

## Hajj to the Heart: Sufi Journeys across the Indian Ocean

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Hajj to the Heart: Sufi Journeys across the Indian Ocean**, by Scott Kugle, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2021, xviii+303 pp., \$32.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4696-6531-3, [https://doi.org/10.5149/9781469665320\\_Kugle](https://doi.org/10.5149/9781469665320_Kugle)

Scott Kugle's latest book is a welcome addition to the history of South Asian Sufism and reform movements. It documents the life of 'Alī Muttaqī (1480–1567) and the Muttaqī community over three generations, including his immediate disciple 'Abd al-Wahhāb Muttaqī (d. 1593), along with Muḥammad ibn Ṭāhir Pātānī (d. 1578) and 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī (d. 1642). Kugle's writing is fluid and accessible, which complements the genre of history he pursues, viz., biography directed at social history. At times, one has a sense of reading an historical fiction rather than an academic history of a *longue durée* that explores social dynamics, power structures and political conflicts. Of course, it helps that Kugle explicitly fictionalizes a few historical accounts at the beginning of each chapter (six 'satchels', as he calls them). This style of writing not only draws the reader in, but also shapes how the rest of the satchel is read, calling one 'to imagine [the historical sources] afresh through prose that is more novelistic' (11). This is Kugle's intention, to be sure, as he details in the Introduction (esp. 10–11).

'Alī Muttaqī and his three primary followers moved back and forth between Gujarat and Arabia, promoting a reformist Sufism fusing 'hadith studies, juridical principles (*qawā'id*) and Sufi discipline (*adab*) in an ethical program with scholarly, political, and spiritual dimensions' (5). The Muttaqī community is largely forgotten, but Kugle demonstrates its impact in shaping seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Islamic reformism and revivalism. Indeed, it is this later reformism that is considered historically important by scholars; and yet, as Kugle notes, the Muttaqī community 'was actively engaged in Islamic reform, in the interstices between Gujarat and Mecca, long before the term "reform" gained wide currency and scholarly recognition' (238). As a contribution to the historiography – especially social history – of reform Sufism between South Asia and Arabia, Kugle has offered a much-needed intervention. But his book does so much more.

At stake between the Muttaqī community and their fellow Muslims is the definition of 'piety' and how it is expressed in the spaces between devotion and scholarly pursuits, between Sufi spiritual stations and states and political involvement. Kugle therefore also offers an attentive exploration of the subtleties suffusing Sufi discourses between ecstatic exclamations and claims of supra-revelatory knowledge on the one hand, and proper *adab* and the limits of the *sharī'a* on the other. How one defined piety shaped how one conceptualized saintly authority. If ecstatic statements exemplify piety, then the more extreme the statements, the more authority the community will attribute to the Sufi. If strict adherence to the ins and outs of the *sharī'a*, void of any inner spiritual development, exemplifies piety, then the harsher the legal judgement of a Muslim, the more authority the community will perceive him to have. As Kugle notes, the Muttaqī community, viewed through the writings of 'Alī Muttaqī, 'Abd al-Wahhāb Muttaqī and 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, aimed to bring together, balance and harmonize these two extremes.

Kugle therefore traces the intellectual history, including treatises, letters, chronicles and more, of the Muttaqī community as it travelled between Arabia and Gujarat, which in the long sixteenth century thrived as a sultanate and later as an important province of the

Mughal Empire. He brings together both inter-Muslim and intra-Sufi histories. That is, he recounts the centrality of Sufi support for Muslim political rulers as well as the debates over the centrality of Hadith studies within Sufi communities. But, as Kugle demonstrates, for the Muttaqī community, these are merely two sides of the same reformist, Sufi coin.

To do this, Kugle draws on manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, such as ‘Ali Muttaqī’s original writings and oral discourses and ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s letters to Mughal grandees and critiques of the Naqshbandi revivalist Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624). This social history employs – impressively – 50 manuscript books and other archival sources in India, Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, Europe and North America. Relatedly, readers will be grateful that this book is available digitally and gratis through an open-access expanded edition in a partnership between the University of North Carolina Press and the Emory Center for Digital Scholarship. Kugle has provided multimedia resources such as images of architecture and paintings related to the Muttaqī community and, furthermore, the enhanced, open-access edition has three additional appendices (translations of ‘Epistle on the Death of Self-Will’ by Ahmad Zarruq, ‘Commentary by ‘Ali Muttaqī on Zarruq’s Epistle’, and ‘Letter by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Muhaddith Dihlawī’) along with images of archival, manuscript material.

The First Satchel recounts the childhood, adolescence and early educational and spiritual development of ‘Ali Muttaqī in his ancestral land of Khāndēsh. Its capital, Burhānpūr, was suffused with Chishti Sufism, which ‘Ali Muttaqī ultimately rejected. The routinized forms of ecstasy common among Chishti Sufis was unattractive to him. Instead, he sought out a form of saintly authority that was not ‘inherited by carrying out a tradition but rather ... acquired through preparation and labor’ (15). Kugle therefore explores the Chishti background that shaped ‘Ali Muttaqī’s adolescence and spiritual development and explains why and how he ultimately rejected it. He then experimented with other forms of authenticity, rooted in *taqwā* understood less as contemplative *dhikr* and ecstatic sayings and more as the practice of a *dhikr* that ‘included acts of teaching, social service, and charity’ and ‘scrupulous observation of the *sharī‘a*’ (37). However, his version of *taqwā* was grounded in a Sufi discipline that renounced the arrogant ego and aspired, paradoxically, to the death of self-will. ‘Ali Muttaqī settled in Ahmedabad and continued a ‘practice of alienation’ (44), socializing with a few companions and maintaining a small community. In a twist of irony, perhaps, even though ‘Ali Muttaqī did not seek out fame, but rather lived reclusively, his piety eventually attracted the attention of both popular and elite circles. This satchel closes by recounting ‘Ali Muttaqī’s meeting with Sultan Bahadur Shah, who had requested an audience. ‘Ali Muttaqī regarded the Sultan as decadent, gave him strong advice, and refused royal gifts, but he nevertheless earned the Sultan’s trust and ‘became a patron and advisor to Sultan Bahadur Shah, showing that he understood himself to be one of the saintly pillars of the sultanate of Gujarat’ (45).

The First Satchel sets out how the Muttaqī community, through ‘Ali Muttaqī, became a political and social force across the maritime zone of the Indian Ocean, between Arabia and Gujarat. The remaining five satchels explore the ups and downs of the Muttaqī community through three generations. I leave readers to explore the details of their travels to and from Mecca and their critical engagement with other Sufis and popular movements. In the remainder of this review, I offer broader observations and comments on the import of Kugle’s book.

First, Kugle’s presentation of the Muttaqī community’s theological and political thought underscores the ongoing corrective to Orientalist assumptions that there was a sharp and oppositional contrast between, on the one hand, spiritual practice and Sufi-philosophical theory and, on the other, Hadith studies, socio-political involvement and attention to ethics and the *sharī‘a*. The Muttaqī community attempted to balance the two, neither

rejecting Sufi *adab* nor accepting claims to supra-revelatory knowledge, direct access to God, superiority to the Prophet Muhammad, claims to being the Mahdī, etc. Regarding the last, ‘Ali Muttaqī rejected claims by Shattari Sufis and the Mahdawi movement, for example, because, according to his reformist Sufism, ‘no vertical dimension of authority could be claimed directly from the divine that marginalized the historic traces of the Prophet Muhammad’s personage as contained in scripture, elaborated in legal norms, and embodied in Sufi lineages’ (163). Nonetheless, the Muttaqī community gainsays any assumption – often sourced in Orientalist discourse – that Sufis were politically quietist or uninvolved in social projects. Nothing can be further from the truth for the Muttaqī community, who were involved both in constructing a socially just community shaped by charity and care for neighbour and in advising political leaders (which often got them ensnared in political machinations).

Second, though Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) is mentioned infrequently by Kugle, his study confirms once again the formative and constitutive impact of his school of on post-classical Islamic thought and its place within reform movements. ‘Ali Muttaqī himself joins an ongoing debate, a community of disagreement as much as agreement, over the place of *wahdat al-wujūd*, the popular reception and refraction of Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmological and philosophical ideas in Persian Sufi poetry, South Asian Sufism and devotional music, and Islamic theological works. Kugle notes that ‘Ali Muttaqī ‘did not oppose these ideas in their essence but rather decried their popularization as an independent religious ideology’ divorced from the Qur’an, Hadith and Islamic legal tradition: only an elite few who studied these discourses and whose ‘loyalty to the outward structure of the *sharī’a* was beyond question ... were qualified to discourse on [these] subtle cosmological issues’ (89–90).

Third, and related to the first two, this study underscores the ongoing debate on defining *taqwā* and saintly authority. This debate is present from the Early Piety Movement of the first few centuries AH, flourishes in the classical period and remains central in the post-classical (and post-Ibn ‘Arabī) and early modern periods. Alluded to by Kugle, this debate is a *very qur’anic* debate, since the Recitation consistently reminds its audience that all humans are both equally capable of, and equitably judged by, *taqwā* first and foremost. It is therefore unsurprising that this debate shapes reformist Sufism in the long sixteenth century, which, as Kugle notes, ultimately ends up framing the reform movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Fourth, it follows that ‘in the era of the Muttaqī community, reform was driven by Sufi communities, and they argued over its contours and limitations through their own technical vocabulary’ (235). In a way, all reform during this period was Sufi reform, mainly because Sufism remained central to lived religion as much as to elite discourse.

Fifth, and already mentioned, Kugle demonstrates how the Muttaqī community shaped early modern and modern reform movements. Theirs was, as it were, a reform movement *avant la lettre*. For example, Kugle shows how Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762) ‘built upon the foundations set by ‘Ali Muttaqī’ and how scholars have ‘exaggerated the importance of Ahmad Sirhindi’ (240) while ignoring ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s impact. Likewise, ‘current scholarship on the influential Deobandi reform movement and its emphasis on hadith studies elucidates its Sufi origins’; however, Kugle demonstrates that this movement ‘had its roots in the Muttaqi community three centuries earlier’ (240).

Much more can be said regarding Kugle’s lively social history of the Muttaqī community written in accessible and mellifluous prose. His book constructs a bridge between the post-classical and the early modern periods, but, more than anything, given the five points above, it seems scholars must continue to reimagine historical periodization. Many of the debates in which the Mattaḳī community participated are extensions of ongoing disagreements between Muslims shaped by Sufi-coloured piety – beginning with the Early Piety

Movement. True, these debates explore different questions and are shaped by changing historical contexts, especially determined by the relative impact of Sufi saints on political leadership and social movements. Novel questions are asked as new social contexts are encountered, of course. However, 'reform' is an equivocal term. It can define historical moments in which movements, such as seventeenth- and eighteenth-century reform movements, achieved stronger socio-political power. However, it can also describe the ongoing debates among Sufis, which is to say among Muslims in general from the classical to early modern period, negotiating the inner (*bāṭin*) and outer (*ẓāhir*) meanings of Islamic revelation. Sufis are less a community of agreement than they are a community of disagreement over the definition and place of Sufi ideas, concepts and practices in Muslim lived religion and political governance.

Finally, this book should remind us of just how much work needs to be done in writing intellectual history between the late post-classical and early modern periods. Kugle examined 50 manuscript books for this project, which writes the history of *one* particular community within *one* maritime zone and over *one* long century. From West Africa to South Asia, Indonesia and beyond, there is much more Islamic intellectual history to be written, a history neglected for far too long precisely because of Eurocentric and Christian-centric concerns that have prioritized the classical period. I am grateful to Kugle for filling in part of that gap.

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