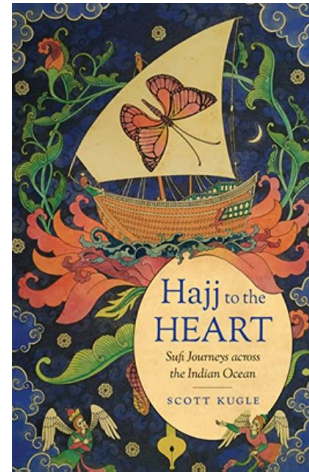


Book Reviews

Scott Kugle. *Hajj to the Heart: Sufi Journeys Across the Indian Ocean*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. Pp. 324. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6531-3. Paperback. \$32.95.

Disparate documents in far-flung archives complicate historical narratives. Based on such hugely scattered material, *Hajj to the Heart* manages to present us with an engaging and seamless travelogue. Its protagonists are pilgrims who shunned the overland route from South Asia to the Middle East, but the work transforms from simple sea voyages into complex intellectual journeys, sometimes slowed by political hurdles. Before realization hits home, the reader is surprised to find that the markers in their itinerary were spiritual genealogies all along. Through this, we trace the Sufi lineage of ‘Alī Muttaqī, who melded together *ḥadīth*, Qur’ānic studies, and Sufism in the sixteenth century.



As we all know, *ḥajj* is a requirement for Muslims to travel to Mecca, a journey to the spiritual and geographic epicentre of Islam, and an essential thread of the narrative web Scott Kugle weaves in his *Hajj to the Heart*. His introduction, “Perilous Pilgrimage and Interconnected Lives,” opens with a powerful vignette that plunges the reader into the perilous journey from Mumbai to Mecca. The hero is no ordinary person, as his books are dearer to him than his own life. They become buried treasure and resurface miraculously when wayside robbers dig them up from where the traveller had buried his books, and while offering them for sale in the bazaar, the robbers end up selling them back to their real owner.

The book revolves around a discourse on trends in Sufism, the importance of *ḥadīth*, and repeated Qur’ānic references to the

* <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v61i3.2529>

interconnections of intellect, emotion, and the physicality of the heart, soul, mind, and body. The Qur'ān says, "Those who honour the sacred rites of God should do so from sincere piety of heart."¹ The introduction outlines his protagonists' travel plans in all these various forms. This is the landscape they traverse in terms of geography, time, religious principles, and inward travel to the heart. As Kugle explains, he arranged his chapters as satchels that the main protagonists, 'Alī Muttaqī and his followers, carry during all their physical and metaphysical pilgrimages.

The travel plans involve multiple forms of the journey. The protagonists' domestic travel occurs within South Asia, mainly between Gujarat and Delhi. Their international expeditions are between the two continents of Asia and the Middle East, with stops in cities like Damascus, and with Mecca as a final destination. These travellers' spiritual odysseys practised 'Alī Muttaqī's principles. Politics intervened, sometimes brutally, by placing obstacles in their path and even threatening their lives. Ideological excursions become highlighted when 'Alī Muttaqī and his followers present to us their specific worldview within the realm of Islam. The pilgrims' journeys were thus domestic, international, spiritual, political, and ideological.

Kugle begins each chapter with a quotation that describes the contents of the satchel. He then spins a short tale using historical records. The history is accurate, though not necessarily verifiable word-for-word by documented material. In short, 'Alī Muttaqī is the fountainhead of the spiritual house discussed in *Hajj to the Heart*. Orthodox in their own beliefs, the worldview of this spiritual house differs from the majority of Indian Muslim Sufis on the spiritual path.

Shaykh 'Alī Muttaqī's full name was 'Alī b. Ḥusām al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Mālik b. Qādī 'l-Hind al-Muttaqī (1480–1567). 'Alī Muttaqī revived *ḥadīth* studies, founded an important *madrasah* in Mughal Delhi, and untiringly propounded the integral connection between Islamic law and Sufi mysticism. His teachings are available in the 50 books he wrote as well as numerous other works about him. Kugle scanned almost all these published and unpublished documents in the three main languages of Urdu, Arabic and Persian. He travelled to India, Pakistan, Türkiye, Egypt, Europe, and the USA to locate, read and translate these works. It is a pleasure to read these and his rhyming translations of poems. 'Alī Muttaqī first arrived in Mecca in 1535 (p. 6) and later crossed the Arabian Sea five times (p. 7). During the next century and a half, three generations of his followers used the seas to follow his example and propound his teachings.

¹ Qur'ān 22:37.

The first satchel, “Ali Muttaqi’s Growth,” delves into several aspects of his specific mesh of Qur’ān, *ḥadīth*, Sufism, morality, and aesthetics. Sufism is not only “death of the will” (p. 27). It also requires following *qawā’id*, *adab*, *akhlāq*, and more. ‘Alī Muttaqī explains the *qawā’id* or juridical principles that are to be followed. He also does a deep dive into *adab* that he defines as a Sufi discipline (p. 5). *Adab* in its normal sense is a traditional code of behaviour for South Asian Muslims, its geographic centres being Lucknow and the Deccan. *Akhlāq*, or ethics, are equally important (p. 21). Along with *adab*, *akhlāq* require moral discipline. According to ‘Alī Muttaqī, it is the Muslims’ “higher ethical duty to stay local in both place and style than . . . to adopt Arabizing airs” (p. 22). This would occur if one abandoned *adab* and *akhlāq* in the pursuit of *qawā’id* alone.

In the second satchel, “Ali Muttaqi’s Exile,” we learn that he felt at home in the intellectual milieu that he encountered abroad. These were practising reform-oriented Sufis concentrated in Cairo and Mecca, who were simultaneously scholars and jurists. Kugle remarks, “In this atmosphere, he was able to combine *ḥadīth* studies and Sufi devotion in ways that were impossible in Gujarat. By combining them, he sought to transform both” (p. 59). ‘Alī Muttaqī succeeded in this goal with influential persons by his “silently persuading al-Haythamī, his apparent superior and teacher in *ḥadīth* sittings to become his discipline through a Sufi initiation. This was an astounding feat since al-Haythamī [had written a] work titled ‘Refraining the Riffraff from Forbidden Frivolities and Musical Sessions’” (p. 59). In his words, ‘Alī Muttaqī would appear to be a traditional Qur’ānic scholar:

The Sufis consign themselves to drowning in absorption with the divine, while the scholar reaches out his hand to pull up the drowning man and save him! He went on to hold that it is the ignorant one among the Sufis who claimed to carry out devotions or follow a saint without authenticating their actions with scriptural knowledge . . . as if they were the enemies of scholars, and of knowledge itself, claiming it is injurious to their faith. (p. 61, 63)

Given his mastery of Qur’ānic injunctions and *ḥadīth* maxims, ‘Alī Muttaqī was adamant that his disciples start their studies with the linguistic, scriptural, and legal niceties of Islam. Outer knowledge or *qawā’id* were to be grasped and inner knowledge, *akhlāq* would follow (p. 67). He even used the strict Zurrūq texts of the *Uṣūlī* approach. Meanwhile, students residing in his *madrasah-cum-khānqāh* realized after a year that “their spiritual training had already begun” (p. 69).

It is, therefore, no wonder, as we learn in the third satchel, “Ali Muttaqi’s Maturity,” that “the Qur’ān is a love letter from God” (p. 88).

Such lyrical teachings gave him fame across the Muslim world. Sulaimān the Magnificent of Türkiye was so moved that he granted ‘Alī Muttaqī a yearly stipend (p. 113). Nevertheless, he remained humble and aware of the perils of al-Ḥallāj-types misunderstanding the Sufi approach:

He feared that . . . Sufis might be seen as giving direct access to God. This would open the possibility for ambitious religious seekers to claim direct connection to God without reference to the Prophet Muhammad and the revelation he relayed. (p. 90)

The fourth satchel, “‘Ali Muttaqī’s Mission,” informs in a nutshell of his innovations in the spiritual realm. These were influenced by his many land and sea voyages, including two years in Multan (p. 141). It was “Muttaqī [who] developed the concept of *istidrāj* or spiritual backsliding” (p. 127). It is in this satchel that Kugle’s narrative gears up to shake off the South Asian perchance for alliteration in which he is so immersed: “Ideas and ideals; burdens that he bore” (p. 7), “contradictions and conflicts (p. 15), “rejoining of piety and propriety, fervor and fluency, reverence and refinement” (p. 21), “flesh and feeling” (p. 32), “containing confrontations and conflicts” (p. 119), and “dead ends, disasters, disappointments” (p. 192). He also relies upon the word “temper” (pp. 102, 104, 182, 202, 223).

Kugle ably brings forth the difference between Mughal and local Sufi schools. Mughals like emperor Humāyūn “imported” the Central Asian Naqshbandī Sufis as opposed to the Chishtī, Suhrawardī, and local Shaṭṭārī leaders (p. 136). Kugle goes further than recent scholars, like Aditya Bhel, to show ideological differences among local Sufis, as the Shattaris undermined ‘Alī Muttaqī’s reformist work (p. 137). In turn, Gujarat’s Sultan sometimes acted on ‘Alī Muttaqī’s advice to suppress the Mahdawīs’ perceived threat to Sunnism.

The fifth satchel, “‘Ali Muttaqī’s Legacy,” details the spiritual journeys of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith Dihlawī (1551–1642), a third-generation spiritual follower of ‘Alī Muttaqī. As a Sufi, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s master, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, allowed people to find God in ‘Alī Muttaqī’s way. He also knew when to be flexible and with whom, cautioning ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq,

From becoming a Shāfi, [thus] ‘Abd al-Wahhāb [and ‘Alī Muttaqī’s] subverted his explicit policy that everyone should choose for themselves which legal method to follow rather than be a partisan of the method into which they were born. That the Shaykh blatantly disregarded his own policy reveals just how crucial he considered it that ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq remain a Ḥanafī so that he could viably return to South Asia as a reformer (p. 202).

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was to go on to become a most respected scholar with the same spiritual genealogy as ‘Alī Muttaqī. In true Sufi tradition, he was able to explain complex Islamic *qawā’id* by combining *ḥadīth* studies

with Sufism in the language and context of South Asia. He narrates a hair-raising tale of a tiger-hunter who becomes the hunted. The tiger suddenly turns and begins to chase the hunter. In desperation, the man leaps down a dry well, grabbing hanging straw to control his fall. But, to his horror, he sees a deadly serpent at the well's bottom while above him, mice begin to chew up his lifeline of straw. Unlike most writers, Kugle does us a great favour to interpret the metaphor. The mice represent time, the tiger is this world, and the serpent is damnation in the next world (p. 211).

The sixth satchel, "Ali Muttaqī's Memory," concludes *Hajj to the Heart*. It begins with another powerful story, this time 'Abd al-Ḥaqq formally presenting himself to the imperial court of the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr. The story is authentically based on Jahāngīr's royal memoir. The account is as fraught with danger as 'Alī Muttaqī's survival in the turbulent Arabian Sea one and half centuries earlier. One wonders if Kugle penned this deliberately or if it is a happy coincidence. With innumerable eyes upon him, including Queen Nūr Jahān's critical gaze from behind a curtain, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq pays his respects with great *adab* but without prostrating himself. He manages to answer both sovereigns' stern reprimands, even coaxing a smile from the mighty emperor. He also dares to give them advice and guidance in a slim book. The sovereigns again critique him, but he skillfully fends it off, to their pleasure. Finally, he refuses their valuable monetary return gift but sagaciously accepts it in the end. As a follow-up, he confronts Aḥmad Sirhindī, another favoured religious scholar, and again manages to avoid imperial wrath.

Kugle presents his painstaking translations of extractions from 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's works, that end with quotations from the Qur'ān. We go on to learn of the vast differences between the thoughts of the two Islamic scholars during Jahāngīr's times, Sirhindī and 'Abd al-Ḥaqq. Kugle ends his narrative by answering the question as to why 'Alī Muttaqī and his third-generation followers were forgotten. He finds his answers in their works which stressed *ḥadīth* studies within Sufism. 'Alī Muttaqī's works later went in two directions, "neither of which would be acceptable to him." One was Wahhabism and Ahl-i Ḥadīth, while the other was the formation of the Deoband Academy (p. 241). Both directions became anti-colonial in the nineteenth century and became anti-modernism in the form of fundamentalism in the twentieth century. However, they lack the Muttaqī movement's basic tenants such as *adab*. We have forgotten to deploy "refinement, virtue and respect" that were so dear to this movement—that was in every sense a *Hajj to the Heart* (p. 241).

The sea voyage from South Asia to Mecca and back adds a special touch to the travel narrative. These do not exclude the protagonists'

overland expeditions within South Asia as well as side trips out of Mecca to Damascus or Iran. However, as the book unfolds, it becomes clear that the story's binding theme goes far beyond travel to reach deep into genealogy. The Muttaqī school of thought also represented the enduring different *weltanschauung* of Delhi and southern India. Kugle alludes to this difference in the first satchel and again in the fourth. It would be good to know if he deliberately hints at this north-south dichotomy of views.

It is most interesting how Kugle defines the “long sixteenth century” which is of great interest to Euro-American historians (p. 8). This began with the Islamic millennium beginning on the 1st of Muharram 1000/October 19, 1591. It was looked forward to by Islamic schools a century earlier, 900/1495-96—the coming of the *Mahdī*. If he did not appear during this last period of humankind on earth, Muslims would give up Islam under an as-yet-to-be Christian emperor. Kugle informs us that Cornell Fleischer challenged historians to find parallels in other Islamic lands in contact with Christianity, such as the Safavid, Timurid, and Mughal contexts. Kugle took up this challenge head-on (p. 9). He mentions the appearance of a self-proclaimed *Mahdī* in Mecca who achieved a following in Gujarat by 1500, the two areas closely connected by the sea. However, the Muttaqī movement countered the Mahdist predictions by merging *ḥadīth* studies with Sufism. These masters had the authority of the *ḥadīth* to wage a powerful intellectual challenge to spurious discourse. In 1498, initiating European colonization, the Portuguese threatened Islamic empires. Centralizing states arose, like the Mughal, Safavid, and Ottoman empires (p. 9). Perhaps the resultant long sixteenth century ended with the beginning of the colonial era. It is a challenge for South Asian, especially Pakistani, historians to delimit periods in the local context.

Kugle's fusion of biography, hagiography, geography, politics, *ḥadīth*, Qur'ānic studies, and Sufism is also a heady lesson for most historians who usually rely exclusively upon archival material. To sum up, *Hajj to the Heart* is an intellectual treat, made sweeter by its open availability. The equally easily accessible expanded digit version with lush paintings and original texts is a sumptuous gift for the global public.

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