

Social Mobility and the Making of the Sufi Paradigm

The second part of this book will primarily study the relation between the birth of a middle class and the development of a section thereof into an intelligentsia, two related phenomena, which I want to distinguish, still, from the outset of the formation of the Sufi paradigm. Also, we will have to deal with the intricate issue of the entanglement between the process of objectification of Sufism and that of the building of the Sufi paradigm. This part opens with a chapter dealing with “the archeology of the Sufi paradigm.” It describes how the conditions of possibility of the paradigm were implemented through two main processes. The first one resulted from an order of the commissioner in Sindh, Bartle Frere, to print the *Shah jo Risalo*. The printing would trigger a process of objectification of Sufism, this happening among the Sindhi intelligentsia. The objectification of Sindhi Sufism would allow them to slowly depart from the Persian pattern and to build the early stage of the Sufi paradigm.

In her book devoted to the shifting of Ashrafs into the middle classes, Margrit Pernau clearly relates the identification of the Muslim with religion in the late nineteenth century with the creation of a middle class whose members described themselves as Ashrafs. Pernau soon observes that the term “middle class” is far from being homogenous (Pernau 2013: XXX). Nevertheless, in this second part of the book, and contrary to Pernau, I do not aim to illustrate how the Sindhi middle class and intelligentsia were to build a community, sharing interests, ideals, and ways of life. Also, Pernau deals a great deal with the concept of identity, which

seems to have played a key role in the shifting from Ashraf to middle classes. This concept is also one, which I do not reference. Notwithstanding, I share her point when she examines “which knowledge was communicated in concrete terms and how, which translation processes underlay this communication, and how it was reflected in individual concepts and the way they changed over time (Pernau 2013: 439).

On the other side, European historians have long associated the development of a bourgeoisie with the process of democratization and secularization. But another episode is less known: the process through which the peasants were colonized by urban people. The historian Eugen Weber wrote that we should think of the process of the modernization of the peasant in late nineteenth-century France in order to help us understand what did happen (Weber 1976: 486). He writes of a “process of acculturation” through which civilization was given to the French by urban France, the disintegration of local cultures by modernity, and finally their absorption into the dominant civilization of Paris and schools. Also, Weber reminds us that the urban elite of France spoke of the rural people as they did of the colonized, with condescension. Since conquered people were not people, having no culture of their own, they could only benefit from the enrichment and enlightenment brought by civilizers.

Another meaningful point to bear in mind is that the territories of France had not been conquered, but they had been annexed by the French without the consent of the local people, who challenged the central power located in Paris even after centuries of annexation. Furthermore, the “provinciaux” benefited from the modern technologies, such as roads and railroads, electricity, and the telegraph, just in the same period as the far away colonies did. In France as in Sindh, the “forces of order ignored and scorned the logic of the societies they administered” (Weber 1976: 493). Nonetheless, a main cleavage is to be highlighted between France and Sindh: the issue of religion. In France, secularization was at work, while in Sindh, the spread of colonial knowledge did not implement a secularization process. Notwithstanding, it is amazing to observe that both processes, in France and in Sindh, were at work during the same period.

The impact was of a different nature, after which new conceptions of religion and new forms of religiosity were born. The Sufi paradigm was part of the reshaping of a vernacular knowledge based on religiosity. In this regard, Mirza Qalich Beg was a leading actor whose writings work at a multi-level scale. He was the first to compose a biography of Shah Abd al-Latif, and to talk of the *Ilm Tasawuf*, “Sufi knowledge.” Furthermore,

in the early twentieth century, he worked at publishing the Sufi *kalam* of Shah Abd al-Karim, and also the *kalam* of Sabit Ali Shah, the leading Sindhi Shia poet and the champion of the *marsiyya* genre, this being the dirge devoted to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his family at Karbala in 680. Other Sindhi literati contributed to enlarging the Sufi paradigm beyond Shah Abd al-Latif and his *Shah jo Risalo*.

The success of the Sufi paradigm could be evaluated when some of its features were dealt with by non-Sufi writers: in fact, this is the very act through which it would become a paradigm. One of them was an Ismaili Khoja who praised the concept built by Sachal Sarmast, the *haqq mawjud*. Thanks to it, he was able to bridge *tasawuf* with Vedanta, what he calls the divine light, the *illahi nur* and the *ishvari jot*. Through this construction, Hashim Lalu was keen to find evidence of Khoja participation in the Sufi paradigm. On the other hand, a number of Hindu literati were the heralds of the Sufi paradigm, most of the time through a new interpretation of Sufism framed by a Theosophical reading. In this regard, the leading scholar was Jethmal Parsram, who was a prolific writer and publisher.

A last addition to the Sufi paradigm resulted from the spread of printing in relation to oral literature. Since the time of the precursors to Burton and Trumpp, British and European scholars had noticed Sindh was very rich in tales and legends. From the second part of the nineteenth century on, the British started to publish some abstracts, but it was in early twentieth century that the *qisso*, the vernacular term for the tale, was printed en masse, thanks to lithography. The most popular *qisso* was “Sasui Punu,” a most famous tale reinterpreted by Shah Abd al-Latif in his *Shah jo Risalo* as the symbol of the mystic Sufi quest. But before analyzing how the Sufi paradigm deploys beyond Sufism and even Islam, first we have to scrutinize the archeology of the paradigm, meaning how the printing created a process of objectification of Sufism.

REFERENCES

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