has composed a work of central importance in the study of Shi‘ism specifically and Middle Eastern studies in general.

Ali J. Hussain


Arranged both thematically and chronologically, *Sufi Martyrs of Love* is a historical analysis of the hagiographical and historiographical tradition of the Chishti Sufi [Chishti Šûf] order that does not result in either “advocacy or reductionism” but rather, in a pregnant tension of compromised ideals and apparent paradoxes and contradictions that, according to the authors, most accurately describe Sufi practices, their social contexts, and the Chishti quest for union with God (p. 48). Indebted to the scholarship of the late K.A. Nizami, Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence provide their readers with an example of sound scholarship by maintaining a critical eye while simultaneously remaining faithful to the spiritual integrity of the Chishti tradition. In their investigation into the Chishti Order, from its Indo-Persian origins to its subsequent global outreach, they also provide a critical analysis of the study of Sufism in general. The authors do not limit themselves to a “golden age” of Chishti spirituality as some scholars do. On the contrary, by refuting the oft-used concept itself, they are persistent in their depiction of Chishti spirituality not only as a vibrant historical phenomenon, but also as an enduring and contemporary one. In fact, the “Beyond” of the subtitle foreshadows the authors’ treatment of contemporary varieties of Chishti spirituality to be found globally as well as in cyberspace.

Ernst and Lawrence provide the rationale for their methodology in the *Introduction*, pointing out that most English-language materials on South Asian Sufism, particularly studies on the Chishtiyya [Chishtiyyah], are limited only to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Therefore, the authors privilege Persian and Urdu texts, translated into English, in an attempt to convey the self-interpretation of the Chishtiyya. Finally, stating that the Chishtiyya is “at once transnational and transcreedal”, the authors introduce
the recurrent theme of paradox and tension that will characterize the Chishtiyya throughout the rest of the book (p. 8).

It is in Chapter 1 that the authors suggest their alternative to the standard tri-partite periodization – ancient, medieval, and modern – of Islamic and Sufi history. Their five divisions of two early periods followed by three cycles are a better measure of the growth, transformation, and faithfulness to Chishti values over the centuries. They continue by covering basic Sufi terminology (e.g., fanā’, baqā’, adab, etc.) in addition to summarizing the origins of Sufism and its institutionalization, including the lineage (silsilah) of the Chishtiyya order. The commonly cited tension “between truth regulated through law and practice (şari‘a) [Şari‘ah] and the creative expression of human longing to have a close personal experience of God (tariqa) [tariqah]” is nuanced by the authors who suggest that Sufism cannot be juxtaposed with orthodoxy without addressing the fact that the ‘ulama’ [‘ulâm] ecstatic dervishes, and qalandars have had among their constituents individuals belonging to more than one of these categories simultaneously (p. 18). The typical academic proclivity to contrast Islamic orthodoxy with Sufism is partly due to observation of practice, and therefore the subjects of Chapter 2 are the two central practices of the Chishtiyya – remembrance of God (zikr) and remembrance through listening to music (samā’). A historical overview of the arguments concerning these practices, e.g., the religious permissibility of samā’, attendance of initiated or uninitiated listeners, and the experience of different levels of ecstasy, is undertaken with references to Aḥmad Ghazâlî’s (d. 1126) Bawāriq al-ilmî (Gleams of Illumination), Uṣūl al-samâ’ written by Zarrâdî, a disciple of the foremost Chishti saint of Delhi, Niẓâm al-Dîn Awliyâ’ (d. 1325), and Hamîd al-Dîn Nâgaurî’s (d. 1274) Risalâh-i Samâ’.

In Chapter 3, Ernst and Lawrence demonstrate cutting edge scholarship when they address the role and process of hagiography in the Chishti tradition. They show how comparison and analysis of saints’ stories can be in creative tension with the stories themselves. The authors respect the “insider’s vision” and the dynamic relationship that it must have with an outsider’s perspective. They distinguish between “historical beginnings”, generally the concern of Western scholarship, and “transhistorical origins”, the focus of disciples and the work of hagiographers. The narrative histories of Shâh Mina (d. 1465) and ‘Abd al-Raḥmân (d. 1683) are analyzed in order to illustrate notions such as multiple initiations, the axis of a generation (quţb), spiritual authority, and the rooting of a local saint with the spiritual root of the Prophet Muḥammad, his companions and successors. This chapter has great
implications for research in sacred history and questions of historicity in a number of disciplines concerned with myth, sacred texts, and ritual.

By focusing on the biographies of Niżām al-Dīn Awliyā’, Ashraf Jahā’ī gir Simnānī (d. 1425), and Sayyid Zauqī [Dhawqī] Shāh (d. 1951) in Chapter 4, the authors examine the common traits and practices of Chishti masters. It is in this chapter that the theme of paradox is most evident and the saints’ lives become examples of both ideals, shaped partly by the hagiographers, and realities. Paradoxes such as scholarship and sainthood, prayerful solitude and commitment to charity, avoidance of secular authority or wealth while often being the recipients of their company and charity, apparent aloofness and care for disciples, and lastly, the tension of living an ascetic life and fulfilling one’s duty to family. Ernst and Lawrence draw on the work of Annemarie Schimmel and Simon Digby each of whom has compiled a list of the common traits found in medieval Sufi shaykhs. From these lists, the authors derive “a synthetic portrait of the recurrent paradoxes of sainthood” (p. 71) which becomes a signature quality of the Chishti masters. For example, with the help of multiple biographies, they uncover many situations in the life of Niżām al-Dīn in which he did not conform to the behavior considered proper for a Muslim or a Sufi master. Undaunted by the tensions that a paradoxical life may create for later generations and unlike the hagiographers, the authors indeed find that what determines a saint’s greatness is the way in which he confronts the paradox in his life. Given that this tension that often defines saintly life is often translated into a discourse on the religious legitimacy of an individual, Ernst and Lawrence provide an analysis much more sensitive to the real life demands on a Sufi master.

It is not until Chapter 5 which focuses on Chishti shrines and pilgrimage (ziyāra) that women become a subject of study. It certainly is no coincidence that they appear in this chapter since historically women comprise a large proportion of pilgrims visiting shrines. Historically, the religious practice of shrine pilgrimage has been declared by men in political and religious positions of power through the issuance of both royal decree and religious ruling to be prohibited for women. Ernst and Lawrence point out that these types of denunciations multiplied during the reform movements of the nineteenth century, including that of the Chishtiyya. The authors provide a first hand pilgrim’s account written by Jahanara [Jahā’ārā’], the daughter of the famous Shāh Jahā’, builder of the Taj Mahal. In this account, Jahanara offers not only a glimpse into a woman’s experience as a Sufi, albeit an elite woman, but also into that of a disciple rather than a master, a perspective generally lacking in most scholarship and perhaps in the annals of Sufism altogether. The rest of
the chapter addresses specific practices performed during shrine pilgrimage, the political controversies surrounding pilgrimage, and the physical maintenance of the shrines themselves. Unfortunately, the authors leave the women of the Chishtiyya at the shrines and ignore their presence and involvement in any other realm of Chishti practice. While a lack of textual documentation may excuse the authors from any serious consideration of women’s roles in medieval Chishti society, their failure to attend to recent contemporary women’s experience is not so easily forgiven. In fact, the mention of Murshida [Murshidah] Rabia Martin, herself a Chishti master and recognized successor to Hazrat Inayat Khan [Hazrat ‘Inayat Khān], is only that, a mention.

In Chapters 6 and 7, the authors refreshingly do not leave the reader basking in an illusion of the medieval glory or “golden age” of the Chishtiyya, but instead they carry him/her directly into the modern era. Refusing to partake in such “temporal provincialism”, Ernst and Lawrence allow the Nizamiyya [Nizāmiyyah] and Sabiriyya [Ṣābirīyyah] Chishti historiographers to tell their story of colonial and modern reformations as well as continuities with their past. The authors review the lives of Hasan Nizāmī, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvi, Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh, and Zauq Shāh in an attempt to illustrate each master’s connection with the first and second cycles of the five-part periodization outlined earlier, but also, just as importantly, they examine each master’s creative adaptation to modernity. Ernst and Lawrence complete their historical analysis of the Chishti Sufi order with a brief glimpse into the contemporary legacy of Hazrat Inayat Khan in Europe and America as well as the creative tension that exists between the original universalist message of the order and the present interest in its Islamic past.

Of interest to specialists are the appendices consisting of a Chishti calendar of saints’ death anniversaries (‘urs, pl. a’ras) and translated biographies of five major Chishti masters and four minor ones. A bibliography on the Chishtiyya in European languages in addition to a select bibliography in Persian and Urdu also will be of great value for the researcher. Ernst and Lawrence have produced a book that is of immense value not only to the study of the Chishtiyya, but also to the entire study of Sufism. Their ability to maintain a dialectic between Chishti self-interpretation and contemporary analytical perspectives marks a shift in scholarship for the better. The theme of contradiction, tension, and paradox in the lives of Chishti masters is skillfully presented and betray the subtler realities in the lives of the Chishti masters represented here. A truly accurate view of the Chishti order, of which the title suggests, would also require however an inquiry into the lives of
Chishti women and what the authors refer to as “lay disciples”, a silence prevalent in most scholarship on Sufism. Overall, the authors have offered a brilliant glimpse into the Chishti order through the lives of its masters.

Melinda Krokus

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