

UTE FALASCH, *Heiligkeit und Mobilität. Die Madāriyya Sufibruderschaft und ihr Gründer Badī' al-Dīn Shāh Madār in Indien, 15.–19. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2015. 286 pages, €29.90. ISBN 978-3-643-12916-1

Based on her dissertation at the Humboldt University in Berlin, Ute Falasch presents a very well researched historical study of the Indian Madariyya Sufi brotherhood, which includes brilliant comments on indigenous textual sources in Urdu and other languages as well as critical reviews of earlier essentialist approaches to Sufi studies. In her multi-layered investigation of complex religious and social patterns in the veneration of the Sufi saint Shah Madar and the formation and development of his brotherhood since the 15th century she aptly uses Talal Asad's view of Islam as a "discursive tradition". Apart from a couple of interviews conducted with local *pīrs* or caretakers of the saint's shrine (p. 286), as a historian the author relies on written sources based on oral traditions. Orality is, in fact, an important dimension of the Madari Sufi tradition as most of its adherents are illiterate and belong to the lower social strata of rural North Indian society.

After the introduction (chapter 1), chapter 2 deals with Shah Madar (died ca. 1434), a charismatic holy man whose shrine in Makanpur (not far from Kannauj in Uttar Pradesh) is visited by both Muslims and Hindus. Although the fakirs and dervishes attached to this popular Sufi brotherhood have the reputation of practising a sort of "free religious lifestyle" and promulgating a devotional piety characterized by elements of "folk Islam" and "informal Sufism", it is important to emphasize that their founder was not an antinomian Sufi, but a respected spiritual master venerated as a *qutb* ("axis", i.e. highest stage in the saintly hierarchy) since the 19th century. Following a well-written history of North Indian Sufism in the medieval period (2.2), the author describes Shah Madar's wanderings between Gujarat in the west and Jaunpur in the east, in the process commenting on the saint's Sufi networks (2.3), before focusing on his mystical concepts and spiritual teachings (2.4). This is rounded off by a critical and nuanced examination of the representations of Shah Madar in local hagiography (2.5).

Chapter 3 on the history of the Madariyya covers a major part of this work. Basically it is a case study on the social role of the *malangs*, i.e. the fakirs and dervishes devoted to Shah Madar, especially in the 18th century. It investigates the charismatic anti-colonial Madari movement, which was active mainly in Bengal and characterized by uprisings of armed *malangs* against the oppressive East India Company. Their resistance between 1770 and 1794 also attracted many landless peasants and impoverished craftsmen. Their object was to restore the economic conditions they enjoyed in the Mughal period, when they were given land and exempted from taxes. When *malangs* collected alms during their pilgrimages, they were persecuted by the army. In retaliation they plundered trading posts and local traders who cooperated with the British. In consequence, peripatetic dervishes were outlawed as "bandits" or "dacoits" (p. 186).

In the final chapter on the Madariyya in the 19th century Ute Falasch critically and insightfully reviews well-known historical works by Indian writers, European travellers, Orientalists and British ethnographers. In this context she also refers to Islamic reform movements whose proponents tried their best to eradicate the concrete ritual practice of vernacular shrine Islam in Muslim South Asia in general and in Makanpur in particular.

There are some inaccuracies in the text. For instance, on page 147 (note 38) Falasch writes: “Ein anderer Aspekt der Madāris bleibt weiterhin unklar. Der Begriff ‘Madāri’ wird verwendet für Gaukler, die häufig mit Affen und Bären von Jahrmarkt zu Jahrmarkt ziehen und mit den Tieren Kunststücke vorführen. [...] Die Frage, inwieweit sie aus der Tradition der *malang* hervorgegangen sein könnten, ist bisher offen. Ihr Name deutet darauf hin, jedoch wurde bei Interviews festgestellt, dass die Gaukler den Begriff ‘Madāri’ als Fremdbezeichnung ansehen, sich selbst aber als *qalandar* betrachten” (cf. pp. 54–56, 245). In this context she could have drawn on the transition between Qalandar dervishes and Qalandar peripatetic performers. As I have argued in my work *Journey to God. Sufis and Dervishes in Islam* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 115–120) the religious mendicancy of *qalandars*, *malangs* and other such Sufi groups can be understood as an occupational specialization of “gypsy-like” peripatetic groups exploiting an economic niche, a phenomenon already observed by anthropologists much earlier. In addition, the use of unclear or dated terms such as “ethnische Völker” (p. 197) and “Naturreligionen der Stämme” (p. 204) is irritating. The term for the close relationship between the *pīr* and his devotees is spelled *pīrī-murīdī* or *pīr-murīd* without the Persian *ezāfe* (see for example pp. 146, 151, 161/note 75). I also object to the expression “Bettelmönche” used throughout the study under review for Muslim fakirs (*faqīr*) and dervishes (*darwīsh*), as on the one hand this term seems loaded with Christian and Buddhist connotations and on the other highlights begging, whereas it would be more correct to refer to the acceptance of alms by the *malangs* of the Madariyya. However, these minor criticisms should not detract from the undisputed value of this work.

In conclusion it has to be emphasized that it is to the author’s credit that she has dedicated such a meticulous study to Shah Madar and his Sufi brotherhood. Historical research on this underestimated topic had long been neglected. The author rightly calls for anthropological fieldwork on this topic (p. 255), which should in my opinion include the shrine in Makanpur, the devotional religiosity of the Madari *malangs* as well as their material religious culture.

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