makhdums of Khora. Since the number of grants of this kind was so small, the British decided that no special rules were necessary, and the regulations covering *khairat* grants were extended to *pattadari* rights. Since all the grants dated from more than sixty years before the British conquest, all became hereditary.<sup>19</sup>

'In a country where the traveller must necessarily traverse so many miles of salt and barren tract', the authorities were keen to preserve garden lands, and so individuals were encouraged to plant trees and dig wells. This policy benefited *pir* families who were well endowed with *baghs* or gardens. As with the other categories of alienated revenue, the disposal of garden grants came to be based on the age of the grant itself. *Sanads* older than 1833 were granted in perpetuity to the lineal heirs of the original holder. No assessment was paid on them, nor was any deduction in their size made. *Sanads* which dated from between 1833 and 1843, or grants for which no *sanads* were available, were continued to the lineal heirs but were liable to one-quarter of the government assessment on ordinary grants of garden land.<sup>20</sup>

In this category, as in the others, the British resolved the problem of reducing the quantity of these grants by isolating those claims which belonged to older, better-established powerholders and treating them in a preferential way. British rule, by placing the old order at risk, had threatened the continuation of any kind of alienation, and *pirs*, whose alienations had stemmed in large part from their relationship with former Muslim rulers, had seemed to be in great danger of losing important sources of their income. Instead, the need of the authorities to bolster the interests of Sind's Muslim élites in order to construct a reliable system of political control meant that *pirs* emerged relatively unscathed from the 'restructuring' of rural landholding in Sind.

### Operating the system

The policies which stated how alienated grants were settled, and on which the British built up their hierarchy of collaborating interests, were directly based on the formal accommodation of differences between the status and power of the holders concerned. But the approach of officials towards operating the system was, in practice, even more pragmatic. When the personal influence and position

<sup>19</sup> Assistant Commissioner for Jagirs, Memo. on Pattadaris, 2 September 1854, Pre-1854, Pre-1857 File No. 72, comp. 1, pp. 47-51, CSR.

<sup>20</sup> *H/A*, vol. I, pp. 359, 368.

of the individual claimant was considered sufficiently important, the rules governing the system were bent. Often these rules were simply guidelines for action, not things to which officials felt bound if circumstances demanded a more flexible approach.

A main area in which British pragmatism quickly became apparent was over the question of the *salaam sanad*. Although by 1846 Napier had excused the holders of garden grants from the need to make their *salaam*, a large number of religious families, especially in Upper Sind, had forfeited other kinds of grants on the grounds that they had not made proper submission to the British authorities. Many of them had been unable to do so as a result of religious injunctions which prevented them from coming into direct contact with Muslim rulers, let alone an 'infidel' administration. Some had overcome this problem by sending a junior member of their family or trusted servant in their place and so retained their grants but those which had not found their lands threatened with resumption.<sup>21</sup>

It was not clear from Napier's proclamation whether or not he had intended *pirs* and *saiyids* to lose their charitable grants in the event of their failing to make their submission. The proclamation in question was addressed to 'Sirdars and Jagirdars', and only these specific groups were obliged to attend *darbars* in the districts of Hyderabad and Karachi. In Upper Sind, however, local officials applied the proclamation to everyone holding any grant whatsoever. The label 'jagirdar' was fixed indiscriminately; the smallest charitable grant of just a couple of rupees still required the presence of its holder at the *darbar* held at Sukkur. To many of the *pirs* and *saiyids* exempted by the *mirs* from the indignity of personal submission, this order seemed extremely arbitrary. In the cases of those who did not comply, partial or total resumption followed.<sup>22</sup>

During the 1850s, many of these forfeitures came to light as the authorities attempted to organise their records more systematically. They reacted sympathetically, and, on the whole, tried to make amends for what seemed to have been unfair treatment but this was mainly in those cases in which reconsideration was in British interests. Lack of understanding had resulted in the unnecessary imposition of hardship on families with whom the British wished to remain on good terms. The importance which was attached to the influence of the grantees necessitated a compromise, as the case of the Ghotki *pirs* illustrated. In February 1854, they petitioned for the restoration of rent-free gardens repossessed from them in 1845 on the grounds that they had not obtained their *salaam parwana*. Following an investigation, officials agreed that, in view of the *pirs*' status and the ancient tenure of their claim, the confiscation had not been fair and their privilege

<sup>21</sup> Secretary to the Governor of Bombay to Collector of Hyderabad, 14 Jan. 1846, Pre-1857 File No. 88, comp. 23, p. 497, CSR. Report by Collector of Upper Sind, 21 May 1853, Pre-1857 File No. 250, comp. 35, pp. 380-1, CSR.

<sup>22</sup> Collector of Upper Sind to Com-Sind, 21 May 1853, Pre-1857 File No. 87, comp. 15, p. 287, CSR.

was returned.<sup>23</sup> This use of discretion depended to a great extent on the value of the claimant in the eyes of the administration: Where the claimant's influence was considered valuable, the authorities could choose to be 'very particular' in the way that they applied the 'rules'. The same flexible approach was revealed in the British treatment of applicants who could not produce any *sanad*, let alone that of submission to the new authorities. The keeper of the shrine of Khwaja Khizr found himself in this unhappy position. But the religious influence wielded by the shrine which drew thousands of people from all over Sind and from neighbouring regions to its annual *mela*, outweighed the fact that he could produce no title deeds, and the grant was confirmed in perpetuity.<sup>24</sup> Equally the high position of the grantee also overcame the age of a *sanad* when this was considered to be politically useful. For reasons 'liberal, politic and in every way expedient' which had much to do with his being the most powerful *pir* in Lower Sind, a fourth-class *jagir* belonging to the Pir of Luari was transferred into the third-class category where it could be regranted in time to his heir.<sup>25</sup>

British practice was to regrant *jagirs* and charitable alienations to eldest sons whenever circumstances made this possible. The most obvious exception to this was in the case of grants which were attached specifically to the position of *mujawir* of a particular shrine and not to a named individual. Though not articulated in terms of policy, the application of a kind of assumed primogeniture was therefore established. *Pirs* had to state clearly whom they wanted as their official heirs. It was no longer always enough to simply inform *khalifas* and *murids* of the choice of successor. Instead, *pirs* were increasingly forced to make wills. The British response was not always consistent when individual *pirs* tried to overcome inheritance problems while they were still alive. Sometimes the British facilitated the transfer of rights. At other times, they refused to cooperate, insisting that the *pir* make a will, and only after his death would the question of succession be decided. In the event, the decision again normally hinged on whether or not officials wanted to encourage good relations with the *pir* family concerned.<sup>26</sup> British decisions were 'contradictory' for the same reasons when it came to settling disputes over the payment of private shares from alienated grants. On many occasions, however, sharers felt that they were not being given their full entitlement. It was then that the British were called upon to reach a solution and their response varied. Depending on whether or not they wished to retain the cooperation of the head of the family, usually a much more influential

<sup>23</sup> Com-Sind to Capt. Goldsmid, 23 June 1854, Pre-1857 File No. 88, comp. 23, p. 502, CSR.

<sup>24</sup> Pre-1857 File No. 72, comp. 14, p. 300, CSR.

<sup>25</sup> District Collector of Badin to Collector of Hyderabad, 23 February 1878, Revenue Dept. File No. 47 (1878), comp. 2, n.p., CSR.

<sup>26</sup> Revenue Dept. (1926) File Nos. 11463 B and 11513, CSR; Revenue Dept. (1933) File No. 341/3, p. 1, CSR.



man than his less important relatives, they either refused to intervene or compelled him to pay.<sup>27</sup>

The overall operation of the settlement of titles to alienate grants was carried out in what was considered to be a 'liberal spirit'.<sup>28</sup> In cases when claims were rejected, the claimant was not necessarily deprived of his lands but allowed to cultivate them in return for paying an assessment set at a relatively low figure in order to compensate for permanent improvements made during the period of revenue-free tenure.<sup>29</sup> While some religious families may have suffered, the vast majority benefited and emerged with their holdings virtually intact. At worst, some *pirs* only retained possession of their alienations for their own lifetimes; the majority had their alienations regranted to them on much more favourable terms ranging from automatic inheritance by the following generation to the extension of 'full' proprietary rights.

Before the arrival of the British in Sind, alienated grants had always been subject to reconfirmation upon the death of the holder. The British system of political control demanded the adoption of a more flexible approach which was also reflected in the way in which officials operated the system. The relative importance of different grantees determined the level of discretion applied to their cases. The more influential the *pir*, the more chance there was of his case being considered in a 'sympathetic light'. *Pirs* too became more flexible in their outlook and adopted new ways of regulating the disposal of their property in line with the 'pragmatism' which proved such a hallmark of this aspect of British administration.

### **Strengthening the system: 'a question of honour'**

British control over the Sindhi countryside was founded on the cooperation of indigenous powerholders whose interests were bound up with those of the new administration. But their cooperation was not maintained by British land-settlement policies alone. In practice, it was strengthened by other less tangible but equally essential 'bargains' based on the public distribution of honour which reinforced the position of these collaborating groups. The authorities recognised that *izzat* (prestige or consideration in the eyes of one's neighbours) formed the cornerstone of the position of local élites in relation to the rest of Sindhi society, and hence incorporated it into their system of political control.<sup>30</sup>

*Izzat* confirmed status and demonstrated power. The great landholder's pre-occupation with his prestige was not just a matter of vanity. Rather it was an issue

<sup>27</sup> Revenue Dept. (1923) File No. 8047D, p. 5, CSR.

<sup>28</sup> Government of Bombay Resolution No. 3153, 18 September 1863, Revenue Dept. File No. 49 (1862-3), comp. 6, n.p., CSR.

<sup>29</sup> *H/A*, vol. I, pp. 335-6.

<sup>30</sup> Com-Sind, 10 Oct. 1899, Bombay Proceedings (hereafter BP) (Revenue Dept. Lands), P/5776, p. 651.

of great importance. *Jagirdars* and *waderos* competed with each other for the allegiance of smaller *zamindars* and *haris*, and it was by appearing powerful that they won support. *Pirs*, like the majority of the landholding élite in Sind, also depended on *izzat*, for by necessity they too were forced to compete with each other for *murids*. While spiritual factors played a significant part in deciding where the loyalties of an individual *murid* lay, his decision could be swayed by the practical attractions of a *murshid* who was also able to protect his interests in more mundane matters.

More generally, *pirs*' position as religious leaders meant that *izzat* for them had special significance. *Sajjada nashins* directly relied on the creation and maintenance of 'distance' between themselves and their *murids*. The basis of their spiritual power revolved around the manipulation of the tools of charisma. Accordingly, they emphasised their separation from the ordinary mass of believers. Often the clothes and general appearance of a *pir* were explicitly 'saintly'. He might dress completely in white with a white turban in the manner of the Prophet Muhammad himself. Alternatively, the richness of his robes, gleaming with gold embroidery and encrusted with seed pearls, would signal his importance. In a land where the amount of material which went into the sewing of the traditional *shalwar kamiz* was a sign of status, an entire *than* of forty yards was often used. The *pir*'s establishment was similar to the court of a king in order to create the right kind of atmosphere in which to receive his followers. *Murids* were his courtiers, *khalifas* his ministers, and the *otak*, or guestroom, his *darbar*. As religious leaders, *pirs* might have been expected to shun overtures from a non-Muslim ruler. Their very nature, however, demanded that they build up and maintain reserves of honour and so in practice they actively promoted themselves in British eyes in order not to be excluded from the public display of honour.

British patronage was closely bound up with the public distribution of *izzat* and symbols of prestige which demonstrated and conferred status. These symbols rarely possessed intrinsic value in themselves for the British gave few materially valuable prizes. During the early years of British rule, small grants of rent-free land had been made from time to time. But as these grants were small by Sindhi standards, usually only twenty to thirty acres in extent, they were not regarded very highly and the scheme was abandoned during the 1870s.<sup>31</sup> The British in the main relied on awards such as the *kursi* at the *darbar* itself; *afrinnamas* or certificates of appreciation written either in silver or gold lettering; *lunghis* of differing qualities of cloth; swords and guns inscribed with thanks for services rendered; arms licences and, more importantly, exemptions from arms licences; and the honour of being excused appearance in the civil courts. These were all privileges which bestowed *izzat* in return for helpful activities which

<sup>31</sup> Collector of Shikarpur to Com-Sind, 22 March 1862, Revenue Dept. File No. 49 (1961-2), comp. 5, n.p., CSR.

ranged from the provision of labour for work on canals and roads to assistance in capturing criminals and the preservation of government authority.<sup>32</sup> The system of patronage depended, above all, on the willingness of local élites to participate, and *pirs*, like their non-spiritual counterparts, demonstrated their eagerness to take part. Pir Sahibdino of Ghotki, for instance, was recommended for an *afrinnama* and sword for help which he had given the authorities in solving a series of crimes in his area. But the *pir* was not satisfied with the quality of the sword which he was to be given, and so volunteered his own money to help the authorities to purchase a really valuable sword instead. Not only did such awards take into account the personal position of the *pirs* involved, but they signalled direct recognition by the authorities of the institution of *sajjada nashin* as a powerful embodiment of local identity.<sup>33</sup>

Anxiety not to be excluded from the British system of patronage was reflected very clearly in the attitude which *pirs* displayed towards the *darbar* in general and the *kursi* which they were allocated there in particular. In adopting this institution, the British became the direct successors of the Mughals who had centred the administration of their state around the *darbar*. Under the British, the *darbar* was no longer the place where everyday state business was transacted. Only its ceremonial functions were retained and used at the occasions upon which announcements were made and awards presented. The structure of the *darbar* symbolised the fundamentally hierarchical nature of British rule. It was on this hierarchy that the success of the *darbar* as a means of control hinged. At the lowest rung was the Collector's *darbar*. Each Collector drew up a list of *kursi nashins* or chairholders entitled to be present at his *darbar*. This honour was conferred at their own discretion whenever they thought fit. As a rule, no one who was not already a Collector's *darbari* could be elevated to the higher rank of a chairholder at the Commissioner's *darbar*. The Commissioner maintained a separate list of chairholders for each district compiled on the annual recommendations of local officials, and it was from these that individuals were chosen to be present at the *darbars* of the Governor of Bombay and the Viceroy on their visits to Sind.<sup>34</sup>

To become a *darbari* at the Commissioner's gatherings was far more prestigious than the award of an *afrinnama* or *lunghi* because the honour was not given in return for a specific action. Instead, three main considerations governed

<sup>32</sup> Such activity could be 'establishing many miles of road-side trees', see Political Dept. File No. 350 (1915-16), vol. I, n.p. CSR, or 'exposing official corruption' see Political Dept. File No. 37 (1909), p. 427, CSR.

<sup>33</sup> Judicial Dept. File No. 2 (1890-1), vol. I, part I, comp. 2, pp. 495-507, CSR.

<sup>34</sup> See Bernard S. Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 165-209, for an excellent account of the process of codifying a theory of imperial authority which took place in the two decades following the suppression of the 1857-8 revolt, based on 'ideas and assumptions about the proper ordering of groups in Indian society and their relationship to their British rulers' (p. 165), and in which the *darbar* occupied a central place in the ritual of empire.

who became a chairholder. The first and most important was social status, then came personal character and only lastly did officials take into account the nature of assistance rendered to the authorities. The award was given as a measure of appreciation of the 'value' of the individual himself: it represented a direct acknowledgement of his worth. In proposing a *pir* for a *kursi*, local officials often stressed his religious position. They might recommend him on the grounds that his status entitled him to a chair or describe him as 'a man of high family' with 'considerable influence' which he always exerted on the 'right side' and which would be strengthened by the honour. Close association with a famous shrine overcame any lack of 'personal character'.<sup>35</sup> Spiritual importance did not always automatically ensure a place and there were many instances when recommendations were not sanctioned at higher levels. But such refusals were never final, and local officials were often advised to resubmit their suggestions at a later date. Pir Ali Shah Jilani, *sajjada nashin* at the shrine of Shah Qadiri at Badin, was recognised as a very influential *pir* who deserved to be made a *darbari*. The only problem was that he was only sixteen years old at the time, and so the Collector of Hyderabad was told to try again in the future. Three years later, the grant was sanctioned, and the *pir* wrote to thank the Commissioner for the respect which this 'special honour' had bestowed upon his family.<sup>36</sup>

Pir Ali Shah's personal letter of thanks was an indication of the high value which *pirs* themselves usually placed on becoming a *kursi nashin*. Another indication was the way in which they often petitioned for the honour. Just as common were the petitions from *pirs* who already held chairs, seeking to improve the position of their place within the internal hierarchy of the *darbar*. Every *kursi* had a number which fixed it at a specific point in the order of merit. While the class of each chairholder was permanently fixed according to his personal rank, the number of his chair could be altered. Movement up the internal hierarchy of the *darbar* was one of the understandings on which the whole system was strengthened. Normal practice was for a new *darbari* to be placed at the bottom of the list. He would then climb higher and higher as vacancies above were caused by death or disgrace. The only exceptions to these 'rules' were made in the cases of the representatives of the big Talpur families, important tribal chiefs and 'influential *pirs* and guardians of shrines'. Their places unlike those of other *darbaris* were normally directly inherited by their successors.<sup>37</sup> Leading *pirs* occupied very senior positions. In Hyderabad District, they filled the seats immediately underneath the ones allocated to the ex-ruling family of Sind. During the 1880s,

<sup>35</sup> Political Dept. File No. 330 (1911), n.p., CSR.

<sup>36</sup> Revenue Dept. File No. 330 (1935), vol. 2, p. 5, CSR.

<sup>37</sup> Chairholders were divided into four classes: Class I – *mirs* and chiefs of the first class; Class II – *mirs*, heads of tribes, leading *jagirdars* of the second class; Class III – *mirs* who were political pensioners drawing Rs. 50 or below, and *zamindars* according to the rent-roll; Class IV – small landholders, see Political Dept. File No. 39 (1882–1903), vol. V, n.p., CSR.

the Makhdum of Hala was ranked in seventy-first place with only *mirs* above him. In the 1890s, his position was raised to seat number thirty-seven; by 1912, he had been given the ninth place.<sup>38</sup>

*Pirs* intervened directly to influence the position of their chairs. They often petitioned to be awarded the honour of their fathers' numbers. Pir Saleh Shah of Ranipur found that on the occasion of the Governor of Bombay's *darbar* at Sukkur in 1900 he had been given chair number 212 instead of chair number 6 enjoyed by his late father, Pir Ghulam Muhiuddin Shah Jilani. Following his petition, the authorities admitted their 'oversight' and raised his chair to the right position. Two years later, the *pir* again found to his dismay that he had been allocated an inferior position. An investigation revealed that, while the new *pir* did not yet command the same sort of influence that his father had done, 'the position of the Pir of Ranipur is such that the occupant of the 'gadi ... should always enjoy the same place', and, therefore, the *pir* was entitled to the same status as his father.<sup>39</sup>

*Pirs* were especially concerned about their position in relation to the chairs held by other members of their own families, their *khalifas* and even *murids*. When this sort of problem arose, the authorities reacted sympathetically and reallocated the *pir* a more appropriately numbered *kursi*. When Pir Mahbub Shah of Ghotki found himself placed below three less senior relatives, the indignity of his dilemma was recognised by officials and the rank of his chair raised in order for him to receive the 'degree of respect' to which he was 'entitled'.<sup>40</sup> A similar situation arose when his son, Pir Rasul Bakhsh Shah, became *sajjada nashin*. The Commissioner-in-Sind had to issue a special authorisation allowing him to take up his father's *kursi* because a *darbar* was due to be held before the annual reassessment of chairholders' positions. If the authorities had not taken this measure, the feelings of both the new *pir* and his *murids* would have been deeply hurt. The authorities had been alerted to the problem by Pir Rasul Bakhsh himself and it is interesting to note that the *pir* based his claim to preferential treatment on his hereditary sainthood alone, and not on 'helpful activities' which, in his opinion, his position prevented him from carrying out in the first place.<sup>41</sup>

Some of the leading *pirs* in Sind maintained the sufi's traditional aloofness from worldly affairs. Even so, they too took pains to ensure that they were not excluded from the public display of honours. The Makhdum of Hala traditionally stayed away from the *darbar*. But his retirement did not prevent him from accepting a

<sup>38</sup> This elevation was due in part to the decrease in available members of the Talpur family, the conscious trimming of the size of the *darbar* through retrenchment, and the creation of two new districts of Nawabshah and Sanghar, see Political Dept. File No. 39 (1882–1903), vol. II, p. 1068 and File No. 330 (1912), n.p., CSR.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. V, pp. 1,243, 1,245–6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1,211–14.

<sup>41</sup> Political Dept. File No. 330 (1915), pp. 13–19, CSR.

highly placed *kursi* or stop his brothers and sons from filling their own seats.<sup>42</sup> The Pir of Luari never came into direct contact with Government officials yet he kept up a healthy correspondence with local British officers. The authorities knew that he would never attend the *darbar* but his name was always entered in the list as 'a matter of civility', and they did not object when his place was taken by a nominated representative.<sup>43</sup> In this way, influential *sajjada nashins* ensured that, while their own absence was a visible sign of their immense religious stature and indifference to the outside world, the attendance of their representatives demonstrated the importantly placed *kursi* which they had been awarded by the British.

Being a Commissioner's *darbari* was particularly important to *pirs* because of their dependence on the public recognition of their status. There was, however, one honour which outdid the *darbar* chair in terms of the privilege which it conferred. This was the right to be exempted from personal appearance in the civil courts. It was an honour which was eagerly sought by *pirs* as a result of their concern to retain their independence and hence apparent 'distance' from the machinery of the state. The determined efforts of the Pir of Luari to get himself admitted to the exclusive circle of people with the right not to appear in the civil courts illustrated the pressure which a *pir* was prepared to bring to acquire such a high prize.

In 1887, the District Magistrate of Hyderabad in response to a petition from the *pir* recommended exemption on the grounds that, as the *pir* lived 'in complete seclusion within the four walls of his Fort', never leaving on any pretext except when proceeding on pilgrimage to Mecca, having to appear in court was religiously impossible for him. More importantly, the *pir*'s influence could not be ignored. He was 'held in highest esteem . . . for his extensive learning, boundless liberality and blameless life'; the *gadi* had been venerated for centuries. *Murids* included *mirs* and Baluch *sardars*, as well as wealthy Cutchi Memons and merchants living as far away as Zanzibar, Mauritius and Southern Africa. Even the local branch of the National Muhammadan Association had written in support of his application. But the authorities at Bombay turned down the recommendation, arguing that no more exemptions were being granted. A further succession of petitions from the *pir* followed. In them, he stressed that any advice he had been given not to feel hurt at the failure of his request had been made from a 'European standpoint', since, from an eastern point of view, it was 'not at all agreeable to be refused such an indulgence'.<sup>44</sup> The crisis for the administration created by the Hur 'rebellion' which gripped Sind during the 1890s meant that the

<sup>42</sup> Political Dept. File No. 39 (1882-1903), vol. II, n.p., CSR.

<sup>43</sup> Private letters in the possession of the present *sajjada nashin*, Pir Faiz Muhammad, Qazi Ahmad, Nawabshah, Sind.

<sup>44</sup> District Magistrate, Hyderabad, to Com-Sind, 27 September 1887, Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1887), vol. II, part II, comp. 72, pp. 229-31, 234, CSR; Pir Muhammad Saiyid Buzurg of Luari to Collector of Hyderabad, 8 July 1890, Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1890), vol. II, part II, comp. 63, pp. 597-9, CSR.

authorities needed to be able to draw upon the cooperation of local élites more than ever before. Local officials were prompted once again to try and secure this highly prized privilege for the *pir*, arguing that, in a frontier province where order depended in great measure on the loyalty and good behaviour of the leaders of society, threatening to withdraw the rare privilege of exemption from appearance in civil courts, which cost the British nothing, was the most powerful instrument which the authorities had to control powerful landowners. Bombay relented and the *pir* duly received his exemption.<sup>45</sup>

This series of decisions highlights the reciprocity which underpinned the relationship between the British and local élites in Sind. In exchange for his assistance over law and order, the Luari *pir* was honoured. But the episode clearly demonstrates another equally fundamental principle on which the system of political control depended. Although British authority was strengthened by the system of patronage which it extended to powerholders living in the Sindhi countryside, honour was never simply 'given'. It had to be won, either directly or indirectly. The administration had to ensure that rewards were not awarded indiscriminately. Otherwise, their public value would have been badly injured. Thus, *afriinnamas* were distributed in return for assistance on behalf of the community in general and not merely for the protection of personal property, lands and villages. Similarly, recommendations for chairs at the Commissioner's *darbar* had to be made for 'good reasons' and with a 'due sense of responsibility'.<sup>46</sup> Just as the British conferred patronage, so they rarely hesitated to withdraw it whenever they considered that it was no longer deserved. By using its withdrawal as a rebuke or a punishment, not necessarily for having done something wrong but often for not having offered help when help was expected, the authorities further strengthened the system itself. As H. S. Lawrence, Commissioner-in-Sind, explained to his *darbaris* at Sukkur in 1909, the object of the *darbar* was not simply to make certain that valuable service for the authorities was publicly thanked and suitably rewarded: equally important was the public admonition of those who 'failed to assist the Government when it was their duty to do so'.<sup>47</sup>

All the same, the authorities trod carefully. They always ran the risk that the forfeitures of honours might drive an individual into open disloyalty by removing all incentive for good behaviour. The system could only function as long as it retained the respect of the participants. Once this respect disappeared, the system began to lose its strength. Luckily for the British, this did not normally happen.

<sup>45</sup> Com-Sind to Government of Bombay, 29/30 August 1894, Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1895), vol. VII, comp. 40, pp. 997-9, CSR; Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1887), vol. II, part II, comp. 72, p. 227, CSR.

<sup>46</sup> Com-Sind to Collector of Sukkur, 2 May 1931, Revenue Dept. (1931) File No. 19849B, p. 43, CSR; Com-Sind Circular No. 843, 28 July 1910, Political Dept. File No. 330 (1911), n.p., CSR.

<sup>47</sup> Political Dept. File No. 37 (1909), n.p., CSR.

When a chairholder was deprived of his honours, he usually tried very hard to regain them as quickly as possible. Their regnant was linked to measurable 'improvements' in his conduct; if he showed positive signs of turning over a new leaf, the disgraced *darbari* might be readmitted. *Pirs* were not immune from being punished in this way. They could be deprived of their honours as easily as any other 'offender'. They first had to prove their good intentions, then they might be restored to their former *kursis*, 'sins . . . altogether purged and blotted out'.<sup>48</sup> The British were not so generous with *pirs* who had voluntarily relinquished their honours. Resignations of this kind lowered the status of the *darbar* in public estimation, and, for this 'crime', offenders paid a harsher penalty. In the event of their being taken back, no attention was paid to their former position and they were made to start again from the bottom of the ladder.<sup>49</sup>

The public distribution of *izzat* was designed to strengthen the system of political control, not to promote local élites to the extent that they came to be seen as more powerful than the authorities themselves. *Pirs* and other Sindhi power-holders were promoted as an example to society and they were punished for the same reason. A delicate balance of interests prevailed. Often the public withdrawal of honours was the only effective punishment available to the British as the influence wielded by *pirs* and *waderos* made it very difficult for the prosecution to find witnesses prepared to speak out against them in a court of law. The British could not afford to treat *pirs* differently before the law as this would have undermined the aura of impartiality of their legal process. However, they rarely secured convictions. In 1902 the Makhdum of Hala was acquitted on a charge of inciting murder as a result of the lack of hard evidence. What seemed to hit him hardest in the end was the wholesale removal of his privileges. Keen to regain his position, the *makhdum* made a conscious effort to reform and by 1912 he had his old *kursi* back. Later the family took an overtly loyalist stand during the upheavals of the Khilafat agitation and reaped the rewards of cooperation.<sup>50</sup> The fact that *pirs* knew that they would not be allowed to stray very far from the path of collaboration, of course, did not ensure 100 per cent cooperation. But the preservation of landed interests buttressed by the distribution of honour guaranteed a high level of participation on the part of Sindhi élites including *pirs* in the British system of political control.

<sup>48</sup> Pir Pir Shah in a letter to the Commissioner dated 10 September 1903 referred to social position as 'the dearest possession of *zamindars* everywhere', Political Dept. File No. 34 (1904), vol. I, comp. 2, pp. 17–19, CSR.

<sup>49</sup> Cohn argues that the return the honours and emblems of imperial rule attacked not so much the institutions of government but the capacity of that Government to make meaningful and binding its authority through the creation of honours, see 'Representing Authority', p. 209.

<sup>50</sup> District Magistrate, Hyderabad, to Com-Sind, 2 February 1900, BP (Judicial Dept. Conf.), Z/P/3196, p. 317, IOL; Com-Sind to Political Dept. Bombay, 22 May 1900, Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1900), vol. IV, pp. 25–9, 47–59, CSR.



### **Making the system 'work': *pirs* take advantage of the *raj***

The imposition of British rule led to the introduction of new institutions in the Sindhi countryside intended by the authorities to help their system of political control to function smoothly. Measures to protect *zamindars* and *waderos* combined with the British legal system provided new avenues down which *pirs* like other Sindhi élites travelled in pursuit of their best interests. On the whole, they were sufficiently flexible in outlook to take advantage of the opportunities which these innovations offered.

The landed interests of *pirs* and *saiyids* were not confined just to charitable grants, *jagirs* and *baghs*. Many were also large *zamindars*. Often their *muafi* lands comprised but a fraction of the much larger estates which they owned. The Makhdum of Hala had only sixteen acres alienated in his name. This was in sharp contrast to the huge extent of *zamindari* holdings in his possession. By the early twentieth century, the *makhdum* paid more than 15,000 rupees in annual revenue assessment on agricultural lands which stretched into thousands of acres. The same pattern was repeated in the cases of many other *sajjada nashin* families.<sup>51</sup>

As *zamindars*, *pirs* prospered under British rule. While early British officials in Sind had regarded *zamindars* as 'exploitative middlemen' and had introduced the *ryotwari* system of revenue collection, the settlement in practice did not undermine the position of Sindhi *waderos* in any lasting way. Some estates did disintegrate under the dual pressure of regular cash assessments and indebtedness, but the vast majority survived, and a significant number actually extended their holdings under the revenue system. After making *batai* and paying assessment, most were able to retain a reasonable profit. Even in districts such as Larkana, where by the 1880s the very existence of the *wadero* seemed doomed, the majority of families involved eventually emerged as powerful, if not more powerful, than before.<sup>52</sup>

Their resilience, to a large extent, was strengthened by the special treatment meted out by the authorities who were afraid that rural indebtedness would seriously undermine their method of controlling the countryside. During the 1870s, a number of reports were compiled which suggested that the *waderos'* economic strength was being eroded.<sup>53</sup> A few officials still welcomed the apparent demise of the large *zamindar*. Most considered it politically imperative to intervene to maintain the status quo. Landed élites had become so integrated into the local structure of British authority that local administration without them was virtually unthinkable. However well-disposed *waderos* might be towards British rule, their collaboration could not be effective once they lost their influence. If too

<sup>51</sup> Revenue Dept. File No. 48 (1887-92), comp. 22, pp. 469-70, CSR; General Dept. File No. 141 (1916), vol. I, p. 52, CSR.

<sup>52</sup> Cheesman, *Rural Power*, pp. 149-62.

<sup>53</sup> For a detailed description of the problems of *saiyid* families living near Sehwan during the early 1870s, see H. E. James, 'Report on the Indebtedness of Munchur Lake', V/27/313/44, IOL.

much land passed from them into the hands of *banias* or moneylenders, the unthinkable threatened to become a reality. The overwhelmingly Hindu *banias* did not possess enough status or command enough respect among a predominantly Muslim rural population to fill the gaps which would be left by the demise of the great landowning families.

In line with similar legislation in other parts of India, the Encumbered Estates Act was consequently introduced in Sind in 1876. It was intended originally as a strictly temporary measure to protect badly indebted *zamindars* but its social and political repercussions proved so attractive that it was repeatedly extended and reintroduced in 1881, 1884 and 1896. The Act set up a department which took over complete responsibility for the administration of holdings admitted for management. Estates were only returned to their owners once all debts had been discharged and all liabilities cleared. Since these benefits were restricted to hereditary *jagirdars* and to *zamindars* who paid at least 300 rupees a year as land revenue, the Act was clearly intended to benefit the 'natural leaders' of the Sindhi countryside upon whose cooperation the British system of control depended.<sup>54</sup>

*Pirs*, as members of this élite, took advantage of the protection afforded by the Act. Even though they had hidden resources in the shape of financial support from their *murids* upon which they could draw during difficult times, they were attracted to the Encumbered Estates department for the very clear practical reasons. The fact that no creditor could sue for recovery of any debt incurred by the landowner while his estate was under management proved a powerful incentive for some *pirs* when faced with mounting debts. Sometimes, the ability of a *pir* to live on his *murids'* *nazranas* for as long as it took to discharge his debts, increased the chances of his estate being accepted by the authorities. In 1911, Pir Muhammad Alim Shah of Tando Bago approached the department with debts totalling over a staggering 40,000 rupees. His estate was only accepted for management on the understanding that the *pir* would not be awarded any living expenses until the debts were cleared. Generally, *pirs* stressed that they belonged to religious families, knowing that this would be in their favour when the political and financial aspects of their cases were weighed up and discussed.<sup>55</sup> *Pirs* like their non-religious counterparts, also benefited from other institutions introduced by the British to bolster the position of Sind's landed élites. The Court of Wards, introduced in 1905 to supplement the work of the Encumbered Estates department, was established to give greater economic stability to the local intermediaries who formed the backbone of British administration. It was a measure of the importance attached by the British to *pir* families that they were included amongst the groups to whom this facility was extended. Similarly, the Cooper-

<sup>54</sup> See Cheesman, *Rural Power*, chapter 6, for a thorough examination of the workings of the Encumbered Estates department and the responsibilities of its manager.

<sup>55</sup> Revenue Dept. (1922) File No. 903R, p. 5, CSR.

ative Credit Societies Act was designed to reinforce the status quo by providing landowners with an alternative source of credit to the local moneylender.

The economic strength which *pirs* possessed by the beginning of the twentieth century was reflected in their efforts to buy up land in newly irrigated parts of Sind. The completion of the Jamrao Canal scheme and the Sukkur Barrage project saw floods of petitions for huge grants of land at preferential cheap rates.<sup>56</sup> In their applications, *pirs* emphasised their special status and relationship with the authorities in the hope of obtaining a favourable response. Pirs Muhammad Sadiq and Muhammad Faruq of Lyari, Karachi, drew the attention of the Commissioner to the increasing inability of their *murids* to provide them with sufficient *nazrana* as justification for 2,000 acres of land that they wanted on the Jamrao Canal, while Sirhindi *pirs* at Tando Muhammad Khan referred to 'valuable assistance' in return for which they lodged a claim for land. *Pir* families added hundreds of acres to their estates during this period, and, although their *murids* often helped towards the cost of these lands, many made these purchases out of their own pockets.<sup>57</sup>

Working the system of control to their advantage was not confined to the question of land. It spread to other aspects of British rule, in particular the legal system. *Pirs* did not always enter the courts unwillingly. Many came to look upon the law as something which they could 'manipulate' in their own interests. The introduction of the Bombay Code in 1886 provided them with new arenas in which to settle old disputes. While they ran the risk of having their standing injured by cross-examination in court, they also stood to gain when judgement went in their favour. They could then rely on the authorities to carry out the instruction of the court down to the last letter. *Pirs* did not abandon old methods of resolving disputes. Disagreements over property and succession could still end in bloodshed: rivals were still murdered. But, as British authority became more established, the number of civil cases involving members of religious families grew.

The issue which most frequently came to the courts was dispute over succession to the *gadi*. Whoever inherited the position of *sajjada nashin* was assured of both religious respect and economic security. Traditionally, disputed successions were settled by force or through the intervention of an arbitrator who commanded enough authority in the eyes of both parties to reach a settlement. In effect, *pirs* now cast the British in the rôle of arbitrator. It became their responsibility to discover who had been nominated by the previous *sajjada nashin* and confirm him as the rightful *pir*. Sometimes the process dragged on over many years as unsuccessful litigants made full use of the process of appeals. When Pir

<sup>56</sup> In August 1894 the Pir Pagaro, Pir Ali Gohar II requested 10,000 acres of land for cultivation on the Jamrao Canal, see Revenue Dept. File No. 18 (1894), vol. II, comp. 48, n.p., CSR.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from the *pirs* to Com-Sind, 13 November 1900, Revenue Dept. File No. 17 (1900), comp. 3a, pp. 257-8, CSR; Pir Abdul Karim Jan Sirhindi to Com-Sind, 22 March 1905, Revenue Dept. File No. 17 (1901-5), comp. 20., pp. 149-50, CSR.

Rashidullah Shah Rashdi, the Pir of Jhando, died in 1922, there was a dispute between two of his sons over the *gadi* and its property. The litigation climbed the legal ladder until it eventually reached the Privy Council in London. With no alternatives left, the unsuccessful litigant was forced to accept the failure of his attempt to become *sajjada nashin*; however the two halves of the family remained estranged for years.<sup>58</sup>

The ability to appeal to a higher authority provided a 'safety-net' in the event of initial failure as it was often possible to reach a more favourable judgement in a different court room. The appeals procedure was an expensive one, but *pirs* with the backing of their *murids* were well equipped to make the most of it. Their overall acceptance of the processes of British law was also highlighted by their willingness to involve themselves in other aspects of the legal system such as by becoming honorary magistrates. Although this formed part of the overall structure of British patronage, it underlined the fact that *pirs* had developed a sufficiently healthy respect for the process of law for their appointments not to be regarded as impractical or even farcical, and by the 1940s, many leading *pirs*, including Pir Ghulam Haider of Bulri, Pir Baqadar Shah of Matiari, Pir Jurial Shah of Bhit Shah and Pir Ali Anwar Shah Rashdi of Larkana, had been honoured in this way.<sup>59</sup>

The British in Sind constructed a system of political control which hinged on the cooperation of landed élites, of whom *pirs* made up a sizeable proportion. These élites looked after local affairs and represented local interests: they were 'the interpreters between Government and the general body of the population'.<sup>60</sup> Just as the authorities relied on collaboration, local powerholders needed the economic security and social status which the system gave them. In operating and taking advantage of the system, both sides were prepared to be pragmatic: officials used their discretion when applying the rules, while *pirs* rarely hesitated to take advantage of new ways of increasing their power and prestige. The very section of the élite which, in theory, had most to lose from being too closely associated with the administration, found that there was much to gain from maintaining a good 'working relationship' with their new 'infidel' rulers. Many of them managed to retain an aura of spiritual aloofness at the same time as making the most of the benefits of cooperation. In the long run, their willingness to participate in the British system of political control helped endow *pir* families with the resilience needed to cope with colonial rule.

<sup>58</sup> *Daily Gazette* (Karachi), 9 May 1931, p. 4 and 9 May 1931, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> *The Sind Civil List* (Karachi, 1943) pp. 44A–44G.

<sup>60</sup> Bombay Government Resolution No. 115, 17 May 1893, Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1893), vol. III, part II, comp. 108, p. 935, CSR.

## Challenge to the system: the Pir Pagaro and the Hur rebellion of the 1890s

*We have . . . seen the singular spectacle of the peace of the country depending on one single individual, not the representative of the government, but a local 'saint'.<sup>1</sup>*

The central importance of local collaborators to the British system of political control in Sind was demonstrated by the events surrounding two crises of British authority involving *pirs* during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In both cases, first the Hur 'rebellion' of the 1890s and second the Khilafat movement of 1919–23, the system was put severely to the test but on both occasions it proved its worth in the way in which it helped to restore order to the province. Both crises illustrated well the complexities of the relationship which existed on the one hand between a *pir* and his followers and on the other hand between a *pir* and the authorities. *Pirs* in Sind acted as mediators between Government and society but this did not mean that they were necessarily 'free agents': their rôle as intermediaries derived from influence over their *murids*, while the preservation of their social and economic power largely depended in practice on good working relations with the British. *Pirs* thus were bound by constraints from both above and below. The British expected them to help in the smooth running of the administration, yet they were also responsible for fulfilling their followers' expectations. Most of the time, *pirs* were able to balance out the two sets of demands. But problems arose when these demands came into conflict and they had to decide which took priority. It was at these times that the British hold on the Sindhi countryside was endangered and the system of political control was itself directly challenged.

This conflict of interests was very marked during the Hur 'rebellion'. The Hurs

<sup>1</sup> Com-Sind to Governor of Bombay, 17 June 1896, Police Dept. File No. 2D (1894–6), vol. II, p. 2, CSR.

were *murids* of the Pir Pagaros, the province's premier religious family, standing out from the *gadi*'s other followers as well as the followers of other *pirs* because of the intensity of their devotion. When, during the 1890s, Hur activities threatened the stability of local administration, the particular quality of this devotion, together with the Hurs' expectations of their *murshid*, imposed constraints on the *pir*'s willingness to collaborate with the authorities. Without the *pir*'s help, officials found it impossible to control the problem and so they placed tremendous pressure on him to cooperate. Eventually, it was his stake in the status quo maintained by the British system of control which persuaded him to restrain, and hence run the risk of alienating, a very important section of his following.

### The challenge

The crisis of the 1890s which took the form of a 'rebellion' on the part of the Hur followers of the Pir Pagaro, challenged British authority on a scale which rocked the province as a whole: while the actual disturbances were more or less confined to an area stretching from Hyderabad to Sanghar in the east, the implications of the threat to law and order were felt throughout the province. The administration was unable to control the problem on its own and so the crisis pulled the system of control sharply into focus by highlighting the practical limits of British authority when it was not accompanied by the cooperation of influential local élites.

The Hurs by the 1890s had earned themselves a reputation for lawlessness in British eyes, culminating in the late 1880s in the emergence of a band of Hur 'outlaws'. During the early 1890s the gang was quiet but it re-surfaced at the beginning of 1894 with the more or less undiluted support of the Hur community. Hurs ranged from landless *haris* to wealthy *zamindars*, but, irrespective of individual status, the vast majority obeyed their duty to the brotherhood and supported the 'rebellion' which carried on well into the second half of the 1890s.

Initially the gang's attacks were confined to individuals who in some way were seen by Hurs to pose a threat to the Pir Pagaro or to be working as Government spies or informants against them. As time passed, other targets also emerged. The harvests of the early 1890s were below average: those of 1893–94 and 1895–96 were both severely hit by meagre rainfall and below normal inundation levels.<sup>2</sup> The district of Thar Parkar, where the majority of Hurs lived, was badly affected by the low level of the Indus which fed its irrigation canals. Under these circumstances, resentment came to be directed against Hindu *baniyas* and shop-keepers as well as larger *zamindars* who were not followers of the Pir Pagaros. Police too were murdered, partly for being representatives of the British and partly for the arms and ammunition in their possession.<sup>3</sup> In February 1895,

<sup>2</sup> Annual Reports on Revenue Administration in Sind for 1893–4 and 1895–6, see Bombay Revenue (Land) Proceedings P/4866 & P/5324, IOL.

<sup>3</sup> M. Yakub to Com-Sind, 30 September 1898, Police Dept. File No. 207 (1914), Gen. vol., comp. 8, pp. 96–8, CSR.

learning that a well-known civilian had been employed to capture them, gang members killed him together with several policemen. Action of this kind, often in broad daylight, terrorised the local non-Hur population. In addition, the horrific manner in which Hur victims met their death, with bodies badly mutilated in what seemed cruel and senseless ways, increased the level of terror, as did their attacks on women and the destruction of property and livestock.<sup>4</sup>

The seriousness of the threat to law and order was reflected in the strenuous efforts of the authorities to control it. The first step taken by the British was to increase the number of armed and mounted police in the affected districts. Police posts were imposed on villages known to contain Hurs and suspected of assisting the outlaws, and the inhabitants were made to finance the cost of these extra policemen. In Thar Parkar district as a whole, the total cost falling on Hur communities was over 50,000 rupees, while in Hyderabad district, where fewer *talukas* were affected, it was 250,000 rupees for the same period. Every Hur landholder had to pay a sum equal to the average amount of land revenue assessment paid by him, this 'annual tax' exceeding 1,000 rupees in the case of many larger Hur *zamindars*.<sup>5</sup> When extra police did not prove a sufficient deterrent, the British called in three infantry companies and a squadron of cavalry but, being unfamiliar with the locality, their presence did not substantially increase the chances of the authorities regaining the upper hand.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the British reacted by taking intimidatory action against leading Hurs. The brotherhood included wealthy *zamindars* whose landed possessions made them targets for individual reprisals. Lists were compiled of known active sympathisers, and gun licences and exemptions from the Arms Act were revoked. Lands were sequestered and attempts made to prosecute on the grounds of sheltering members of the gang. When suspects were acquitted for lack of evidence, as was often the case, their lands could still be held 'under attachment' until local officials considered it prudent to reinstate them. Other coercive measures included announcements that canal water would be withheld until the disorder was over. In addition, moves were made to bring in non-Hur settlers from outside the area in order to reduce the dominance and hence dilute the strength of Hurs in the 'afflicted' districts.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the British introduced rewards whose sizes were substantially greater than the usual rates offered by the authorities. Normally there was a threshold of 200 rupees on any reward which could be offered by the Commissioner without

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> See Com-Sind, Memo., 17 September 1895, Bombay Proceedings (hereafter BP) (Judicial Dept.) P.5089, p. 292, IOL; and Deputy Commissioner, Thar Parkar, to Com-Sind, 25 May 1896, Police Dept. File No. 2D (1894-6), vol. II, p. 58, CSR.

<sup>6</sup> Bombay Government Judicial Dept. to Government of India, 23 Nov. 1896, BP (Home Dept.) (Police), P/5193, n.p., IOL.

<sup>7</sup> Com-Sind, Memo., 1 June 1894, Police Dept. File No. 2D (1894-6), vol. I, n.p., CSR; Deputy Commissioner, Thar Parkar, to Com-Sind, 25 May 1896, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 51, CSR; Deputy Commissioner, Thar Parkar, to Com-Sind, 18 July 1896, *ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 127, CSR.

the sanction of the government at Bombay. This restriction was now lifted and the local authorities were allowed to set their own limits. By 1895 the Commissioner-in-Sind had begun to announce rewards of 500 rupees for information leading to the arrest and conviction of wanted Hurs.<sup>8</sup> The authorities also made full use of the honours system to reward individuals for their services with *darbar* chairs, *lunghis* and *afrinnamas*.<sup>9</sup>

British attempts to isolate and capture the gang in this way, however, remained distinctly unsuccessful. They were able to track down some of the wanted men but there was no shortage of Hurs ready to fill the gaps. One important reason for the authorities' failure was that the British initiatives could not break the solidarity of the Hur Union. The wanted men occupied a position of immense honour within their community. Ballads extolling them became popular and were sung by Hur 'minstrels' who travelled from village to village until the authorities intervened to stop the practice. The songs referred to Hurs who had been killed by the authorities as *shahid* (martyrs) for they were seen to have given their lives in the cause of their *pir*, and 'flown straight to heaven'. The gang itself resembled a kind of mock government: the leader was its *badshah*, the second-in-command its *vazir*, another outlaw its *qazi*. Gang members walked about 'armed and fearless' in broad daylight, and wherever they went they received great respect and the best food and entertainment. They were attended everywhere by ordinary Hurs who looked after their wants, comfort and safety. A network of spies and information-gatherers worked under their direction, and so they could count on both hospitality and protection from the Hur villages through which they passed.<sup>10</sup>

Hurs were able to intimidate non-Hurs from cooperating with the authorities. A skilful system of blackmail was established. *Panchayats* of larger villages had to make payments in order to protect themselves from attack, which then helped towards the legal expenses of Hurs who were tried for harbouring wanted men as well as raising the necessary security for their future good behaviour. *Banias* and *zamindars* were usually too afraid to resist such demands. They were discouraged from giving information to the authorities who appeared discredited and unable to stem the 'tide of lawlessness'. Even some police officials paid to make sure that no offences were committed in their particular areas.<sup>11</sup> On top of this, the murder of known government informers terrorised the countryside still further. Non-Hur *zamindars* took elaborate precautions to protect themselves,

<sup>8</sup> Com-Sind, Memo., 25 April 1895, BP (Judicial Dept.), P/4869, n. 963, IOL.

<sup>9</sup> District Superintendent of Police, Hyderabad, to Com-Sind, 23 May 1894, Police Dept. File No. 2D (1894-6), vol. II, p. 23, CSR; Collector, Hyderabad, to Com-Sind, 26 November 1894, *ibid.*, Vol. I, n.p., CSR.

<sup>10</sup> M. Yakub to Com-Sind, 30 September 1898, Police Dept. File No. 207 (1914), Gen vol. comp. 8, pp. 95-6, CSR.

<sup>11</sup> Deputy Commissioner, Thar Parkar, to Com-Sind, 25 May 1896, Police Dept. File No. 2D (1894-6), vol. II, pp. 48-9, CSR; section of a translated letter from a 'dacoit' c. January 1896, *ibid.*, vol. II, n.p., CSR; *ibid.*, vol. III, p. 1,022, CSR; Letter dated 20 May 1894, *ibid.*, vol. I, n.p., CSR.



building high compound walls around their homes, and, if they were sufficiently wealthy, maintaining a personal guard at all times of the day and night. Many additional gun licences had to be issued even though the possession of arms sometimes directly led to raids by Hurs who looked to increase their own stock of weapons. The generally high level of fear made it very difficult for the British to secure convictions. Time after time, suspects were either released before being tried, or, if cases went as far as the courts, acquitted for lack of evidence. Most individuals were not prepared to risk their lives and property by acting as witnesses for the prosecution.<sup>12</sup>

The outlaws were further protected by the nature of the terrain in which they operated. They made their headquarters in a large swamp-filled depression known as the Makhi Dhand just to the north of the area of highest Hur concentration around Sanghar. The *dhand* and its *kachcha* wells were very familiar to local Hurs. During periods of low inundation, it had provided the perfect grazing spot for thousands of head of Hur cattle. But its many small shallow lakes, coarse grasses and thick jungle cover of tamarisk trees and babuls made it very difficult for the authorities to clear their way through to the Hurs' strongholds. The reeds which covered much of the *dhand* quickly re-established themselves within a short time of being cut down and efforts by the military to burn parts of the Makhi jungle failed completely. Members of the gang were thus able to live there in almost perfect security for weeks at a time. Hurs on the edge of the tract kept them informed of the movements of the police. In an effort to break the unity of the Hurs, the British prohibited them from grazing their cattle in the *dhand* and warned them of dire consequences if these orders were not obeyed. Despite the fact that the ban threatened their livelihood, Hurs continued to feed and support the wanted men. Without inside information, which Hurs were not prepared to give, it remained impossible for the authorities to discover the gang's whereabouts.<sup>13</sup>

### **The roots of the problem**

The British were all too aware of the inadequacies of their response to the crisis. What, in British eyes, distinguished the Hur problem from ordinary raids by gangs of robbers was the religious element: they regarded the outlaws as 'fanatics' with 'murder and revenge . . . more to their heart than mere plunder'. While organised crime was relatively rare in Sind in comparison with other parts of the subcontinent, bands of dacoits were by no means unknown, nor was it considered by officials to be uncommon for dacoits to terrorise local people to prevent

<sup>12</sup> District Magistrate, Hyderabad, to Com-Sind, 18 May 1895, Police Dept. File No. 2D (1894-6).

<sup>13</sup> M. Yakub to Com-Sind, 30 September 1898, Police Dept. File No. 207 (1914), Gen. vol., comp. 8, p. 98, CSR.

information being given about their whereabouts and so defer their capture. However, the main problem with the Hurs was the way in which religious devotion to their *pir* made them defiant of all other sources of moral and physical authority.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, officials placed great store on the ability of the Pir Pagaro to use his influence to restore order. They were convinced that he could instruct his *murids* to give up the wanted men and return to a peaceful way of life. This conviction stemmed in large part from what they knew about the nature of the relationship between the *pir* and the Hurs as well as the way in which relations between the Pir Pagaros and the British had developed over the preceding fifty years. At the same time, officials knew from past experience that it would not necessarily be easy to obtain the *pir*'s cooperation: the Hurs provided him with a very solid basis of support which he could not afford to disappoint. Previous encounters with the Hurs had demonstrated to the authorities that the brotherhood possessed its own perception of the *pir*'s relations with the British which meant that they often interpreted his actions in terms of what they thought his true feelings ought to be rather than what the *pir* actually said or did.

As part of their response to the mounting crisis of control, British officials drew together information and opinions on the Hurs and a number of reports were produced in order to give the administration a better understanding of the phenomenon with which they were dealing. It soon became clear that members of the Hur Union made up a relatively small but important part of the total following of the Pir Pagaro which, by the late 1890s, stood at over two hundred thousand. Known also as the Farq Jamiat, they differed from the majority Salim Jamiat in the way in which they regarded the *pir*. 'Salimis' paid far and away the most respect to the *gadi nashin*. However they also treated his relatives with the honour which they felt was due to the legitimate descendants of their former *pirs*. In contrast, the 'Farakwalas' or Hurs revered only the Pir Pagaro. To them he belonged to an order that was infinitely higher than that of a mere mystic or saint; rather they placed him on a par with God. Hurs were thus united in their firm and absolute belief in the quasi-divine nature of their *murshid*.<sup>15</sup>

The reports pointed out that the Hurs, largely as a result of this sense of unity, had developed extremely strong ties of brotherhood and fellow-feeling based on mutual support and cooperation, with a Hur code of behaviour along side their code of honour. Special rules of conduct were respected which included directions on eating, dressing and greeting: Hurs abstained from eating and drinking with non-Hurs; they wore distinctive dark green clothes and adopted a special style of turban; they extended their right hand in greeting to the *pir* alone and

<sup>14</sup> Com-Sind to Governor of Bombay, 17 June 1896, Police Dept. File No. 2D (1894-6), vol. II, p. 1, CSR.

<sup>15</sup> M. Yakub to Com-Sind, 30 September 1898, Police Dept. File No. 207 (1914), Gen. vol., comp. 8, p. 93, CSR.

saluted no one but him by voice.<sup>16</sup> The intensity with which the Hurs were devoted to the *pir* was shown most clearly when they flocked in large numbers to see him during his tours. Men and women performed *ziarat* together, for, as with *haj*, there was no separation of the sexes on these occasions. Murids took the opportunity of *ziarat* to overwhelm the *pir* with lavish gifts. Much land and numerous cattle were given to the *pir* who, by the later years of the nineteenth century, was thought to collect *nazrana* worth several hundred thousand rupees from a tour through Hur country.<sup>17</sup>

The intensity of this devotion was considered unusual by the British, even in a region of the subcontinent famous for its reverence for sufi saints and their descendants. Parallels were drawn between the Hurs and the followers of the Aga Khan. Officials also pointed to resemblances between the Hurs and the Ismaili sect of the Assassins, the followers of the Old Man of the Mountains whose headquarters had been in Iran: common to both groups were 'a close bond of loyalty to comrades and a devotion to leaders' as well as the adoption of beliefs and practices which came to be mistrusted by the orthodox.<sup>18</sup> Explanations of the origins of the brotherhood emphasised the extreme devotion of a section of the *pir's* *murids* who became the founders of the Hur Union. Following the example of the original Hur who won honour by his support for the direct heirs of the Prophet Muhammad, the Hurs in Sind were said to have earned their title by conspicuous loyalty to their *murshid* and the readiness to sacrifice themselves in the name of his faith.<sup>19</sup> One suggestion was that the Hurs emerged as a result of a struggle for succession following the death in 1818 of the line's founding father, Pir Muhammad Rashid, and argued that their support for the successful candidate lay at the bottom of their special relationship with the holder of the *gadi*.<sup>20</sup> A second explanation associated the Hurs with a small band of *murids* picked by the second *pir*, Sibghatullah Shah, to support the *jihad* of Saiyid Ahmad Barelwi during the late 1820s and 1830s. Although it was not known whether these *murids*

<sup>16</sup> M. Yakub, 'A Brief Account of the Hur Union', n.d., Police Dept. File No. 2D (1894-6), vol. II, p. 11, CSR.

<sup>17</sup> Com-Sind to Governor of Bombay, 17 June 1896, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 6, CSR.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (London, 1968), p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> The name 'Hur', meaning 'one emancipated', is highly prestigious for Muslims. Its significance dates back to the early years of Islam when Hur, an influential man in Yezid's army, went over to the side of the Prophet's grandsons at Karbala and was killed in battle. Subsequently his name became a symbol of extreme sacrifice in the cause of Islam.

<sup>20</sup> Pir Muhammad Rashid left thirteen sons of whom the most prominent were Pir Sibghatullah Shah and Pir Muhammad Yasin. After their father died, the two quarrelled over the *pirship*. Sibghatullah, the nominated successor, was challenged by Muhammad Yasin who had the backing of the eleven other brothers. However, Muhammad Yasin's unsuccessful attempt on Sibghatullah's life alienated support for his claim. News of his attempted 'treachery' spread quickly among the Pir Pagaro's *murids*, and supporters from the Nara region, who had been devoted to Sibghatullah from the outset, now resolved that they would only ever honour the holder of the Turban or *Pag*; in future, they would never greet or bow down to any of the *pir's* relations. Impressed by their declaration of loyalty, Sibghatullah was said to have rewarded them with the name of 'Hur', see Aijaz al-Haq Quddusi, *Tazkira-i Sufia-i Sind* (2nd edn., Karachi, 1975), p. 273.

actually ever left Sind, the *pir* was supposed to have awarded them the collective title of 'Hur' in recognition of their readiness to take a stand in defence of Islam. These early Hurs, and afterwards their descendants, then continued to observe the original instructions laid down for their journey, and out of this observance was held to have developed the separate ideology and exclusive lifestyle of the brotherhood.<sup>21</sup>

The significance of the Hurs' display of special devotion for the occupier of the *gadi* which formed the central theme of both explanations was that it effectively set them apart from the rest of his following. And it was the continuing readiness of the Hurs to defend the *pir*'s interests, with or without his approval, which, the British recognised, had contributed to the expansion of the Union after the mid 1860s. During the long tenure of the fourth *sajjada nashin*, Pir Hizbullah Shah, which lasted from the early 1850s to the beginning of the 1890s, the power of the *gadi* increased tremendously and the basis of its support consequently grew stronger. Areas where its following had been traditionally concentrated, such as the Eastern Nara Valley and the western fringes of Thar Parkar, increased in prosperity as the nineteenth century progressed. Their economies had earlier been dominated by shifting pastoralism and sparse cultivation, conditions whose very unpredictability had contributed to the initial growth of support for the *gadi* among the nomadic cattle-grazers of the region. Agricultural production had now risen with the expansion of the canal network and a significant proportion of the inhabitants of these areas had been transformed into relatively well-to-do small *zamindars* and peasant proprietors.<sup>22</sup> But these changes did not seem to affect the love and respect which people there felt for the *pir*; they still retained their loyalty, demonstrating it with larger contributions of *nazrana*. In addition, fairly substantial migration to these areas took place, stimulated in part by the new agricultural opportunities opening up there and in part as a result of the serious famine which struck the Thar region in 1868–9. Many of the newcomers subsequently became *murids* as a result of social pressure to conform, coupled with the fact that by becoming members of an accepted and well-established group it was easier to integrate into their new environment.<sup>23</sup>

The increase in the *pir*'s income was reflected in the construction of a lavish tomb and a couple of big mosques as well as several large fort-like palaces in the family's 'ancestral' village of Pir-jo-Goth (also known as Kingri). Pir Hizbullah's clothes became more regal. He started the precedent among the Pir Pagaros of wearing a long coat or *kalunghi* and crown in the style of the local *mirs*. His

<sup>21</sup> For details on the *saiyid*'s visit to Sind and the response of the Pir Pagaro and his followers, see J. Burnes, *A Visit to the Court of Sind* (1st edition, Bombay, 1829, reprinted Karachi, 1974), p. 100, Aijaz al-Haq Quddusi, *Tarikh-i Sind* (3rd edn., Lahore, 1985), vol. II, pp. 637–43; Tabasum Chaudhury, *Tazkira-i Piran-i Pagaro* (Hyderabad, Sind, 1975), pp. 94–5, 112, 124–6; K. B. Khudadad Khan, *Lubb-i Tarikh-i Sind* (Hyderabad, Sind, 1959), pp. 255–9.

<sup>22</sup> Yakub, 'A Brief Account', p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> H. T. Sorley, *The Gazetteer of West Pakistan: The Former Province of Sind (including Khairpur State)* (Karachi, 1968), p. 440.



*Plate 1 The Pir Pagaro, Pir Hizbullah Shah (1847–90)*



Plate 2 Shrine and mosque of Pir Pagaros at Pir-jo-Goth, Sind

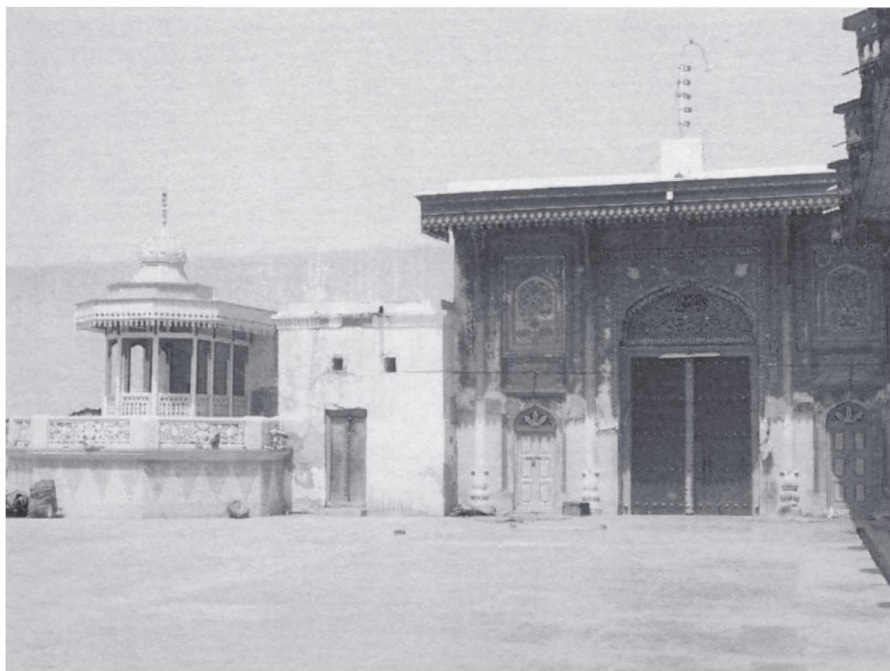
interests also began to reflect those associated with worldly rulers: elephant riding, shooting, hunting and archery. In time, he was called the Takht Dhani, in a reference to the 'throne' which he seemed to have established for himself.<sup>24</sup> Such obvious displays of the *gadi*'s new wealth only served to reinforce the devotion which the Hurs felt for their *pir*.

As Hurs gained in self-confidence and became more ardent in their beliefs and customs, 'orthodox' members of the province's Muslim community had begun to criticise them openly. In time this created problems for the *pir* who was forced to respond to wider public pressure. Critics disapproved of the Hurs' refusal to eat or drink with others while their strong sense of brotherhood was regarded with great suspicion. The widely believed rumour that Hur mosques pointed northwards to Pir-jo-Goth, rather than in the direction of Mecca, also incited great opprobrium. Worst of all was the quasi-divine status endowed upon the *pir* by the Hurs for it directly contradicted the most basic principles of Islam and smacked of heresy. Pir Hizbullah Shah was increasingly reproached for having allowed his followers to 'plunge into darkness' and as a result he finally disowned in public the doctrines and habits adopted by the Union.<sup>25</sup> However, in practice, the *pir*'s

<sup>24</sup> N. A. Baloch, Preface to Pir Saiyid Hizbullah Shah Rashdi, *Diwan-i Miskin* (Pir-jo-Goth, 1985), p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> Yakub, 'A Brief Account', p. 12.





*Plate 3 Ziarat platform at Pir-jo-Goth, Sind*

actions did not affect the Hurs very greatly for they refused to accept that they were being in any way rejected by him. They argued that the *pir* had been influenced by the British, that his wishes were not of his 'own mind and soul' and that Hurs were therefore not obliged to respect them.<sup>26</sup> Instead, his new outlook was blamed on the influence of 'evil' advisers and gradually Hurs began to feel that they alone knew what was best for him. It became their responsibility to free the *pir* from the clutches of these people, and a series of murders of non-Hur *khalifas* subsequently took place. Echoing the later events of the 1890s, the assassins were regarded as heroes by the brotherhood who protected them from capture by the authorities.<sup>27</sup>

The British were therefore conscious in the 1890s that the Hurs could pose problems for the holder of the *gadi*. His overall influence depended on retaining the loyalty of his followers including the Hurs whose support strengthened the hand of the *sajjada nashin* during disagreements within the family especially at times of disputed succession. Yet he was obliged by the British to do his duty and,

<sup>26</sup> M. Yakub to Com-Sind, 30 September 1898, Police Dept. File No. 207 (1914), Gen. vol., comp. 8, p. 95, CSR.

<sup>27</sup> For details of the murder of Khalifa Karam Ali Shah, see Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1889), vol. I, comp. 7, pp. 621–41, CSR.

on occasions, found the actions of the Union to be a liability in terms of his relationship with the authorities. In this context, officials placed great store in the 'understanding' which linked the fortunes of the *gadi* to the British presence in Sind and which hinged on the authorities' decision in the early 1850s to include the countryside around Pir-jo-Goth in the nearby British district of Rohri. This decision had its origin in a quarrel which soured relations between the *pir* and the Mir of Khairpur in the aftermath of the conquest of Sind. The *pir*'s rôle in exposing illegalities on the part of the *mir* over the way he inherited his position from his brother meant that the *pir* expected protection in return from the British and, in particular, the preservation of his 'ancestral' seat.

The British move to keep Pir-jo-Goth under their control and hence protected from reprisals by the *mir*, in spite of the fact that it became an enclave within the independent state of Khairpur and created problems of practical administration. From time to time, officials raised the possibility of exchanging the *tapa* for another portion of Khairpur State which would be more efficient from the administrative point of view. However, these suggestions never got very far as British interests demanded that the 'great influence of the Pir of Kingri in enforcing law and order' should remain 'at the call of the British authorities and not the Mir'.<sup>28</sup> British support was based on the direct understanding that the *gadi* would be useful in the future: by guaranteeing the *pir*'s safety, the authorities hoped to ensure his cooperation. The Pir Pagaros themselves had good reason to prefer to remain under the shadow of British jurisdiction. Living in Pir-jo-Goth allowed them to show contempt for the local authority of the *mir*. Such an obvious permanent display of British backing allowed them to demonstrate their importance to their *murids* and the rest of Sindhi society; at the same time, they realised that, should they lose British support, they risked losing the physical seat of their spiritual power.

Recognition on the part of the *gadi* that its fortunes were closely linked to good relations with the authorities helped to keep it within the framework of local collaboration. Setbacks such as an unsuccessful British attempt in the 1860s to prosecute Pir Hizbullah Shah for his alleged involvement in the death of his cousin and rival, the Pir of Jhando, did not last long. In spite of the gravity of the charges, the *pir* quickly managed to live down the affair. The reality of the political situation in Sind meant that he was soon received 'with honour' once again by British officials and not long afterwards awarded a highly placed *kursi* at the Commissioner's *darbar*.<sup>29</sup> On the whole, in the years leading up to the 1890s,

<sup>28</sup> Revenue Dept. File No. 69A (1896-9), vol. I, p. 81, CSR.

<sup>29</sup> The trial caused a sensation among the *pir*'s *murids* who donated large sums of money towards the cost of his defence. Seven thousand rupees were subscribed to bring a prosecution against the Collector of Shikarpur for having subjected him to the indignity of being handcuffed at the time of his arrest, see R. I. Crawford to Com-Sind, 31 May 1895, Police Dept. File No. 2D (1894-6), vol. II, p. 25, CSR; the *pir* was placed thirteenth in the Darbar List of 1887, see Political Dept. File No. 391 (1882-1903), vol. IV, n.p., CSR.



the holder of the *gadi* was ready to cooperate with the authorities: murders and dacoities were carried out by Hurs during the tenure of Pir Hizbullah Shah but widespread trouble was averted by his willingness to exercise a restraining influence over his followers. The real crisis for the British took place when the *pir*'s 'obligations' to the Hurs caused him to ignore his other 'set of responsibilities' to the system of control at a time when the Hurs had exhausted all the coercive measures that the administration itself could muster.

### **The system works**

It had not taken long for the British to recognise that the *pir*'s cooperation would prove vital to the success of the efforts to control the Hurs. Yet the first couple of years of the crisis were marked by the obvious unwillingness of the *pir* to provide them with the kind of help demanded by the system of control. It was only when the British put pressure on the *pir* by threatening to remove his privileges wholesale that he capitulated to their demands for assistance, and the tide began to turn in favour of the authorities. The *pir* was forced to choose between his responsibilities towards a section of his *murids* and his wider personal interests. In the end, his personal stake in the system of political control overcame his other 'obligations', and he used his influence to put a stop to the 'rebellion'.

British moves to persuade the Pir Pagaro to put the needs of the administration above those of his followers stemmed from the fact that by the early 1890s the *gadi* was filled by a *pir* who was far less willing to jeopardise his relations with his followers than Pir Hizbullah Shah had been. In 1890, the old *pir* died. Newly installed on the *gadi*, Pir Ali Gohar II's position was far less secure than that of his father. Unlike his predecessor, he allowed Hurs to visit him at Pir-jo-Goth and he himself toured their villages. As a result, officials felt that he would have only to threaten that he would no longer accept their *salaams* and the Hurs would soon lead 'quiet and pious' lives. At first, the *pir* argued that he had expelled the Hurs from his *jamiat*. He could not, he claimed, be held accountable for the misdeeds of people who were 'misguided enough to regard him as their godhead': if he did intervene in the way that the authorities wanted, then he too would be in danger of violence at the hands of the Hurs.<sup>30</sup>

By 1895, the British were no longer prepared to accept these 'excuses'. Despite the fact that the Hurs had before chosen to ignore the *pir*'s express instructions, officials were certain that he still commanded considerable influence over his Hur *murids*. During a recent tour through Hur country, he had collected over one *lakh* of rupees in tribute, generosity which did not strike them as the action of disaffected supporters. Instead they suspected that the *pir* was afraid of alienating

<sup>30</sup> District Magistrate, Hyderabad, to Pir Ali Gohur Shah, 24 May 1894, Police Dept., File No. 2D (1894-6), vol. II, p. 31, CSR; Deputy Commissioner, Thar Parkar, to Acting Com-Sind, 2 April 1895, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 35.

the Hur Union precisely because it represented a considerable source of his support and income. The authorities were convinced that the *pir* 'could insist upon his disciples giving up the outlaws' and grew increasingly frustrated at the way in which he was accepting 'contributions to his exchequer knowing full well that they are attained by outrageous crimes' while, at the same time, talking 'to Government officers of sending his agents to help them.' All that Pir Ali Gohar had done apart from sending representatives who had proved 'no use whatsoever' had been to write letters to leading Hurs in the relevant districts, telling them to put a stop to the lawlessness. As these men for the most part openly sympathised with the outlaws, the letters had produced no results. Their only effect had been to reinforce in the minds of the Hurs the belief that it was not the *pir*'s real wish that the gang be given up.<sup>31</sup>

Just 'when matters seemed most hopeless', the authorities hit upon a plan of action which turned the tide in their favour. Following a series of discussions, the administration realised that they had to put at risk something as important to the *pir* as the Hurs' support before he would listen seriously to requests for help. Gathering together the opinions of local British and non-British officials, the acting Commissioner-in-Sind, Sir Charles Ollivant, decided to exert pressure on the *pir* where it would hurt him most; in other words, his pocket and his pride. Accordingly, the *pir* was forbidden to visit Thar Parkar or enter the affected parts of Hyderabad District. In this way, he was prevented at a stroke from touring areas where non-Hur support for the *gadi* was also greatest, and he thus stood to lose a very substantial proportion of his income. At the same time, his official prestige was threatened. While local officials had suggested depriving the *pir* of his *darbar* chair and other honours such as his exemption under the Arms Act, Ollivant decided not to curtail the *pir*'s privileges straightaway arguing that this move would leave Pir Ali Gohar with nothing left to lose. Instead, the threat of their removal was to hang ominously over the *pir*'s head as a warning of what was certain to befall him if he continued not to cooperate properly with the authorities.<sup>32</sup>

In August 1895, the Commissioner refused to accept a symbolic gift of fruit sent by the *pir*. This worried him greatly, and he wrote to Ollivant pointing out that there was no precedent for such action: previous Commissioners had always accepted *dali* from his family, who, in turn, had always prayed for the prosperity of the British Government and its representatives; Ollivant's decision to return the gift had sent 'shock waves' throughout Sind, bringing great contempt on the *pir*, and lowering his respect in the eyes of Sindhi society: his *izzat* was badly damaged.<sup>33</sup> Ollivant emphasised in reply that, as long as professed followers of

<sup>31</sup> District Superintendent of Police, Hyderabad, to Acting Com-Sind, 17 May 1895, *ibid.*, vol. I, n.p., CSR.

<sup>32</sup> District Magistrate, Hyderabad, to Com-Sind, 18 May 1895, *ibid.*, vol. IV, n.p.

<sup>33</sup> Pir Ali Gohar to Acting Com-Sind, 10 August 1895, *ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 275-7.

the *pir* were 'notoriously abetting or sheltering persons who have committed and continue to commit outrageous crimes', it was 'unbecoming' for the Commissioner to receive any complimentary offerings from the *pir* himself. The Commissioner's predecessors had indeed recognised the *pir*'s ancestors as persons of influence and dignity for this is what they had been. It was up to Pir Ali Gohar to 'show by facts, not by words merely' that he also exercised the same kind of influence. Otherwise, he was not to wonder if his dignity was impaired.<sup>34</sup> The *pir* was placed in a dilemma of sizeable proportions. Unless he assisted the British fully, they could argue that he no longer had any authority over his followers, or that he was using it improperly. In either case, his inactivity would then be held against him, and used as justification for the revocation of the official symbols of his high status. The only way to retain his claim to preferential treatment and favours was by meeting the demands of the administration.

Ollivant's visible disapproval was underlined by his refusal to grant an audience to the *pir* during his visit to Upper Sind at the end of 1895.<sup>35</sup> The rebuff was keenly felt. By the time that the *pir* finally obtained an interview with the Commissioner in February 1896, he was anxious to restore better relations. He offered to take the Hurs back into 'the fold of his spiritual blessing' on condition that they cooperated with the police.<sup>36</sup> He then called leading Hur *zamindars* from Sanghar to Pir-jo-Goth, and instructed them to assist the authorities. This move was followed up by the despatch of four of the *pir*'s *khalifas* to the affected districts, where they distributed sheaves of letters from the *pir* and delivered messages to specific Hurs. The British gave special passes to more than fifty men to enable them to move about as spies, but all proved quite ineffective, either because they were strangers or because they were 'hard-hearted' Hurs who still did not believe that it was the genuine wish of the *pir* that the gang should be caught or killed.<sup>37</sup> The authorities therefore decided that the *pir* should be made to use his influence in person. He was brought to Hyderabad where he spoke at a gathering of 400 specially assembled Hurs, admonishing them vigorously. He was, he told them,

very sorry that the outlaws of the Makhi Dhand . . . have not yet been apprehended. For this reason, the Government [has] shown displeasure to me in the extreme. They have stopped my tour . . . Before all this, European officers used to come to me and pay me due respect, but nowadays not a single officer comes to me . . . If you are my true murids . . . get [the gang] arrested, and let me have my honour restored. Otherwise, you are not my murids.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Acting Com-Sind to Pir Ali Gohar, 5 September 1895, *ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 277–8.

<sup>35</sup> Com-Sind to Governor of Bombay, 17 June 1896, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Pir Ali Gohar to Acting Com-Sind, 29 September 1895, *ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 283.

<sup>37</sup> Deputy Commissioner, Thar Parkar, to Com-Sind, 25 May 1896, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> Town Police Inspector to District Superintendent of Police, Hyderabad, 7 March 1896, *ibid.*, vol. II, n.p.

The impact of the *pir*'s direct instructions turned the tide in the authorities' favour. The majority of the Hurs now recognised that their loyalty to the *pir* meant that they had to comply with his wishes. Spies were sent out to make contact with the main Hur leaders. They were informed that it was now the wish of the *pir* and the Hur community that they should be given up. By the end of April 1896, most of them had been captured or killed, and at the beginning of May their leader surrendered to the authorities. The disturbances did not cease entirely. There were still minor gangs at large, and sporadic outbursts of trouble continued to take place. Hurs did not lose their respect for their former heroes. In the words of a prominent Hur, 'the country looks now without its charms; everything looks barren. The pleasant fakirs are gone, and, without them, we all are nothing more than birds without feathers.'<sup>39</sup>

The *pir* was presented with more than the customary tokens of thanks. As well as a sword of honour, he was made Shams al-Ulama, and exempted from personal appearance in the civil courts. He was also allowed to tour among his *murids* again provided he did not visit Hur villages or allow Hurs to perform *ziarat*.<sup>40</sup> The authorities recognised that, without the help of the 'unwilling' *pir*, they would have still been baffled by the Hurs who had had the benefit of two allies: on the one hand, the Makhi Dhand whose swamps and tangled jungles had offered almost impenetrable hiding places, and, on the other hand, the common bond of unity which welded the brotherhood so tightly together. Not surprisingly, they disliked being so dependent on an 'ecclesiastic' for the restoration of law and order. While they accepted that the system depended on the chiefs of Baluch tribes to find and surrender criminals in the Upper Sind Frontier district, they considered it not just 'undignified' but also 'unpleasant' that 'in the very heart of Sind' it had been only the *pir*'s intervention which had brought about the necessary breakthrough.<sup>41</sup>

The extent to which the British depended on the smooth working of the system of control was emphasised again within two years when more Hur trouble was triggered off, this time by a challenge to the legitimacy of Pir Ali Gohar's successor. Pir Ali Gohar had died in December 1896. He was succeeded by a younger brother, Pir Shah Mardan Shah, who, although not next in seniority in terms of age, had been chosen by the late *pir* to follow him. Pir Shah Mardan Shah permitted Hurs to visit Pir-jo-Goth freely as he required their support in order to mount a defence against his older brother Ali Muzaffar Shah's bid for the *gadi*. Immediately the customary year of mourning was over and the new *pir* could leave his headquarters, he set off on tour visiting the thickly Hur-populated

<sup>39</sup> M. Yakub to Com-Sind, 30 September 1898, Police Dept. File No. 207 (1914), Gen. vol., comp. 8, p. 95, CSR.

<sup>40</sup> Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1895), vol. VII, comp. 40, p. 997, CSR.

<sup>41</sup> Com-Sind to Governor of Bombay, 17 June 1896, Police Dept. File No. 2D (1894-6), vol. II, p. 9, CSR.



*Plate 4 The Pir Pagaro, Pir Shah Mardan Shah (1897–1921)*

*talukas* of Sanghar, Khipro and Shahdadpur where he was entertained by, among others, relatives of former leading outlaws.<sup>42</sup>

The tour was the first to take place since the disturbances of the earlier 1890s. Hurs congregated in large numbers, arriving in the area from all over Sind as well as from adjoining states. Excitedly, they marched 'from camp to camp in huge processions after their "godhead" exalting triumphantly and assuming defiance and contempt for all others'. Fresh outbreaks of disorder followed close behind. The link with the *pir*'s tour was unavoidable and so officials advised the *pir* to alter his programme to avoid potential troublespots.<sup>43</sup> In a letter which sought the *pir*'s assistance, the Commissioner made it clear that, in order to preserve his honour, he should offer his 'loyal help' just as his late brother had done. The turning-point came when the British informed the *pir* that Pir Ali Gohar had personally expressed his choice of successor to a senior British official before his death. With this kind of evidence in his favour, Pir Shah Mardan became confident that he could not be ousted as *sajjada nashin* by the civil courts and straightaway his 'need' for Hur support diminished significantly.<sup>44</sup> Shortly afterwards, he set about exercising his influence in the way that the authorities wanted, making it very clear during a visit to Hyderabad that, if the perpetrators of recent outrages were not surrendered, his status would be severely lowered in the estimation of the government. It was also probable, he warned his followers, that future tours would be prohibited unless order was immediately restored. Threats of this kind, together with more subtle forms of 'blackmailing' and trips to places where Hurs were most stubborn in their defiance of the authorities, resulted in the majority of the offenders being taken into custody.<sup>45</sup>

For the second time in the space of a handful of years, the British found themselves relying heavily on the *pir*'s cooperation: as on the previous occasion, it was obtained largely as a result of the system of control which guaranteed the *pir* his position and privileges in return for help. Pir Shah Mardan Shah was rewarded with the same honours which his late brother had received; in 1900, he too was made Shams al-Ulama by the visiting Viceroy.<sup>46</sup> The wording of his civil court exemption clearly demonstrated the understanding on which these honours

<sup>42</sup> Acting Deputy Commissioner, Thar Parkar, to Com-Sind, 8 September 1898, Police Dept. File No. 2D (1898-9), vol. I, pp. 121-2, CSR.

<sup>43</sup> Hurs of Khipro took a much larger share in the unrest than they had done on previous occasions, due to the *pir* spending the longest time of his tour in this *taluka*, see *ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>44</sup> Collector of Shikarpur to Com-Sind, 25 January 1897, Judicial Dept. File No. 2 (1897), vol. I, comp. 6, n.p., CSR.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, while the *pir* was negotiating with the Hurs, news arrived of the death of his stepmother at Pir-jo-Goth. After consulting with officials, he made good use of the opportunity by explaining to the Hurs that their behaviour was preventing him from performing the usual rites and that his absence would lower him in the eyes of his relatives as well as badly damage his chances in the civil suit over succession to the *gadi*, see *ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>46</sup> Political Dept. File No. 37 (1892-1900), vol. II, p. 517, CSR.

were awarded for the exemption was to continue only as long as the *pir* exercised effective influence over his followers, suppressed disorder and arranged for the arrests of any who were wanted by the authorities. If any of these circumstances changed, then the privilege, like all his others, was 'liable for reconsideration'.<sup>47</sup> By threatening the continuation of the honours already possessed by the *pir*, the authorities were able to press him to cooperate: by increasing his honours, they sought to insure themselves further against a repetition of the crisis in the future.

The events of the 1890s highlighted very accurately the way in which the system of political control worked and the extent to which the British relied on it to control law and order. The system, albeit somewhat unsteadily at first, was able eventually to diffuse a challenge which threatened its stability. Not surprisingly, however, officials were anxious to avoid repeating the experience for a third time and so began to look for other ways of reducing the potential threat posed by the Hur Union. Drawing on the lessons of the 1890s, a two-pronged plan of action emerged. First, settlers were brought in from outside to colonise the Hur country. The completion of the Jamrao Canal meant that many hundreds of acres of well-watered land were now available. Mari families from Johi on the other side of the Indus and Khosas from the desert tracts, were joined by Baluchis, Panjabis and Pathans in their thousands. Most of the latter were military pensioners whose loyalty was unquestionable. In addition, the authorities rewarded leading individuals for their help during the crisis. The Bugti chief, for instance, was given 4,000 acres of land near Sanghar, which were settled with a large colony of his tribesmen, in return for his offer of 200 men to assist in controlling the Hurs.<sup>48</sup>

Second, and more important, the Hurs were declared a criminal tribe in May 1900. The main object of this move was to bring the 5,000 or so adult Hurs living in the most notorious *talukas* under the direct surveillance of the authorities. They were relocated in special guarded settlements or *lorhas*. Inmates could leave the camps during the day but had to report for *hazri* or roll call at dawn and at sunset. No Hur was allowed to leave the immediate area of the camp without a pass, and regular searches were made to prevent 'bad characters' from visiting. Officials also took the opportunity to start an educational programme for Hur children which, they hoped, would undermine the ignorance on which they believed the Hurs' devotion was based. One year after the Criminal Tribes Act had been introduced, official opinion was cautiously positive about what it had achieved. However, it still saw improvement as gradual and related to a large extent to the amount of physical restraint which could be brought to bear on the Union. Above all, the authorities recognised that they had committed themselves to a strategy which combined direct and indirect restrictions on both the spiritual and material lives of the Hurs. In the short term, repression of this kind seemed

<sup>47</sup> Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1898), vol. II, p. 535, CSR.

<sup>48</sup> *Sind Gazette* (Karachi), 7 April 1896, p. 6.

the most obvious way of coping with the Hur problem. Only in the long term would it become clear whether it had indeed been the right policy.<sup>49</sup>

The 1890s crisis therefore illustrated in a dramatic way how a *pir* could be persuaded to cooperate with the authorities even when he was being pushed from below to take a stand which directly challenged government authority. The rôle of *pirs* as intermediaries hinged on their being able to satisfy the requirements of the various groups for whom they were acting as mediators. In order to be effective collaborators, they needed to be on good terms with the authorities but not to the extent that they sacrificed their influence over the supporters who made up the basis of their power. On the whole, *pirs* managed to effect a working equilibrium. In the case of the Pir Pagaro, the special nature of his relationship with the Hurs put strains on his ability always to act in the way that the administration expected: it produced situations in which he, as a local Muslim leader, found it difficult to exert the kind of control expected of him by local officials. It was then that the system of political control, which had successfully integrated the *gadi* into the local hierarchical structure of British authority, came into play, albeit rather hesitantly at first, and thus underlined its importance as one of the corner-stones on which British rule in Sind rested.

<sup>49</sup> Government of Bombay (Judicial Dept.) Notification, 25 May 1899, BP (Judicial Dept.), P/5785, p. 1,056, IOL; Deputy Magistrate, Thar Parkar, to Com-Sind 14 January 1901, BP (Judicial Dept.), P/6252, p. 1,947, IOL.



## Challenge to the system: the Khilafat movement, 1919–1924

*Pirs of modern times do not deserve their following ... they consider the grant of the title of Shams al-Ulama as the highest honour. In these desperate times, there were high hopes in them, but they have proved weak ... you are fools if you still follow them!*<sup>1</sup>

Up to the turn of the twentieth century, the British system of political control had worked well in Sind. During the Khilafat movement of 1919 to 1924, however, the British faced a second major challenge to their authority. The Khilafat movement represented the first occasion on which a significant number of Sindhi *pirs* came together on a common platform to protest about British policy, and their involvement reflected the way in which they were being gradually involved in the concerns of the wider Indian Muslim community. Like their co-religionists elsewhere, many of these *pirs* had been affected by the growth in pan-Islamic sentiment as well as by the changing awareness of the position of Muslims in India as a whole. Their participation in the agitation seriously threatened to undermine the position of the British in Sind. Yet, despite the enormous influence wielded by *pirs* and the considerable support which they generated for the Khilafat cause, the system of control proved its worth by ultimately reducing the threat posed to British authority to one of manageable proportions.

### **Pirs are drawn into a wider Islamic framework**

The system of control was seriously shaken by the involvement of Sindhi *pirs* in the Khilafat movement. The concerns of the movement appealed very strongly to a significant section of the province's religious leadership as a result of the growth in interest in pan-Islamic issues during the years leading up to 1919. Support for wider Islamic concerns during this period was directly related to the gradual erosion of the barriers which had isolated Sind from developments taking place in

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Wahid* (Karachi), 15 September 1920, p. 1.

other parts of the subcontinent. From the late nineteenth century onwards, these barriers had been breaking down as the province had become more integrated into all-Indian systems of communications, of trade and ideas. A burst of railway construction during the 1890s linked Sind with Quetta, Lahore and Bombay, and by 1907, the city of Sukkur had become a major railway junction.<sup>2</sup> As a result of these changes, the volume of trade through Sind increased tremendously, and Karachi developed into one of the major Indian ports. With the transfer of the seat of the Government of India from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, Karachi's importance rose still further on account of its being significantly closer to Europe and the new capital than the nearest alternative port of Bombay. New ideas were able to circulate with the rise in the number of local newspapers. The expansion of the vernacular press, which accompanied developments in new printing techniques, brought into being, in Sind as elsewhere, a 'reading public of province-wide, if not India-wide range, and helped make possible a . . . public opinion on contemporary affairs which overstepped provincial boundaries'.<sup>3</sup> From the Sindhi Muslim point of view, involvement in the 'outside world' was strengthened by the 1912 decision to open up Karachi for *haj* traffic: thousands of pilgrims from all over Northern India now passed through Sind on their way to Mecca, bringing the concerns of their own communities with them.<sup>4</sup>

Under these circumstances, *pirs* in Sind became more conscious of the pan-Islamic sentiment which had been stoked by the decline of Turkey as an important world power. They, like other Indian Muslims, became more concerned about the declining fortunes of the Ottoman Empire and the consequences which this had on its ability to defend the integrity of Islam. The British rôle in undermining the position of Turkey led many Muslims in India to suspect that Britain was no longer the 'safe custodian' of Muslim interests. This suspicion was hardened by Government actions at home. Government encroachments upon Muslim educational and legal institutions, and interference with Muslim personal law were resented. More specifically, the abolition of the partition of Bengal in 1911, the emergence of official opposition to the creation of a Muslim university at Aligarh in 1912, and the excitement of the Cawnpore Mosque incident of 1913 all fuelled resentment against the British.

A number of Sindhi *pirs* developed very close links with pan-Islamic leaders in other parts of the subcontinent. Most notable of these connections was the involvement of a certain group of *pirs* with *ulama* belonging to the Dar al-Ulum at Deoband in the western United Provinces (UP). By the beginning of the twen-

<sup>2</sup> E. H. Aitkin, *A Gazetteer of the Province of Sind* (Karachi, 1907), pp. 344–5; H. T. Sorley, *The Gazetteer of West Pakistan: The Former Province of Sind* (including Khairpur State) (Karachi, 1968), p. 588.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 126–7.

<sup>4</sup> 'Report on Native Papers published in Bombay Presidency', week ending 4 May 1912, p. 22, L/R/5/167, n.p., IOL.

tieth century, there existed a network of religious centres, stretching from Bharchundi on the Sind–Panjab border, via Haleji and Amrot near Sukkur, to Goth Pir Jhando, north of Hyderabad, which had become outposts of Deobandi influence in the province. The network's origins, however, pre-dated its Deobandi links. They went back to the distribution of *baiat* by Pir Muhammad Rashid, father of the first Pir Pagaro and Pir of Jhando. From Pir Muhammad Rashid, the *baiat* had passed to Syed Hasan Shah of Sui, and thence to Hafiz Muhammad Sadiq Qureshi of Bharchundi. The Pir of Bharchundi had two principal Khalifas, Maulana Abul Siraj Ghulam Muhammad of Dinpur in the state of Bahawalpur and Maulana Taj Muhammad of Amrot. They, in turn, passed on the *baiat* to their followers, notably Muhammad Saleh of Bhaiji Sharif and Maulana Amanullah of Haleji. As direct descendants of the network's original *murshid*, the *pirs* of Jhando were closely connected with his spiritual disciples. All belonged to a combination of the Qadiri-Rashidiyya and Naqshbandi sufi orders.<sup>5</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century, their links with each other and with Deoband had come to be symbolised in the person and ideas of the leading pan-Islamic campaigner, Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi. When the *maulana* first arrived in Sind from the Panjab as a boy in the late 1880s, he went to Bharchundi which enjoyed a considerable reputation as a place of spiritual learning. There he took *baiat* from Pir Hafiz Muhammad Sadiq, and began his religious training. It was from Bharchundi that he was sent to Deoband for the first time. After the *pir's* death, Sindhi's welfare was transferred to the care of the *pir's* two leading Khalifas. The Pir of Dinpur took on the task of his spiritual guidance, while Taj Muhammad Amroti cared for the young convert's material needs. Accordingly, when Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi returned to his adopted province, he stayed at Amrot where he established a press, Mahmud al-Matabah, and brought out a journal named *Hidayat al-Akhwan*.<sup>6</sup>

In pursuit of his religious studies, the *maulana* also visited Goth Pir Jhando, where he became a close associate of the Pir of Jhando, Pir Rashidullah and his son, Pir Rashiduddin. Pir Rashidullah was an exponent of *jihad* and forceful believer in *tauhid*. He had an important impact on Sindhi, both in terms of spiritual advancement and traditional religious learning. Their relationship was formalised in 1901 when the *maulana* established a *madrasa* at Goth Pir Jhando, named the Dar al-Rashad after the founder of the network. Earlier plans to found a *madrasa* at Amrot had been frustrated by Taj Muhammad Amroti's lack of a regular income and his reluctance to ask for subscriptions from the public. Pir Rashidullah, however, raised all the necessary expenses from his *murids* who numbered many thousands and included many members of Sind's wealthy Memon community. The *madrasa* gave instructions in secular subjects as well as

<sup>5</sup> See *Shariat (Sawan-i Hayat no.)*, October 1981.

<sup>6</sup> Shaikh Muhammad Hajan, 'The Life and Work of Mawlana Ubaydallah Sindhi' (PhD thesis, University of Sind, 1975) pp. 13–27.

the traditionally taught Arabic, Persian and theology. It was attended by students from all over Sind, Kacch and Bombay, and many went on to complete their studies at Deoband. The close links between the two seminaries was symbolised by the visit of Maulana Mahmud al-Hasan, Shaikh al-Islam and principal of the Dar al-Ulum, to the first convocation of the Dar al-Rashad in 1908.<sup>7</sup>

Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi's activities outside Sind strengthened connections between the province and pan-Islamic leaders at Deoband. In 1909, he left Sind for the Dar al-Ulum again. There he worked on the creation and organisation of the Jamiat al-Ansar, an association of Deobandi graduates, which aimed at supporting the progress of the Dar al-Ulum and promoting its pan-Islamic teachings among Indian Muslims. In this endeavour, he was helped by two people from Sind, Maulvi Muhammad Sadiq from the Khadda Mosque in Karachi and Maulana Ahmad Ali. The only branch of the Jamiat ever founded outside Deoband itself was one in Sind. Although, after 1911, the association rather faded away, its short life illustrated clearly the close links which existed between Deoband and its Sindhi sympathisers. This relationship was further strengthened by the active participation of a number of Sindhi *ulama* in the Nazar al-Muarif al-Quraniya, set up in Delhi in 1913 by Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi under Maulana Mahmud al-Hasan's direction.<sup>8</sup>

The influence of Deobandi teachings on this group of Sindhi *pirs* was highlighted by the interest they took in the Ilm-i Ghaib controversy which gripped Karachi in the summer of 1912. The agitation was stimulated by the preachings of Maulvi Muhammad Sadiq of the Khadda Mosque, who had been educated at Deoband. His assertions that the Prophet had not had the power to pierce 'the veil of futurity', and had only known what God had chosen to tell him, aroused a storm of indignation and protest among more 'orthodox' Hanafi Muslims who supported the Prophet's 'semi-divine' status and were led by Maulvi Abdul Karim Dars. Muhammad Sadiq was supported by Pathans in the city under the influence of Dost Muhammad Tokay, agent of the Amir of Afghanistan, and the *mohana* fisherman community of the Khadda quarter. Both sides drew on reserves of support from outside Karachi. While theologians from the UP and Panjab arrived in Karachi to take up the contest in support of Dars, many from the interior of Sind took Muhammad Sadiq's side. This was due, in large measure, to the fact that many *ulama* in Karachi and the hinterland of Sind had received their theological training at the Khadda Mosque. Pir Rashidullah took an active interest in the debate and wrote tracts in defence of the Deobandi argument. He also appeared at large public meetings in Karachi at which several

<sup>7</sup> S. A. Soomro, 'A Brief Autobiography of Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi', reprinted in *Al-Hikma* (2nd issue, n.d.), pp. 1-6.

<sup>8</sup> Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilisation in India* (New Delhi, 1982), pp. 28-9.

thousands were present, as did Pir Zia Ahmad Sirhindi of Landhi, another close associate of Maulana Muhammad Sadiq.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, other *pirs* in Sind were forging their own pan-Islamic connections. They too, in the main, came from families which belonged to the Qadiri and Naqshbandi sufi orders, and included Pir Ghulam Mujaddid Sirhindi of Matiari, and Pirs Turab Ali Shah Rashdi and Ali Anwar Shah Rashdi both from Larkana district. They were all followers of the pan-Islamic leader, Maulana Abdul Bari, a respected *alim* and Qadiri sufi belonging the Firangi Mahal family of Lucknow.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, they supported the Sind branch of the Anjuman-i Khuddam-i Kaaba which was set up by the *maulana* in 1913. As a result of Pir Ghulam Mujaddid's active encouragement, more members enrolled at the branch of the Anjuman in the small town of Matiari, twenty-five kilometres north of Hyderabad, than at any other branch in the province. These *pirs* also gave their support to the Red Crescent Society, which extended its activities to Sind in October 1912 under the organisational leadership of western-educated Karachi-based Muslims such as Haji Abdullah Haroon and Mir Ayub Khan. Pir Ghulam Mujaddid, for instance, was responsible for collecting over 12,000 rupees for the Red Crescent fund.<sup>11</sup>

The extent to which some *pirs* had become committed to the pan-Islamic cause by this time was highlighted by their rôle in the so-called Silk Letter Conspiracy in 1916. In 1915, both Maulana Mahmud al-Hasan and Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi left India. The former made his way to Mecca to perform *haj*, while the latter surfaced in Afghanistan, where he was to establish a base of operations for a proposed invasion of India. This invasion was intended to signal a general uprising of Indian Muslims against British rule. As part of his preparations, Sindhi set up an 'Army of God', an Islamic organisation formed to draw recruits from India and to bring about an alliance among Muslim rulers. Many of its officers were friends, followers and relatives of the *maulana* in Sind. Some *pirs* were awarded senior ranks within its hierarchy. Maulana Taj Muhammad Amroti, for instance, was made a Lieutenant General, as was Pir Asadullah Shah Rashdi, cousin of the Pir of Jhando.<sup>12</sup> *Pirs* in Sind had also played an important role in organising Ubaidullah's journey to Afghanistan. Before leaving, he had spent several months in his adopted province. As well as visiting Goth Pir

<sup>9</sup> Home Confidential Proceedings P/Conf/21, p. 2472, IOL; *Sind Gazette* (Karachi), 15 May 1912, p. 8; 'Report on Native Papers published in Bombay Presidency', week ending 25 May 1912, p. 33, L/P/5/167, n.p., IOL; Maulana Pir Saiyid Rashidullah, *Ali-Maunat al-Sabdiya Fi wad Auham al-Hidiyat al-Asadiya* (1333 AH) (pamphlet with Pir Wahibullah Shah, Goth Pir Jhando, near Saidabad, Sind).

<sup>10</sup> See Francis Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 419–20, for a potted biography of the *maulana*'s family background and life.

<sup>11</sup> See *Sind Gazette* (Karachi), 5 February 1912, p. 5 and 30 July 1912, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Mehran* (Tahrik i-Azadi no.), vol. 34, nos. 1–2 (January–June 1985), p. 60.

Jhando, he had stayed at Amrot making preparations for his passage to Kabul. Together with Maulvi Muhammad Sadiq of the Khadda, he had gone to the small village of Tando Saindad near Tando Muhammad Khan to try to persuade Pir Muhammad Jan Sirhindi to assist his project. The Tando Saindad branch of the Sirhindi family had arrived in Sind at the end of the nineteenth century from Qandahar where they still possessed many relatives and *murids*. The *maulana* was able to make use of these contacts as he travelled from Sind, via Quetta, the Bolan Pass and Qandahar, to Kabul.<sup>13</sup>

For similar reasons, the line of communications between Ubaidullah Sindhi and Mahmud al-Hasan in Mecca passed through Sind. In the summer of 1916, three letters, written on silk and sewn into the lining of the courier's coat, accidentally fell into the hands of the authorities. One of the letters was addressed to Shaikh Abdur Rahim, a Muslim convert from Hyderabad and brother of the Congress leader, Acharya Kripalani. It, together with a second letter, dealt primarily with the disposal of property left behind by individuals who were with Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi in Afghanistan. The third letter was addressed to Pir Rashiduddin, the Pir of Jhando, requesting the *pir* to send 1,000 rupees to Maulana Mahmud al-Hasan. The British interpreted the letters as proof of conspiracy and successfully prosecuted many of the individuals implicated in it. One or two of the minor *pirs* were imprisoned as a result of their involvement. Although the Pir of Jhando was obviously connected with the scheme, the British chose not to take action against him. He did not strike them as being a serious enough threat to risk the discontent which legal proceedings against him would cause among his *murids*. They did however, take the opportunity to arrest the Pir of Dinpur, who, together with Maulvi Muhammad Sadiq and other less well-known Khadda *mullahs*, was suspected of having incited an anti-British uprising among the Brahui tribesmen of the Jhalwan tract in eastern Baluchistan the previous year.<sup>14</sup>

By 1919, concern for what was happening in the Islamic world beyond Sind had taken root in a number of centres scattered throughout the length of the province. *Pirs* associated with these shrines had demonstrated by their involvement that they had begun to move in wider Indian Muslim circles which called upon them to fulfil their responsibilities as religious leaders. They came, on the whole, from Qadiri and Naqshbandi *sajjada nashin* families which had emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In contrast, *pirs* who belonged to more established shrines showed little interest in pan-Islamic ideas. This fact had

<sup>13</sup> For a complete record of the Silk Letter Conspiracy Case, see L/P&S/10/633, IOL, in particular V. Vivian's 'Summary of the Silk Letter Case', p. 3, and 'Index to Moulana Obaidullah Sindhi's Letters', p. 17; the same network of contacts in Sind also made arrangements for Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's proposed trip to Afghanistan in 1916, see 'Statement of Ahmad Ali, Gujranwala', pp. 6-8.

<sup>14</sup> HCP, P/Conf/21, pp. 2476, 2479, IOL; 'Silk Letter Conspiracy Report', p. 111, L/P&S/10/633, n.p., IOL.

not escaped the attention of the authorities. The British recognised that pan-Islamic leaders would probably try to utilise the influence of *pirs* in future campaigns, but they felt confident in the immediate pre-Khilafat period that most would not have been drawn into taking a pan-Islamic stand. In the opinion of officials, the intense rivalry which divided *pirs* was bound to prevent them from cooperating with each other, while the seeming general lack of preoccupation about 'what went on in the Islamic world beyond the immediate source of their own influence' would also help to ensure that the majority took little interest in movements protesting about events taking place far away. With the launch of the Khilafat movement, however, these assumptions together with the system of control itself were put to the test.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Pirs act as 'go-betweens' for the Khilafat movement in Sind***

*Pirs* with pan-Islamic sympathies acted as the main 'pivot' on which support for the Khilafat movement in Sind hinged. Through them, more secular and westernised Khilafat leaders gained access to the mass of Sindhi Muslims, especially those living in the countryside. Pro-Khilafat *pirs* helped the movement to penetrate the thick layers of isolation which still insulated many Muslims in Sind from events taking place elsewhere in the Muslim world, as well as providing an essential link between the urban and rural groups which made up the province's Muslim population. Their extensive local influence gave them great leverage over the views of ordinary Sindhi Muslims and it was they who, to a great extent, inspired the extraordinary 'burst of Khilafat agitation' which gripped Sind after 1919.

The Khilafat movement of 1919 to 1924 was on one level a pan-Islamic movement, concerned with preserving the status of the Sultan of Turkey as Caliph; it sought to ensure his continued control over the Ottoman Empire, including the Jazirat al-Arab, which was under threat as a result of Turkey's defeat in the First World War. However, on another level, the significance of the Khilafat movement lay in the way in which pan-Islamic sentiment was translated into Indian terms of reference and interpreted by wide sections of the Indian Muslim community as being anti-British in practice. The early 1920s consequently witnessed the non-cooperation movement which brought Khilafat and Congress together in a united protest against British rule. Just as non-cooperation involved the cooperation of different groups, so the Khilafat was made up of a coalition of different interests. Its membership ranged from conservative Muslims to radical nationalists, from *ulama* to the western-educated, secularised products of Aligarh. It included *zamindars*, middle-class businessmen, and the urban and rural poor. For some, the religious aim remained paramount; for

<sup>15</sup> HCP, P/Conf/21, p. 2478, IOL.

others, the political question became more important. A substantial number was also drawn to the movement on account of the economic hardships which followed the end of the war. Sharply alternating booms and depressions, combined with poor harvests and epidemics of influenza and cholera, raised popular resentment to a new pitch.<sup>16</sup>

Sind was one of the areas of strongest support for the movement. From the time of the creation of the Sind Provincial Khilafat Committee and the first Khilafat Day in October 1919, popular support steadily increased. By the summer of 1920, the protest had reached its peak in the form of the *hijrat* in which thousands of ordinary Sindhis participated. After this high point, the movement began to ebb; but its decline was slow and often interrupted by renewed bursts of energy surrounding provincial conferences and the arrest of leading Khilafatist *pirs*. During 1923, however, mass agitation virtually petered out, leaving only the Khilafat Committee which, as elsewhere in India, survived as a body with little influence for the next decade.

The initial moves to organise a Sind Provincial Khilafat committee in October 1919 originated among Muslims who, on the whole, belonged to larger cities and towns such as Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur, and who were mostly involved in trade and commerce. They differed substantially from the bulk of Sindhi Muslims who were landholders and peasants. Haji Abdullah Haroon, one of the leading Khilafat activists, for instance, came from the Memon merchant community of cosmopolitan Karachi. Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi, another notable pan-Islamic worker and editor of several important pan-Islamic newspapers such as *Al-Haq* and *Al-Wahid*, was an Amil convert from the ancient town of Tatta who had close connections with the Ali Brothers. Even men such as Rais Ghulam Muhammad Bhurgri and Jan Muhammad Junejo, scions of powerful landholding *wadero* families, had distanced themselves from their rural backgrounds: Ghulam Muhammad Bhurgri had been educated at Aligarh and had trained as a barrister in England, while Jan Muhammad Junejo had also become a leading member of the town-based legal profession.<sup>17</sup>

The success of the Khilafat appeal in Sind, therefore, hinged on the cooperation which its organisers enlisted from among the ranks of the local religious leadership. In order to secure its collaboration, secular Khilafat leaders drew on contacts which had been made and strengthened during the pan-Islamic agitations of the previous ten or so years. Through the mediation of influential

<sup>16</sup> The collaboration between Khilafatists and groups of workers and cultivators was especially pronounced in Bengal, see Rajat K. Ray, 'Masses in Politics: The Non-Cooperation Movement in Bengal, 1920-1922', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, II, no. 4 (December 1974), p. 363.

<sup>17</sup> 'Report on the State of the Feeling among the Mohammadans of India', HCP, P/Conf/9211, pp. 205-7, IOL; Mushirul Hasan, 'Religion and Politics in India: the *Ulama* and the Khilafat Movement', in Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1982), p. 8.



individuals such as Pir Ghulam Mujaddid Sirhindi, the Pir of Jhando and Maulana Taj Muhammad Amroti, Khilafat organisers appealed to and were heard by other less prominent *pirs* in Sind. They also made good use of existing *piri-muridi* ties. Many members of Karachi's Memon community were followers of the Pir of Jhando, and Haji Abdullah Haroon took full advantage of these connections. There were also firm *piri-muridi* links between the Bhurgri family and the Sirhindis at Matiari which contributed substantially to the way in which these *pirs* were drawn into the heart of the campaign itself. Meanwhile, the Khilafat cause in Sind benefited from the close association of some *pirs* with the Firangi Mahal leader, Maulana Abdul Bari. Pir Ghulam Mujaddid Sirhindi, Pir Turab Ali Shah Rashdi and Pir Ali Anwar Shah Rashdi, together with Maulana Taj Muhammad Amroti, were among the founding members of the Jamiat ul-Ulama-i Hind in November 1919. They later took leading roles in the Jamiat ul-Ulama-i Sind following its establishment in 1921.<sup>18</sup>

*Pirs* were responsible for building up the momentum of the Khilafat campaign in the Sindhi countryside towards the end of 1919 and in the early months of 1920. Their relationship with their *murids* brought large numbers of rural and often illiterate Muslims into the 'orbit' of the campaign. Their own enthusiasm was demonstrated by their participation in the first national Khilafat Day celebrated on 17 October 1919. Throughout Sind, Muslims in small villages as well as towns and cities, prayed and fasted in an effort to show solidarity and 'save Islam'. *Pirs* were most prominent in the interior of the province where the heart of their influence lay. But larger meetings in the towns also attracted their support. Taj Muhammad Amroti travelled down to preside over the meeting held in Hyderabad. On his arrival at the railway station there, he was greeted by a huge crowd composed of both Hindus and Muslims. After leading special prayers at the Saddar Mosque, he spoke at Holmstead Hall, emphasising both the importance of the Khilafat and the Jazirat al-Arab as well as the necessity for the integrity and independence of Turkey. Under their *pirs'* directions, many Sindhi Muslims scrupulously boycotted the Peace Celebrations observed throughout India at the end of the year.<sup>19</sup>

As the campaign gained in popularity during 1920, *pirs* often went on 'speaking tours', addressing meetings held in local mosques after *juma* prayers. Their speeches stressed the spiritual position of the Sultan of Turkey and why the future of Islam was indissolubly bound up with the preservation of his temporal power and his empire. More important, most of their anger was directed against

<sup>18</sup> Khan Muhammad Panhwar, *Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi: Life and Achievements* (Karachi, 1984); *Daily Gazette* (Karachi), 10 March 1924, p. 5; Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, p. 82; Shaikh A. Razzak, *Sukkur Past and Present* (Sukkur, 1962), p. 155; *Al-Wahid*, 14 January 1921, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *The Khilafat Day in Sind: Presidential Address of Seth Haji Abdullah Haroon Sahib and Brief Report on the Proceedings of Some Important Meetings* (Karachi, 1919); *Daily Gazette*, 18 December 1919, p. 5.

the actions of 'infidel' British troops in the Holy Places. This was particularly important in mobilising support. While the concept of the Caliphate, removed from the reality of everyday life in Sind, often held little direct significance for their audiences, this was not the case as far as references to threats to the Holy Places of Islam were concerned. Ordinary Muslims in Sind, with their great love and reverence for the shrines of their local *pirs*, could comprehend the seriousness of acts of desecration in the Jazirat al-Arab. Reports of damage and dishonour inflicted there possessed reality for them which the Caliphate less immediately represented. Accusations along the lines that British troops, assisted by Sikhs, had disinterred the remains of the Prophet's tomb, for instance, aroused strong anti-British feeling during the first half of 1920.<sup>20</sup> These and other rumours were taken very seriously by the authorities who felt compelled to step in to contradict their validity. Thus, it was in relation to the Holy Places, rather than the Khilafat itself, that many ordinary Sindhi Muslims responded to the cry from their spiritual leaders that Islam was in danger. At the same time, speeches of *pirs* and other Sindhi *ulama* repeatedly pointed out the dire consequences which would befall any individuals who continued to support the British Government in the face of its attacks against their religion. Muslims were faced with a choice between non-cooperation in this world and the prospects of damnation in the next: to an audience for whom the disgrace of being branded a *kafir* was enormous, warnings of this kind made a substantial impact.<sup>21</sup>

*Pirs* raised support for the Khilafat movement in a number of ways. Their influence resulted in large amounts of money being donated to the Khilafat, Angora and Smyrna Funds. Of the three, the Angora Fund became the most popular because, during this period, the Turkish Government was regarded as the 'champion of Islam'.<sup>22</sup> *Pirs* encouraged donations by their own example, and their generosity was widely publicised in the pro-Khilafat press. They also mobilised support for the Khilafat volunteer appeal. Under his instructions, thousands of *murids* of the Pir of Jhando were reputedly recruited as volunteers. Maulvi Muhammad Sadiq, the Khadda Mullah, also took a strong interest in the volunteer movement. Many of his followers from the *mohana* community were enrolled as a result of his encouragement. Equally *pirs* used their influence to popularise the boycott of foreign goods. The Pir of Jhando issued orders to his *murids* to wear only home-spun cloth. In addition, they called for the boycott of Government institutions such as schools and law courts. In comparison with both the rest of Bombay Presidency and British India in general, there was an impress-

<sup>20</sup> HCP, P/64, p. 637, IOL.

<sup>21</sup> Bombay Proceedings (Judicial Dept. Conf.), P/53, p. 411, IOL.

<sup>22</sup> In Karachi alone, 20,000 rupees were collected for the Angora Fund during October 1921. This figure was almost as much as the amount raised for the other two funds in the whole of Sind for the previous year, see Sind CID Report, week ending 26 November 1921, Curry Papers, Box IV, p. 143, CSAC.

ive response in terms of the renunciation of honours and awards and resignations from Government service.<sup>23</sup>

*Pirs* became office-bearers in Khilafat Committees at both local and provincial levels. Very often the President of a local or district branch of the Sind Khilafat Provincial Committee was an influential *pir*. Branch meetings were often arranged to coincide with important events in the calendar of local pro-Khilafat shrines: a meeting of the Hyderabad District Khilafat Committee, for instance, took place on the day of the *mela* at Shaikh Bhirkio, a shrine about twenty kilometres east of the city of Hyderabad.<sup>24</sup> The membership list of the Sind Provincial Khilafat Committee always included the names of a number of leading *pirs*: Pir Turab Ali Shah Rashdi, Pir Ali Anwar Shah Rashdi, Taj Muhammad Amroti and the Pir of Jhando were among its earliest members. The last two also sat on the Central Khilafat Committee, and signed its request to the Viceroy in June 1922 demanding that the British Government adopt a softer attitude towards the question of Turkish peace terms.<sup>25</sup>

As a result of their official positions within the campaign, *pirs* took a prominent rôle at local and provincial conferences. One of the earliest occasions on which this became apparent was the first Sind Provincial Khilafat Conference, held at Larkana from 6 to 8 February 1920 and which was attended by Gandhi and the Ali Brothers. The Pir of Jhando was president of the conference, while the Chairman of the Reception Committee was Taj Muhammad Amroti.<sup>26</sup> Conferences in Sind were often attended by important all-India leaders and so leading pro-Khilafat *pirs* came into direct contact with the men who were directing the national movement. The frequency with which Sind was visited was a sign of the importance attached to events which took place there. The level of mass support which was raised in Sind, largely through the efforts and influence of local religious leaders, was 'rewarded' by the amount of interest shown in the province by the central leadership. One outcome of this contact was that *pirs* were drawn into wider political organisations such as the Indian National Congress. They sat on the Sind Provincial Congress Committee, and represented the province at national congresses. Pir Turab Ali Shah Rashdi even made his way on to the All-India Congress Committee, and, in June 1921, his name was put forward to become one of its Vice-Presidents.<sup>27</sup>

On an individual basis, Sindhi *pirs* played somewhat of a minor rôle at the all-India level, but as a body they exerted a noticeable influence on decision-making. Their substantial weight, in terms of the influence which they wielded,

<sup>23</sup> *Al-Wahid*, 24 June 1922, p. 2; Sind CID Report, week ending 26 March 1921, Curry Papers, Box IV, p. 28; Pro. No. 209, HCP, P/Conf/64, n.p., IOL.

<sup>24</sup> *Al-Wahid*, 10 November 1922, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Panhwar, *Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi*, p. 55.

<sup>26</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 10 February 1920, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Sind CID Report, week ending 2 July 1921 and week ending 26 November 1921, Curry Papers, Box IV, pp. 82, 145, CSAC.

was a powerful tool in the hands of those who received their support. Maulana Abdul Bari and Shaukat Ali relied a great deal on Sindhi *pirs* for backing in the factional struggles which took place at the Khilafat Committee headquarters in Bombay during the crucial months of late 1919 and early 1920 when the movement was taking shape. The *pirs* backed Mulana Abdul Bari and his associates in their contest for control against the more moderate merchant grouping led by Chotani. At the same time, they helped to radicalise the outlook of the movement by supporting efforts to replace the use of delegations and representations to the Government with more direct methods of non-cooperation. At an All-India Khilafat Conference meeting in February 1920 at which Maulana Abdul Bari and his supporters proposed a *fatwa* denouncing Muslim military service as unlawful, moderate objections were reputedly stifled by a Sindhi *pir*, who called upon the meeting to decide whether or not British law books or the Quran had more legality for Muslims. Faced with this argument, 'the odds were against the Government code', and the moderates backed down.<sup>28</sup>

The drive for a more militant stance continued at the Central Khilafat Committee meeting in Bombay on 12 May 1920 where a decision was passed in favour of non-cooperation, albeit with the assurance to Gandhi that Muslims would remain non-violent. At the All-India Khilafat Conference in Allahabad at the beginning of the following month, held to ratify the Central Khilafat Committee's decision, Sindhi *pirs* supported Abdul Bari's call for the immediate enactment of a four-stage programme of non-cooperation which involved the renunciation of titles, resignation from Government service, resignation from the military and the police, and the non-payment of taxes. The conference passed the resolution, and, therefore, Sindhi support helped the *maulana* and Shaukat Ali to retain control over the progress of the movement.<sup>29</sup>

The ability of Sindhi *pirs* to affect the popularity of the Khilafat cause was epitomised by the response of ordinary Sindhi Muslims to the call for *hijrat* to Afghanistan in the summer of 1920. While economic hardship contributed to the decision of thousands of Sindhis to perform *hijrat*, their mobilisation also underlined the strength of the bonds which existed between *pir* and *murid*. The concept of *hijrat* was based on the distinction between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*, and the duty of Muslims to migrate from a land where Islamic law was no longer enforced to another where the *Sharia* was firmly established. Early in 1920, Khilafat leaders announced that, if the Caliphate were harmed in any way, Muslims had only two alternatives open to them: *jihad* or *hijrat*. The debate intensified in March 1920 when Maulana Abdul Bari issued a *fatwa* which gave the impression that he supported *hijrat* from British India. The idea spread like wildfire among sections of the *ulama*. Chief supporters of the argument that

<sup>28</sup> Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, p. 92.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

*hijrat* had become a religious duty again included Taj Muhammad Amroti, Pir Ali Anwar Shah Rashdi and Pir Mahbub Shah Rashdi.<sup>30</sup> At a Sind Provincial Khilafat Committee meeting at Sehwan in April, fiery speeches were made in favour of migrating. By early May, the advocates of *hijrat* had received the *fatwa* for which they had been waiting from Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Another Khilafat conference held at Jacobabad in Upper Sind in June passed a resolution in favour of *hijrat*. A Sind Hijrat Committee was set up with Pir Turab Ali Shah Rashdi appointed president as well as the movement's chief legal authority in Sind. The conference also chalked out practical ways of implementing the decision for action. By July, trains had been organised to take groups of *muhajarin* to the frontier. Donations to the Hijrat Committee paid for fares, and individuals applied for tickets from a number of outlets including the offices of pro-Khilafat newspapers such as *Al-Amin* in Sukkur. *Pirs* did not themselves perform *hijrat* but they accompanied the trains as far as NWFP. Pir Turab Ali Shah, Pir Ali Anwar Shah and Taj Muhammad Amroti went with one train-load of *muhajirin* to Peshawar, and, on their return, gave glowing accounts of the hospitality of the Pathan welcome which encouraged more Sindhis to embark on the journey northwards.<sup>31</sup>

The authorities, at one stage, had estimated that not more than a hundred people altogether would leave Sind, but the numbers involved rapidly overtook this total. The vast majority of Sindhi *muhajirin* were poor cultivators or *haris*: they had little to lose by leaving Sind and much to gain if the Amir of Afghanistan's promises of land were to be believed.<sup>32</sup> *Pirs* in their speeches struck a chord of recognition in the hearts of these listeners. Rumours flew around, especially in the Larkana and Upper Sind Frontier districts where support for the *hijrat* was fiercest, that the British had prohibited the study of the Quran and had fixed Sunday instead of Friday as the Muslim day of prayer. Since many of the *muhajirin* placed implicit faith in the pronouncements of their *murshids*, they were easily convinced of the need to save their religion as well as their own souls by undertaking *hijrat*: the alternative was to remain passive and eventually die as *kafirs*.<sup>33</sup>

The *hijrat*, however, eventually ran out of steam. This was due in large part to the bad treatment which many migrants suffered on their journey and after their arrival in Afghanistan. The Afghan authorities had hoped for more prosperous and educated Muslims able to contribute their skills towards the development of the country. Once they learnt that the migrants were made up of the poorer

<sup>30</sup> HCP P/Conf/51, p. 921, IOL; M. Naeem Qureshi, 'The "Ulama" of British India and the Hijrat of 1920', *Modern Asian Studies*, 13, 1 (1974), p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> Aijaz al-Haq Quddusi, *Tarikh-i Sind* (Lahore, 1984), vol. III, pp. 181–2; Pro. No. 45, November 1920, HCP, P/Conf/59, n.p., IOL; Pro. No. 203, August 1920, HCP, P/Conf/58, n.p., IOL.

<sup>32</sup> Pro. No. 46, November 1920, HCP, P/Conf/59, n.p., IOL.

<sup>33</sup> Pro. No. 45. *ibid.*

elements of Indian Muslim society, they lost enthusiasm and prevented any more *muhajirin* from entering Afghanistan.<sup>34</sup> From an overall perspective, therefore, the *hijrat* failed. But from the point of view of Sindhi *pirs*, it successfully confirmed the strength of their influence over the rural population and the amount of anti-British energy which they could help unleash. Their participation in the *hijrat* symbolised their involvement throughout the period of Khilafat agitation: they took part in decision-making, at least at the local and provincial levels, while the moral pressure which they brought to bear on their followers proved vital in generating support for the Khilafat cause. Thus, pro-Khilafat *pirs* breathed life into the movement in Sind.

### **The British respond to the challenge: the system of control in operation**

The British were aware from the outset of the dangers to their system of control associated with the involvement of *pirs* in the Khilafat movement: it was something which they had feared from the time of the first pan-Islamic murmurings in the province. As the agitation unfolded, they realised that they could not afford to stand quietly on the sidelines, waiting for it to exhaust itself. Officials therefore made repeated efforts to discourage the spread of *pir* involvement by encouraging them to enlist their support on the side of the authorities. They also sent out warnings against not cooperating in the form of the prosecution of leading pro-Khilafat *pirs*. In both cases, the success of the British tactics depended on the sizeable stake that most Sindhi *pirs* had invested in the British system of collaboration. More than anything else this stake helped to undermine support for the Khilafat movement and to restore the overall balance of power in favour of the authorities.

At the first signs of Khilafat agitation in Sind, the British sought to influence *pirs* against joining the movement. Officials made attempts to pressurise individual *pirs* into speaking out against the Khilafat cause. Pir Muhammad Ismail, son of the Pir of Jhando, for instance, was called to Karachi by the Native Assistant Commissioner-in-Sind, to try and win over his cooperation. Similarly, Maulvi Muhammad Sadiq of the Khadda was approached by other Muslims working for the administration.<sup>35</sup> The British also tried less straightforward methods. In the summer of 1919, an obscure *maulvi*, Faiz al-Karim, from Nawabshah, published a pamphlet entitled *Tahqiq al-Khilafat*.<sup>36</sup> It questioned the claim of the Sultan of Turkey to the Caliphate, approved of the actions of the Sharif of Mecca in seeking independence and included a declaration of Muslim loyalty to the British Government. These contents were authenticated by a lengthy list of names of religious

<sup>34</sup> Qureshi, 'The "Ulama" of British India', p. 56; Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, p. 106.

<sup>35</sup> *Independent* (Allahabad), 10 December 1919, p. 1; *The Khilafat Day in Sind*, pp. 28–31.

<sup>36</sup> Maulana Faiz ul Karim, *Facts About Khilafat* (Karachi, 1919).

leaders in Sind, including a number of pro-Khilafat *pirs* who, once they learned of its existence, were quick to disassociate themselves from the pamphlet claiming that they had been tricked into signing the document at a conference held earlier in the year at which an *anjuman* had been formed specifically in support of the Turkish Sultanate.<sup>37</sup>

All the same, the majority of the signatures supporting the pamphlet's contents had been collected with the full knowledge of the *pirs* concerned, such as the Pir Pagaro, the Pir of Ranipur, the Makhdum of Hala and the *pirs* of Ghotki. As leading *sajjada nashins* with well-established interests which were closely identified with British rule, they had little interest in seeing the status quo undermined, and so they maintained a pro-British rather than a pro-Khilafat outlook. However, signing this pamphlet was as far as many of them were prepared to go at this stage. The enthusiasm which had been ignited by Khilafat agitation led them to bide their time, afraid that any outspoken condemnation of the movement would lose them religious credibility and possibly *murids*. During late 1919 and most of 1920, open criticism of the movement was left to loyalist *waderos* and *zamindars*.<sup>38</sup>

By the beginning of 1920, the British were seriously worried by the growing strength of Khilafat agitation. Hopes which they had might have entertained of the movement failing to get off the ground had proved unrealistic. It seemed as if disloyalty was becoming 'fashionable' in 'ecclesiastical circles': in some districts, any *pir* or *maulvi* who did not 'follow the fashion' apparently ran the risk of lapsing into obscurity as pro-Khilafat *pirs* gained in prominence. From the point of view of the authorities, the participation of *pirs* now constituted a grave danger to the public peace. The surge in activity which accompanied the call for *hijrat* provided the British with the opportunity to act, and moves were made to arrest *pirs* whose speeches were regarded as seditious. From this time onwards, the threat of prosecution formed an important plank in the Government's anti-Khilafat strategy. In line with all-India directives, the Commissioner decided to adopt a hardline approach towards leading individuals who openly defied the law.<sup>39</sup>

The success of this policy was reflected in the decision of the authorities to prosecute three *pirs* who had made 'seditious' speeches during the *hijrat* cam-

<sup>37</sup> Shaikh Abdul Aziz Mohammad Soleman, *Anti-Khalif Intrigues in Sind* (Sukkur, 1919), p. 3; L/R/5/176, p. 27, IOL; Pir Imamuddin Shah, who had gathered together about 200 *pirs* and *maulvis* in March 1919 to sign the *fatwa* issued by Maulana Abdul Bari, printed a circular in which he acknowledged the 'mistake' which he and many others present there had made, see *Daily Gazette*, 23 July 1919, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 October 1919, p. 9; the Pir Pagaro for instance rendered 'conspicuous service' during the war in securing recruits, while in 1919 he hosted a gathering of *pirs* at which he called upon his followers, if they were 'true Muslims', to show steadfast loyalty to the Government 'under whose shadow of protection' they lived, see *ibid.*, 8 April 1919, p. 4, and Political Dept. File No. 347 (1919), pt. II, n.p., CSR.

<sup>39</sup> BP (Judicial Dept. Conf.), P/53, p. 397, IOL.

paign. In the middle of June, these *pirs* spoke at a meeting held after *juma* prayers in the important town of Tando Muhammad Khan which several thousand people attended. It was the duty of Muslims, they explained to their audience, not just to boycott Government courts in favour of the *Sharia* but also 'to declare war and kill the *kafirs*' who had placed Islam in such danger. All three *pirs* were from influential families: Pir Mahbub Shah was the brother of the Pir of Jhando, while Pirs Abdullah Jan Sirhindi and Abdul Sattar Jan Sirhindi were sons of Pir Muhammad Jan Sirhindi, the Qandahari Pir of nearby Tando Saindad. Together, they commanded the respect of a large body of *murids*, whom the British feared would respond positively to their instructions.<sup>40</sup>

Faced with the prospects of prison, the Sirhindi *pirs* retracted their speeches before their cases reached the courts: soon after they were arrested, a 'respectable' *murid* of their father passed on a message to the authorities that, while they did not admit the accuracy of reports against them, they were willing to undertake to refrain from agitation in the future. The Commissioner-in-Sind did not have much confidence in the genuineness of the *pirs*' regret but he realised that the publication of their apologies in the press would badly discredit the movement in general. It would also, by implication, strengthen the official case against the remaining *pir*, Pir Mahbub Shah. Consequently, the Commissioner accepted the assurances of the *pirs*, and released the text of their letters in a press note.<sup>41</sup>

Pir Mahbub Shah took longer to yield. At the beginning of August 1920, he was taken into custody, whereupon he embarked on a hunger strike in protest against the authorities' actions. His defiance provoked a nation-wide response. Gandhi held him up as a national example, and wired congratulations on being the first man to be arrested during the non-cooperation campaign. He also applauded the *pir's* decision not to offer any defence at his forthcoming trial.<sup>42</sup> The pro-Khilafat press was ecstatic about the *pir's* stand. It was, they declared, 'the first instance in India of a man revered by thousands going on hunger strike as a protest against the treatment accorded him. The Pir and his family have several *lakhs* of followers in Sind and it is easy to understand their grief and indignation. The very idea of the Pir Sahib's trial has outraged Muslim sentiment'.<sup>43</sup> *Murids* flocked to Hyderabad where the *pir* was being held in the city's Central Jail. Anxious and excited, they worried the authorities enough for the crowds to be dispersed periodically by the military. The authorities took the added precaution of banning the carrying of axes and *lathis* in order to prevent a possible outburst of trouble near the prison.<sup>44</sup>

The question of how to deal with the *pir* became an all-India matter. The

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 399.

<sup>41</sup> BP (Judicial Dept. Conf.), P/53, pp. 397, 405, IOL; *Daily Gazette*, 31 July 1920, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> BP (Judicial Dept. Conf.), P/53, p. 407, IOL.

<sup>43</sup> *New Times* (Karachi), 7 August 1920, n.p. in L/R/5/178, p. 20, IOL.

<sup>44</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 6 August 1920, p. 8.



British were faced with four alternatives. They could offer to release the *pir* in return for an apology or retraction; allow him to die from starvation; resort to forcible feeding to keep him alive to stand trial; or arrange his deportation to somewhere like Aden. The authorities in Sind and Bombay were solidly opposed to the first option. In view of the *pir*'s character, they were afraid that such a move, unless it was initiated by the *pir* himself, was likely to be counterproductive and might even expose the Government to an awkward rebuff. His release without an apology was unthinkable for it would lay the authorities open to future attempts to extract concessions by resorting to the hunger-strike tactic. At the same time, neither agreed to the *pir* being deported. Nor was either prepared to allow the *pir* to die in custody in view of the unpredictable reactions that this would provoke all over India. The very nature of the *pir* as a religious leader led them to believe that he might be more persistent in starving himself to death than ordinary political detainees. In the end, the authorities agreed that they would have little choice but to resort to force-feeding if the *pir*'s health deteriorated to the point at which he was in danger of dying, and, accordingly, they proceeded with the prosecution.<sup>45</sup>

Once Pir Mahbub Shah realised that he was not going to escape prosecution by his hunger strike, he abandoned it voluntarily and became anxious to extricate himself from the unpleasant situation in which he found himself. Under pressure from his brother, Pir Rashiduddin, he signed a non-committal petition requesting his release. When he was informed by the District Magistrate that no retraction would be considered unless it contained an unconditional apology, the *pir* produced the necessary documents complete with his signature. But the authorities saw that events had turned firmly in their favour. They realised that it was to their advantage to complete the case and secure a conviction against the *pir* before revealing that he had, after all, been ready to recant. Thus, after being found guilty and sentenced to two years' simple imprisonment, the *pir* found his sentence remitted and himself released. In view of the fact that the *pir* had broken the hunger strike, signed a valuable admission of 'guilt' and that the power of the Government to secure a conviction had been fully demonstrated, the authorities did not feel it necessary to enforce the penalty, especially as the *pir* was 'practically worshipped by thousands' and the religious excitement caused by his detention would have nullified 'the good effect produced by the course of his case'.<sup>46</sup>

The effectiveness of these British moves was reflected in the response of Khilafatists to Pir Mahbub Shah's behaviour in particular and to *pirs* in general. The reaction among Khilafat leaders and supporters was one of dismay and anger. They felt let down by the *pir*'s lack of commitment. Gandhi, who had started from Bombay to attend the *pir*'s trial at Hyderabad, abandoned his journey after he had received the news that the *pir* had apologised. Newspapers all

<sup>45</sup> BP (Judicial Dept. Conf.), P/53, p. 407, IOL; Pro. Nos. 436 & 439, August 1920, HCP, P/Conf/58, n.p., IOL.

<sup>46</sup> BP (Judicial Dept. Conf.), P/53, p. 410, IOL.

over India, which had just been lauding the *pir* as a martyr, now denounced him as 'utterly shameless': if he had intended to back out at the critical moment, then he should have thought twice before joining the campaign in the first place.<sup>47</sup> This sense of betrayal was echoed particularly strongly on the pages of *Al-Wahid*, the leading Khilafat newspaper in Sind.<sup>48</sup> Its ideological commitment towards promoting the interests of the Khilafat movement meant that its initial reactions to the events surrounding the apologies had been guarded. Its editors did not want to jump to hurried conclusions for fear of falling into a trap set by the British to create divisions among Khilafat ranks. Nor did they want to alienate the supporters of the *pirs* by being unduly critical while the possibility of mitigating circumstances still existed. But, in all three cases, *Al-Wahid* expressed its disappointment: final responsibility lay with those who had sought pardon, and the newspaper could not condone their actions. More generally, these incidents sparked off an attack against the institution of the *pir* as it then existed in Sindhi society. *Pirs* who had shown no interest in becoming involved in the movement were denounced as 'utterly ignorant', even 'illiterate'. While *Al-Wahid* had always opposed the superstitious practices which had become incorporated in *piri-muridi*, it had accepted that Islam had allowed the development of *piri-muridi* as a legitimate way of giving spiritual and moral advice. Now, however, it claimed that the practice had been abused, and that the majority of those calling themselves *pir* no longer deserved the title: the personal credibility of the *pirs* had sunk very low.<sup>49</sup> Even though all three continued to participate in Khilafat agitation, the outcome of the incident was that other Khilafat leaders could no longer rely on them as they had done before. Their apologies had something like a domino effect on other *pirs* who also began to buckle under British pressure. Most notable of these 'disappointments' was Pir Turab Ali Shah Rashdi, who apologised to the authorities when faced with prosecution after he had delivered a 'seditious' speech at Nawabshah in July 1921.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 11 August 1920, p. 5; *Loka Shahi* (Bombay), 23 August 1920, n.p. in L/R/5/178, p. 15, IOL.

<sup>48</sup> The newspaper had been started by Haji Abdullah Haroon in 1919, but was handed over to the Sind Provincial Khilafat Committee in 1920, and virtually became its official mouthpiece. On its pages, it carried organisational reports, transcripts of important speeches, and day-by-day accounts of the campaign's progress. At the same time, in its editorial columns and on its letter pages, *Al-Wahid* actively promoted the Khilafat cause. It launched strong attacks against sections of Sindhi Muslim society which remained loyal to British authority. For instance, in November 1920, it criticised the Sind Madrasa for having made no response to the call of the country, urging it to realise its Muslim duty and shun the western-style education which was 'making Muslims slaves'. Similarly, it conducted a vigorous campaign against loyalist *zamindars* who, it considered, had sold their souls for titles from the British *raj*; see *Al-Wahid*, 3 June 1920, p. 2 and 15 July 1920, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Al-Wahid*, 8 August 1920, p. 2, 22 August 1920, p. 3, 5 September 1920, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> For details of the arrest of Pir Turab Ali Shah Rashdi after his speech at Nawabshah on 29 July 1921, see BP (Judicial Dept. Conf.), P/62, pp. 445–57. For press reactions to his apology before his trial the following October, see L/R/5/179, p. 1, 282, IOL.

The factors which caused *pirs* to behave so unreliably in pro-Khilafat eyes were related in part to the position which *pirs* held in Sindhi society. *Pirs* in the normal course of events were often inhibited from appearing in a court of law or allowing themselves to be subjected to the indignities of a prison sentence on account of the 'humiliation' which this represented for them. Just as on these occasions they would take great pains to avoid direct involvement in legal proceedings, they now shied away from the 'disgrace'. The idea of being subjected to the same treatment as ordinary prisoners threatened to tarnish the aura of being special which helped to sustain their position in society. *Pirs* were also used to good food and easy living and so the material discomfort of prison life was an additional deterrent. Forced to choose between relative luxury and the demands of the Khilafat cause, they put their own interests first. Their desire to escape a spell in prison was so strong that *pirs* were generally prepared to risk undermining their credibility as individuals not to mention the credibility of the movement as a whole.<sup>51</sup>

The main reason for their retreat in the face of official pressure, however, was closely bound up with the British system of control. Unlike the Khilafat's more secular leadership, who combined religious demands with political objectives, most of the *pirs* who were drawn into the movement in Sind lacked the political sophistication to see very far beyond its relatively limited pan-Islamic demands: in other words, their Khilafat sympathies were motivated by religious rather than anti-British sentiment. Their speeches could be violently anti-British in tone, but this rhetoric was not converted into a consistent policy of opposition to the British presence in India itself. While the same contradiction was present in other groups of Khilafat supporters, it was very marked in the case of Sindhi *pirs* for, having taken such a prominent stand in the first place, their subsequent 'inconsistency' stood out all the more. Torn between religious 'duty' and the understanding which they, as members of Sind's landed élite, had developed with the British, their local interests proved stronger than their wider Indian Muslim loyalties. A mixture of 'political immaturity' and their firm stake in the status quo undermined the solidity of their Khilafat stand. They were not equipped intellectually or emotionally to live with the consequences of their support for pan-Islamic agitation in the context of British-ruled India.

To illustrate these points more clearly, it is worth looking at the conduct of Pir Ghulam Mujaddid Sirhindi, who, unlike most other *pirs*, did not recant under the threat of punitive action when faced with prosecution and imprisonment. The reason for his steadfastness lay in his stronger grasp of the national significance of

<sup>51</sup> The case of a Maulvi Muhammad Sadiq of Nawabshah provides a good example of the way that physical hardship could break the resolve of certain Khilafat supporters. The *maulvi* was sentenced to one year in prison for refusing to furnish security for good behaviour; however after only a few days in Hyderabad Central Jail, he changed his mind. When asked to explain his change of heart, he answered with a quotation from the Quran: 'He who takes up a burden which he has not the power to bear commits a sin.' After a week in prison, he had realised that he could not 'bear prison life', and so paid for his release, see *Daily Gazette*, 4 November 1920, p. 5.

the Khilafat movement. In his speeches, he called upon his followers 'to struggle for the attainment of *Swaraj* and do what you can for religious freedom and betterment . . . if we thirty-two *crore* of Hindus and Muslims become one, then even the greatest power in the world cannot oppress us . . . we are suffering the present traumas because of past disunity'.<sup>52</sup> The *pir*'s political development demonstrated the radicalising impact on individuals that participation in the Khilafat movement could produce. He had taken an active interest in pan-Islamic issues before 1919, but this interest had not succeeded in turning him against British rule in India. Like his mentor, Maulana Abdul Bari, he had responded loyally at the outbreak of the First World War. The authorities in Sind had considered him to be particularly 'well disposed' towards them; of all the members of his family, he was the one most likely to render assistance if respected and treated well.<sup>53</sup> As late as May 1919, the *pir* had presided over a meeting of Muslims and Hindus which had declared its support for the Government in the aftermath of the enactment of the Rowlatt Bill, and called upon other *pirs* in Sind to take active steps to prevent the agitation from spreading to the province.<sup>54</sup>

However, as the *pir* became more involved in the progress of the Khilafat movement, his political outlook broadened. He still viewed his participation primarily in terms of his religion, each day reciting fourteen *siparas* from the Quran, but his anti-British stand grew stauncher. He was a strong supporter of the switch from moderate methods of protest to those of non-cooperation. In his speeches, he denounced the British monarch as a 'dishonest King', and called for his removal from the Indian 'throne'. By the summer of 1921, the British could no longer put up with his speeches which had become 'so dangerous and inflammatory' that, by 'one alternative or another', the *pir* had to be 'put out of action'.<sup>55</sup> The opportunity arose following the All-India Khilafat Conference held at Karachi in July 1921 where Pir Ghulam Mujaddid spoke in support of the resolution that it was religiously unlawful for Muslims to continue in the British Army and to encourage other Muslims to join in. He even went so far as to suggest that, if the British Government renewed hostilities against Turkey, then Indian Muslims should not wait for the next session of Congress to declare civil disobedience and the independence of India. Together with six of the most prominent leaders present at the Conference, the *pir* was arrested on charges of conspiracy and brought to trial the following October in Karachi.<sup>56</sup>

During his cross-examination, the *pir* revealed something of the way in which the system of control operated. Intense pressure was brought to bear on him to

<sup>52</sup> Extract from the presidential address of Pir Ghulam Mujaddid Sirhindi at a special session of the Jamiat ul-Ulama-i Sind, quoted in *Al-Wahid*, 28 November 1923, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> HCP, P/Conf/21, pp. 2,477-8, IOL.

<sup>54</sup> Political Dept. File No. 347 (1919), vol. V, pp. 389-91, CSR.

<sup>55</sup> BP (Judicial Dept. Conf.), P/62, p. 217, IOL.

<sup>56</sup> Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, p. 140.

retract his comments. While in custody awaiting trial, the *pir* had been visited by a number of important people, including Pir Turab Ali Shah Rashdi, who had warned him that he faced five years' rigorous imprisonment and had urged him to apologise. Mujaddid remained unmoved: for his religion, he would endure the hardships of prison life and take menial work in his stride. The *pir* chose to emphasise his family's traditional lack of respect for Government authority. During the trial, he mentioned a story which highlighted this resistance. His ancestor, the famous Naqshbandi sufi, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, had refused to pass through a very low door when ordered by the Mughal Emperor, Jahangir, on the grounds that he would not bow his head to anyone but God. At first, Jahangir was angry and sent the sufi to prison. In time, however, the emperor saw the folly of his ways and released him. Drawing this analogy, Mujaddid was confident that the British Government, like its predecessor, would repent and ask pardon from the *pir* and his companions.<sup>57</sup> In the event, the *pir* was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. His treatment aroused a wave of sympathy throughout Sind, and pro-Khilafat *pirs* led a heated agitation on his behalf. He was regarded as the victim of bureaucratic repression, a martyr to the Khilafat cause whose arrest helped to bring nearer the eventual day of freedom from British rule. The *pir* served his sentence in full, and, following his release, returned to the forefront of local Khilafat agitation.<sup>58</sup>

Pir Ghulam Mujaddid's individual political development helped him to step outside the framework of reference within which the British system of control operated. His broader understanding of the aims and responsibilities of the movement meant that he was no longer tied to local interests but able to participate in a wider political arena. The British policy of taking punitive action against *pirs* had disadvantages as well as advantages: when it was successful, it dealt huge blows to the credibility and self-respect of the Khilafat movement in Sind. Yet, it remained a risky business in that it allowed *pirs* the opportunity to rally support before steps were taken against them. As the example of Pir Ghulam Mujaddid showed, the scheme depended on the stake of individual *pirs* in the status quo: when that stake was no longer considered important, the administration was left vulnerable.

By the beginning of 1921, the system of control had begun to work in more straightforward ways again. As the religious issue, which had sparked off Khilafat agitation, was increasingly overtaken by the more general anti-British tone of the Non-Cooperation movement, loyalist *pirs* felt able to speak out with less fear of being accused of disloyalty to their religion. Even *pirs* who had participated in the Khilafat protest began to withdraw their support. *Pirs*, in the main belonging to well-established Suhrawardi and older Qadiri shrines, took a prominent rôle in

<sup>57</sup> *The Historic Trial of the Ali Brothers, Dr. Kitchlew, Shri Shankaracharya, Moulana Hussain Ahmad, Pir Ghulam Mujaddid and Moulana Nisar Ahmad* (Karachi, n.d.), Part II, pp. 6, 133.

<sup>58</sup> *Hindu*, 17 September 1921, n.p., in L/R/5/179, p. 1152, IOL.

the formation and organisation of *aman sabhas*, so-called 'peace associations', which sprang up under official orchestration throughout the province during 1921. The Hyderabad District Aman Sabha, for instance, was set up in August 1921. Its leadership was dominated by local *pirs*. Apart from the post of President, which was held by the Collector of Hyderabad, *pirs* filled the important positions on the managing committee. The branch's Vice-Presidents were the Makhdum of Hala, Pir Siddiq Muhammad of Bukera and Pir Bhulan Shah of Norai. Its ordinary members included Pir Ghulam Muhammad of Jhok, Pir Ghot of Bhit Shah, Pir Ghulam Haidar Shah of Bulri, Pir Vilayat Shah of Bukera and Makhdum Ghulam Haidar, brother of the Makhdum of Hala.<sup>59</sup> This level of participation was repeated at district and village level all over Sind. Meetings were held at which non-cooperation was condemned: little mention, however, was directly made of Khilafat issues. The inaugural meeting of the *aman sabha* at Rohri, attended by relatives of the Pir Pagaro, passed resolutions calling upon Sindhis to be loyal to the Government, and to take action to stop the menace of non-cooperation.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, at a loyalty meeting at Lyari, in Karachi, reference was made to the 'benevolent and unselfish character of British rule'. Its organisers called on a local *pir*, Pir Anwar Shah, to take the lead in the branch's peace propaganda, reminding the audience of the loyal stand taken by the *pir*'s late father at the outbreak of war in 1914. The *pir* responded by promising to 'do everything possible to keep all his *murids* and others of his Quarter from sedition mongers'.<sup>61</sup>

In the same way as pro-Khilafat *pirs* took advantage of the institutions of the *mela* and the *urs* to promote their cause, so loyalist *pirs* now exploited the magnetic power of the *dargah* to draw large audiences to *aman sabha* meetings. One meeting held during the annual fair at Pir Pithoro, under the presidentship of Pir Siddiq Muhammad Shah of Bukera, attracted over 3,000 participants. Pir Ali Bakhsh Shah of Bhit Shah prohibited 'preaching' by men in *khadar* at the *mela* held at his family's shrine in May 1922.<sup>62</sup> *Pirs* also discussed ways of coordinating their actions. Following a gathering of *pirs* from Lower Sind at Udero Lal in January 1922, a *hidayat* or injunction was issued which enjoined their *murids*

entirely to keep themselves aloof from this dangerous movement, heartily to join their efforts to those of peace-loving men in putting down acts of violence resulting therefrom, to adopt all lawful means to combat and destroy the nefarious Non-Cooperation Movement, and to remain loyal to the King Emperor and his Government in India, for by these lawful and effective means alone can religious

<sup>59</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 5 August 1921, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 August 1921, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 December 1921, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 September 1921, p. 5.

and worldly interests of Mussalmans be saved from falling into the jaws of ruin and destruction.<sup>63</sup>

Unswerving support for the authorities was the outcome of a conference of *pirs* from Upper Sind which met at Sukkur in May 1922 under the presidentship of Pir Saleh Shah Jilani of Ranipur.<sup>64</sup> The example of senior *sajjada nashins* was very important in deciding the outlook of minor members of a *pir* family. In 1921, Pir Mahbub Shah was still trying to win new recruits for the Khilafat cause from within the Rashdi 'clan' by calling a meeting at Bangi Kalhoro near Larkana. His efforts, however, got nowhere. Few *pirs* attended for they knew that the gathering had nothing to do with the head of the family, the Pir Pagaro.<sup>65</sup>

The amount of publicity given to the very significant contribution of pro-Khilafat *pirs* to the successes of the movement in Sind has tended to obscure the fact that the majority of *sajjada nashin* families remained firmly outside the campaign. At first, this meant that they simply did not add their voices to the call for support for the Caliphate. Later, this 'neutrality' was replaced by a prominent stand against the 'evils of non-cooperation'. For their services, they were well rewarded. Apart from the normal selection of honours and awards, the 1920s saw the distribution of land in areas to be served by the Sukkur Barrage, and many of the *pirs* who remained conspicuously loyal during the Khilafat period earned the right to buy up hundreds of these fertile areas at very nominal prices.<sup>66</sup>

The success of British efforts to control the crisis represented by the Khilafat movement and to regain the upper hand demonstrated in very decisive terms the effectiveness of the system of control on which the structure of local administration rested. The British were correct to take very seriously the dangers of a concerted challenge to their authority by pro-Khilafat *pirs*. The power of these *pirs* to mobilise support caused considerable administrative problems and so officials, like their counterparts in the Khilafat movement, strove to win *pirs* to their side. In the end, it was the system which was largely responsible for securing the 'loyal' response of *sajjada nashins* belonging to shrines whose interests bound them closely to the British administration and non-confrontational political activity. Likewise, it was the system which weakened the opposition of pro-Khilafat *pirs*. Despite the fact that they had begun to assert their wider Indian Muslim identity and needed to fulfil the expectations of their followers, their interests were still embedded first and foremost in Sindhi society and hence in the

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 January 1922, p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 May 1922, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Sind CID Report, weekending 5 May 1921, Curry Papers, Box IV, p. 55, CSAC.

<sup>66</sup> Many *pirs* received rewards in return for their cooperation during the Khilafat period. At the Commissioner's *darbar* held at Hyderabad in February 1922, ten *pirs* and *saiyids* were given an assortment of *afrinnamas*, *lunghis* and swords as marks of British appreciation, see Political Dept. File No. 331 (1922), comp. 6, n.p., CSR.

preservation of the local framework of authority. Threats to the stability of their position drastically undermined, in practical terms, the strength and extent of their commitment to the Khilafat cause, and so the prospect of a concerted confrontation was overwhelmed by the desire of the majority of *pirs* in Sind to retain the privileges conferred on them and preserved by British rule.



## A more complex system of political control: *pirs* and politics under the *raj*, 1900–1947

*I and [my] followers are pleased with the services of Rais Ali Muhammad Mari, Assembly Member of Shahdadpur taluqa . . . he is [an] old worker of Musliman [sic] . . . we recommend the League ticket this time also be given to him [and] hope he will win.<sup>1</sup>*

The system of control which linked *pirs*, both materially and ideologically, to the British, encouraged them to take part in new forms of political activity as a wider political context developed. Their involvement was the logical extension of the British need to retain their support as the system grew more complex. It also reflected the *pirs*' desire to be recognised as powerful figures within their own localities. Gradually, their political horizons broadened as the scope of political activity in Sind grew wider. The steadily increasing franchise, along with improved communications, extended the potential influence which they were able to wield at the time of elections, and so *pirs* became an indispensable ingredient in the success of electoral campaigns. Individuals as well as political parties made concerted efforts to enlist their support, for with it, as often as not, came the votes of their *murids*. The backing of *pirs* contributed in considerable measure to the growth of the Muslim League in Sind, which eventually, like the British, came to seek 'collaborators' in the countryside. *Pirs* now emerged as a 'bridge' between the structure of local politics and the political ideals of a broader Muslim community in the shape of the demand for Pakistan itself.

### ***Pirs* respond positively to the growth of electoral politics**

*Pirs*, as members of Sind's landed élite, were successfully incorporated into the local machinery of the colonial state created by the British. As the British

<sup>1</sup> Pir Muhabullah Shah Rashdi, *Sajjada Nashin* Pir Janduwalla to M. A. Jinnah, 21 October 1946 (?), Sind VIII, p. 78, SHC.

attempted to build up a more solid basis of legitimacy for their rule, they introduced the principle of local representation, based at first on nomination, later on elections. *Pirs* took advantage of this more complex system of political control by participating in local government institutions as well as higher-level advisory and legislative bodies. In this way, they were able both to confirm their position in local society and to strengthen it through these new arenas of power-broking.

The British were not long in Sind before they made efforts to adapt local government institutions 'framed on British models' to the conditions prevailing in the Sindhi countryside.<sup>2</sup> In 1865 the Bombay Government extended to Sind its Act of 1863 ordering the establishment of Local Funds and the creation of local district committees and municipal bodies.<sup>3</sup> The system, however, was unsatisfactory. Only a very small proportion of the Sindhi population lived in urban centres which were large enough to qualify as municipalities. The vast majority of people lived in the countryside in small villages and hamlets and fell outside the scope of the municipal regulations. Officials found little enthusiasm for the local district committees among tax-payers. By 1880, the committees were meeting only rarely, and all 'initiative, control and responsibility' still rested with government officials such as Collectors and their deputies.<sup>4</sup>

In 1882, Lord Lytton's scheme for the extension of local self-government was formulated, and, two years later, embodied in the Bombay Act I of 1884. Under this Act, the management of affairs in each district was entrusted to a district local board which had authority over a lower tier of *taluka* local boards.<sup>5</sup> Initially *pirs* showed little interest in participating in these bodies, but, as the committees gained in strength and as membership took on greater prestige, they began to respond more positively, joining boards, both in nominated and elected capacities. Their high social status made them obvious candidates for the honour of

<sup>2</sup> H. T. Sorley, *The Gazetteer of West Pakistan: The Former Province of Sind (Including Khairpur State)* (Karachi, 1968), p. 648.

<sup>3</sup> The Act authorised a cess on land which provided the bulk of the revenue assigned to the embryonic local bodies. District Committees administered affairs in rural areas while municipalities which had begun to spring up in the major towns were invested with additional functions. On top of their responsibility for the provision of sanitation, cholera control and other civic functions, these bodies were now also entrusted with running hospitals, dispensaries and schools. In 1873, their powers were extended further, see Mohsin Farooqi, 'A Study of Local Government Institutions in Sind during the British Period: 1843-1947' (PhD thesis, University of Sind, 1970), p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Sorley, *Gazetteer*, p. 649.

<sup>5</sup> Farooqi, *A Study*, p. 45. The size of district local boards was fixed at twenty-four. The President could not be an elected member and during the early years the position was normally filled by the local Collector. Nominated members also included Assistant and Deputy Collectors, Executive Engineers, Education Inspectors, as well as sanitary and health officers. The elected members represented the *talukas*, the municipalities and the holders of entire alienated villages. In the same way, *taluka* local boards were also presided over by the highest officials in the sub-division. They normally consisted of fifteen members, of whom half were elected and half nominated, see Cecil M. Putnam Cross, *The Development of Self-Government in India: 1858-1914* (New York, 2nd edn. 1968), p. 118.

nomination, while their economic interests qualified them to take part in the electoral process, the right to vote and to stand for election being based on property and income.<sup>6</sup> Membership of the boards reconfirmed their position in society, reiterated the respect and deference which they considered to be their natural due, and highlighted the influence which they wielded.<sup>7</sup> It meant that they were better placed to protect their – mainly landed – interests, and, thus, it widened the scope of their patronage.<sup>8</sup>

The importance which individual *pirs* placed on sitting on local boards was reflected in the way in which they put themselves forward for election. The influence and respect which they commanded greatly assisted their chances of being selected. Certain boards were dominated by particular *sajjada nashin* families.<sup>9</sup> Even when *pirs* did not stand for election themselves, candidates were very much aware of their ability to mobilise and control the voting. In an election to the Hyderabad Municipal Board in 1913, 'Sayyads [*sic*] and Pirs were called in from various parts of Sind for the purpose of influencing the Mohammadan voters'.<sup>10</sup> Nor did *pirs* limit their involvement to simple membership. Many often served as office-bearers, which further emphasised the respect which was due to them as well as the position in society which they occupied. The principle of greater local representation was accompanied by moves towards offices being filled by non-official, elected members. Whereas Presidents had always been local British officers, and Vice-Presidents usually the local *mukhtiarkar*, after 1915 the situation had begun to change. First, non-official Vice-Presidents were elected: then Presidents could also be drawn from among the ranks of non-official members. Eventually, by 1938, like all councillors, Presidents and Vice-Presidents were no longer appointed but elected by their fellow councillors. Under these circumstances, *pirs*, who aimed at civic office, had two factors in their favour. Their local influence stood them in good stead as it did in all other elections for which they put themselves forward, while the fact that the member-

<sup>6</sup> The franchise was based on two criteria: property and income. The right to vote and to stand for election was extended to those people who either owned real property bearing a value of 5,000 rupees or an annual assessment of 48 rupees, or received an annual income of not less than 500 rupees or a monthly pension of 50 rupees, see Sorley, *Gazetteer*, pp. 649–50.

<sup>7</sup> As members of district and *taluka* boards, *pirs* were often introduced to senior British officials such as the Commissioner-in-Sind, the Governor of Bombay and even the Viceroy, see, for instance, Political Dept. File No. 3 (1904), vol. II, p. 88; and *Daily Gazette* (Karachi), 20 November 1926, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> District boards organised many essential local services. By 1919, they had become totally responsible for the upkeep and running of primary schools, dispensaries, *dharamsalas* and travellers' bungalows. They also supervised the ordinary maintenance of roads and bridges, village sanitation and vital supplies of drinking water, see Farooqi, *A Study*, pp. 62, 64, 70.

<sup>9</sup> At Ghotki in Upper Sind, for instance, *saiyids* belonging to the local *pir* family took all the Muslim seats on both the municipal and *taluka* boards after 1919, see *Daily Gazette*, 14 February 1919, p. 4 and *Sind Official Gazetteer*, Part I–A, 17 September 1925, V/11/2730, p. 257, IOL.

<sup>10</sup> *Sind Gazette* (Karachi), 3 April 1913, p. 7.

ship of the boards often contained their relatives assured them of a block of votes.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of hierarchy which permeated the attitude and approach of *pirs* towards the system of honours and *darbars*, was reinforced by their participation in local representative institutions. There was a clear hierarchial difference between *taluqa* local boards and those which had control over districts as a whole. Consequently, less important or younger members of a *pir* family took up positions at the *taluqa* level, while more senior relatives sat on district local boards and municipalities. Hierarchy was repeated by the way in which the British used to nominate more senior *pirs*, leaving the less important to take their chances in the electoral process, while the fact that sons often took their fathers' places, or younger brothers took those of their older brothers further emphasised the importance of hierarchy.

Certain *pirs* regarded active involvement of this kind as a violation of the distance from government on which they felt that their spiritual reputation still depended. Their desire to maintain a physical distinction between themselves and more mundane concerns of life meant that they chose not to cross the divide by becoming directly involved themselves. This decision, however, did not automatically signal antagonism towards the British: more often, it simply indicated an established practice of separation from the affairs of government. Yet, the need to be seen by the rest of society as 'recognised' by the authorities remained. To ignore entirely the benefits to be gained from taking part in this new arena of prestige seemed a high price to pay. Most *pirs* overcame this dilemma by being 'represented' by less important relatives or their *khalifas*.<sup>12</sup>

The same forces which motivated *pirs* to take advantage of the additional power and influence offered by elected local boards, persuaded some to look further afield to provincial and all-India legislative councils as new arenas in which to demonstrate their importance. At first, representatives from Sind were nominated by the Commissioner-in-Sind to the Bombay Legislative Council and the Council of State. The number of people involved was still very limited, and *pirs* did not figure amongst those chosen in this fashion. Once the electoral principle was introduced, however, the picture altered, and *pirs* took a more active role, both as voters and as candidates.

*Pirs* as members of Sind's Muslim élite were enfranchised in two ways: they could select representatives in their capacity as members of district and municipal boards, and as propertied Muslims. Out of the twenty-one elected seats on the

<sup>11</sup> Pir Rasul Bakhsh Shah, *sajjada nashin* at Ghotki, became President of its Municipal Board, although on this occasion his election was secured when, as Chairman of the meeting, he cast the deciding vote in his own favour, see *Daily Gazette*, 23 October 1925, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> The Makhdum of Hala was never directly involved himself. Instead the family was represented by his brother, Makhdum Ghulam Haidar who was local councillor on the Hyderabad District Local Board for many years, see *Northern India's Who's Who* (Lahore, 1942), p. 17.

Bombay Legislative Council in 1909, for instance, four were chosen by district local boards, four by the municipalities and four more by Bombay's Muslim community.<sup>13</sup> Many leading *pirs* also qualified for the special franchise awarded by the British to leading *jagirdars* and *zamindars*. The decision to recognise the importance of the great Sindhi landowners by creating this privileged constituency with the right to send its representative to the Legislative Council in Bombay, was taken during the mid 1890s. It mirrored for Sind the creation of special seats for the influential *sardars* of the Deccan and Gujarat.<sup>14</sup> First- and second-class *jagirdars* were automatically entitled to a vote, while *zamindars* qualified for membership of this exclusive 'club' by paying an average land assessment of at least 1,000 rupees over the three years before an election. Electoral rolls were revised annually to include those whose assessments had risen above the necessary amount and to exclude voters whose revenue payments had fallen short.<sup>15</sup>

The majority of enfranchised *pirs* belonged to the third of these categories, and the electoral lists were scattered thickly with the names of *pirs* who, as important *zamindars*, were entitled to vote. The authorities considered this whole group important not just for preserving law and order but also for improving conditions in the Sindhi countryside. Over 30 per cent of occupied land in Sind was held in estates which exceeded 500 acres in size. The British, therefore, looked to the owners of these estates to lead the way in 'agricultural experimentation' and finance the far-reaching changes in agricultural practice which accompanied the irrigation schemes of the late nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth.<sup>16</sup> It was considered very necessary for their point of view to be fully considered, and for this reason they became entitled to separate representation. Nor did the privilege cease with the reforms introduced in 1919. Rather, the authorities felt that the great divergence in interests between the great landowners and the petty peasant proprietors enfranchised by the Act meant that the *jagirdars* and *zamindars* had to retain their special vote.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Sind Official Gazetteer*, Extraordinary, 22 November 1909, V/11/2670, p. 76. For an example of a list of *pirs* and *saiyids* selected by district local boards and municipalities as delegates to elect an Additional Member to the Bombay Legislative Council in 1912, see General Dept. File No. 141 (1912), I, comp. 3, pp. 63–5, 91–3, CSR. Municipalities were entitled to select delegates for the election to the Bombay Legislative Council provided that they had at least five thousand inhabitants, see General Dept. File No. 141 (1916), vol. II, p. 93, CSR.

<sup>14</sup> *Sind Official Gazetteer*, Extraordinary, 22 November 1909, V/11/2679, p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> General Dept. File No. 141 (1916), vol. I, p. 5, CSR.

<sup>16</sup> General Dept. File No. 141 (1920), vol. I, pp. 6–7, CRS.

<sup>17</sup> The only changes which were introduced were designed to protect the exclusive nature of the vote, and involved doubling the qualifying threshold to 2,000 rupees a year. This was in order to keep out 'less desirable' *zamindars* from Thar Parkar, Larkana and the Upper Sind Frontier districts who did not possess the level of influence and respectability required by the authorities. Changes of this sort, however, had little impact on the number of *pirs* already included for most paid enough assessment to ensure their continued membership of Sind's most select political constituency, see *ibid.*, pp. 27–61.

*Pirs* took a leading rôle in these elections from as early as the middle of the 1890s. Many acted as nominees for candidates. At the same time, nominating someone did not ensure that the candidate in question would receive the vote of his proposer or seconder, nor did it mean that a *pir*'s support was necessarily available at the time of subsequent elections. In spite of open backing during election campaigns, many *pirs* did not eventually cast their votes. Voting, by and large, does not seem to have been considered as important as nominating a candidate. Whereas the former was done by the electorate as a whole, the latter represented a more individual act which had the added advantage of establishing good relations with the candidate.<sup>18</sup> The proportion of *pirs* who actually turned out and voted was therefore usually low. As a group, however, they were not especially 'lax'. During the early years of the twentieth century, small turnouts were a regular feature of elections. As the century progressed, improvements in communications and transport, together with greater understanding of the electoral process itself, were reflected in the larger proportion of voters, including *pirs*, who made it to polling stations.<sup>19</sup> And, just as *pirs* prospered by being associated with a candidate's success, so someone standing for election benefited from *pirs*' support in order to win votes. Positive backing by an influential *pir* was always welcomed by candidates. Their influence was often manipulated to secure votes. Shaikh Sadiq Ali, Deputy Commissioner for Mehar and later Vazir of Khairpur State, was elected to the Bombay Legislative Council in 1907 with the help of Pir Alan Sani, who sent telegrams and messages to his *murids* in Tatta, instructing them to vote for the *shaikh* in return for his blessings and pleasure.<sup>20</sup>

By 1920, it had become very difficult for candidates to work among voters 'without the active support of influential local men' such as *pirs* and *mirs*.<sup>21</sup> The immense spiritual hold of *pirs* over the majority of Muslims in Sind was directly translated into and measured by the electoral success of the candidates whom they supported. The authorities themselves recognised that unless 'very considerable progress' was made, elections would remain a 'farce', since the people of Sind had 'no idea of the meaning of an election' and gave 'their vote on purely personal considerations'.<sup>22</sup> This assessment was reinforced after a decade of experience of elections based on a wider franchise by the report of the Indian Statutory Commission which described the large part played by *pirs* in securing the attendance of voters and in directing their votes:

months before [an] election, . . . candidates visit the principal places in their constituency and meet voters individually or collectively, according to the importance of the person or exigency

<sup>18</sup> Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1903), comp. 28, pp. 153, 154, 156, 159, CSR.

<sup>19</sup> Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1907), vol. XII, p. 169, CSR.

<sup>20</sup> Judicial Dept. File No. 1 (1907), vol. XII, pp. 543–8, CSR.

<sup>21</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 30 October 1920, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> General Dept. File No. 141 (1921), p. 21, CSR.

of the occasion. As . . . election days approach, paid workers are engaged, manifestoes are issued, meetings are held and posters and handbills are distributed. Besides these open measures, [however], the candidates approach voters through the influential men of the locality who are favourably disposed. In the case of Mahommedan voters, the Pir or Sayed [*sic*] . . . becomes the most useful canvasser and no candidate could succeed without the assistance of such persons. No corrupt practices of the nature of payment for voters have been proved, but money has been freely used in the travelling and entertaining expenses of Pirs . . .<sup>23</sup>

*Pirs* did not limit their influence simply to assisting others to victory. The earliest attempt by a *pir* to gain election was that of Pir Sahibdino Shah of Bulri, who first stood as a candidate for the election to the Viceroy's Legislative Council in 1911. Only his early death in 1914 prevented him from eventually securing a seat, for after the constitutional changes of 1919 the number of representatives from Sind to Bombay was increased by the creation of 'Mahommedan Rural Constituencies', and it was left to his son, Pir Ghulam Haidar Shah, to take advantage of these new opportunities during the 1920s.<sup>24</sup> The Government of India Act of 1919 signalled the candidature of other *pirs* who were, by and large, from the same *sajjada nashin* families which were already taking similar initiatives at the local level. These families had developed a well-established relationship with British rule. It was in their interests to incorporate themselves successfully into the machinery of the colonial state. While the older generations within these families had received a purely traditional Muslim education, a substantial proportion of the younger generation was being educated along western lines by the 1920s and 1930s. The same families who participated in the district, *taluka* and municipal boards, therefore, cropped up among the lists of candidates for elections to Bombay or to the centre. Pir Rasul Bakhsh Shah of Ghotki stood for election in the Muslim rural constituency of Sukkur, was duly elected in November 1923, and continued to represent the seat until the separation of Sind from Bombay Province in 1936.<sup>25</sup> Provincial and all-India bodies provided *pirs* with more scope in which to demonstrate their influence. The rôle of *pirs*, both direct and indirect, in the widening electoral process introduced by the British confirmed their power in terms of the support which they were able to mobilise: their participation illustrated their willingness to take advantage of new electoral opportunities in order to reinforce their position as local leaders.

<sup>23</sup> *Indian Statutory Commission* (London, 1930), vol. VII, p. 424.

<sup>24</sup> *Sind Gazette*, 17 June 1914, p. 8; *Sind Official Gazette*, 9 October 1930, V/11/2740, p. 2,110, IOL.

<sup>25</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 16 November 1923, p. 5.

### ***Pirs* and the widening political arena to 1937: the politics of associations**

At the same time as Sindhi *pirs* were being drawn to electoral politics, they were, from the end of the nineteenth century, also being attracted to associations and organisations which represented their interests as Muslim leaders and powerful landed élites. Their involvement reflected their desire not to be left out of the widening framework of political activity which was something which they could not afford to ignore. It was still as local leaders that they were motivated to act: and the protection of their local interests ensured that, on the whole, they supported the authorities. It was during the same period that many also began to be involved in concerns which were shared by other sections of the wider Indian Muslim community.

*Pirs'* recognition of the need to protect their interests as landowners was first indicated by their membership of local *zamindar* associations. The primary concern of these associations was lower land assessment rates. They also lobbied the authorities for improved irrigation facilities and other agricultural developments. *Pirs* took leading rôles within local associations, whose meetings often coincided with important fairs at their *dargahs*. *Pirs* formed the backbone of many local associations. This was partly a reflection of the respect which many *zamindars* accorded them, but it was also a sign of their strong landholding interest. The Hala Zamindar Association was dominated by the local religious 'aristocracy'. In the early 1930s, its president was Makhdum Ghulam Haidar, brother of the Makhdum of Hala, while its secretary, Pir Baqadar Shah, belonged to the leading *saiyid* family of the nearby town of Matiari.<sup>26</sup>

The most influential organisation to which nearly all of the more politically active *pirs* belonged by 1917 was the Sind Mahommedan Association. This branch of the Central National Mahommedan Association was set up in 1883 by a leading Sindhi Muslim educationalist and philanthropist, Hasan Ali Bey Effendi.<sup>27</sup> The Association's membership was drawn from Sind's Muslim landed élite – '*waderos, pirs* and *mirs*' – with a few merchants, resident mainly in Karachi.<sup>28</sup> Its main purpose was to lobby on behalf of the Muslim community for its 'fair share' of the benefits of British rule, especially as far as Muslim representation was concerned. *Pirs* joined deputations to the Governor of Bombay and the Viceroy on their tours through Sind. Their addresses focused on the relatively small proportion of Muslims in the local government service. As early as 1895, these had pointed out that there was not a single Muslim official magistrate

<sup>26</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 23 January 1933, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> The National Mohammadan Association was launched by Amir Ali in 1878 as a pressure group demanding preferential treatment for Muslims: within ten years it had acquired more than fifty branches scattered throughout India, see Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 310–13.

<sup>28</sup> Political Dept. File No. 350 (1917), vol. II, n.p., CSR.



serving in Sind at the time. Complaints increased as the twentieth century progressed, repeatedly stressing the need for the expansion of higher education among Sindhi Muslims and urging the authorities to increase the amount of funds available for this purpose.<sup>29</sup> The Association's desire for higher levels of Muslim education in Sind was reflected in its early support for Effendi's project to set up a *madrasa* modelled along Aligarh lines. This ambition was realised in 1885 with the establishment of the Sind Madrasa in Karachi. Its combination of a western-style curriculum and traditional religious instruction turned it into the premier educational institution for Muslims in Sind. *Pirs* were among its most important sponsors, as well as a rich source of financial support for other educational establishments.<sup>30</sup>

*Pirs* sometimes found that their rôles as Muslim leaders and large landowners created a direct conflict of interests. This potential problem was revealed most clearly by their mixed reaction to the proposed introduction of a 'Mahommedan' Cess Bill designed to raise money needed for the expansion of educational facilities for Muslims in Sind. The bill was introduced in the Bombay legislative Council by G. M. Bhurgri in 1912. It sought to levy one quarter of an anna on every rupee of land assessment in order to pay for the promotion of Muslim education. The leadership of the Sind Mahommedan Association held meetings to rally support for the bill. But, with the exception of Pir Ghulam Mujaddid Sirhindi, *pirs* did not figure prominently amongst the members of the Association who actively campaigned on the bill's behalf. Pir Ghulam Mujaddid's cooperation was the result of his family's close ties with Bhurgri's: other *pirs* did not have the same 'obligations' to fulfil. Many *pirs* came out openly against the bill primarily on financial grounds. At meetings held throughout the length and breadth of Sind, the bill was condemned, and *pirs* were amongst its harshest critics.<sup>31</sup>

Hostility to the Cess Bill did not mean that *pirs* were necessarily opposed to the question of extending educational facilities for Sindhi Muslims. As individuals, they were prepared to give large sums of money: but they preferred their donations to be made on a voluntary, not an obligatory, basis. Their concern about the state of Muslim education was in harmony with their rôle as Muslim leaders, but they seemed to fear that, once their generosity became 'compulsory',

<sup>29</sup> Political Dept. File No. 3 (1895), comp. 4, n.p., CSR. By 1917, the position of Muslims in the higher ranks government service was:

	Hindus	Muslims
Revenue Dept. Deputy Collectors	56%	22%
Revenue Dept. Mukhtiyarkars	79%	19%
Judicial Dept. Sub-Judges	82%	18%
Educational Dept.	74%	10%
Public Works Dept.	77%	8%

Political Dept. File No. 349 (1917), vol. II, n.p., CSR.

<sup>30</sup> For the Pir Pagaro's contribution to the Sind Madrasa, see District Magistrate, Karachi, to Acting Com-Sind, 31 May 1895, Police Dept. File No. 2D (1894-5), vol. II p. 25, CSR.

<sup>31</sup> *Sind Gazette*, 2 May 1912, p. 5, 22 May 1912, p. 5 and 9 July 1912, p. 8.

they would lose the power which control over the 'purse strings' gave them. In addition, the authorities' sponsorship of a network of *madrasas* throughout Sind modelled on the one in Karachi, transformed these institutions into something by which local notables could earn further respect in British eyes.<sup>32</sup> *Pirs* contributed to *madrasa* funds, and joined their governing committees.<sup>33</sup> This interest eventually extended, in 1924, to the proposed creation of a Sind Zamindari College, to ensure that 'the landed gentry of the province [was] sufficiently educated to look after its interests' and 'not elbowed out in the onward march of democracy by their remaining without education': the Pir Pagaro alone contributed 5,000 rupees to the appropriate fund.<sup>34</sup>

The Sind Mahommedan Association was very well suited to the needs of the British system of control. Its outlook reflected the attitude of its membership; like the majority of *pirs*, it was 'loyalist' and pro-Government in outlook. Association members contributed 'very satisfactorily' to the war effort between 1914 and 1918, primarily through the payment of War Loans rather than the supply of recruits, as it was not until April 1917 that the authorities decided to accept recruits from Sind on account of their 'unwarlike and undisciplined reputation'.<sup>35</sup> The innate 'conservatism' of *pirs* was illustrated by their attitude towards the question of Home Rule. In 1917, a branch of the Sind Mohammedan Association at Sukkur decided to present a petition to the Viceroy against Home Rule.<sup>36</sup> This caused a split within the ranks of the Association for the branch at Hyderabad under G. M. Bhurgri's leadership immediately passed a resolution supporting the introduction of Home Rule. Finally a compromise was reached. In place of outright rejection, a milder clause was inserted which held that Home Rule was against the interests of the Muslim community, but, if reforms had to be introduced, then it trusted that steps would be taken to ensure that these interests would be safeguarded. Included in the delegation which presented the address to the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, in Karachi was Pir Pir Shah Rashdi.<sup>37</sup>

The 1920s and early 1930s did not witness any significant decrease in the loyalty towards the British displayed by *pirs* who were involved in the Sind Mahommedan Association. Following its pro-British stand during the Khilafat agitation, the Association continued to press for Muslim interests: separate electorates and separate representation in the legislatures and local bodies, as well as special encouragement to counteract the general 'backwardness' of Sind's Muslim population. Both as individuals and in organised groups, *pirs* took an open stand against the Congress-led Civil Disobedience of 1930. *Aman sabhas*,

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of fund-raising approaches made to leading *pirs*, see General Dept. File No. 4 III (1902), vol. I, comp. I, pp. 13-21, CSR.

<sup>33</sup> General Dept. File No. 4 III (1908), comp. 4, p. 39, CSR.

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 7 June 1924, p. 15 and 12 March 1925, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Political Dept. File No. 350 (1919), vol. III, comp. 20, n.p., CSR.

<sup>36</sup> G. A. Chagla to AIML Secretary, 24 September 1917, SPML Papers, 1, p. 8, FMA.

<sup>37</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 10 October 1917, p. 5, and 30 October 1917, p. 10.

echoes of Khilafat days, were formed, and *pirs* once again took leading rôles within them. Mass meetings were held in the interior at which *pirs* warned against 'the harmful results' of the campaign. These efforts were brought together at a meeting hosted by the Makhdum of Hala at which nearly fifty leading *pirs* were present. In his opening speech, the Makhdum condemned the Civil Disobedience movement for encouraging lawlessness and for generally undermining all forms of authority. He urged all *pirs* to support the resolution which called upon them to use everything in their power to defeat the movement, which, if left unchecked, would, he warned, 'introduce Bolshevism', a British propaganda catchword, into India.<sup>38</sup>

*Pir* opposition to Civil Disobedience can be seen as part of the campaign for the separation of Sind from Bombay Presidency in which *pirs* also flexed their influential muscle. The conference organised by the Makhdum of Hala, for instance, also passed a second resolution calling upon the Government to concede Muslim demands at the London Round Table Conference which included the separation of Sind. By 1930, the campaign for separation had attracted fairly widespread support among *pirs* and *saiyids* on account of its direct appeal to feelings of resentment against supposed Hindu 'exploitation' which had taken root amongst all sections of the Muslim élite in Sind. In this way, Sindhi *pirs* were being drawn into the growing communal atmosphere of politics largely as a result of their determination to protect their own local interests.

The demand for separating Sind from Bombay had initially been raised not by a Muslim but by a prominent Sindhi Hindu at the annual session of the Congress held in Karachi in 1913. He argued the need for separation on the grounds of Sind's distinctive cultural and geographical character, but his motion reflected a desire among Sind's commercial community to extricate itself from having to compete with much more powerful Bombay interests. The issue had lain dormant until the time of the Montagu–Chelmsford Report when it was taken up by G. M. Bhurgri. This time, in order to make it consistent with the Report's 'liberalising' spirit, greater emphasis was laid on the 'oppressive' and 'autocratic' rule of the Commissioner-in-Sind as symbolic of Sind's connection with Bombay. Reactions were generally cool and the local Congress branch alone responded positively. The Sind Mahommedan Association, in contrast, reluctantly agreed to support separation only if and when change became inevitable.<sup>39</sup>

The non-communal atmosphere of the Khilafat period dampened support for the scheme, and it was not until Hindu–Muslim tension increased during the late 1920s that influential Muslims in Sind were won over to the concept of a separate province. During the 1920s, resentment against Hindu moneylenders and Hindu

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 July 1930, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Muhammad Irfan, 'A Brief History of the Movement of the Separation of Sind', *Al Wahid* (Karachi) Special No., 1 April 1936, p. 52; Allen K. Jones, 'Muslim Politics and the Growth of the Muslim League in Sind, 1935–1941' (PhD dissertation Duke University, 1977), pp. 34–6.

dominance in Government service, stored up since the nineteenth century, became distinctly communal. By the end of the decade, the deterioration in Hindu–Muslim relations in Sind had become undeniable. In 1924, the Commissioner-in-Sind had dismissed the need for the authorities to take special precautions to prevent Hindu–Muslim clashes on the grounds of the ‘great measure of mutual tolerance’ which existed between the two communities: when disputes did break out, their origin was ‘almost always of an essentially secular nature, being disputes as to property rights over lands and buildings’ and religious observances ‘rarely, if ever’ gave rise to trouble. By 1926, his successor had a very different picture to report. The situation had altered quite dramatically, and many more communal incidents had occurred. Official fears were confirmed by an outbreak of communal rioting which broke out in Larkana in 1927 over the abduction of women and children for the purpose of forcible conversion. This was followed by clashes in Jacobabad and Sukkur which served to heighten Hindu–Muslim tension further.<sup>40</sup> Sind’s Muslim élites felt directly endangered by what they perceived as the ever-growing threat of Hindu domination over land ownership and Government service, and so they began to hold meetings, organise conferences and distribute pamphlets. An informal organisation called the Sind Azad Conference was formed early in 1932 to bring together the landed aristocracy and the emergent Muslim middle classes, the two groups who felt their positions to be most fragile, on this single-issue platform. The Sind Mahomedan Association also swung its support behind the campaign. *Pir* families took a prominent rôle and, as a result of their influence, a groundswell in favour of separation gradually developed. One of the campaign’s most important leaders Saiyid Ghulam Murtaza Shah, better known as G. M. Syed, belonged to the *sajjada nashin* family of the shrine of Pir Haidar Shah at Sann in District Dadu.<sup>41</sup>

The Hindu community now openly rejected separation. This opposition was ostensibly on the grounds of financial viability but in reality owed much to fear, in particular that its position would be seriously threatened once it lost the balance of numbers provided by Bombay’s Hindu majority. This in turn incited greater resentment on the part of the Muslims. Pir Turab Ali Shah Rashdi, for instance, wrote a long article in Sind’s leading English-language newspaper, the *Daily Gazette*, in which he outlined arguments against the Hindu case. If, in spite of the wealth, power and education, he argued, Hindus in Sind needed the presence of the Presidency to protect them, it was hypocritical on their part to dub those Muslims who wanted the presence of the British to protect them from the Hindu majority as ‘*johukums* and toadies’. Similarly, he warned that it increased

<sup>40</sup> Rieu to Home Department, Bombay, 16 October 1924, Bombay Proceedings (Home Dept. Conf.), P/70, p. 6, IOL; 15 June 1926, BP (Home Dept. Conf.), P/71, pp. 58–9, IOL.

<sup>41</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 8 July 1930, p. 10, and 2 September 1932, p. 5; and M. A. Khuhro, *A Story of the Sufferings of Sind: A Case for the Separation of Sind from the Bombay Presidency* (Karachi, 1930), Appendix I, for details of the first Sind Azad Conference held at Hyderabad on 16 November 1932.

ill will to talk on the one hand of the right of India to be free, an India where the majority community, namely the Hindus, will respect the rights of the minority community, and, on the other hand, to mistrust the Muslims where they unfortunately happen to be in a majority, and to bring forth a hundred and one false excuses to deprive them of their due share in the administration of the country. If this is a foretaste of what the Hindus mean by 'Swaraj', I fear evil days are ahead for India and even more evil days ahead for Muslims.<sup>42</sup>

The campaign to win a separate Sind proved successful in spite of a relatively bitter and divisive communal legacy. The decision in favour of an autonomous Sind was announced on 24 December 1932 following discussion about it during the London Round Table Conferences and two official investigations into the financial aspects of separation.<sup>43</sup> Although the authorities in Bombay regretted losing the usually cooperative votes of the Sindhi representatives in the Bombay Legislative Council, the outcome was in line with the principles of self-determination and provincial autonomy given prominence in the Government of India Act of 1935.<sup>44</sup> But important in determining the final outcome was the way in which separation did not alienate the influential landholders on whom the British depended so heavily in the Sindhi countryside. As far as *pirs* themselves were concerned, their involvement was made possible by the fact that the protest was not intrinsically anti-British in character and therefore did not threaten the basis of their understanding with the administration. In the long run, their participation, as landowners and as leaders of Sind's Muslim community, foreshadowed the way in which they were later drawn into 'party politics' as well as preparing them for it. Although, from time to time, they attempted to reduce tension by calling for harmony and goodwill between the two communities, it was undeniably their influence which contributed in large part to the amount of support which the campaign was able to generate. *Pirs* had already demonstrated the value of the cooperation in individual electoral contests. Their involvement reconfirmed beyond doubt the importance of their formidable reserves of influence in deciding the outcome of any province-wide campaign earlier revealed by their activities at the time of the Khilafat movement. This, combined with the fact that Sind's hereditary religious leadership could be mobilised in defence of perceived threats to their interests, was a lesson which political parties after 1937, especially the Muslim League, could not afford to ignore.

<sup>42</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 30 April 1931, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> 'Sind: Question of Constitution as a Separate Province', L/P&J/9/59, IOL.

<sup>44</sup> In March 1935, Brabourne, Governor of Bombay, wrote to the Viceroy explaining that without the assistance of the Legislative's Sindhi Muslim members, the forthcoming budget session would be very difficult for the government since it could as a rule rely on their cooperation, see MSS. EUR F 97/7, n.p., IOL. Indeed, separation was actually postponed several months because Bombay wanted to hold on to its Sindhi members until the Budget session had been completed, see MSS. Eur F 97/4b, n.p., IOL.

***Pirs* and the widening political arena: the politics of the All-India Muslim League**

The mid 1930s signalled a turning-point in the political activities of many of Sind's *pir* families. The separation of Sind combined with the constitutional changes embodied in the 1935 Government of India Act raised local political stakes considerably and meant that the system of political control grew more sophisticated. Now that ministries depended on the result of localised elections, the incentive to participate in electoral politics increased dramatically; and *pirs*, like their secular counterparts, joined in the new provincial scramble for power.

It was at this stage that the Muslim League first turned its attention properly to Sind. Under the new expanded set of 'guidelines' for political action created by greater provincial autonomy, it had much to gain from controlling the newly created Muslim majority province of Sind. At first, however, Sindhi Muslims were not very interested in the League: to them, its use was limited to an all-India level. Only when the League became a vehicle for local political concerns did it become the party with strongest support among Muslims in Sind. Its increased popularity was directly linked to winning over the province's religious families. *Pirs* acted as interpreters for the League, translating its policies into a language which had meaning in the Sindhi countryside. In giving their support, *pirs* responded as local Muslim leaders: in practice, therefore, the rise of the Muslim League had less to do with the promotion of all-India matters and considerably more to do with the way in which it strengthened the position of established powerholders in Sind.

*Pirs* had shown little interest in early efforts to establish a branch of the Muslim League in Sind. The first attempt had been made soon after the League's creation in 1906, but had been frustrated by the small amount of local interest and a lack of help from the central organisation. Another attempt in 1912, following a visit by the Aga Khan to Karachi, also failed for the same combination of reasons, and local Muslim politicians who wished to align themselves with the League were forced to join the branch in Bombay instead.<sup>45</sup> Finally, in 1917, in the aftermath of the clash over the Home Rule clause, a Sindhi branch was finally formed.<sup>46</sup> *Pirs* were still not attracted to it. The branch was dominated by Karachi-based, commercial interests whereas the concerns of *pirs* were still overwhelmingly rural. The political reputation which the League acquired over the next few years also alienated the support of many *sajjada nashin* families who were not interested in confronting the authority of the British during the period of Khilafat agitation. Only those *pirs* who took a pro-Khilafat stand showed interest in the

<sup>45</sup> Jones, *Muslim Politics*, pp. 22–4.

<sup>46</sup> It was not until 1920 that the Sind League finally secured affiliation to the AIML, and this was only after it had threatened to declare itself an independent body, see A. Ahmad to Secretary, AIML, 27 February 1920, SPML File No. 1, p. 17, FMA.

organisation. Indeed, when efforts were made in 1925 to revive the branch's fortunes, several of them were numbered among the members of its provisional organising committee, but the enterprise came to nothing and Sindhis interested in the League continued to be involved through the mediation of its Bombay branch. All-India Muslim League support for the idea of the separation of Sind helped to put new life into the defunct organisation. At meetings held during the early 1930s, repeated stress was laid on the demand for Sind's separate identity, and *pirs*, such as Pir Rasul Bakhsh Shah of Ghotki and Pir Baqadar Shah of Matiari, who in the past had distanced themselves from the League, now began to pay it more attention.<sup>47</sup>

This increased interest in the League was not reflected in the elections of 1937 in which it fared very badly and emerged with no seats. The results were dominated instead by local Muslim political parties, namely the Sind Azad Party, the Sind United Party and the Sind Muslim Political Party, which between themselves won nearly all of the Muslim seats in the Sind Legislative Assembly.<sup>48</sup> League membership was still something which was regarded as 'reserved' for all-India issues, with little direct relevance to what was actually taking place in Sind where provincial concerns together with the struggle for personal power took priority. Leading rival Muslim politicians such as Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi, leader of the Azad Party and Haji Abdullah Haroon, co-founder of the United Party, were both closely connected to the League, while Muhammad Ayub Khuhro, one of the leading figures in the Sind Muslim Political Party, was a member of the All-India Muslim League Council.<sup>49</sup>

Although the impact of the League in the 1937 elections was very restricted, the influence of Sindhi *pirs* was not. Sind's status as an autonomous province broadened the scope of their involvement in the election process. Muslims in Sind had formed only a minority of the electorate within Bombay Presidency, and had commanded only a small proportion of the seats in its Legislative Council. After separation, the new province had a whole Legislative Assembly to itself in which Sindhi Muslims formed the majority.<sup>50</sup> This intensified the desire of candidates

<sup>47</sup> For instance, Pir Turab Ali Shah Rashdi, Pir Ali Anwar Shah Rashdi and Pir Ghulam Mujaddid Sirhindi of Matiari, see *Daily Gazette*, 18 February 1925, p. 6; Shaikh Nur Muhammad (Hon. Sec. Sind ML) to Hon. Sec. AIML, 22 February 1925, File No. 241, pp. 30, 33, 40-1, FMA.

<sup>48</sup> The Sind United Party won 21 seats, while the Sind Azad Party and the Sind Muslim Political Party won three apiece. The remaining 7 Muslims in the Assembly were elected as Independents, see SFR for the First Half of February 1937, L/P&J/5/251, n.p., IOL.

<sup>49</sup> See *List of Members of the Council of the All-India Muslim League, 1938* (New Delhi, 1938), p. 12; Jamaluddin Ahmad (ed.), *Historic Documents of the Muslim Freedom Movement* (Lahore, 1970), p. 195; *List of the Members of the All-India Muslim League, 1937* (New Delhi, 1937), p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> The Communal Award of 1932 gave Sind sixty seats, allocated as follows:

General	19	European	2
Muslims	34	Landholders	2
Commerce and Industry	2	Labour	1

See MSS. EUR F 150/4, p. 228, IOL.

for the support of *pirs* and *saiyids*, as well as increasing the number of contests in which members of Sind's religious élite could take part. Combined with the extension of the franchise embodied in the Government of India Act of 1935, these changes produced elections in which *pirs* filled a more prominent rôle than had ever been the case in the past. Candidates vied with each other to secure the blessings of leading *sajjada nashins*. Shah Nawaz Bhutto, Vice-President of the Sind United Party, for instance, brought leading *pirs* from outside his constituency 'to influence religiously' the voters by sitting outside the polling stations and 'impressing illiterate Muslims to cast their votes in Sir Bhutto's favour.' Individual *pirs* allied themselves openly with one or other of the parties involved in the polls. Pir Baqadar Shah of Matiari supported the Sind United Party, while Pir Ghulam Haider Shah of Bulri, Pir Taj Muhammad of Thar Parkar District and Pir Muhammad Shah of Sukkur stood for election as members of the Sind Azad Party.<sup>51</sup>

In practice, the elections revealed how little real part was played by the concept of 'party' in either electoral behaviour or in the electoral outcome. In most constituencies, specific factors such as the enmity between a leading landlord and tribal chief or the alliance between a *wadero* and an influential *pir* determined the number of candidates standing for a constituency and the number of electors who actually turned out to vote. In nine of the contests, members of *pir* families were elected, and the large majority of the Muslim seats in the Legislative Assembly (twenty-seven out of thirty-four) was filled by members of Sind's Muslim land-owning élite.<sup>52</sup> Nor did the existence of parties determine the ministry which came to be formed after the elections. While the Sind United Party had won most seats, its leader, Haroon, and deputy leader, Bhutto, had failed to be elected. Under these circumstances, the Governor of Sind called upon Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah, leader of the Sind Muslim Party, to form a ministry instead. Pressure was put on Assembly members to forget 'superficial' party differences and support the new premier.<sup>53</sup> Large-scale defections also reduced the numbers remaining within the folds of the Sind Azad Party and the Sind United Party to a handful, and so the new premier together with his supporters emerged as the largest single bloc in the Assembly, a clear indication of the 'triumph of personality over party' and the nature of politics in Sind.<sup>54</sup>

From the League's point of view, Sind ranked alongside the Panjab in terms of its most disastrous showing. The explanation put forward at the centre was that

<sup>51</sup> *Al-Wahid*, 7 January 1937, p. 6 and 10 February 1937, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Eighteen candidates belonging to tribal *sardars* were also successful, see Jones, *Muslim Politics*, pp. 101, 105, 113.

<sup>53</sup> Ikram-ul Haq Parvez, 'The Contribution of Muslims of Sind towards the Making of Pakistan' (PhD thesis, University of Sind, 1976), p. 332.

<sup>54</sup> Jones, *Muslim Politics*, p. 128.



the Congress had contrived a split among the Muslims of Sind which had prevented a League ministry from taking office.<sup>55</sup> In reality, the results underlined that Sindhis were still not interested in the League as far as provincial politics were concerned. The only way in which the League would be able to make ground would be by becoming involved in the local political arena in Sind. Yet, whereas the League embarked on a programme of reorganisation in other parts of the subcontinent after its all-India session in October 1937, it was not until the demise of Hidayatullah's ministry in the following March that the party began to organise itself in earnest in Sind. Hidayatullah's resignation was caused by the defection of a section of his support, including Allah Bakhsh Soomro and G. M. Syed, ostensibly in protest at the ministry's failure to carry out agreed programmes but in reality largely as a result of personal rivalries. A new ministry under Soomro was formed with the support of local Congress politicians, independent Hindus and a sizeable chunk of the Assembly's Muslim membership. Under these circumstances and combined with Congress' Muslim Mass Contact campaign, the Muslims members who had remained 'loyal' to Hidayatullah formed themselves into an opposition group prepared to accept the League's overall leadership. Meetings passed resolutions calling for the establishment of League branches throughout Sind.<sup>56</sup> The spring and summer of 1938 saw a high level of League organisational activity. The initiative, led at first by Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi, was considerably strengthened by Seth Haji Abdullah Haroon's public declaration of support for the League at the end of April. The next important person to identify openly with the League was Hidayatullah at a League meeting at Sultankot in Sukkur district; and he was followed, shortly afterwards, by G. M. Syed who exerted considerable influence among the *pir* and *saiyid* members of the Legislative Assembly and whose transferred allegiance widened the potential pulling power of the party.<sup>57</sup>

By July 1938, some forty branches of the Muslim League had been formed and 15,000 members enrolled, mostly in the rural areas. Much effort was directed towards enlisting the province's *pirs*; and by June, branches had been established in towns such as Matiari and Ghotki.<sup>58</sup> The League's non-confrontational attitude towards the British meant that it attracted many pro-establishment *pirs* who

<sup>55</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 43.

<sup>56</sup> SFRs, 6 November 1937, 7 December 1937, 7 January 1938, L/P&J/5/251, pp. 12, 4, 6, IOL.

<sup>57</sup> Haroon still envisaged the scope of the League as limited to non-Sindhi affairs, and discounted the prospect of it ever seeking office locally, *Daily Gazette*, 24 April 1938, p. 9; Jones, *Muslim Politics*, pp. 146–9, 152–3.

<sup>58</sup> List of Muslim League branches in Sind in 1938, File No. 241, pp. 73–4, FMA – by the end of the year the total had risen to 138, see Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi to Secretary All-India Muslim League, 30 November 1938, File No. 241, pp. 73–4, FMA, p. 64.

would have been alienated by a defiantly anti-British stand. *Pirs* quickly assumed an organisational rôle and also held provincial office. The high level of interest taken by *sajjada nashin* families in the League was reflected in the way in which one-third of Sind's quota of delegates to the All-India Muslim League Council in November 1938 was made up of *pirs* and *saiyids*.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the fanfares surrounding the Sind Provincial League Conference held in Karachi in October 1938 and the long list of primary organisations, it became obvious by 1939 to the League leadership itself that the basis of its support remained relatively weak.<sup>60</sup> To rally more members and intensify its attack on Allah Bakhsh Soomro's premiership, the League leadership looked for some means of firing local imaginations. The solution came in the shape of agitation over the return of a domed building in Sukkur on the grounds that it had once been used as a mosque. With the help of Sind's religious élite, the League was able to popularise the issue of the Manzilgah so that it achieved provincial importance. The whole episode illustrated vividly the way in which the League depended on the cooperation of local religious leaders to rally support amongst local Muslims.

Encouraged by events surrounding the Shahidgani Mosque in Lahore,<sup>61</sup> the Sind Provincial League presented its demand to the Government for the restoration of the building, setting in motion the mechanics of agitation. These included a Restoration Committee and a Manzilgah Day on which meetings and demonstrations were held all over Sind. Above all, the League's organisers turned to *pirs* to popularise the demand by arousing the necessary emotions. *Pirs* were at the forefront of the campaign, in particular members of the Sirhindi and Rashdi 'clans'. A meeting in Matiari on 3 August 1939, under the presidency of Pir Muhammad Umar Jan Sirhindi, passed a resolution which called for the Government to accede to Muslim claims for the Masjid Sharif Manzilgah. Likewise, the Executive Committee of the Jamiat-i Mujaddidiya of Sind, headed by Pir Muhammad Husain Jan Sirhindi, held an important session on 15 September 1939. The Committee, which represented the whole of the Mujaddidiya family, its *murids* and friends, publicly confirmed that the Manzilgah was a place of Muslim worship and described the Government's stand as 'arbitrary' and 'tyrannical'. In line with a decision of the Restoration Committee, it called upon Muslims to volunteer to undertake religious *satyagraha* from the beginning of October if the building was not returned by that date.<sup>62</sup>

By the end of September, thousands of volunteers had arrived in Sukkur.

<sup>59</sup> Pir Ali Muhammad Rashdi, *Report of the General Secretary of the First Sind Provincial Muslim League Conference, October 8 to 12, 1938* (Karachi, 1938), pp. 13, 17, 18, 19; File No. 241, p. 60, FMA.

<sup>60</sup> *Report of the Secretary on the Working of the Sind Provincial Muslim League: 27.11.1938 to 12.2.1939*, File No. 4255, n.p. GMSP.

<sup>61</sup> PFRs for November 1937 to January 1938, see L/P&J/5/238, pp. 22, 32, and L/P&J/5/239, p. 134, IOL.

<sup>62</sup> *Al-Wahid*, 6 September 1939, p. 6 and 20 September 1939, p. 5.

When no agreement was reached between Allah Bakhsh and local League leaders, *satyagraha* was begun. Within a couple of hours, over 300 people had been arrested, including Pir Ghulam Mujaddid Sirhindi of Shikarpur, Pir Abdul Aziz Sirhindi and thirty-six other *saiyids*. Over the next few days, many more arrests were made, including 250 members of the Amroti Jamiat, followers of the Maulana of Amrot. There was a seemingly endless supply of other *satyagrahis* to take their places: Pir Allahdino Shah Rashdi left for Sukkur with his brother and forty of his supporters, while over 500 *mujahids*, all *murids* of the Pir of Bharchundi, arrived together from various towns in Upper Sind.<sup>63</sup> On the third day of *satyagraha*, the volunteers pushed passed the police and occupied the building. The Government decided to take a lenient attitude in the hope of defusing tension. All *satyagrahis* who had been arrested were released and the police were withdrawn. Instead of relieving the situation, these moves only strengthened the resolve of the occupiers to stay put until the authorities officially conceded their claim. The League decided to picket ministers' homes in Karachi, which led the Governor to promulgate an Ordinance on 14 October, giving local authorities the power to make arrests without a warrant.<sup>64</sup>

As negotiations dragged on, the atmosphere in Sukkur became increasingly communal in nature.<sup>65</sup> The legacy of fear and insecurity left by the recent campaign for the separation of Sind among Sindhi Hindus, particularly those of the interior, meant that they viewed Muslim claims to the Manzilgah as a direct threat. Old tensions took on new life; and two separate streams which had been running parallel with each other now converged and became 'almost inextricably confused'.<sup>66</sup> In the middle of November, the Government arrested local League leaders, including G. M. Syed, Chairman of the Restoration Committee, on the grounds that they were deliberately forestalling a settlement. The authorities then re-took possession of the Manzilgah using force. The situation quickly degenerated into a wave of communal disturbance and rioting which spread from Sukkur into the surrounding districts. Both communities suffered in terms of loss of life and property, though Hindus lost proportionally more. Afterwards an investigation was carried out into the exact nature of the building, and in 1941 it was handed back to the local Muslim community.<sup>67</sup>

The political outcome of the November *satyagraha* was the collapse of Allah

<sup>63</sup> SFR 5 October 1939, L/P&J/5/254, pp. 20–1, IOL; *Al-Wahid*, 5 October 1939, p. 8 and 8 October 1939, n.p.; 3 November 1939, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Jones, *Muslim Politics*, pp. 192–3.

<sup>65</sup> For instance, a popular syncretist Hindu singer and preacher, Bhagat Kunwar Ram, was murdered, see SFRs 2 August 1939 and 22 November 1939, L/P&J/5/254, pp. 17, 49–50, IOL.

<sup>66</sup> Graham to Linlithgow, 4 January 1940, MSS. EUR F 125/96, pp. 9–10, IOL.

<sup>67</sup> Graham to Linlithgow, 24 January 1940, L/P&J/5/255, pp. 4, 8, IOL; *Causes of Sukkur Disturbances: Important Findings of the Court of Inquiry into Sukkur Riots of November 1939, presided over by Judge Weston* (Karachi, 1940); *Report of the Court of Inquiry Appointed under Section 3 of the Sind Public Inquiries Act to Enquire into the Nature of the Manzilgah Buildings at Sukkur* (Karachi, 1941), p. 36.

Bakhsh's pro-Congress ministry and its replacement by one headed by Mir Bande Ali Khan Talpur which included a number of 'Muslim Leaguers' such as M. A. Khuhro, G. M. Syed and Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi.<sup>68</sup> While the life of this ministry was limited (it fell in 1941 and was replaced by one again led by Allah Bakhsh Soomro), the agitation which preceded its formation underlined the extent of the influence which could be exerted by *pirs* on the League's behalf. Unlike the Panjab, where support for the party was largely restricted to towns and cities until the elections of 1946, the League in Sind had managed to develop strong links with the countryside by the early 1940s. This reflected to some extent the absence of well-established alternative political organisations such as the Unionist Party in the Panjab. It also reflected the fact that the basis of local power lay very firmly in the countryside and so it was here that the League not surprisingly had from the beginning of its renewed campaign directed the bulk of its efforts. Lastly, the relative strength of its position in rural Sind was a measure of the League's success in capturing the support of many of the province's *pir* families. All the same, this very 'success' underlined the League's inability to establish a separate institutional base for itself in the Sindhi countryside which could, if and when necessary, operate independently of the pre-existing framework of local powerholders.

The League was keen to capitalise on the publicity which it had received as a result of its Manzilgah stand. A series of local meetings, often presided over by *pirs*, culminated in May 1940 in an important district conference at Sultankot which was attended by Makhdum Murid Hussain Qureshi, *sajjada nashin* at the shrine of Ghous Bahawal Haq at Multan. The Makhdum Sahib exercised a great deal of influence over local Suhrawardi *pirs* and had many *murids* in Sind. He provided an ideal model with his calls on Muslims and his followers in particular to look upon the League's flag as 'the flag of the Prophet of Islam'. His cries were taken up by the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Pir Rasul Bakhsh Shah of Ghotki who echoed the same sentiments when he criticised Congress efforts to 'mislead' local Muslim villagers.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, other *pirs* were drawn further into the organisational structure of the League. Pir Abdul Sattar Jan Sirhindi, for instance, became a member of the committee formed to coordinate the League's propaganda campaign, while Pir Ghulam Murtaza Sirhindi of Malir took on the responsibility for forming new primary league branches.<sup>70</sup> At Khiarvi Sharif near Sakrand, for instance, the branch was dominated by the local Naqshbandi *sajjada nashin* family: as well as its president, who was also Joint Secretary of the Nawabshah District League, all its office-bearers were *pirs*.<sup>71</sup>

The return of Allah Bakhsh and his open association with Congress boosted the

<sup>68</sup> SFR 5 April 1940, L/P&J/5/255, p. 45, IOL.

<sup>69</sup> *Muslim Voice* (Karachi), 31 May 1941, pp. 5-6.

<sup>70</sup> Syed to Jinnah, n.d., File No. 460, p. 66, QAC; File No. 248, p. 38, FMA.

<sup>71</sup> *Al-Wahid*, 9 January 1942, p. 3.

League's drive to recruit more *pirs* which was reinforced once G. M. Syed, with his family links to many *pir* families, became President of the League after Haroon's death in May 1942. By the time of the Quit India campaign and Allah Bakhsh's dismissal in the middle of 1942 for renouncing his honours, the League was able to claim nearly 450 branches, comprising at least in theory well over 150,000 members. At the same time, League leaders were conscious that there was no guarantee that membership figures had not been artificially produced by the creation of 'bogus' branches as part of local competition for power.<sup>72</sup> As part of a plan to increase League support, they sought to raise political consciousness by persuading Muslims to buy goods from Muslim shops only. Accordingly, Syed appealed to 'all Pirs of the Dargas [*sic*] in Sind where fairs are held . . . to give facilities to Muslim shopkeepers and . . . to enhance . . . Muslim trade'. Similarly, a round of village conferences, organised to establish 'close and personal contact with the people' and acquaint 'them with the League's constructive programme', was arranged at important shrines such as Bukera Sharif, Jhok Sharif, Matiari, Hala and Shahpur Chakar (district Nawabshah). At these gatherings, *pirs* participated as organisers, presidents and opening speakers. The meeting at Matiari was organised by Pir Muhammad Zaman Shah, local branch President and Vice-President of the Hyderabad District League, and opened by Pir Ghulam Haidar Shah of Bulri. Both were Matiari *saiyids* and close associates of G. M. Syed.<sup>73</sup>

The reappointment of a 'Muslim League' ministry led by Hidayatullah (who had left the League in January 1939 following rivalry with Haroon but had returned to its fold in October 1942), followed by the holding of the All-India Muslim League session in Karachi in December 1943, acted as 'triggers of respectability' and led an increasing number of new *pirs* to identify with the party. Now that the League had established itself as an integral part of the framework of Sindhi politics, they saw advantages in being associated with it as well as in attending such an important event taking place on their very doorstep. The presence of Jinnah and other leading all-India Muslim politicians only increased the importance of the conference further. A significant number of *pirs* attended as official delegates. Others took a conspicuous role in the opening procession through the streets of Karachi. The Pir of Bharchundi and the Pir of Ranipur both arrived in Karachi with a large contingent of their followers to swell the number of visitors.<sup>74</sup> The conference, which received enormous publicity in the local press, stimulated further interest in the League. In a climate of growing certainty that far-reaching constitutional changes were approaching, individual

<sup>72</sup> *Quarterly Report of the Progress of the Muslim League in Sind*, January 1943 (Confidential), File No. 4256, n.p., GMSP.

<sup>73</sup> *Morning News* (Lahore), 10 August 1943, p. 2; Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi to Syed, 27 June 1945, File No. 4256, GMSP.

<sup>74</sup> *List of Delegates selected for the A.I.M.L. Session*, File No. 281, p. 56, FMA; *Daily Gazette*, 17 December 1943, n.p., in File No. 258, p. 33, FMA.

*pirs* were forced to decide where their best interests would lie in the future. Some, who previously had been 'sympathetic', now no longer saw the need to hide their 'inclinations': Makhdum Ghulam Qadir Pirzada of Kotri Kabir, for instance, had been a friend and business associate of Abdullah Haroon for many years – Haroon had regularly bought agricultural produce from the *makhdum*'s lands – but it was not until the success of the Karachi session that the *makhdum* finally decided to cement his unofficial ties with the League by becoming a paid-up member.<sup>75</sup>

The cultivation of *pirs* and *saiyids* by the League during this period brought undoubted benefits such as victory in a Shikarpur by-election at the end of 1943 in which the League was determined to exploit the religious factor to the full.<sup>76</sup> In the run up to polling day, the Sukkur District League branch held a meeting at which Makhdum Murid Hussain Qureshi of Multan pointed out that it was the duty of Muslims to 'add to the glory of the Muslim League' by voting for its candidate. His efforts were reinforced by those of Pir Ahmad Shah of Ranipur who had a great many *murids* living in Shikarpur and its surroundings areas.<sup>77</sup> The manipulation of religion was so pronounced that Dow, Governor of Sind, afterwards commented that the election was 'a pityful commentary on the state of democracy in Sind that both sides enlisted support less by political arguments than by bands of Pirs and Maulvis who went round threatening hellfire to all who dared to vote against their candidate'.<sup>78</sup>

*Pir* cooperation with the League underlined the extent to which they were prepared to take advantage of the new sets of ground rules by which the status quo in the Sindhi countryside and hence their own power were to be maintained. Their concerns as religious leaders attracted them to the League, but it was the League's 'promise' to protect their social and economic interests which proved vital in securing their support. Their involvement demonstrated their increased identification with the Indian Muslim community as a whole, but it was primarily their position as local leaders which drew them into party politics during this period. At the same time, the local nature of political involvement in Sind meant that political activity in general and that of *pirs* in particular remained essentially 'factional' in nature. Although the League had established a relatively firm footing after 1943 with Hidayatullah's premiership surviving until independence in 1947,

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Ghous Muhammad Pirzada, Kotri Kabir, Sind, July 1985.

<sup>76</sup> The election, held in Shikarpur in November 1943, was caused by the murder of the ex-premier, Allah Bakhsh Soomro, and the constituency had been in his family since 1926. While there was some feeling that the League ought not to take part as a mark of sympathy and respect, the League eventually nominated a candidate and swung the whole of its machinery into action, see *Annual Report of the S.P.M.L., 1943–44*, File No. 4256, n.p., GMSP.

<sup>77</sup> *Second Quarterly Report of the Working Party of the S.P.M.L.*, n.d., File No. 4256, n.p., GMSP; *Morning News*, 12 October 1943, p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 22 November 1943, L/P&J/5/259, p. 22, IOL.

political manoeuvrings and competition continued as a central feature of Sindhi politics throughout the whole of this period. During 1944, the Sind Provincial Muslim League was divided by factionalism, from which *pirs* were not immune. Their involvement in the conflict illustrated both their approach to the question of politics and the factors which determined to whom they finally gave their blessing.

By the end of that year, rivalry which had always existed at some level between League leaders reached a new pitch. Resentment against G. M. Syed led to accusations that he was constructing a 'Saiyid League'. Under Syed's presidency, the proportion of *pirs* and *saiyids* on the various committees and council of the Provincial League had risen substantially. His 'wooing' of Sind's landed élite at the same time as his support for the Hari movement was not contradictory, for his personal ambition led him to take advantage of every possible means of creating power bases for himself within the party. Syed's main 'adversaries' were Khuhro and Hidayatullah. By 1944, Khuhro had been temporarily put out of the contest by his imprisonment for alleged involvement in the death of Allah Bakhsh, and so Hidayatullah was left as Syed's main target. Their rivalry was emphasised by the fact that Jinnah had laid down that no Parliamentary member of the League could hold provincial office. Polarised in this way, Syed, as party president, commanded loyalty at the ground level, while Hidayatullah relied on his influence as premier to retain support. In order to unseat the latter, the former had to cause a rift within the ranks of the party as a whole.<sup>79</sup>

Relations between Syed and Hidayatullah deteriorated sharply. Tension between the two surrounding factions was heightened by two further by-elections which took place over the winter of 1944-5. Rivalry for control of the League in Sind prompted them to support opposing candidates, and, since Hidayatullah had strong connections among the former ruling family of Sind, the contests became a virtual 'tug of war' between 'the Mirs and Pirs of Sind'.<sup>80</sup> At the first of the two contests, which was held at Shikarpur at the end of 1944, this rivalry prevented any official League candidate from standing and the seat went to a pro-Congress Muslim.<sup>81</sup> Hidayatullah and his supporters were furious. A seat had been thrown away which they felt confident could have been won. The ill-feeling between the two sides grew more bitter. Hidayatullah now began to write to Jinnah complaining that Syed was in the process of establishing a 'Saiyid Raj'. He accused Syed of expelling members and appointing his own men to influential positions within the organisation's hierarchy. The outcome would be

<sup>79</sup> Hidayatullah to Jinnah, 31 October 1944, Sind II, p. 44, SHC; Jalal, *Sole Spokesman*, p. 111.

<sup>80</sup> SFR 2 February 1945, L/P&J/5/261, p. 144, IOL.

<sup>81</sup> 'Sind Affairs', Sind VII, p. 10, SHC; Hidayatullah to Jinnah, 11 December 1944, Sind III, p. 74, SHC.

two Leagues in Sind: 'surely', he argued, 'the party was 'not for *saiyids* only, but for all Leaguers'.<sup>82</sup>

The *pir*-versus-*mir* split further widened as a result of the circumstances surrounding the second by-election which was held in January 1945. There was no question that this constituency of Tando Muhammad Khan was in the pocket of local Talpur *mirs* who dominated the town. As a result, Hidayatullah wanted the League ticket to go to the *mirs*' choice of candidate. Syed, however, decided not to field an official candidate, even though Pir Abdul Sattar Jan Sirhindi, of nearby Tando Saindad, put himself forward for nomination. Instead, behind the scenes, he set the League apparatus into full swing in support of the anti-*mir* contestant. But the local influence of the *mirs* proved too powerful for 'all the Pirs and Maulvis' that Syed could muster, and his opponents accused him of having thrown away another useful propaganda victory by not having endorsed the *mirs*' candidate as the official League representative.<sup>83</sup>

Accusations that Syed was sponsoring his own men at the expense of the League's best interests continued to multiply. Throughout the summer of 1945, 'parallel' League branches were set up all over Sind as a direct gesture of defiance to Syed's leadership of the party. Efforts by the central Muslim League leadership to restore some semblance of unity got nowhere. First, Syed organised a 'no confidence' vote against Hidayatullah in the Assembly. Then he openly supported his 'man', Pir Ali Muhammad Rashdi, against the official League candidate, Yusuf Haroon, in the election for the Sind Muslim seat at the Central Assembly. In the end, the rift came to a head over the question of the selection of candidates for the elections due at the beginning of 1946.<sup>84</sup> By this point, Jinnah's patience had finally run out. Having weighed up which of the two sides the League could least afford to lose, and afraid that continued disunity would lead to severe repercussions in the forthcoming elections, the Central Committee of Action finally expelled Syed.<sup>85</sup>

Pro-League *pirs* reacted in a mixed way. Many stayed with the League but a fairly sizeable minority followed Syed out of the party. The first instinct of *pirs* closely associated with Syed, such as Pir Baqadar Shah and Pir Muhammad Zaman Shah of Matiari, Pir Qurban Ali of Nawabshah, Pir Ali Shah of Badin and Pir Ghulam Haidar of Bulri, was to accompany him 'out' of the League. Although they had been leading lights within the League under Syed, they had remained essentially motivated by local, factional concerns which prohibited them from

<sup>82</sup> Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 9 February 1945, L/P&J/5/261, p. 142, IOL; Gazdar to Jinnah, 20 January 1945, Sind IV, p. 62, SHC.

<sup>83</sup> Jinnah to Syed, 28 February 1945, Sind V, p. 24, SHC; A. A. Khan, President Parallel League City Muslim League to Jinnah, 12 July 1945, Sind VI, p. 12, SHC; Yusuf Haroon to Jinnah, 30 October 1945, Sind VI, p. 70, SHC; Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 3 November 1945, L/P&J/5/261, pp. 26-7, IOL.

<sup>84</sup> Khuhro to Jinnah, 3 October 1945, Sind VI, p. 69, SHC.

<sup>85</sup> *Dawn* (Lahore), 4 January 1946, p. 1.



staying without him. With their help, Syed and his supporters won four seats in the elections of February 1946 which combined with four Nationalist Muslims and twenty-two Congress members to form the opposition Coalition Party in the Sind Legislative Assembly.<sup>86</sup> In the Hyderabad North Muslim Rural constituency, it was the influence of the *pir* families at Hala, Bhit Shah, Matiari and even a branch of the Pirs of Jhando family, which defeated the official League candidate, Saleh Muhammad Shah, and resulted in the election of his pro-Syed opponent, Pir Baqadar Shah.<sup>87</sup>

The defection of these influential *pirs* and *saiyids* did not stop the League from trying to make use of others who had not deserted it. Syed's opponents within the League had used the cry of '*Saiyid Raj*' to get rid of him. Once they were certain that he was no longer an internal threat, they set about consolidating as much *saiyid* support as possible. Saleh Muhammad Shah, for instance, counted among his chief workers Pir Badiuddin Shah, a member of the rival section of the Pirs of Jhando, as well as Pir Mewal Shah Jilani, the *sajjada nashin* of a shrine near Udero Lal. Further north, the League made great efforts to safeguard the cooperation of the Pir of Ranipur through one of his leading *murids*, the Khan of Kelat. The *pir*, who had many followers in the district of Sukkur and around Jacobabad, had already proved very helpful in motivating support for the League in earlier elections in Upper Sind.<sup>88</sup>

The campaign to win over new *pirs* continued throughout 1946 and increased in intensity at the prospects of another round of elections late in the year. In September, Hidayatullah faced severe problems in how to maintain his Muslim League ministry with only a total of twenty-seven votes out of an Assembly of sixty members. With a vote of confidence looming, he needed to win over at least one member of the eight Muslims in the Coalition Party without losing any of the twenty-six undisciplined followers whom he already had. Eventually, as the political temperature mounted, the Speaker (elected as a Muslim League candidate) resigned in order to give the League its full voting strength. In the political confusion which followed, Hidayatullah requested a postponement of the election of a new Speaker. Instead, the Governor, Sir Francis Mudie, practically falling over backwards to keep the Muslim League ministry under Hidayatullah in power, decided first to prorogue the Assembly and then to dissolve it. There appeared to be no question that, in view of its failure to convert any of Syed's supporters or gain back its own deserters, the Ministry had wanted the Governor to dissolve the Assembly rather than to resort to the alternative of asking Syed to form a Ministry. On 12 September, it was announced that elections would take

<sup>86</sup> Despatch No. 1350, dated 3 October 1946, Decimal Files 1945-9, 845.00/10-346, p. 3, USNA.

<sup>87</sup> *Sind Government Gazette*, 7 February 1946, V/11/2775, p. 225, IOL; Saleh Muhammad Shah to President SPML, 6 February 1946, Sind VII, p. 53, SHC.

<sup>88</sup> For overtures to the Ranipur *pir*, see Khuhro to Jinnah, 3 October 1945, Sind VI, p. 69 and 26 December 1945, Sind VII, p. 27, SHC.

place in late November and early December, and in the meantime a 'caretaker' government was appointed, made up of exactly the same individuals as before.<sup>89</sup>

Every Muslim seat was bitterly contested in the elections. The struggle even extended to in-fighting between Muslim League leaders. M. A. Khuhro, new President of the League, conspicuously avoided supporting Hidayatullah in the latter's efforts to win the landowners seat (elections for which were held on 26 November) until Jinnah learnt of the danger of a further split and arrived in Sind to campaign on Hidayatullah's behalf. The Premier's safe return which was announced before the main polling took place on 9 December seemed to have quite a dramatic effect on both League and Syed workers: the League was galvanised into 'triumphant crusading' while Syed supporters were 'stultified' by the size of his win. The overall results which emerged gradually between 15 and 17 December revealed that the League had won a resounding success, with thirty-four seats in the Assembly as opposed to only two won by the Nationalist Muslims and Syed's own failure to secure election.<sup>90</sup>

The League's emphatic victory in Sind had more than just a local significance for, when the new Assembly met in February 1947, it was the first time in ten years that the All-India Muslim League had a complete and seemingly unassailable majority in any provincial legislative body. It also confirmed the importance which the party placed on the support of influential *pirs* and *saiyids* even at the cost of some internal resentment. Khuhro, as chief party organiser, had few scruples about making direct overtures in order to win their cooperation and he awarded official League tickets to many of them or their nominees. Action of this sort did cause resentment amongst some League supporters. A lot of opposition, for instance, was created when a League ticket was awarded to Pir Qurban Ali, a former close supporter of Syed's who, at one stage, had been expelled from the League by the party's High Command. The *pir* was accused of being 'a chameleon [*sic*], changing colour to serve his own selfish ends' and the League leadership was criticised for endorsing the 'strange principle' of turning a 'traitor' into a 'hero'.<sup>91</sup>

The opportunism of *pirs* and League alike was reflected in similar 'reconciliations' in other parts of the province as the elections drew nearer. It became party policy 'for the general good of the Muslim community' to bring in important people from the 'opposition'. Local branches set about recommending wealthy individuals of great influence who had been financing Syed's campaign but on whom it was now felt that the League could rely.<sup>92</sup> Pir Ali Shah of Badin was won back into the fold of the League in October by the offer of the official ticket for the

<sup>89</sup> Despatch No. 1350, dated 3 October 1946, Decimal Files 1945-9, 845.00/10-346, pp. 4-16.

<sup>90</sup> Despatch No. 1373, dated 3 January 1947, Decimal Files 1945-9, 845.00/1-347, pp. 4-5, USNA.

<sup>91</sup> Letter to Chairman, Muslim League Parliamentary Board Naushahro Feroze, 26 September 1946, Sind VII, p. 80, SHC.

<sup>92</sup> Letter to Central Parliamentary Board, 17 October 1946, Sind VIII, p. 27, SHC.

constituency of Karachi East where he had a large number of *murids* and was sure to be successfully returned. Although there were objections to his nomination on account of his open canvassing against the Muslim League in the previous election and the fact that he had not been a member of the League for long enough to qualify to stand as one of its candidates, the decision was regarded as 'absolutely necessary in the interests of the League's future'.<sup>93</sup>

The extent to which *pirs* were prepared to re-think their allegiances once circumstances had changed, and the eagerness of the League to re-accommodate them within the ranks of its supporters, were highlighted by the League's decision to select Makhdum Ghulam Haidar of Hala as its official candidate for the Muslim Rural constituency of Hyderabad North in spite of the fact that he had backed out of the February elections in favour of Pir Baqadar Shah at the last moment. The *makhdum* had pleaded ill-health as the reason for his earlier withdrawal, but this did not adequately explain why he had sent circulars to his *murids* instructing them to support Syed's man.<sup>94</sup> Local interests in the shape of family politics had been at the bottom of the affair. As the second set of elections drew nearer, his nephew Makhdum Muhammad Zaman, the *sajjada nashin* at Hala, issued a notice to all his 'friends, disciples and voters', explaining that, just as in the last elections when his uncle had withdrawn his candidature in favour of Pir Baqadar Shah 'in reverence to the wishes of some elders of the *saiyid* family', he again wanted to see the *pir* successfully elected.<sup>95</sup> On this occasion, however, the family 'pact' did not prove strong enough to withstand the assault launched against it by the League, and the Hala family was won over to its cause. By October, Muhammad Zaman was writing to Jinnah, recommending the names of people to whom he felt that League tickets should be awarded.<sup>96</sup> Although the League leadership knew very well that the *makhdum* could always perform the same 'disappearing trick' as before, the benefits of having him on their side were clearly worth the risk involved, since without him there was little chance of defeating the Matiari *pir*. From the Hala point of view, final acceptance of the League over the claims of G. M. Syed signalled their recognition of the benefits to be gained by being associated with an all-India party which had proved itself in recent elections

<sup>93</sup> Also, by offering East Karachi to the *pir*, the League ensured that he did not contest the constituency where he lived for which one of its Ministers, Mir Ghulam Ali Khan Talpur was standing, see Yusuf Chandio to Jinnah, 22 October 1946, Sind VIII, p. 36, SHC. Compromises of this sort were not unknown. For instance, in 1941, an eleventh-hour agreement had been reached between the *pirs* and *mirs* of Hyderabad District who were fighting over the presidentship of the District Local Board. According to the terms of the compromise, Pir Baqadar Shah had withdrawn from the election in favour of Mir Ghulam Ali, in return for the chairmanship of the District School Board, see *Muslim Voice*, 7 June 1941, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Saleh Muhammad Shah, Senior Vice President SPML to Liaquat Ali Khan, Chairman AIML Central Parliamentary Board, 7 October 1946, Sind VII, p. 54, SHC.

<sup>95</sup> English copy of Sindhi notice, signed 'Muhammad Zaman, *Sajjada Nashin*, *Dargah Shareef Hala*', n.d., Sind VII, p. 55(e), SHC.

<sup>96</sup> Makhdum Muhammad Zaman to Jinnah, 10 October 1946, Sind VIII, p. 16, SHC.

to be the 'party of the future' as far as their long-term interests were concerned. They could not afford to allow themselves to be politically outflanked and isolated in the run-up to an independent Sind which looked more and more likely to become part of the Pakistan being demanded by the Muslim League.

Sindhi *pirs* participated in the British system of control in order to protect their privileges and to extend them further whenever and wherever possible. The same motives drew them into new political arenas as more and more venues were gradually opened up during the course of the first half of the twentieth century. Just as the British had welcomed them with open arms, so new pressure groups and political parties courted them as a very rich source of potential support. To a large extent, their 'popularity' was the result of the way in which their powerbase had been consolidated rather than undermined by British rule. Their religious responsibilities did not prove much of a barrier to active political involvement; instead, their religious status often endowed them with the means with which to be successful. Local political activity, however, was a confusion of alliances and rivalries in constant flux, a struggle between the 'ins' and the 'outs'. *Pirs*, like the province's other notables, took full advantage of the local power struggles which gripped Sindhi politics in the decade from 1936 to 1947. They adopted a very flexible attitude, and invested their support where they felt it would bring them most return. By late 1946, the Muslim League had proved both locally and on a national level that it was the party most likely to achieve power in whatever Muslim state emerged after independence, a state in which Sind would be included. The practical day-to-day survival of 'pirdom' in Sind depended on *pirs* being respected and rewarded by the authorities of the day, and so, as independence loomed nearer, *pirs* increasingly came to appreciate the benefits of being associated with the League. Thanks to the electoral system introduced by the British in order to strengthen their control in the changing political context of the twentieth century, *pirs* found themselves in a position to transform their rôle from one of 'collaboration' to one in which they were included in the 'administration' itself. In this way, the British system of political representation – local, provincial and national – endowed *pir* families with the strength and resilience to make a smooth transition into the post-independence period and helped them to emerge in 1947 as strong, if not in some ways stronger, than they had been in 1843.

## The final challenge: the Pir Pagaro again

From the North came riding like a black cloud  
the 'Pagaro' whose followers are angels,  
Do not oppose this Syed – [you] devil and infidel,  
[You] cannot compete with my Beloved . . .<sup>1</sup>

The British allowed local holders of power in Sind a high degree of independence in return for collaboration. This collaboration, however, presumed the acceptance of British rule on the part of these local élites. During the late 1930s and the early 1940s, the British were faced with another serious challenge to the working of their system of control in the form of a second Hur 'uprising' instigated this time by the Pir Pagaro, Pir Sibghatullah Shah, himself. Unlike his predecessors, the *pir* was not prepared to adhere to the rules which controlled the administrative machinery in the Sindhi countryside. Both during and after the crisis, which erupted out of a gradual campaign on the part of the *pir* to assert his authority over and above that of other local holders of power and culminated in his execution and the imposition of martial law, the British sought to explain his defiance in terms of his personal character. Described as a 'monster' with the 'warped mentality' and 'vacant stare' of a 'madman', they argued that no sane man would ever have dreamed of mounting such a challenge.<sup>2</sup> In reality, the question of the *pir*'s sanity was far less relevant than the fact that his ability to defy the authorities was based on the enduring relationship between the *gadi* and the Hur Union, which had grown stronger rather than weaker as a result of British efforts to reform the brotherhood in the aftermath of the earlier crisis of the 1890s. And just as important in encouraging the *pir* to reject the notion of shared interests on which collaboration was based was the heightened atmosphere of nationalist excitement

<sup>1</sup> Extract from translation of song sung by Hurs in praise of the *pir* and against the British, see Lambrick Papers, MSS. EUR F 208/69, p. 133, IOL.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant General G. N. Molesworth, *Curfew on Olympus*, p. 241, in MSS. EUR F 161/2/33, IOL.

which preceded independence and the *pir*'s growing involvement in this widening political arena.

### **The challenge returns**

The British system of political control was based to a large extent on the existence of very close relations between a local powerholder and his supporters, whether they were members of his tribe, *haris* working on his land or *murids* as in the case of the province's *pir* families. The irony of the second Hur crisis lay in the fact that it was precisely the closeness of the relationship between the Pir Pagaro and his Hur followers which posed such a threat to British authority. Following the 1890s Hur 'rebellion', officials had taken steps to try and mould this relationship into something which was more easily controlled from outside. They had embarked on a programme designed to reduce the extent to which they depended on the Pir Pagaro for the maintenance of law and order among his *murids* with the ultimate aim of undermining the strength and solidarity of the Hur Union itself. The authorities used both the carrot and the stick in their measures to control the Hurs. They confined them to guarded settlements and after 1914 deported the worst offenders to far-off Visapur in the Bombay Presidency. At the same time, they took steps to promote their 'moral improvement', holding out the possibility of release in return for good behaviour. As long as the Pir Pagaro, in the main, remained cooperative, the British were able to maintain a level of control over the Hurs. But the British found it impossible to break the unity of the Hurs in any lasting way. To some extent, this failure was connected to the very nature of the Union, which seemed to thrive when it was made to suffer on account of its devotion to the *gadi*, or when the authority of the *pir* himself was threatened. It was, in part, the result of mistakes by the authorities who were at times over-optimistic in their handling of the Hurs. Finally, the lack of success owed much to the Pir Pagaro's own desire not to alienate permanently this relatively small but essential section of their support, a factor which became very important when the *gadi* passed into the hands of a *pir* who was not inclined to respect the British system of control. The British position, therefore, was made substantially more difficult by the accession to the *gadi* of the twelve-year-old Pir Sibghatullah Shah in 1921. Relations between the authorities and the new Pir Pagaro quickly soured and looked set to disturb the balance of interests on which the system of control rested.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1920s, the authorities' dilemma was reflected in the *pir*'s growing defiance of the administration which increased both his own confidence and the Hurs' sense of pride but which brought him closer to conflict with the British. Officials were aware from the outset of the potential problems associated with

<sup>3</sup> Com-Sind, Note, 1 December 1912, Political Dept. File No. 330 (1921-22), n.p., CSR.

such a young boy succeeding the most powerful *gadi* in Sind. They were afraid of his becoming the easy target of 'unscrupulous' manipulation by sections of his following. Regarded as 'precocious', the young *pir*'s lack of respect for the authorities was encouraged by *murids* who included leading members of the Hur Union. Within a few years, he had become a source of great worry for officials, who took steps to replace his more 'sycophantic' advisers and appoint tutors to improve his education. But the *pir* proved difficult to teach, and, in British eyes, his behaviour grew worse as he grew older. Rather than having taken Sibghatullah in hand straightaway, making him a Ward of Court and sending him to study outside Sind, officials realised that they had allowed him to grow up intensely aware of his own power as well as antagonistic and resentful towards authority.<sup>4</sup> The British were always conscious of the danger of alienating individual powerholders to the extent that they no longer retained sufficient respect to play the mutual cooperation 'game' according to its rules. At the same time, the system of control could not afford to allow infringements to go unchecked for fear of encouraging further defiance. By 1928, Sibghatullah had come to be regarded by the authorities as a 'public danger'. Accordingly, it was decided that he had to



*Plate 5 The Pir Pagaro, Pir Sibghatullah Shah II (1921–43).*

<sup>4</sup> Collector of Sukkur to Com-Sind, 24 April 1923, File No. 2523 A (1922), p. 89, CSR; Acting Com-Sind to Home Dept. Bombay, 20 June 1929, Bombay Proceedings (Home Dept. Conf.) P/76, p. 231, IOL; L. N. Brown to his mother, 21 February 1926, Photo E 158, n.p., IOL.



Plate 6 Tomb of Pir Shah Mardan Shah at Pir-jo-Goth, Sind.

shown that he was neither above the law nor beyond the reach of the government. Since he never attended *darbars*, officials felt that there was little point in depriving him of his *kursi*. Recent changes in the Arms Act rules, however, had increased the value of an arms licence exemption, and so they decided to cancel his privilege by way of an official warning. It was the discovery of the *pir*'s infringement of this ban which led, eventually, in 1930 to his arrest and trial on a number of charges which included the unauthorised possession of arms and ammunition but extended also to kidnapping and murder.<sup>5</sup> The case opened in Sukkur in the May of that year but the prosecution quickly realised that the fear of reprisals would prevent witnesses from giving evidence to convict him of murder and so that charge was dropped. The same problem did not exist with the other charges for which police witnesses were available, and so, despite the services of Muhammad Ali Jinnah as defence lawyer, Sibghatullah was found guilty and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 2 May 1930, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Pir Ali Muhammad Rashdi, 'Quaid-i-Azam, As I Knew Him', MSS in possession of author, pp. 1–2; Jinnah's fees amounted to 60,000 rupees, Lambrick Papers MSS. EUR F 208/67, p. 47, IOL. For a copy of the final judgement in the case, see Nisar Ahmad Pannoun, *Jinnah the Lawyer* (Lahore, n.d.), pp. 329–37.



The trial together with the sentence proved too much for the *pir*'s Hur supporters. Sibghatullah had not been permitted bail and so had been detained throughout the trial. This indignity angered his *murids* who denounced the authorities at a number of protest meetings. Later they condemned the severity of the sentence and the authorities had to step in to prevent a breakdown of law and order.<sup>7</sup> They were encouraged in their protest by resolutions passed at meetings organised to counteract the Civil Disobedience movement of the time which had professed 'heartfelt sympathy' for the *pir* and called for the withdrawal of charges against him.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the presence of very respectable defence witnesses, such as the Mir of Khairpur and two Sindhi members of the Bombay Legislative Council, were seen as evidence of the important position which he filled in the hierarchy of Sindhi society. These factors combined with the 'insult' to their *murshid*'s honour and their own inability to help him, to harden Hur resolve never to allow the *pir* to be insulted again.

The Sind to which Sibghatullah returned in 1936 was not the same as the one that he had left in 1930. During his absence, changes in the form of the 1935 Government of India Act and provincial autonomy had been introduced with the result that the amount of political influence available to local élites in general and the Pir Pagaro in particular had risen tremendously. Between 1936 and 1941, the *pir* was able to act more independently as a direct consequence of the combination of this shift in the balance of power in Sind and the rising tempo of the nationalist movement. The increased amount of power at stake meant that local politicians, who depended on the cooperation of Sindhi notables for electoral success, were prepared to pay the price of allowing the *pir* very substantial freedom of action in return for electoral and ministerial security. The growth in nationalist feeling meant that the British were equally anxious not to antagonise the *pir*, and so, at first, his activities were given 'the benefit of the doubt'. Under these circumstances, Sibghatullah's confidence soared to new heights. He asserted his authority in two ways. First, he strengthened his position in relation to the rest of Sind's Muslim leadership, both secular and spiritual. Second, he openly defied British authority by assuming power to which he was not entitled under the British system of control and by openly allying himself with more extreme wings of the nationalist movement.

The system of control in Sind as elsewhere in British India highlighted the value of flexibility. Growing pressure for constitutional reform as the twentieth century had progressed had resulted in concessions which the British hoped would placate opposition and further strengthen the bonds which tied local holders of power to the overall status quo. The extension of the franchise meant that, in theory, the authorities had to deal with growing numbers of 'intermedi-

<sup>7</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 9 May 1930, p. 5 and 29 August 1930, p. 5; *Al-Wahid* (Karachi), 4 September 1930, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, see *Daily Gazette*, 19 June 1930, p. 9.

aries'. In practice, it served to reinforce the influence enjoyed by a relatively select few. Changed political circumstances made it relatively easy for the Pir Pagaro to exercise his authority over local Muslim politicians. As the *gadi* with the greatest amount of popular support in the province, constitutional changes had 'placed in his hands the priceless weapon of the thousands of votes of his followers'.<sup>9</sup> Before the *pir*'s release from prison, leading Muslim politicians, such as Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah and Shah Nawaz Bhutto, had worked hard to cement good relations with him: Hidayatullah had represented the *pir* in a legal dispute with the income tax authorities. Sibghatullah's premature release in 1936 was due in large part to successful lobbying by local politicians who argued for leniency on the grounds of the *pir*'s 'tender age, eminently high position and the services of his father to the state'.<sup>10</sup>

The importance accorded to the *pir* was visibly demonstrated by the fanfare which surrounded his return in December 1936: almost before properly setting foot again in Sind, he was welcomed as one of the province's most important, albeit prodigal, sons by many of the most respectable Sindhis in Sukkur district as well as by leading politicians. Even the Governor of Sind, Graham, greeted the *pir* with the hope that he would revive his family's 'great traditions of loyalty' to the Government.<sup>11</sup> This impression was reinforced during the provincial elections of 1937 which revealed the extent of Sibghatullah's influence over his *murids*. 'Cajoled and feted by . . . candidates who like sycophants surrounded him . . . to gain' his support, his standing was pushed even higher and strengthened the widespread belief in his ability to 'make or mar' any ministry in Sind. After the election, as proof of his influence, the *pir* immediately took advantage of Hidayatullah's position as Chief Minister to press for the abolition of the Criminal Tribes Act and the release of the Hurs from their guarded settlements. The new ministry could not afford to ignore pressure from the *pir* as he controlled many of the seats in the Legislative Assembly without which Hidayatullah could not survive in office. Since the authorities at this point felt confident enough to give the *pir* and his followers the chance 'to run straight', the decision was taken to bring back those deported to Bombay Presidency, close the settlements in Sind and end the other restrictions enforced against the Hurs. Shortly afterwards, Sibghatullah was allowed to undertake a tour through Hur country: his progress lasted seven months during which he 'restocked his coffers' as well as his prestige.<sup>12</sup>

The impact of these events on the relationship between the *pir* and the Hurs was twofold. The release of the Hurs and the granting of a tour highlighted the

<sup>9</sup> K. S. Yusifani, *Seventy Years of Crime – Hur Outrages in Sind*, n.d., LP, MSS. EUR F 208/68, p. 3, IOL.

<sup>10</sup> LP, MSS. EUR F 208/67, p. 49, IOL; K. R. Eates, 'A Note on the Kingri Pirs and the Hurs of Sind', MSS. EUR F 161/2/33, p. 9, IOL.

<sup>11</sup> *Punjab Awaz* (Lahore), 25 November 1936, n.p.

<sup>12</sup> LP, MSS. EUR F 208/67, pp. 57, 60–1, IOL.

*pir*'s ability to influence the administration. However, the Hurs' conviction that the *pir* was directly responsible for their 'liberation' reconfirmed the intensity of their devotion which was then given the opportunity to express itself during his lengthy tour. Emboldened by what they perceived as the magnitude of his power, Hurs began to travel freely to the *dargah* at Pir-jo-Goth, and the *pir* replaced many of his personal attendants with members of their *jamiat*. A two-hundred-year-old prophecy, believed to have been made by the mystic Abdul Rahim Girori, circulated widely and gripped the imagination of many of Sibghatullah's followers. Interpreted to mean that he was destined to become ruler of Sind, it increased his prestige still further in their eyes.<sup>13</sup>

Armed in this way, the *pir* took the opportunity to assert himself as one of Sind's most important Muslim leaders. Early in 1937, he undertook *haj* to Mecca and Medina. Then he issued a *farman* which prohibited smoking and the use of intoxicants by his *murids*. He also took the opportunity of using his tour to carry out 'propaganda work for rural uplift', urging Sindhis to educate their children, settle their disputes amicably by arbitration and to be thrifty and united in outlook.<sup>14</sup> But, at the same time, these displays of good practice were backed up by less 'orthodox' moves designed to strengthen himself in relation to other Muslim religious leaders in the province. In order to consolidate his position, the *pir* undertook to silence criticism from groups of 'reformist' *ulama* who were campaigning against 'worshipping at shrines' and the amount of reverence exhibited by Sindhi Muslims for their *pirs*. During Sibghatullah's stay in prison, *maulvis* from the nearby *madrasa* at Therhi had held public meetings in Pir-jo-Goth at which they had attacked the *pir* personally. Once he had returned, the meetings ceased but Sibghatullah organised reprisals at their own gatherings to frighten them into silence.<sup>15</sup>

This policy of confrontation continued in 1939 when, on a second tour of the district of Sanghar, the *pir* refused to allow anyone to enter local mosques there without his permission.<sup>16</sup> The following year, the authority of local *maulvis* was again comprehensively undermined when the *pir* supported the refusal of some of his followers to perform *id* prayers in the Id Gah in Sanghar. These Hurs wished the prayers to be led from the special platform from which the *pir* greeted his *murids* during his visits to the town and which they consequently considered to be more sacred than any mosque. When local *ulama*, together with the Pesh Imam at Sukkur, condemned the Hurs' stand as 'unlawful' and persisted with *id* prayers at

<sup>13</sup> For an English translation of the prophecy, see LP, MSS. EUR F 208/66, notebook no. 2, n.p., IOL.

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Wahid*, 27 April 1937, p. 6; *Daily Gazette*, 1 January 1938, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> District Superintendent of Police, Sukkur, to District Magistrate, Sukkur, 1 July 1938, LP, MSS. EUR F 208/69, p. 76, IOL. As proof of confidence, the *pir* engaged Hidayatullah to defend the Hurs who were arrested for carrying out the assault, see District Superintendent of Police, Sukkur, to Inspector General of Police, Karachi, 19 April 1938, L/P&J/7/47361, p. 445, IOL.

<sup>16</sup> LP, MSS. EUR F 208/69, p. 82, IOL.

the mosque, Sibghatullah excommunicated any *murids* who had participated in the prayers, and the murder of two of the *maulvis* involved in the dispute quickly followed.<sup>17</sup>

As his power over his Sindhi Muslim rivals increased, so the *pir's* confidence in his ability to challenge British authority grew. One of the ways in which he asserted his independence was in his establishment of what amounted to virtually a 'parallel government' administered from his headquarters at Pir-jo-Goth. From 1937 onwards, he openly levied private taxes on vendors in the town's markets and established a system of private courts whose jurisdiction covered Pir-jo-Goth and adjoining territory as well as his *murids* wherever they lived. Sibghatullah instructed all disputes and quarrels to be referred to the *mashirs* on these courts and not to the police. The courts could impose punishments ranging from beatings and the shaving of beards to detentions and fines up to 200 rupees. Important or intricate cases were passed on to the *pir*, to whom all appeals were directed.<sup>18</sup>

The authorities' fears seemed to be confirmed by reports of the enlistment of a private army of some 6,000 so-called *ghazis* or soldiers drawn mainly from among the Hurs. The move on the part of the *pir* was a gesture of defiance calculated to worry the authorities while strengthening his bonds with the Hurs. It started during his first tour and continued on every subsequent visit that he made to Hur districts. The *ghazis* – whom the British came to link to the wider Khaksar movement, the only differences being that the *ghazis* did not wear uniforms and were drawn from a closed section of society – swore to defend the *pir* with their lives. In his addresses, he always stressed the value of loyalty and discipline, and appealed to them to be ready for the day when he would summon them to prove their faith: in return, he promised that the doors of heaven would be waiting 'open for them'. As if to emphasise their potential 'martyrdom', Sibghatullah would read to them the *janaza* prayer normally said at funerals. A huge 'underground' network developed. The *ghazis* were divided into sections under the command of captains selected on account of their influence within the Union. These smaller groups then drilled and practised to prepare themselves for any tasks which the *pir* set them in the future.<sup>19</sup>

The dilemma which the authorities faced in terms of how to respond to the *pir's* challenge was in many ways the direct outcome of their system of control which permitted collaborators to retain enormous day-to-day power as long as they did not step outside the boundaries 'agreed' by both parties. What tipped the balance

<sup>17</sup> District Superintendent of Police, Thar Parkar, to District Magistrate, Thar Parkar, 2 November 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 137–8.

<sup>18</sup> District Superintendent of Police, Sukkur, to Inspector General of Police, Karachi, 19 April 1941, *ibid.*, pp. 439–40.

<sup>19</sup> H. T. Lambick, *The Terrorist* (London, 1972), p. 51; Sub-Inspector of Police, Pir-jo-Goth, to District Superintendent of Police, Sukkur, 25 June 1940, LP, MSS. EUR F 208/69, p. 98, IOL; 'Summary of Activities of the Pir Pagaro of Sind', 21 December 1940, L/P&J/7/4736, p. 414, IOL.

was the context in which the challenge had arisen. The *pir*'s association with the nationalist movement combined with the uncertainties of wartime meant that they could not afford to 'ignore' his growing defiance. At the time of his imprisonment, Sibghatullah had already acquired a certain level of consciousness of nationalist issues: when he had been arrested in 1930, for instance, he had first asked his followers not to engage a lawyer for, like the members of Congress, he claimed that he did not wish to make any defence.<sup>20</sup> His stay in prison between 1930 and 1936 had proved influential in further shaping and crystallising his attitude towards the British. Most of his sentence had been served outside Sind where he had come into contact with more extreme nationalist ideas, including those of Bengali 'terrorists' at Alipur Jail in Calcutta.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, his statements had become more overtly 'political' in tone. Messages strongly coloured with a radical nationalist tinge were smuggled out in the form of notes written in the margins and between the lines of books and magazines. They condemned the British for treating 'Indians like donkeys', loading them down with 'England's burdens', and pointed out that the only reason why the British were able to rule over 300,000,000 people was because Indians were 'cowards'.<sup>22</sup>

The extent to which the *pir* genuinely espoused Congress aims following his return to Sind was never easy to gauge as he did not refrain from taking advantage of local, by-and-large loyalist Muslim politicians when the need arose. But he was sufficiently astute to recognise that his own interests would be assisted by attaching himself to the nationalist cause in the heightened anti-British atmosphere of the late 1930s and early 1940s. British intelligence reports frequently mentioned visits by Congress politicians to Pir-jo-Goth, where they addressed mixed meetings of Hindus and Muslims, organised with the *pir*'s backing. In order to publicise his sympathy for the Congress cause, the *pir* ordered a *charka* for himself and instructed his *murids* to wear *khadar*.<sup>23</sup> In addition, he spoke out against the Muslim League, which he blamed for the riots and attacks committed in Sukkur at the time of the Manzilgah agitation. Whereas the League was 'faithless and selfish', the Congress was a powerful institution with 'principles' which represented the best safeguard for his, and by implication, Indian Muslim interests, and local Congress leaders, not surprisingly, were often convinced that the *pir* was on the point of joining the party himself.<sup>24</sup> Official suspicions of the *pir*'s pro-nationalist loyalties were fuelled by more general steps to win the trust of local Hindus such as his organisation of a *shuddhi* ceremony for a Hindu from Pir-jo-Goth who had converted to Islam but who wished to be readmitted to his

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Gazette*, 29 May 1930, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> James Halliday, *A Special India* (London, 1968), p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> LP, MSS. EUR F 208/67, pp. 58, 33, 34.

<sup>23</sup> Sub-Inspector of Police, Sukkur CID, n.d. (1938), LP, MSS. EUR F 208/69, p. 71, IOL; Note entitled 'Congress and the Hurs', n.d., LP MSS. EUR F 208/851, n.p., IOL; Eates, *A Note*, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Pir Pagaro to District Magistrate, Sukkur, 31 January 1941, LP, MSS. EUR F 208/69, p. 267, IOL; Sub-Inspector of Police, Khairpur State, August 1940, *ibid*, pp. 110–11.

original faith. Likewise, Sibghatullah instructed his followers not to eat meat. More important, he gained a great deal of respect for his protection of Hindus during the Manzilgah riots.<sup>25</sup> In his newspaper, the *Pir-jo-Goth Gazette*, he called for Hindu–Muslim unity: ‘My forefathers’, he wrote, ‘treated Hindus and Muslims alike as a sacred trust. The same is my principle . . . Allah is the same as Parmatma, though with different names. I will be happy when I see temples and mosques together with only a wall dividing them and everyone [worshipping] according to their rights so that no one may have a grievance against the other’. In a similar vein, he denounced the Hindu Sabha and the Muslim League as divisive communal movements. Only when Hindus and Muslims combined would ‘peace . . . be achieved and satanic deeds . . . stopped’: Indians had to be ‘national minded’ and regard India as a country which belonged to all its inhabitants.<sup>26</sup> When war broke out in 1939, the *pir* intensified his activities and his speeches to the *ghazis* were directed more and more against the ‘injustices’ of British rule. He welcomed the initiatives of the ‘Forward Bloc’ section of the Congress, and called upon Congress not to blunder by giving the British its wholehearted support unless very considerable advantages were extracted in return. In addition, the British believed that he was deliberately spreading disquieting news about the Allied War effort obtained from Hindustani programmes broadcast by the Germans.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the period, the *pir*’s challenge had its contradictions: for instance, the way he increasingly referred to himself as the future ruler of Sind as forecast by the Girori prophecy. Yet, by 1940, despite uncertainties regarding his ultimate objectives, Sibghatullah’s actions had come to worry the British considerably. They realised that the balance of power from the point of view of their relationship with the *pir* had shifted too far in his direction. The political context in which his challenge was being mounted meant that they were not prepared to interpret his behaviour as the expected if rather ‘high-handed’ reaction of ‘a big local man resisting the introduction of measures which would reduce his authority.’<sup>28</sup> The extra dimensions presented by the nationalist movement and the war made the *pir*’s stand too dangerous. His involvement with Congress and his increasingly antagonistic attitude towards colonial rule meant that he had strayed too far from the guidelines which regulated the relationship between the British and local élites in Sind, and officials instead felt a pressing need to make him ‘toe the line’.

<sup>25</sup> Sub-Inspector of Police, Sind CID, n.d. (1938), *ibid.*, p. 71; District Superintendent of Police, Sukkur, to Inspector General of Police, Karachi, 19 April 1941, L/P&J/7/4736, p. 455, IOL.

<sup>26</sup> *Pir-jo-Goth Gazette*, Pir Pagaro Special No., 8 July 1940 (?), LP, MSS. EUR F 208/67, p. 280, IOL.

<sup>27</sup> Political Dept. Pol. 4229/41, L/P&J/7/4736, p. 410, IOL; ‘Summary of the Activities of the Pir Pagaro in Sind’, *ibid.*, p. 414.

<sup>28</sup> Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 6 June 1941, L/P&J/5/2571, p. 200, IOL.

### **The system breaks down**

The British needed to re-establish the balance of power in their favour and turned to tried and tested methods of exerting pressure which had proved effective on other occasions. This time, they found that their actions were circumscribed: constitutional changes combined with delicate political circumstances meant that they now had to secure the cooperation of local politicians whose priorities were not necessarily the same as their own. These politicians could not afford to alienate themselves from the richest source of political support in Sind and consequently their response remained ambiguous. Under these circumstances, the system broke down in spectacular fashion, unable to cope with the combined strain of Sibghatullah's defiance and the 'studied indifference' of local politicians whose own interests led them deliberately to play down the whole affair for as long as they could.

The complexity of the situation faced by the British was the direct result of measures which they had introduced to enable the system of control to cope with increasing Indian demands for greater self-determination. In this case, however, the effect of changes in the electoral system did not serve to strengthen the British hand. Officials soon realised that senior ministers, let alone ordinary members of the Sind Assembly, were loath to 'lift even their little fingers against the Pir' as a result of their 'preoccupation with votes'. The *pir* wielded influence in every district of the province, and he could, if he desired, make it 'hot for every Assembly member in his own constituency'.<sup>29</sup> During the ministerial crisis of the spring of 1940 in which Allah Bakhsh Soomro's cabinet had fallen, the *pir* had used his influence to make five members of the legislature change sides in favour of the new ministry. Since ministers, therefore, owed their offices to Sibghatullah, they were not likely to sanction very tough measures against him. In addition, the new Chief Minister, Mir Bandeh Ali Khan Talpur was himself a *murid* of the *pir*. Under these circumstances, it was more probable that ministers would try to influence the British in his favour.<sup>30</sup>

The British in turn had their own reasons for not wanting to quarrel with the ministry. Both Graham and his successor as Governor of Sind, Dow, recognised that great care was needed in dealing with the affairs of a province in which a ministry was still functioning, unlike many other parts of India where Congress ministries had resigned following the Viceroy's unilateral declaration of war.<sup>31</sup> Their hesitation to test its loyalty revealed their lack of confidence in the outcome of such a trial and underlined the extent of political power wielded by the *pir*. As a result, the authorities initially adopted a soft approach and gave the *pir* the benefit

<sup>29</sup> Sub-Inspector of Police, Pir-jo-Goth, to District Superintendent of Police, Sukkur, 22 June 1940, Lambrick Papers, MSS. EUR F 208/69, p. 91, IOL.

<sup>30</sup> 'Notes prepared by His Excellency the Governor of Sind on the Hurs', n.d. (1942), L/P&J/7/4736, p. 301, IOL; Note, 1 September 1941, *ibid.*, p. 411.

<sup>31</sup> 'Summary of the Activities of the Pir Pagaro in Sind', 21 December 1940, *ibid.*, p. 415.

of the doubt. When, in July 1940, the *pir* was called to Karachi by the Governor, Graham was happy to accept Sibghatullah's assurances that he had enlisted the *ghazis* with the purpose of offering them to the authorities as Civic Guards to help with internal security problems. He was so anxious to find Sibghatullah cooperative that he dismissed as 'incorrect' and 'prejudiced' police information which cast the *pir* in a bad light. While he acknowledged that he could not claim that the *pir* had 'turned over an entire new leaf' as a result of their meetings, he did believe that Sibghatullah realised that it would pay him to cooperate with the authorities. Together, they had enjoyed a 'hearty laugh' at rumours that the *pir* was saying that he would succeed as the next governor of the province.<sup>32</sup> Graham's faith was further boosted by the *pir*'s promise of a donation of 10,000 rupees to the Sind War Planes Fund and instructions to his *murids* to pray for the success of British arms.<sup>33</sup>

In practice, however, the *pir*'s promises of cooperation amounted to very little and, by the end of the summer, Graham was forced to reconsider his earlier optimism. The *pir* was still recruiting *ghazis* and stocking his forest stronghold; he was even reported to have drawn up plans of attack against the police and there were signs that he intended to move his headquarters to Sanghar to be closer to his Hur followers. In December 1940, the first somewhat reluctant signs of a tougher approach emerged. The tone of the exchanges between the authorities and the *pir* hardened as the system of control shifted into a higher gear. At another meeting in Karachi, Graham ordered Sibghatullah not to leave Pir-jo-Goth, and warned him against spending so much time visiting his lands in Khairpur State and his *murids* in Thar Parkar.<sup>34</sup>

The more the British attempted to reassert their authority, the more the *pir* continued to ignore their increasingly feeble protests. The prestige of the authorities waned in almost direct proportion to the way in which the reputation of the *pir* rose in both his own estimation and that of his followers. His correspondence with the authorities reflected this sense of confidence. When the British tried to snub the *pir* into being more 'compliant' by making sure that the Resident for the Panjab States had 'no time' to meet him while on a visit to the state of Khairpur, Sibghatullah was merely scornful. He upbraided the Resident for having had enough time to go on *shikar* but not to see him, pointing out that 'in Sind my position needs no mention, therefore it would have been better if necessarily some time [had been] saved from your personal entertainment programme for my interview . . . [but] since crores of people of India are given such treatment, such a thing is neither degrading nor wonderful for a Fakir like me'.<sup>35</sup> By April 1941, it seemed that Sibghatullah had drawn up plans based on the likelihood of the war

<sup>32</sup> Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 25 July 1940, L/P&J/5/255, p. 87, IOL.

<sup>33</sup> SFR, 10 July 1940, *ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>34</sup> PSFR, 15 December 1940, L/P&J/7/4736, p. 474, IOL.

<sup>35</sup> Pir Pagaro to Resident for Panjab States, 24 February 1941, *ibid.*, p. 430.



reaching Sind's doorstep which involved seizing sufficient resources to be recognised as an independent ruler in return for allegiance to the invading enemy. Despite the gravity of these accusations, the British had no evidence save hearsay, which did not carry weight in a court of law, the next option open to them in terms of putting pressure on the *pir* to cooperate: they had no alternative at this stage other than to wait while Sibghatullah grew more confident by the day.<sup>36</sup>

The descriptions of the *pir* made by Sind's new Governor, Dow, following their first meeting in June 1941, illustrated well the strength of the *pir*'s position by this time. On the one hand, as indication of his immense power, Sibghatullah was wearing 'a long blue velvet coat encrusted with as much gold and jewels as [the] whole Chamber of [Indian] Princes might [have worn] on a gala night'. On the other hand, Dow perceived the *pir* to be 'an extremely shrewd man, very quick in seizing and even anticipating' the points made in their conversation. He, therefore, rejected arguments which claimed that the *pir* was a 'simple-minded person', the 'innocent centre of other people's intrigues'.<sup>37</sup>

The *pir* was an asset to the administration only as long as he remained amenable: otherwise he was potentially a dangerous enemy. Increasingly, officials were no longer prepared to leave him in a position in which he would be able 'to create internal trouble at an inconvenient time' for the administration.<sup>38</sup> District officials had become weary of the *pir*, and were impatient for concerted action to be taken against him. Some talked of a surprise attack on his forest stronghold in order to obtain sufficient first-hand evidence to satisfy the courts. Others began seriously to consider his deportation from Sind: by putting as much distance as possible between him and his followers, it was hoped that his influence would gradually decline. The authorities at Sukkur favoured deporting the *pir* under Regulation XXV of 1827. Their first choice was the Andaman Islands. There were some officers, convinced that the Andamans were not far enough away, who favoured Tasmania. In their opinion, 'a desperate disease' required 'a desperate remedy'.<sup>39</sup>

The growing sophistication of the system of control had been intended to strengthen its workings and to offer the British additional means of asserting their authority over the Indian countryside. In view of the *pir*'s apparent insensitivity as far as direct communications between himself and the authorities were concerned, the British turned to their second line of attack, that of the new stratum of political intermediaries created as a result of moves towards greater self-rule.

<sup>36</sup> Mir Ghulam Hussain Talpur to Minister of Khairpur State, 1 April 1941, *ibid.*, pp. 432–3.

<sup>37</sup> Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 12 June 1941, L/P&J/5/257, pp. 181–2, IOL.

<sup>38</sup> District Magistrate, Sukkur, 6 May 1941, L/P&J/7/4736, p. 466; District Magistrate, Nawabshah, to Chief Secretary to the Government of Sind, 14 March 1941, *ibid.*, p. 428.

<sup>39</sup> Note by E. M. Sinton, 29 August 1941, *ibid.*, p. 410.

Dow could see that the *pir* was deliberately trying to embarrass the authorities by visiting parts of Sind which he had been asked to avoid, but he was just as afraid as his predecessor of restraining the *pir* without first building up 'a real case' against his activities. To play for time, the authorities decided to take advantage of the then Home Minister Hidayatullah's close ties with the *pir* to persuade Sibghatullah to live in Karachi. Hidayatullah agreed to cooperate but, significantly, insisted that Sibghatullah realise that it 'really was the Governor who was annoyed with him and not the Home Minister trying to double cross him'. Consequently, the *pir* was given another chance to produce *murids* wanted by the police. If none were produced within a month, he was warned that he would be confined to Karachi. As the deadline approached and the *pir* had still failed to respond, Dow tried to frighten him into 'submission' by dropping hints to Hidayatullah that there would be no 'half-way house' between the *pir*'s good behaviour in liberty and his arrest and deportation outside the province'.<sup>40</sup> Cracks in the system had begun to show and it did not take much more strain before they split wide open.

To a limited extent, the system paid off in that Sibghatullah did come to Karachi as ordered, but he left the timing of his arrival until just a couple of days before the deadline ran out as if to emphasise his disdain for British authority. It was not long before he grew restive. In October, Hidayatullah, acting once again as middle-man but this time in reverse, approached Dow with a request to allow the *pir* a short visit to Pir-jo-Goth to check on the running of his lands. When the Governor refused, the *pir* went anyway, taking with him all his personal belongings which suggested that he did not intend to return. The Ministry then had little option but to agree to the *pir* being brought back to Karachi under escort.<sup>41</sup> Within a few days, Hurs murdered one of his cousins who had been under police protection for having spoken out against the *pir* to the authorities. This death proved the final straw. There was no reason, the British felt, to doubt that the *pir* had used his short visit to Pir-jo-Goth to give orders for the attack. A week earlier, Dow had still believed that he would be able to handle the situation without taking the extreme step of arresting the *pir*. Now, he was convinced that the series of murders, which had been committed by followers of the *pir*, had been instigated by Sibghatullah himself. Sibghatullah was duly arrested and, before news could spread very far, he was sent by train to Seoni in the Central Provinces, the authorities hopeful that 'out of sight' would mean 'out of mind' as far as his *murids* were concerned.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 8 August 1941, L/P&J/5/257, pp. 149–50.

<sup>41</sup> Dow to Linlithgow, 4 October 1941, MSS. EUR F 125/97, p. 100, IOL; Dow to Linlithgow, 15 October 1941, *ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>42</sup> Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 19 October 1941, *ibid.*, p. 111; Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 25 October 1941, pp. 119–20.

### **The use of force**

After eighteen months of trying to put pressure on Sibghatullah to cooperate, the British finally used direct action against him. The relationship had been complicated by the *pir*'s knowledge that he could rely on support from local politicians who depended on his influence during elections and the authorities' own desire not to lose the cooperation of these same politicians or even to alienate the *pir* permanently. The actual question of taking a more hardline approach was also a complex one. The British knew that once they did so their position would actually be weakened as it would reveal the extent to which they depended on the system of control. It was bound to lead to criticism from local and national politicians keen to make capital out of any repressive measures introduced to restore order in the Sindh countryside. In the event, the authorities found themselves with a spiralling crisis which was sparked off by their decision to use force to bring it under control.

The main problem for the authorities following the *pir*'s arrest was the violent reaction which it caused among his Hur supporters. Taking him into custody did not mean that the administration's problems were over: the British now had to handle a wide-scale revolt on the part of the Hurs, directed at securing the release of their *murshid*. Officials had been prepared for displays of support for the *pir* by his *murids*, but they did not bargain for the severity of the Hur offensive. When the *pir* had been released from prison in 1936, he had chided his followers for not protesting hard enough against his arrest in 1930: accordingly, the Hurs undertook a campaign of violence aimed at blackmailing the British into releasing him. By the end of 1941, the districts of Nawabshah and Thar Parkar had become badly scarred by their activities.<sup>43</sup> Muslims and Hindus who were known or suspected to have helped the authorities against the *pir* were murdered. Hurs sabotaged railway lines, cut telegraph wires and damaged irrigation *bunds* in order to undermine the infrastructure of the province. Extra police were sent into the affected districts. They did little to reduce the general state of panic; instead they became the subject of attacks themselves. The Hurs exercised a virtual reign of terror. Villagers would huddle together at night, hoping that the money which they had paid over to the Union would save them from being raided. The authorities could extract little cooperation from ordinary people, while large *zamindars* were 'busy running with the hare and hunting with the hounds'.<sup>44</sup>

As the situation grew worse, the authorities realised that a tougher response was required and high-level meetings in Delhi decided that military intervention would soon be necessary since the *pir* showed no signs of cooperating. A programme was drawn up aimed at the revival of government prestige, which

<sup>43</sup> SFR, 16 January 1942, L/P&J/5/258, p. 7, IOL.

<sup>44</sup> *Al-Wahid*, 4 February 1942, p. 1; Sind was vulnerable to attacks on its irrigation system but the authorities were not prepared to cut off any canals on account of the huge revenue losses which this would have entailed, see Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 6 May 1942, L/P&J/5/258, p. 140, IOL.

involved clamping down hard on the Hurs as well as their sympathisers; securing the cooperation of 'loyal' *zamindars*; and making the most of rivalries between the Pir Pagaro and other *sajjada nashins* whose followers were to perform reconnaissance work on behalf of the authorities. Officials also looked to papers outlining the British response to the Hur problems of the 1890s for guidelines on how to deal with the present crisis. The main lesson which they drew was the need to isolate the main body of Hurs from those actively involved in acts of violence. Thus, in April 1942 the Sind Assembly passed an act which introduced measures to restrict the Hurs' freedom: as in the 1890s, Hurs were placed in guarded settlements. The level of fear which existed in Sind at the time even inside the Legislature was reflected in the session being held in camera. Members of the Assembly were not prepared to vote openly in favour of the act 'lest they were marked down for the Pir's future vengeance'. Any remaining doubts which the British still entertained about acting more decisively were ended with the derailment of the Lahore Mail train in the middle of May which killed twenty-four passengers, including Hidayatullah's son, and injured many more. On 1 June 1942, the authorities declared martial law, covering an area of eastern Sind of more than 16,000 square miles.<sup>45</sup>

Martial law was, in the words of one of its chief administrators, 'a terrible organ of repression' as it permitted local police to denounce innocent individuals as Hurs and allowed higher authorities no way of checking the truth of these accusations.<sup>46</sup> The lives of ordinary Sindhis were badly disrupted by curfews and restrictions imposed on travel. The area north of Sanghar and the Thar desert were thoroughly reconnoitred from the air; paratroopers and bombs were used against bands of armed men.<sup>47</sup> Hur villages were raided, wells stopped up and their cattle herded into other districts. On the whole, however, as in the 1890s, the authorities did not make much progress. The Hurs were mobile and possessed a very good intelligence system, in contrast to the military which was dependent on mechanised transport easily seen and heard for miles and useless at night. It was now an offence to be a Hur, and hundreds of arrests were made. But many were released for lack of evidence. Other *pirs* cooperated with the followers of the Pir Pagaro by allowing them to register as their *murids* and so escape confinement. The British tried to exploit the Union's notorious refusal to accept food or drink from anyone outside the brotherhood and instituted 'trial by ordeal' which was upheld by the Sessions Courts: anyone who would not accept a glass of water was deemed to be a Hur. Hurs adopted a flexible attitude towards these things:

<sup>45</sup> Proclamation of Martial Law in Sind, 1 June 1942, L/P&J/5/258, p. 235, IOL.

<sup>46</sup> Proceedings of Conference on Hur Situation held at Viceroy's House on 8 August 1942, L/P&J/7/4736, p. 128, IOL.

<sup>47</sup> 'Martial Law Administration in Sind', LP, MSS. EUR F 208/71, pp. 5-7, IOL; paratroopers were used operationally for the first time in the Indian subcontinent during the period of martial law in Sind, see *The Times*, quoted in L/P&J/7/4736, p. 154, IOL.

they gave up their 'peculiarities like bobbed hair' and 'no longer minded wearing black clothes' which made them indistinguishable from non-Hurs from whom they also started to accept food and drink.<sup>48</sup>

Gradually, as the Hurs' defiance continued in spite of the measures taken to control them, the authorities came to favour the idea of eliminating the 'source of the problem', the *pir* himself. If he was unwilling to cooperate then perhaps it would be better that he be removed permanently from the scene. Earlier in 1942, they had considered the question of his permanent exile from India: by making the prospects of his return unlikely, they hoped to encourage people to testify against the Hurs. But officials had quickly realised that, although the *pir* was already cut off from his *murids*, Hur belief in his ability to know everything that was happening in Sind even from his far-off prison cell made distance an ineffective deterrent. With the introduction of martial law, the situation changed. Now it was possible to charge the *pir* with treason, which carried an automatic death penalty and since the main prosecution witnesses would be members of the administration there would be no problem in convicting him. In August, officials talked of securing 'a really firm hanging case' against the *pir*; anything else was considered to be 'quite useless'.<sup>49</sup> The *pir* was brought back to Sind at the beginning of 1943, tried at Hyderabad Central Jail and hanged on 20 March of the same year. His body was buried in a secret location outside Sind to prevent his grave from becoming a place of pilgrimage. In order to reduce the power of the *gadi*, many of the buildings belonging to the *pir* at Pir-jo-Goth were razed to the ground: only the *dargah* and the mosque were spared to avoid obvious religious protest.<sup>50</sup>

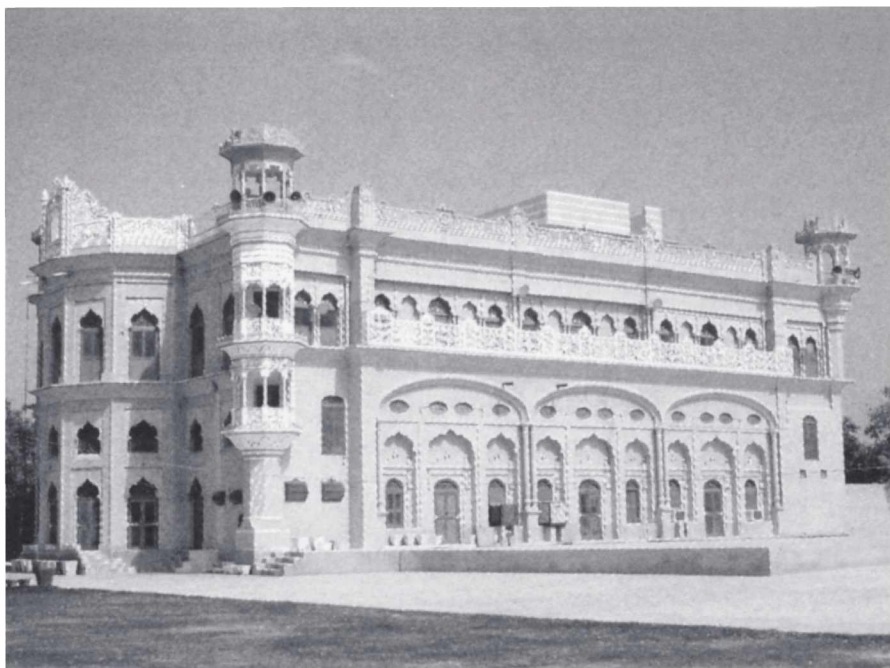
The *pir*'s death did not have the effect that the authorities had expected. Many of his *murids* refused to believe that he was dead and regarded reports of his hanging as a hoax on the part of the British to make them surrender. The *pir* remained very much alive for Hurs, who continued their attacks as if nothing had happened, still carrying with them copies of the Girori prophecy that the *pir* would one day become ruler of Sind.<sup>51</sup> Although martial law was lifted in June 1943, the authorities had to cope with serious problems of law and order right up to 1947. Hurs were confined throughout in specially constructed villages where they were closely supervised. Even so, frequent killings and other crimes continued to take place, and by 1945 the British had resorted to the old practice of sending the worst offenders to Visapur in Bombay Presidency. The refusal of the British to permit any successor to the *gadi* at this stage meant that they had no one

<sup>48</sup> D. C. Barty, Note, n.d., MSS. EUR F 180/26, p. 35, IOL; 'Talk with K. B. Abdul Kabir', n.d., LP, MSS. EUR F 208/64, n.p., IOL.

<sup>49</sup> Proceedings of Conference on Hur Situation held at Viceroy's House on 8 August 1942, L/P&J/7/4736, pp. 122–8, IOL.

<sup>50</sup> Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 23 March 1943, L/P&J/5/259, pp. 127–8, IOL; Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 20 May 1943, *ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>51</sup> SFR, 17 November 1945, L/P&J/5/261, p. 18, IOL.



*Plate 7 Present home of Pir Pagaro at Pir-jo-Goth, rebuilt in the style of the 'palace' destroyed by the British there in 1943.*

to whom they could turn to exert a restraining influence over the Hurs. They had used force to reassert their authority over the *pir* and his followers once the system of control had broken down: but, without a substitute collaborator, force continued as the main method by which they sought to re-establish control over the countryside.

Throughout the duration of the Hur 'rebellion', the actions of the authorities were constrained by the lack of support which they received from many politicians. In the absence of the *pir* himself, the question of the Hurs and later the restoration of the *gadi* became issues which politicians used to attract all-important electoral support. Similarly, the hardline repressive way in which the crisis was tackled provided nationalists with yet another stick with which to beat the authorities. Congress connections with the *pir* meant that there had been strong Congress protests at the time of his arrest. Shortly afterwards, an important Congress member of the Sind Legislative Assembly led a deputation to the Governor to ask for Sibghatullah's release. Local Congress politicians kept in touch with Hur leaders both before and during the imposition of martial law.<sup>52</sup> In

<sup>52</sup> LP, MSS. EUR F 208/85, n.p., IOL.

May 1942, Gandhi himself called on local Congress ministers and MLAs to resign their seats, form a 'peace brigade' and settle 'fearlessly' among the Hurs. He also sought permission to visit the *pir* in prison in order to persuade him to 'prohibit his followers from their lawless activities'. It took a personal visit by Allah Bakhsh Soomro, by then Sind's Chief Minister once again and open supporter of Congress, to convince Gandhi that Hur activities were running in a very different direction to his own promotion of non-violent protest.<sup>53</sup> Congress leadership took up the Hur question again at the beginning of 1946 when Nehru, on a visit to Sind and in the context of forthcoming elections, spoke in support of the Hurs on humanitarian grounds. He condemned the conditions in which Hurs were being made to live and argued that their 'perseverance and courage' had shown that they deserved 'a great deal of consideration'.<sup>54</sup> These comments were backed up by others which described the Hurs as 'a brave and daring people ... subjected to treatment [which could only] aggravate their resentment and egg them on to anti-Government activities'.<sup>55</sup>

Pro-Muslim League politicians in Sind also clambered on to the Hur bandwagon once martial law had been imposed. Whereas at first many had welcomed the tougher measures, they now saw an opportunity for undermining the pro-Congress ministry of Allah Bakhsh Soomro, calling for the dismissal of his cabinet on the grounds that it was responsible for martial law excesses. In September 1942, the Working Committee of the Sind Provincial Muslim League passed a resolution condemning the enormous sacrifice of civil liberties which martial law entailed. This was echoed the following May when the All-India Muslim League session at Delhi called for the end of martial law and the restoration of the Pir Pagaro's property to his successor.<sup>56</sup> And it was combined pressure from both Congress and the League which contributed in large part to the British decision to lift martial law in most of the affected area well before the situation was under control.

The administration thus faced concerted opposition from both Hindu and Muslim politicians to its policy towards the Hurs. For Congress, and Nehru in particular, support for the Hurs formed part of a wider interest in the masses of India. Supporters of the Muslim League ministry were disturbed by the fact that it was only in Sind that people were being detained without trial, and that these people were Muslims. The combination of pressures meant that the administration found it difficult to extend the Suppression of Hur Outrages Act whenever the time came for its renewal in the Sind Legislative Assembly. In the end, the act

<sup>53</sup> *Harijan*, 24 May 1942, quoted in 'Congress and the Hurs', n.d., *ibid*; Jairamdas Daulatram to Allah Bakhsh Soomro, 7 June 1942, MSS. EUR F 125/98, pp. 128–30, IOL; Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 23 September 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 189–90.

<sup>54</sup> Wavell to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, 15 January 1946, L/P&J/7/4736, p. 1, IOL.

<sup>55</sup> Aruna Asif Ali while on a visit to Sind, see *Daily Gazette*, 4 August 1946, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> 'Proceedings of Muslim League Meeting', 14 September 1942, LP, MSS. EUR F 208/60, p. 20, IOL; *The Transfer of Power 1942–47* (London, 1971), vol. III, p. 923.

was always extended for only six months at a time, and even then it took 'very careful handling' on the part of the administration to get it passed.<sup>57</sup> All the same, the British were forced to publicise their efforts to 'reform' the Union as widely as possible. The best-behaved Hurs were gradually resettled outside the camps, and taught new agricultural skills. Free compulsory education, night schools for adults and vocational classes were started in the camps themselves. Great efforts were made to show that the administration took its responsibilities towards the rehabilitation of the Hurs seriously.<sup>58</sup>

By 1946 the British had decided that it was time to take more positive action over the question of the *gadi*'s future. Over the years, a number of candidates had put themselves forward as successors to Sibghatullah, but the British had refused to sanction their claims on the grounds that the root of the problem lay in the relationship between the *gadi* and the Hurs, and, therefore, it would be best to have no Pir Pagaro at all. The British had destroyed the *pir*'s *kot* in 1943 to show that the Government was determined to break his temporal power: it would have been illogical to allow someone to be invested and even more inexplicable for the authorities themselves to promote and arrange the ceremony itself. As independence approached, however, a less dogmatic approach was required. They still hoped for the abolition of the *gadi* but decided that doing so would outrage Muslim opinion. In any case, it was necessary to provide against the possibility of it being restored *de facto* if not *de jure*. And so, in defiance of established custom, according to which they limited their obvious involvement to ensuring that a chosen successor was installed peacefully, the authorities intervened to veto the claims of Sibghatullah's younger son, widely believed to be the old *pir*'s choice, in favour of his older brother. As added insurance, both boys were sent to England to be educated and 'hopefully' turned into 'little Aga Khans'. The Governor of Sind organised the return of the *gadi*'s property from the Government of India to whom it had been forfeited by the court martial which had tried the *pir*, and a trust was created to pay for the cost of their education.<sup>59</sup> The situation did not change overnight with the coming of independence. The Hurs were not finally released from their settlements until the early 1950s, when the new Pir Pagaro, Pir Shah Mardan Shah II, returned from England and was invested as *sajjada nashin*. The new Pakistan government felt confident enough of the young *pir*'s well-publicised support for the ruling Muslim League to run the risk of officially re-establishing the relationship between the *gadi* and its followers which had proved so troublesome to administrations in the past.

Force, to which the British resorted when their system of control had failed, eventually restored a semblance of order to the Sindh countryside; but it took

<sup>57</sup> Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 13 April 1946, L/P&J/5/261, p. 107, IOL.

<sup>58</sup> 'Reclamation of Hurs: Sind Government's 17-Point Plan', *ibid.*, 5 March 1946, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Governor of Sind to Viceroy, 27 April 1946 and 26 July 1946, L/P&J/5/261, pp. 101, 65, IOL.



several years of intensive military and police action before this 'calm' was achieved, and even then it was not until the restoration of the *gadi* and its close links with the new Pakistani administration that the situation could be said to have returned to 'normal'. Whether the *pir*'s revolt was the outcome of personal ambitions or whether he was a sincere nationalist who communicated in the traditional 'language' of *piri-muridi* to mobilise his followers behind the wider movement for freedom, the breakdown of the British system of control demonstrated the difficulties which the administration experienced when the *pir*'s political horizons widened to the extent that he was no longer prepared to abide by the system. It also demonstrated the way in which the authorities' choice of action was increasingly hampered by the interest which politicians showed in the issue. When Sibghatullah took advantage of the atmosphere of political uncertainty leading up to independence to challenge the essential premise of cooperation on which British authority was based, the British mounted a show of strength in reply. In the long run, their use of force symbolised the general undermining of their authority which was taking place not just in Sind but in the Indian sub-continent as a whole. British actions in Sind were eventually designed to limit criticism in an atmosphere of increasing anti-British feeling: instead they reflected the practical constraints which the changed political situation had imposed on the ability of the British administration to choose what suited its interests best, and helped to underline the irrevocable shift of power which had taken place in India by the time that independence was achieved in 1947.

## Epilogue

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Independence brought about an important shift in the relationship between the state and the *pirs* of Sind. Unlike the British, the rulers of Pakistan were Muslim and so Islam became intimately connected with the ideology of the new nation and their attempts to legitimise their leadership of a Muslim state. Although the Pakistan movement had been primarily a political struggle, it was identified with Islam in the minds of many of its supporters. Initially proclaimed to have nothing to do with the business of the state, Islam as a bridge linking the state with society at large was too attractive for the authorities to ignore. Governments consequently tried, to varying degrees, to take advantage of the legitimising potential offered by Islam.<sup>1</sup> Within this framework, their approach to the institution of the *pir* was fairly consistent. Whereas shrines have been suppressed in other Muslim countries such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, *pirs* and their *dargahs*, both in Sind and elsewhere in Pakistan, have been seen as important sources of influence which governments can wield in their own favour.<sup>2</sup> But policies which were intended to undermine the power of *pir* families by redirecting the reflected glory of the original saints on to the Governments themselves, only served in the long run to reconfirm the political value of shrines and their representatives. The overall result has been that *pirs* have survived as important powerbrokers in the political equations of the Sindhi countryside.

Official government policy from the late 1950s was to reduce the power of *pir* families on the grounds that it was incompatible with the political and religious

<sup>1</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence* (Cambridge, 1990), chapter 6.

<sup>2</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971).

goals of successive administrations. Ayub Khan (1958–69), Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971–7) and Zia ul-Haq (1977–88) all set out, in theory at least, to restructure Pakistani society. For Ayub the goal was ‘modernisation’ combined with ‘development’, for Bhutto greater ‘democracy’ or ‘Islamic socialism’ and for Zia a more consciously Islamic state. In all three cases, these priorities to some extent involved confronting existing powerholders of whom *pirs* formed a significant section. Ayub’s modernising policies incorporated land reforms which threatened their economic power; Bhutto’s populist rhetoric seemed to reject their political rôle; and Zia’s stress on scripturalist Islam appeared to undermine the basis of their religious authority. In practice, these governments were never really able to stamp fully their authority on the institution of the *pir* but what they were able to do was to seek to harness the popularity of the shrine to their own purposes.

Ayub’s priorities of creating a strong central government and overcoming regional divisions meant that he stressed a shared if limited Islamic identity which had to fit in with the needs of the state. To this end, he sought to displace *sajjada nashins* while restating the importance of shrines themselves. In 1959, the Department of Auqaf was established and assigned the task of the day-to-day running of shrines in order to demonstrate that *sajjada nashins* were not essential for their upkeep. The conspicuous attendance of officials at *urs* celebrations symbolised this within a ritual context. Shrines were also used as a way of introducing change into the countryside, by becoming social-welfare centres or spreading awareness of new agricultural techniques at the time of their festivals.<sup>3</sup>

With Bhutto, it was much the same story, with if anything greater emphasis on government participation in the rituals themselves. Shrines became more than ever translated into national cultural symbols for the glorification of Pakistan and, increasingly, Islam. The *urs* of important saints became occasions of national celebrations and were inaugurated by national political figures. Permanent research centres and libraries were planned for the shrines of Sind’s famous sufi poets. Like Ayub, Bhutto needed to demonstrate that the direct mediation of the *pir* was largely superfluous. On a spiritual level, Bhutto made a conscious effort to draw parallels between the sufi and the social reformer, and between their goals and his own. Official and semi-official publications presented a picture which stressed the piety as opposed to the miracles of individual saints as well as the reconstruction work carried out by the government.<sup>4</sup>

The Zia period marked something of a change in direction in that, instead of the symbolism of the sufi, it was the language of the *ulama* which pushed forward its programme of Islamisation. Festivities accompanying the annual *urs* in many shrines were closely monitored for ‘un-Islamic’ practices such as dancing and

<sup>3</sup> Kathy P. Ewing, ‘The Politics of Sufism: Redefining the Saints of Pakistan’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 42, no. 2 (February 1983), pp. 251–68.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Inam Mohammad, *Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar of Sehwan-Sharif* (Karachi, 1978).

drumming, and devotional attendance was discouraged in Friday prayers. Even so, Zia's government still made efforts to profit from an association with the sufi legacy by incorporating representatives of this kind of Islam into the regime's own ideology. Government officials continued to make long speeches to commemorate the birth of saints, emphasising that the original saints were also religious scholars who fitted the *ulama* mould. It also maintained its predecessors' policies of improving the physical condition of tombs themselves, and generally took care to ensure that no antagonism on the part of the regime towards the sufi tradition was discernible at the popular level.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these policies aimed at undermining their power, *pir* families have remained central to the religious and political life of Sind. The actual number of shrines which the Auqaf Department controlled remained relatively small. Apart from major shrines such as those of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, Sachal Sarmast, Makhdum Nuh of Hala and the Pir of Luari, most were fairly minor *dargahs*. Land-reform measures which were intended to redistribute power in the countryside had a restricted impact for *pirs*, like other non-religious landowners, often found ways of evading ceilings on land ownership. Their spiritual position also meant that they could receive additional support from *murids* to compensate for any losses which they incurred. This combination of resources enabled *pirs* to play a prominent rôle even where they had lost full control over the *dargah* itself. The large followings which they enjoyed provided them with a constituency of support which politicians needed at times when democracy was in operation which could be just as crucial when it was not. The failure of the state to penetrate the countryside effectively as far as replacing existing institutions with its own was concerned reinforced further the mediating functions of local powerholders such as *pir* families. The access to rural Sind which *pirs* continued to provide explained why governments sooner rather than later came to terms with their existence.

*Pirs* themselves have displayed a continuing readiness to be flexible when confronted with changing political circumstances. The extension of franchise at independence raised the stakes higher and encouraged them to participate more directly and in larger numbers at all levels of the political process, right the way up from local councils to the National Assembly and Senate. The Pir Pagaro, who remained the leading *sajjada nashin* in Sind in terms of the size of his following, provides a good example of how an individual *pir* responded to the challenges of the new state. Following the restoration of the *gadi* in 1952, the new *pir* aligned himself with the Muslim League. By 1955, he was said to control twenty members of the Sind Assembly and his backing for Sind's Chief Minister, M. A. Khuhro, was instrumental in enabling the Centre via Khuhro to achieve the appearance of

<sup>5</sup> Abbas Rashid, 'Pakistan: The Ideological Dimension', in Mohammad Asghar Khan (ed.), *Islam Politics and the State: the Pakistan Experience* (London, 1985), p. 91.

full support for One Unit in a province where the move was bitterly resented.<sup>6</sup> In 1970 the *pir* joined the Awami League but later returned to the Qayyum faction of the Muslim League. Subsequently he formed his own grouping and wielded great influence during the Zia period through his *murid*, Prime Minister Junejo, and his own position in the Senate. The *pir* was defeated in the 1988 elections in the wave of anti-Zia support for the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) which swept through Sind but his fortunes were revived in the elections in 1990 and the *pir* once again became important behind the scenes, his support for the new Sindhi administration a crucial vote in its favour. Continuing what could almost be described as a 'rivalry' dating back to the nineteenth century, the Makhdums of Hala have often competed directly for power in the same constituencies as candidates of the Pir Pagaros. Makhdum Talib ul-Moula became a supporter first of Ayub and later Bhutto. His support for the PPP endured the Zia years, with the Makhdum an important advocate of Benazir Bhutto. Once in political retirement, his place was taken by his sons, two of whom became PPP central and provincial ministers. The 1990 elections, however, saw a significant break with this tradition on the part of some of the family who were vocal critics and opponents of the PPP government.<sup>7</sup>

This kind of 'internal' political split, repeated in many other *pirs* families over the years, underlines their willingness to keep their options open by spreading their support between various, often competing, political groupings. In addition to national parties, such support has recently been extended to Sindhi groups seeking different levels of autonomy for the province. Nationalists, in search of ways of differentiating Sind from the central government and its policies, have held up the institution of the *pir* as a symbol of Sindhi culture in opposition to the state-sponsored Islam of the Zia years in particular and Panjabi domination more generally. Their involvement has been linked to the influence of the veteran Sindhi nationalist politician, G. M. Syed, who after the creation of Pakistan joined the ranks of the opposition as leader of the Sind Awami Mahaz and later the Jiye Sind Mahaz and used his personal links with other *pir* and *saiyid* families to advance the nationalist cause in much the same way as he used them to popularise the Muslim League in the 1940s. At the same time, the realities of the political process in Pakistan have encouraged a number of *pirs* to take their chances in the nationalist arena placing them in a position to play the central government and its provincial opponents off against each other.

Migratory patterns since 1947, in part responsible for the increased support for nationalist and ethnic politics, have altered the demographic and economic structure of the province, leading to a new balance between countryside and town. Sind retains a predominantly agrarian character but the relative import-

<sup>6</sup> Despatch No. 769 dated 28 May 1955, 790.00/5-2855, USNA.

<sup>7</sup> *Herald* (Karachi), special election issue, October 1990, pp. 80-5.

ance of urban areas has steadily increased, as has the impact of education and new forms of employment. These changes have helped to reduce the influence of traditional élites in Sind's towns and cities, reflected in the wider variety of candidates elected from these constituencies. In the countryside, however, these changes have made a much less significant impact and well-established land-owning élites, including *pirs*, continue to dominate politically: when one of them loses an election, more often than not it is a person from the same kind of background who takes their place. High levels of insecurity combined with a lack of faith on the part of many rural Sindhis in either the ability or the inclination of the state to intervene on their behalf mean that the mediation offered by *pirs* remains attractive. Their followers still need intercession in this world much as they rely on it in readiness for the world to come. And so, like their shrines in the Sindhi countryside, *pirs* present one of the most enduring features of Sind's religious and political landscape.

## Conclusion

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The relationship between the British and the *pirs* of Sind grew directly out of the powerful position held by these Muslim religious leaders when the British conquered the region in 1843. It was affected, however, by the classic contradiction which lay at the basis of British colonial power everywhere. The British throughout their empire relied on local élites whose power was entrenched in the status quo at the time of colonial rule being imposed: but colonial rule, by its very nature, introduced changes which undermined the power of these élites, threatening their position in society. In Sind as elsewhere both parties effectively walked a 'tight-rope' in order to protect their interests and maintain the balance on which a successful alliance rested. When the balance was upset, however, the authorities usually resorted to force of some sort. The very nature of the institution of the *pir* could produce strains which weakened the British system of control. *Pirs* acted as levers between society and government, but they were subject to pressure from below just as much as from above. Their position depended on retaining the support of their followers and so they were never completely free to decide on the stand which they took towards the authorities. From time to time, therefore, *pirs* came into direct conflict with the British as a result of their need to fulfil the expectations of their followers.

The first Hur Rebellion of the 1890s represented an extreme example of the predicament in which an individual *pir* could find himself. On the one hand, the Pir Pagaro was pushed into taking a stand against the local authorities by a section of his *murids*. On the other hand, he was subjected to great pressure from the British to restrain his followers. While his cooperation illustrated the extent to which the authorities could rely on local religious élites in times of crisis, the *pir's*

eventual submission proved the effectiveness of the system of control which had been constructed in Sind. This was highlighted again during the Khilafat movement of 1919 to 1924 which saw a number of *pirs* pressurised as Islamic leaders into taking an open stand against the Government. For a while their participation looked set to undermine the position of the authorities in the province. In the event, the system of control held firm largely as a result of the reciprocity which underpinned the relationship between Sind's religious élite and the British.

Sindhi *pirs* proved themselves flexible in the way in which they were largely able to come to terms with British rule. To a great extent, this flexibility was due to the landed interests which they had acquired over centuries and which they wanted to protect under the changed circumstances of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their position as landed élites also meant that they were well placed to take advantage of new forms of political activity introduced by the British. Once the prospect of independence appeared certain, they began to cooperate with the Muslim League, as it seemed to be the political party most likely to protect their interests in the future. Thus, the evolving system of control brought dividends to both sides. It enabled the British to retain control over the province, while allowing the *pirs* to adapt to colonial rule without serious damage to their interests. The second Hur rebellion, however, was a sharp reminder that the system rested on a delicate balance of interests: when relations between this particular *pir* and the British broke down, the authorities relied on force to restore the equilibrium on which their power depended.

The examination of the relationship between the British and the *pirs* of Sind thus highlights both the foundations on which European empires were constructed and factors which influenced the response of local powerholders towards these empires. In the reactions of the *pirs*, we see a classic example of the pressures working on indigenous allies and their reactions as the British system of imperial control grew more complex. The situation in Sind demonstrates in yet another context that 'collaboration' was one of the main planks on which British rule in India was based. The authorities recognised that law and order could not be sustained at the point of a bayonet over long periods of time. Rather, 'consent' of some kind from a substantial section of the local population was needed, something which local élites in possession of extensive influence were able to deliver. But while collaboration formed a central feature of colonial rule, studying how bargains were struck in Sind reveals that it was neither fixed nor static. The careful balancing act which collaboration demanded could be upset as a result of tensions created by competing sets of interests. Equally, problems developed in the system as the political context changed. Local allies had to cope with and respond to the pressures of widening political arenas. While other collaborating groups, such as the *talukadars* of Awadh, the Deccan *sardars*, and even Sind's own *waderos* were faced with an evolving framework of secular government, Sindhi *pirs* also faced a widening and increasingly fraught religious context as



they became more aware of developments taking place in India and throughout the world. It is this added dimension which makes the reactions of this particular collaborating group stand out from the reactions of its non-religious counterparts both elsewhere in Sind and in the Indian subcontinent.

The complexity of these reactions was demonstrated during the Khilafat movement. *Pirs* in Sind were by no means united in their responses to Khilafat agitation: some participated while others tried to ignore and later opposed it. The reaction of individual *pirs* was connected in large part to the sufi order to which they belonged and to the age of their family's shrine. As in the Panjab where support for the Khilafat cause tended to come from Chishti revival shrines, pro-Khilafat *pirs* in Sind belonged to reformist Qadiri and Naqshbandi families which had emerged in the province after the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> For doctrinal reasons, they were more willing to consider jeopardising their places within the imperial framework of administration in order to safeguard the unity of the wider Muslim community. Practical reasons seem to have contributed to their readiness to challenge British authority. As members of 'younger' *pir* families, they were likely to be more dependent on the material support of their *murids* and consequently susceptible to pressures from below to defend Muslim rights. This insight is strengthened by the fact that those *pirs* who did not take part in the Khilafat movement tended to come from sufi families – Qadiri, Naqshbandi and Suhrawardi alike – with bigger landholdings which helped bind them to the British administration. Pro-Khilafat *pirs* both in Sind and the Panjab, were less firmly embedded in the local structure of rural landholding interests, and more loosely tied to the system of control than *pirs* who remained overtly loyal to the authorities.

Widening horizons themselves formed one of the premises on which the participation of *pirs* in the British system was based. By the beginning of the twentieth century, a more complex set of alliances was evolving in order to meet the growing complexities of the political situation in India. Electoral representation was introduced partly to satisfy Indian demands for greater self-determination, but it was also designed to strengthen existing élites by creating an environment in which those with power grew more powerful still. *Pirs* from more established shrines already wielded the right kind of influence to benefit from the introduction of elections. They were drawn in as allies at higher and higher levels within the framework of the colonial state. But the further up they travelled, the wider their horizons grew, until, gradually, many *pirs* were 'captured' by a third force in the shape of political parties, in particular by the Muslim League. The absence of strong alternative political organisations, such as the Unionist Party in the Panjab, enabled the League to make significant gains among Sindhi *pirs* from the late 1930s onwards, to the extent that, whereas the 'capture' of rural religious

<sup>1</sup> See David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam* (Berkeley, 1988) chapter 2.

leaders during the 1946 elections proved the turning-point in the party's fortunes in the Panjab, in Sind these elections only confirmed the existing support of the province's *pirs* for the demand for Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

The British introduced a more complex system of control to strengthen the position of their administration. In the long term, however, it was severely weakened by the repercussions of these policies. It depended on allies working according to set rules and it broke down when they did not. The disintegration of relations between the British and the Pir Pagaro in the atmosphere of heightened nationalist feeling during the late 1930s and early 1940s provides dramatic illustration of how the widening of political horizons led to the rejection of the very premises of the alliance between local powerholders and colonial rulers. In Sind, as in the subcontinent in general, nationalist agitation during the decade preceding independence raised the stakes as far as continued British presence in India was concerned. The British were able to use force to re-establish control, but, in doing so, the cost of empire, moral as well as financial, grew too heavy for voters and tax-payers back home to bear. Without a reliable system of political control to reduce the need for force, the British could effectively no longer afford to stay on. By 1947, they had lost the allies whose cooperation had helped to make the *raj* pay.

Political and religious developments in Sind also shed light on the ways in which different Islamic societies have evolved, as well as on the kinds of relationships that Muslim religious élites have established with secular powers. Islam had adapted itself to the particular environments in which it has historically evolved, the process of Islamisation taking different forms in different parts of the Muslim world.<sup>3</sup> In some places, *ulama* have provided the necessary transmission belt along which Islamic ideas have travelled, while, in other places, sufis have been the main agents of conversion and consolidation. The most important single factor influencing these developments seems to have been the nature and extent of Muslim state power. Where this power has been centralised, there has been a demand for men skilled in making and interpreting the law, and a strong body of *ulama* has grown up. Where Muslim state power has tended to be weaker, rulers have had greater need for the mediating functions offered by sufis, for example mediating between different tribal interests and offering supra-tribal structures based on new sets of loyalties. Hence, sufi orders have become dominant in a variety of settings: in the Bengali countryside and Egyptian cities, in Indonesia on the fringes of the Muslim world and close to the central Islamic heartlands in

<sup>2</sup> David Gilmartin, 'Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement in the Punjab', *Modern Asian Studies*, 13, 3 (1979) pp. 485–517.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of work highlighting the way in which Islam has adapted to different social and political circumstances, see Michael Gilsenan, *Recognising Islam* (New York, 1982), and Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley, 1984), especially its introduction.

places such as the Sudan and Kurdistan. Religious élites operating in the framework of weak state power have also been able to acquire much greater control over local resources than would otherwise have been the case under more centralised governments: in Morocco like Sind this has led to the emergence of saintly families with very great social and economic landed interests, who themselves came to wield political power.<sup>4</sup>

*Pirs* in Sind have shown a great capacity to survive. This has been largely the result of the way in which they have continued to provide a function: they have been able to retain a social rôle. The introduction of the modern state is cited as one of the main reasons for the general decline of sufi orders in recent times, yet developments in Sind show that this decline has not necessarily been uniform or inevitable. Here *pir* families by and large survived the process of modernisation introduced by the British. The colonial authorities' need for strong and reliable intermediaries contributed directly to the enduring vitality of the institution of the *pir* within Sind. The British desire to work through existing local élites whenever possible meant that the institutions of the modern state were introduced in ways which favoured existing powerholders. *Pirs* modified their outlook and behaviour according to their perceptions of the threat to their interests posed by British rule. By striking 'bargains' with the authorities, they were able to take advantage of new political methods of asserting their position in society and prepared themselves well for participation in the politics of the independent state of Pakistan.

Thus, flexibility, which proved the main force behind the vitality of the sufi tradition in the past, would also appear to be the hallmark of the survival of sufi leaders in the modern world. Where they have been prepared to rethink their traditional rôles and to adapt to new political circumstances, they have retained and even expanded their influence. At the same time, the local context in which sufi leaders operate has determined their ability to respond effectively to changes beyond their control. It has affected the way in which their influence is exercised and their relations with secular state power. Even in environments which are relatively hostile to Islam and its institutions, such as Central Asia under both Tsarist and Soviet rule, sufis have survived as the main sustainers of Islam largely as a result of their ability to adapt to the changed circumstances in which they find themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Since 1947, the *pirs* of Sind have continued to flourish. Like other great landowners, they have survived attempts at land reform with their estates virtually intact. They have become leading politicians at provincial and national

<sup>4</sup> See Michael Gilsenen, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt: An Essay in the Sociology of Religion* (Oxford, 1973); Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> A. Bennigsen and S. Wimbush, *Mystics and Communism: Sufis in the Soviet Union* (London, 1985).

levels, often with members of the same extended family strategically positioned in political terms to ensure that it does well whatever the nature of the administration. Spiritually, their influence has not been significantly damaged by state-sponsored revivals of 'orthodox' Islam. Governments over the years have sought legitimacy through their support; either directly, by winning them on to the same political platform, or indirectly, by adopting policies towards their shrines which turn them into national religious and cultural monuments. The skills which *pirs* perfected during the one hundred years of British rule have equipped them for today's Pakistan. Once again under Muslim rule, as in the past, they continue, by and large, to prosper, their flexibility still ensuring their survival as one of the most powerful élites in Sindhi society.

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