Project Title: Trans-regional Authority in the Age of Political Fragmentation and the Great Game

Abstract:
Trans-regional Authority in the Age of Political Fragmentation and the Great Game: Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Revivalist Networks and the Shaping of the Early Modern Persianate World, 1747-1857::: My dissertation examines the development of trans-regional Islamic revivalist networks from the mid-18th to mid-19th centuries, centered around Sindh, Peshawar, and the Kabul Valley, and extending across present day Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Xinjiang (China), and North India. The primary subjects of my study, the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi (lit. "revivalist") religious networks, are noteworthy for influencing some of the region's primary Muslim religious movements, and for articulating the major social responses to the decline of Muslim political power, the advent of colonialism, and Great Power politics. At the intersection of religious studies, anthropology and political history, my research seeks to address how these crises impacted Muslim identity formation, and helped shape the current socio-political landscape of the region.:::::: This historical inquiry provides the basis for tracing the development of various strands of religious networks today– from confrontational revivalist movements to those that advocated for educational reform. My dissertation seeks to address how the Mujaddidi networks expanded rapidly from South to Central Asia, encompassing urban, tribal, and rural spaces, and how they adapted to the drastic socio-political changes from the mid 18th to 19th centuries. I propose that the synthetic nature of the Mujaddidi networks – reconciling Sufism, the world of the urban intelligentsia, folk traditions, and sharia into one cohesive system - allowed them to adapt to local environments while maintaining a foundation in devotional practices and central texts. In addition, the Mujaddidi Sufi-scholars formed a network of institutions which acted as loci of academic and cultural exchange, and assumed important social functions in the absence of strong states. These institutions represented a parallel authority structure that helped define the contours of a Sunni Persianate Islam, deeply imbued with Sufi practices, which persisted into the modern period.