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Sufism East and West in Qudratullāh Shahāb's *Shahābnāma*[1]

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Abstract. In this study of Sufi elements in the *Shahābnāma*, the autobiography of Qudratullāh Shahāb, I would like to reflect on the themes of cross-cultural exchange and contact, as well as diverse literary, philosophical, and even religious or spiritual strands that extend and inspire individuals to probe some of the more profound mysteries of the human condition.

Keywords. Qudratullāh Shahāb, *Shahābnāma,* Sufism, Western Sufism, Indian Sufism

On its publication in 1986, the Urdu autobiography of Pakistan's Qudratullāh Shahāb, a well-known Pakistani civil servant and literary figure, attracted wide popular interest. Qudratullāh Shahāb (d. 1986) was born in Gilgit, then part of British India, in 1917. After succeeding in the demanding civil service exam of British India and starting a career there, Shahāb migrated to Pakistan. There, he pursued a distinguished career serving in various government posts including being Ambassador of Pakistan to the Netherlands beginning in 1962, and later Information Secretary, Education Secretary, and Principal Secretary to governors general Ghulam Muhammad and Iskandar Mirza and to President Ayub Khan (Zaman 206). Shahāb was also a literary figure, writing novels, composing poetry, and perhaps most well-known, authoring the autobiography under consideration here that was first published posthumously in 1986. His career and interests intersected with many important personages, both Pakistani and foreign, and with cultural and religious/spiritual currents circulating in Pakistan of the 1960s and 70s. Shahāb's literary work and personality have been celebrated in numerous studies, especially by notable writers counted among his circle of colleagues such as Ashfaq Ahmad (d. 2004) and Bano Qudsiya (d. 2017) each of whom produced works in his honor (Ahmad 1991, Qudsiya 1989), as well as the writer Mumtāz Muftī (d. 1995).[i]

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As a student in the Berkeley Urdu Program in Lahore in Fall 1976, I had the good fortune to meet and spend some time with some figures whose names are well known to those with cultural and literary interests in Pakistan. Despite my callow youth and as yet tentative and incomplete grasp of so many aspects of the history, language, and culture of Muslim South Asia, as a student in this program I was privileged to be put in contact with many writers and intellectuals in Lahore. But perhaps, anticipating some of the themes of the *Shahābnāma* that I will treat in this reflection, I was propelled and guided by forces beyond both my stature and my capacity to moments and experiences that now can be treasured, reflected on, and interpreted; retrospectively, and in the light of frameworks of later understandings along with historical and theoretical underpinnings that may both illuminate and revivify what transpired in the past.

I believe that I first heard of the Qudratullāh Shahāb in the company and at the home of the noted literary couple, Ashfaq Ahmad and his wife, Bano Qudsiya. But I am not sure that this is the case, and the *Shahābnāma* was not published until 1986 after the death of its author, while my first time in Lahore dates back to 1976! Being a young graduate student in the Berkeley Urdu program, I had only a vague grasp of who they were in the Pakistani intellectual and cultural landscape. One of my fellow Berkeley Program participants, a young man exploring eclectic spirituality mainly associated with Indian traditions, for whom Islamic Studies and Sufism were secondary interests, had the good fortune to be selected as their houseguest for the duration of the three-month long program. The premise of the Berkeley program was that American students of Urdu who scored in the top ranges of a proficiency exam, would stay in Lahore for three months, live with Pakistani households as part of intensive language immersion, and be offered classes geared to their proficiency and interests. My colleague, had, in fact, "lucked out" in being chosen to stay with such eminent hosts.[ii]

I was, in several aspects, myself a guest among the program students. First of all, and significantly, I was not at the time a US citizen or even a US Green Card holder. As a newly arrived Canadian student at the University of Chicago, I had never formally studied Urdu! Yet somehow through the good offices of Professor C. M. Naim I was permitted to sit for the proficiency exam, which could be taken in either the Urdu script or Devanagri. Cobbling together my rather basic knowledge of Arabic (and its script) with a rigorous one-year Hindi course taken at the University of Toronto—I was able to score within the cohort of students eligible for the program. As a foreign student I was, however, not eligible for any financial support since it was a government level exchange.

The program began in Lahore in September. Meanwhile I found a summer job in Mashhad, Iran teaching English, saved my summer earnings, and travelled by bus across Afghanistan and then by train from Peshawar to

Lahore. My Pakistani host family lived in Rahmanpura and I occupied their living room for the three months, sleeping on a *chārpā'ī.* Only the husband spoke English—little did I know at the time that being placed in a modest household was my greatest good fortune in terms of learning about the local language and culture.

But having set this scene, back to Sufism, spiritual seeking, and the *Shahābnāma.* In the rest of this contribution, I intend to briefly highlight some aspects of Sufism *(taṣawwuf)* as presented in the *Shahābnāma*. My own academic interests, especially since the 1990s, have involved the analysis of Sufism in modern Western contexts. I initially imagined that "modern" manifestations of Sufism would feature among the main themes of this article and would be the main lens through which to reflect of the work of Qudratullāh Shahāb.[iii] Returning to consider the original work somewhat complicated this intention for me, suggestion that the topic should be Sufism more generally, some of it modern, some of it "Western", and some of it a reflection on the "enchantment" or even "reenchantment" that still surrounds the spiritual quest and its concomitant experiences that I believe is a theme that runs through contemporary Pakistani Urdu literature.

Sufism in the *Shahābnāma*

Some of the prominent aspects of Sufism as presented in the *Shahābnāma* are the author's encounters with European Sufis, his own religious and spiritual experiences, in particular as described in the final chapter of the autobiography, and the Sufis whose teachings or writings he cites.

While literary accolades for the work seem to be widespread and universal, the reception of its autobiographical elements were and are, until today, somewhat mixed. Some critics appreciated the personal spiritual dimension of some of the incidents described therein, others have been either suspicious and skeptical, or admiring and even hagiographic in their responses. The literary aspects of the *Shahābnāma* are somewhat genre bending. It is not a completely linear narrative, perhaps due to the fact that some chapters were previously published independently in magazines of the time. There is also a blurring of the boundaries of autobiography in terms of what "really happened" which I suppose could arguably be considered suitable for a Sufi-inflected work. Critic Mumtāz Shīrīṉ (1963), in particular, highlights the tension between *afsāna* and *ḥaqīqat*—story and actual event—within the earlier narratives of Shahāb's short stories. Less generously, Mushfiq Khwāja cast doubt on the literary and career affiliations among Shahāb and some of his circle within Pakistan's literary and government service networks, in particular with writers Ashfaq Ahmad and Mumtāz Muftī, whom Khwāja suggests had been overly devotional in their appreciation or even promotion of Shahāb(Khwāja 1995).[iv] More recently,

Ayesha Siddiqa is even more critical of a “post-modernist Sufi Islam that in Pakistan was created during the 1980s and represents the legacy of writers like Qudratullāh Shahāb, Mumtāz Muftī, Ashfaq Ahmad and Bano Qudsiya” which in her opinion served to sustain an anti-progressive Pakistani intellectual narrative based on passivity and mystification (Siddiqa 2018).

In a doctoral thesis on Qudratullāh Shahāb and his works, Riffat Mālik assesses the *Shahābnāma* from a literary genre point of view as representing a unique and distinct form of autobiography. Among literary critics who have assessed it as being more fictional than truly biographical Mālik cites Rashīd Amjad (153-4) and Farīda Nazīr (326). However, each of these critics also admires the creative elements within the narrative. Amjad describes it as being an “autobiographical novel” that is not merely a work written by and about the subject himself but also a narrative composed with attention to storytelling and mastery of the techniques of creative fiction (153). In particular, the last chapter of the book featuring the disclosure of Shahāb’s “inner” experiences is clearly appreciated by Naẓīr who writes, “Had it not incorporated the mention of his spiritual life, Qudratullāh Shahāb’s autobiography would have remained incomplete” (326).

Mālik, in contrast, criticizes the inclusion of the Sufi elements at the end of the book. While some of these materials have a connection to the biography of Shahāb, the appending of prayers and supplications seems to Mālik, as well as to some previous critics, to constitute a disservice to the overall aim of the work due to the didactic, rather than self-revelatory, nature of such materials. Also, from a literary aspect these components, according to Mālik, do not seem to be what the genre of autobiography requires (343).

The specific political and historical details of the work, while worthy of further study, are beyond the scope of this article. Rather, in what follows I will engage certain specific aspects of the narrative related to Sufism.

Western Sufis and Sufism in the *Shahābnāma*

The phenomenon of Westerners converting to Islam, after becoming interested through Sufism is clearly of great interest to Shahāb and he alludes to this and related topics, and also expounds more expansively on them, at a number of places in the *Shahābnāma*. For example, in describing his initial time in Holland during the 1960s Shahāb writes:

> One day by chance I happened to be introduced to a Dutch Sufi. His Dutch name was Edwin Keating while his Sufi name was Karam Dīn. His wife’s Sufi name was Kulsūm and the names of their two children were Nūr Dīn and Sharaf Dīn. In daily life he used his Dutch name but in the intimate company of his Sufi friends he unabashedly used his Sufi name. . . The Dutch Sufis have centers in several locations that are called Sufi Churches (Sufi Kerk). The distinguishing symbol of this church is a human

> heart on each side of which are wings and inside of which are a star and crescent moon.
>
> In 1963 when I became the Ambassador to Holland, the Dutch Finance Minister was Professor Witteveen who was affiliated with the Sufi Movement. After that he became the head of the International Monetary Fund. The founder of this Sufi lineage in Europe was Inayat Khan (556).

Johannes Witteveen (d. 2019) is a well-known figure in the history of European Sufism and even more generally. In Sufi circles he was called Karimbakhsh Witteveen. He served as the Dutch Minister of Finance during the 1960s and later he was elected President of International Monetary Fund in the 1970s. Within his branch of the Sufi Movement initially founded in the West by the Indian Sufi, Inayat Khan (d. 1927), Witteveen served as the national representative and also used to organize the Universal Worship services of this Movement. Witteveen was also a member of the committee that planned and executed the building of the Sufi Movement's center, 'Murad Hasil' in Katwijk, Holland[v] and he helped finance and embellish the facilities of the *Dargāh* (shrine) of Inayat Khan in the Nizamuddin area of New Delhi.

An entire chapter of the *Shahābnāma* is dedicated to "The Sufis of Europe" (557-566). Initially in this section Shahāb reviews in some details the life and contributions of Inayat Khan who is credited with bringing Sufism to the West in the early 20th century. Shahāb recounts a lot of details about the family origins, Indian travels and experiences, and studies of Inayat Khan, as well as his mission to Europe in order to spread Sufi teachings there. Of particular interest here is Shahāb's explanation of the adaptations of Khan's teachings in the Western context (563 ff.).

> In this way, in order to become a "Sufi" or a "Murīd" one did not have to adopt any specific religious belief. Besides Muslims, Christians, Jews or Zoroastrians—even Hindus or idol worshippers, atheists or heretics, could equally join this movement. In this path (maslak) the book of human nature is the sole holy scripture and the global human brotherhood is the one shared religion *(mazhab)* (564).

Shahāb goes on to describe the European Sufi ritual of Universal Worship at which the scriptures of various religions are read as a candle is passed from one presenter to the next. He describes certain ranks within the movement, and some of its practices such as occasional zikr sessions. Despite its invocation of Arabic, Islamic, and Sufi terminology, he declares the Sufi Movement to have "no relation to Islamic Sufism," opining that, "Since the practice of *sharī'a* is not required, it is an error to call Inayat Khan's mission *'taṣawwuf'*" (565).

Shahāb further recounts that during a trip to Pakistan, Musharaff

(Musharraf) Moulamia (Maulā Miān) Khan (d. 1967),[vi] youngest brother of Inayat Khan who had assumed the leadership of the European Sufi Movement in 1958 and who was married to a Dutch Sufi, had lamented that after his death the connections of the Sufi Movement to its original Islamic roots would become even more tenuous, which Shahāb observes is what, in fact, happened (565). Shahāb seems somewhat ambivalent about the spiritual attainments of Musharaff Khan. He mentions his popularity among young Dutch disciples *(murīds)*, partly due in Shahāb's assessment, to Khan's (excessively) agreeable and tolerant attitude. Interestingly, Shahāb indicates that Witteveen would frequently seek Musharaff Khan's spiritual insight regarding both personal and political matters (566). These two figures reappear later in the narrative at the time of the outbreak of the 1965 War between India and Pakistan. At that critical juncture Witteveen and Musharaff Khan promptly arrived at the official residence to condole and console then Ambassador Shahāb and his wife, 'Iffat (932 ff.).

In summary, I would characterize Shahāb's attitude to Western Sufism in this section of the *Shahābnāma* as somewhat ambivalent—on the one hand curious and appreciative, and at the same time sceptical regarding the authenticity of its grounding and practices.

The construction of the narrative (1051-75) of this autobiography suggests that some chapters are not in a temporal sequence but rather cover the same periods of time from different thematic angles. Thus, one of the later chapters in the autobiography. "Rozgār-i safīr," (Memoirs of an Ambassador) covers some of the same 1960s experiences of Shahāb while he was in the Netherlands serving as the Ambassador of Pakistan. The chapter opens with the theme of diplomacy as a career from historical perspectives, then it shifts to describing Shahāb's trip to take up the post, the presentation of his credential to Queen Juliana, and the general set up of the Embassy of Pakistan in The Hague. Due to the fact that there were as yet few Pakistanis in the Netherlands and that relations between the two nations were not particularly complicated, his workload was "to an unusual extent, easy and light" (1064). This gave Shahāb the opportunity to explore his interests aside from diplomacy, for example, making use of the resources of the Eastern Institute at Leiden University,[vii] investigating, apparently through some participant observation, the Western Sufism of Inayat Khan, and also taking some post-graduate courses at the Institute of Parapsychology at Utrecht University.[viii] Shahāb seems to have been especially intrigued by Gerard Croiset (d. 1980), a Dutch psychic of the time known internationally for his skills in faith healing and finding lost children. However, after deeply evaluating all of the Western scientific explorations of parapsychology Shahāb concludes that, "All of these Western activities had not even achieved the rudimentary A-B-Cs of Islamic Sufism" (1065).

He developed a cordial relationship with the Director of the

Parapsychology Institute at Utrecht University, Wilhelm Tenhaeff (1894–1981),[ix] and even had the *Ẓiā al-Qulūb* of the Sufi scholar Ḥajjī Imdādullāh Muhājir Makkī (d. 1899) translated into English for his benefit. According to Shahāb the learned professor was amazed by this work and inclined to become Muslim. However, due to fears of losing his job and social position he did not take this step. In contrast, Tenhaeff's secretary, a Dutch lady, read the text and was so impressed that she converted to Islam—for the very purpose of following the path of spiritual seeking *(sulūk)* imparted in the *Ẓiā al-Qulūb* (1065). Shahāb gave her the Muslim name Rābiʿa and she persevered on the path and ended up moving to Medina (1065-66).

Shahāb's Spiritual Experiences

The recounting of dreams, visions and other spiritual experiences is common in classical Sufi biography and even in some of the more rare autobiographical accounts of Sufis of the pre-modern past. Perhaps some of the critical resistance to such elements appearing in the *Shahābnāma* is that the autobiography is not primarily viewed as being of work of religious literature.

Disclosing such experiences can serve to exalt the authority of the individual and his or her spiritual status. In modernity, however, there is a discomfort, not only with such an intimate degree of self-disclosure, but also with the hubris that such claims might indicate. For example, some studies of the *Shahābnāma* take umbrage at the recounting of a childhood dream in which Shahāb claims that he had a vision of the Prophet Muhammad (1162-64). In the context of the work this early experience does not, in the opinion of this author, seem to be excessive.

However, it is in the final chapter: "Choṭā muñh baṛī bāt"— (small mouth [for such a] great subject)—an Urdu expression of humbleness, where the author's spiritual experiences are concentrated. The most remarkable aspect of this section is the author's account of his encounters over an extended period with a *Khizr-i rāh* (spiritual guide on the path) a mysterious figure—who Shahāb calls "Ninety" (1184).

The onset of Shahāb's communications with Ninety comes after a description of a period that Shahāb went through in life when he first began to have vague dreams of saintly figures which were then followed by a more concrete dream in which an attractive, venerable personage who was emanating beauty *(ṣāḥib-I jamāl)* and dressed in pilgrim robes appeared to him. This figure was circumambulating the Kaʿba in a realm that was amazingly ecstatic and intoxicating. Shahāb found himself overwhelmed by this presence. The person approached him smiling, and invited Shahāb to sit beside him somewhere outside of the circumambulation area, saying, "My name is Quṭ̤buddīn Bakhtiyār Kākī.[x] You are not a man of this path, but the blessed court from which you have received permission, is the place to which

we all bow our heads in submission" (1182). Next in the dream Shahāb is presented with a choice of whether to accept from Kākī a cup with some food or drink in it. This represents a choice of spiritual death (that world) over earthly life (this world), and Shahāb's ego breaks through so that he declares that he wants something of each world. At that point a disgusting black dog suddenly appears and sticks its muzzle in the cup. Clearly the aspirant is not yet ready and Quṭbuddīn smiles and says, "Alas, this effortless and freely given blessing is not destined for you since your ego *(nafs)* still dominates you to a high degree, therefore you will have to undertake a regime of spiritual exercises *(mujāhida)*" (1183).

For some time Shahāb remained dejected at this turn of events, depressed to the point that he even briefly contemplated suicide. Then, one of the most important incidents in his life takes place. He receives a mysterious letter by regular mail—however, the time stamp on the letter is such that it would have been impossible for it to have arrived so speedily. The letter, written in such fluent and complex English that Shahāb needed to consult a dictionary in places while reading it, gave an account of his character, life, and faults, many of which were only known to him personally, in thirteen pages. In addition, it contained deeper insights about himself that even he had not realized. The latter portion of the letter contained advice and directives about the future. Thus begins a correspondence that will continue for 25 years; however, this was the only letter to arrive by normal post—the following communications would mysteriously appear in his bookshelf or a book, under his pillow, floating in the air,[xi] etc. The letter was signed, "A ninety years young *faqīr*" (1184).[xii]

The purpose of this guide within the narrative is puzzling, especially in the light of a rather odd episode that arises fairly early in their correspondence when Shahāb, who has been told to immediately destroy any communications from "Ninety" although he can take notes in his own words about the contents, imagines that he might at least preserve a signature as a souvenir or talisman. Immediately a warning of the "punishment" for such a transgression is communicated. The sole light bulb in the room went out and Shahāb found his hands and feet tied up for half an hour by means of a living snake (1185)!

While literary critic Farīda Nazīr suggests that "Ninety" is another manifestation of Quṭbuddīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, I suppose that a Jungian analyst would interpret "Ninety" as being a manifestation of the archetype of the wise old man who is serving as a guide, whether as a supernatural being or a projection of some element deep within Shahāb's psyche.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the *Shahābnāma* from the perspective of trends in contemporary global Sufism, one finds Shahāb anticipating some recent

approaches to Sufi autobiography within what I have termed “authenticity” Sufism.[xiii] My designation of “authenticity Sufism” as a more recent Western and even global trend refers to the tendency emerging in the late 1990s that presented Sufism in a sober, fiqh-oriented mode exemplified in the teaching of the Bā ‘Alawiyya originating in Yemen, or figures such as American convert Sufis such as Hamza Yusuf Hanson or Nuh Ha Mim Keller. In Shahāb’s appending of a sort of Sufi manual of practices to his autobiography thereby pairing biographical or quasi-biographical narratives with some aspects of the earlier classical “Sufi manual” genre, Shahāb anticipates forms chosen by certain Western Sufi autobiographers writing a half-century later.[xiv] In fact, the manual of practices component that comprises the final section of the *Shahābnāma* is fairly lengthy and extensive. It includes litanies (aẕkār) as well as concentrations (murāqabāt) (1190-92). There is also an explication of the subtle spiritual centers *(laṭā’if)* and spiritual exercises to awaken and activate them, a discussion of some stages and states along the Sufi path, as well as advice regarding the cultivation of certain virtues (1194-95). Perhaps unusual for this genre is the occasional gloss by Shahāb on a specific practice, recounting its effect on him personally.

One example is his commentary on the impact of the practice “the concentration on death” *(murāqabah-yi mawt).* While performing this spiritual exercise one night Shahāb experienced an event in which he felt himself leaving his bed, while his consciousness appeared to be detached from his physical body, still lying prone on the mattress. This he associates with the experience of “astral travel,” written in English letters in the text (1193). Such linguistic code switching occur at a number of places within the narrative, where Shahāb employs English or modern expressions such as “super highway,” (1169) “Morse-key,” “wave lengths,” (1220) etc., in ways that reflect his eclectic interests in parapsychology and the association of occult and paranormal experiences with modern science as a sort of rationalization of the supernatural.[xv] Some of these elements give us some insights into the development of the discourses of modern, global Sufism, especially of its more universalistic variety.[xvi]

In another turn that could be associated with modern Sufism, Shahāb advocates for a sort of de-mystification of Sufism to take place since its practices are not highly secretive, albeit the fact that one’s personal experiences in general were not usually to be shared according to classical Sufi norms (1187). This perspective aligns with what scholar of Sufism, Carl Ernst, describes as “the publication of the secret” an increased tendency to publically disclose previously arcane teachings and practices among Sufi discourses as modernity came to impact Islamic societies (215-220). Factors behind this shift include the advent of print technologies and “print capitalism” as well as an exploding literate audience shaped by mass education, further amplified through international distribution, facilitating the dissemination of Sufi concepts through newspapers, magazines, and a

broadening literary culture in Muslim societies including novels and biographical works. This tendency may be found in *Shahābnāma* and continues to expand among those already named within his literary circle, who popularize some previously arcane and esoteric teachings of Sufism in literary productions.

As for the extraordinary, supernatural, or fantastic elements of Shahāb's final chapter, the appending of this material featuring "spiritual" or "inner" experiences to the earlier more historical, political, or practical biographical narrative reminds me of at least one precedent in Urdu—the biography of Khwāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī (d. 1955) composed in the 1920s. This notable Sufi writer composed (1922) a "Lahūtī āp bītī" (spiritual autobiography) at the conclusion, of his *Āp bītī* (biography). In fact, his spiritual autobiography was subjected to criticism to the extent that Niẓāmī decided to have the two portions of the work—regular and spiritual—published separately in later editions (1925). To introduce the stand-alone edition of his final chapter—the spiritual autobiography—which is a pamphlet of some 20 pages, Niẓāmī explains in a preface entitled "Anā al-kull" (I am everything), that some readers of the earlier edition considered the work to be overly ecstatic (majzūbāna) or even heretical, therefore he deemed it preferable to preserve it from the eyes of those who would not understand and thereby be perplexed or even worse (Nizāmī 2).

As for the approach to Sufism found in the *Shahābnāma*, the Islamic nature of the practices and experiences described by Shahāb do not seem to be controversial, and the authorities whom he cites as sources and inspirations include the famous Deobandi-affiliated scholars who are also considered Sufi guides, Imdādullāh Muḥājir Makkī (d. 1899) and Ashraf 'Alī Thanvī (d. 1943). Shahāb also mentions that he began his own study of Sufism with the classic work of Shahābuddīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1234), '*Awārif al-Ma'ārif*, a manual beloved by the Sufis of the sub-continent and especially popular among Chishtī Sufis (1179). In addition, the Chishtī Sufi master of the past, Quṭbuddīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, whose shrine is in Delhi, was said to have appeared to Shahāb in a dream and acts as an inspiration to him (1182). Then, in the final section of the final chapter Shahāb cites a maxim of Kākī in the context of his own sense of still being at the most basic level of spiritual progress. The Sufi said, "On this path persistence itself is the precious jewel that is sought (gawhar-i maqṣūd). This road has no end (1195)!"

As a further observation, all of the Sufi orders (tariqas) and lineages are portrayed by Shahāb as being part of one path, and in fact, his personal affiliation to Sufism was not through initiation by a living Murshid in any one order but rather through an Uvaysī connection, that is, he directly received inspiration and transmission from a Sufi saint by means of dreams or visionary experience. These factors could also be taken as representing certain trends in global Sufism in the latter part of the 20th century, for

example, the phenomena of "post-tariqa" Sufism, where initiation into and identification with a specific Sufi order is no longer required.

Shahāb consistently presents Sufism as being completely grounded in the sharīʿa, and the litanies and supplications that he recommends in the final pages are such as could be found in pious Sufi literature and even non-Sufi devotional works, primarily consisting of Arabic and Qur'anic phrases. The practice of sending blessings on the Prophet, regular ritual prayer, and reading and reflecting on the Qur'an are early and fundamental pillars of Shahāb's personal religious practice. In fact, Sufism is at times portrayed by Shahāb as the entry point or literally, a "kindergarten," in the progression of Islamic values (1178). This stands in contrast to the usual sense of Sufism, at least among Sufis, as being the highest reality or *ḥaqīqah* of spiritual progress. While this may indeed have been Shahāb's experience, it also seems likely that in the Islamicizing ideology of Pakistan during the 1980s, this was the most politically acceptable formulation.

Shahāb's view of Sufism and *sharī'a* is at one point presented through an interesting literary analogy:

> Initially I could be counted as one of those easygoing types who were apprehensive regarding the bonds of the routine and discipline of the sharī'a. During this period the new style of "free verse" *(āzād naẓm)* had emerged within Urdu literature. My limited perspective and naïveté led me to embrace the immature idea that verses devoid of rhyme and pattern, whether in long or short lines, despite their obvious dissonance due to lacking rhythm, prosody, and meter, could still be counted as legitimate expressions of the poetic art. In the same manner, merely by maintaining ritual prayer and fasting while choosing to let go of all of the other restrictions of the sharīʿa, [for a time I thought that] I could still have the right to be considered a good Muslim. Thank God that in those days the trend toward prose poetry *(nasrī naẓm)* had not yet taken hold, otherwise I might have even thrown off the requirement to pray and fast (1179)!

Qudratullāh Shahāb was a man of his times and the Sufism of Pakistan during the post-Partition decades cannot be viewed in isolation from the changing political and cultural currents under successive regimes. A pioneering article by my University of Chicago and Berkeley Urdu program colleague, Katherine Ewing, considered the changing portrayals of historical Sufis and their roles according to ideological propensities of successive Pakistan government regimes through analyzing the government approved promotional pamphlets associated with Sufi shrine activities issued respectively during the Ayub Khan, Zulfiqar ʻAli Bhutto, and, to an extent, the Zia-ul-Haq periods. As part of her anthropological study, Ewing observed that:

> In 1976-1977, when the primary research for this study was conducted, several justices of the Lahore High Court were devout followers of various pirs and were intensely interested in Sufism. This was also true of army generals, police officials, a former chief minister of the Punjab, authors, businessmen, and other members of the Western-educated elite of Pakistan. Thus, many government servants who publicly participated in the rituals at the shrines were in fact practitioners of Sufism themselves (265).

One can appreciate that the Sufism of the *Shahābnāma* also reflects some of these evolving trends In Pakistan, and in fact the work itself is amenable to a range of receptions, which leads to both appreciations and critiques of the representation of Sufi spirituality within the text on the part of those who have either extolled or criticized these Sufi aspects of the work.

[i] Riffat Mālik "Qudratullāh Shahāb: Ṣawāniḥ o ādābī khidmāt". (Qudratullāh Shahāb: Life and Literary Work). Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Urdu. Punjab University, 2012, discusses Mumtāz Muftī and Ashfaq Ahmad's association with Shahāb, pp. 323 -325. All three as well as Wāṣif 'Alī Wāṣif are mentioned as close friends in the opening remarks to the *Shahābnāma*, 12.

[ii] I would like to mention that the four of us travelled together to Pakpattan to visit the shrine of Bābā Farīd there.

[iii] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, in particular, has been interested in exploring the relationship between Sufism and modernism in Pakistan. *Islam in Pakistan*, 195-225 and in this context considered some aspects of the *Shahābnāma*.

[iv] The original article was first published in 1986. I owe discovering this source to Qamar Abbas's review "Qudratullah Shahab". *Jang Sunday Magazine*. July 12, 2020. https://jang.com.pk/news/792470 Accessed July 11, 2021.

[v] Eric Roose, "Dargāh or Buddha? The Politics of Building a Sufi Sanctuary for Hazrat Inayat Khan in the West." *Journal of Sufi Studies*. 1, 193-223 discusses the history and design of this center.

[vi] For background on Musharaff Khan see Karin Jironet, *Sufi Mysticism into the West: Life and Leadership of Hazrat Inayat Khan's Brothers 1927-1967*. (Leuven: Peeters, 2009) and Khan's own memoir, *Pages in the life of a Sufi*. (Den Haag: East West Publications, 1982).

[vii] Shahāb took a critical interest in European Orientalists and their representation of Islam, for example, Snouck Hurgronje (d. 1936), *Shahābnāma* pp. 553-4.

[viii] *Shahābnāma*, 1064. An enduring interest in such matters is reflected in Mumtāz Muftī's accounts of Shahāb in *Alakh nagarī*, for example, associations with a "Seer" in Karachi pp. 415ff, acceptance of predictions based on numerology ('ilm-e jafr), pp. 548-9, etc.

[ix] Wilhelm Tenhaeff (1894–1981) was appointed in 1953 at Utrecht University and in the 1970s and 1980s parapsychology was accorded its own research laboratory at the university within the division of psychology. For more on this institution see Ingrid Kloosterman. "Psychical Research and Parapsychology Interpreted: Suggestions from the International Historiography of Psychical Research and Parapsychology for Investigating Its History in the Netherlands." *History of the Human Sciences* 25, no. 2 (April 2012): 2–22.

[x] Kākī (d. (1235), was a prominent saint in the Chishtī Sufi order.
[xi] Some aspects of this correspondence are reminiscent of the founder of Theosophy, Helena Blavatsky, receiving written communications from disembodied spiritual masters (Mahatmas) that mysteriously appeared in a cupboard and elsewhere while she was in Madras.
[xii] This is an allusion to Shahāb's spiritual connection to the Prophet.
[xiii] Marcia Hermansen. "American Sufis and American Islam: From Private Spirituality to the Public Sphere" in *Islamic Movements and Islam in the Multicultural World: Islamic Movements and Formation of Islamic Ideologies in the Information Age*. (Kazan: Russian Federation, Kazan Federal University Publishing House, 2014), 189-208.
[xiv] A discussion of this trend may be found in Marcia Hermansen. "Beyond East Meets West: Space and Simultaneity in Post-Millennial Western Sufi Auto-Biographical Writings" in *Sufism East and West: Mystical Islam and Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Modern World*. Jamal Malik and Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh (Eds.) (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 149-179.
[xv] For more on the historical development of Western Esotericism and its discourses, especially in response to modernity, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Readers of this chapter might be interested to know that the study of esoteric currents in the West, including Islamic and Sufi elements, has undergone an academic revival since the 1990s. One of the main centers is at the University of Amsterdam, suggesting that there is some continuity in the Netherlands of interests in such topics.
[xvi] On universal or "perennial" Sufism, along with other contemporary trends see M. Hermansen, "American Sufis and American Islam," 191-2. For a nuanced explanation of distinctions across universalist and Traditionalist Sufis see Francesco Piraino, "'Islamic humanism': another form of universalism in contemporary Sufism", in *Religion* 53 (2, 2023): 246-268.

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