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Being-in-translation

Sufism in Sindh

Rita Kothari

Mudra Institute of Communications Ahmedabad

This paper is an attempt to understand how the convergence of different languages and religious traditions in the Sufi practice prevalent in Sindh reflects moments of hybridity, migrancy and translation. Sufism emerged in Sindh like a migrant text, constantly crossing borders, being carried over, as if in a state of translation. At the same time it refused to become a final target text and to be bound to a textuality identified with a single religion, language or territory. This state of being-in-translation helped create and sustain, for the most part, identities that were neither Hindu nor Muslim nor Sikh in an exclusivist sense.

Introduction

Translation constitutes un/willing movement from origins, a movement that leads to an experience for the original that is both rupturing and enriching. When Salman Rushdie refers to his tribe as “translated men” (1991: 17) he has in mind the consciousness of people who are not speaking from well-defined safe havens or homes. The colonised, the migrant, the exile—all speak from a context that cannot be defined clearly and unproblematically as the home or source. This results in the vulnerability and permeability of a migrant text/person/movement, constantly hybridised by the experience of translation. In simpler terms, movement and translation are bound together, leading to forms of experience that cannot be pinned down to a singular original identity. This flux is helped by translation and it also helps translation to happen, and it is my argument that such a state of constant translation makes for tolerance.¹

1. It is important to qualify what ‘tolerance’ means in this particular context, since the word has come to be sullied by an association with condescension and “willingness to “put up with” those things one rejects or opposes” (Sullivan et al 1993: 2; see also Farahad in this volume). I am using ‘tolerance’ to suggest empathetic and inclusive co-existence. Furthermore, I do not

This point is illustrated here through the example of Sufism in Sindh, a largely Muslim province in present-day Pakistan. Sufism—a mystical sub-movement of Islam that traces its origins back to the Prophet Muhammad and that has been localised into a folk, everyday experience of love and divinity—became one of the chief markers of a ‘Sindhi’ identity for both the Muslims *and* Hindus of Sindh. As a philosophy it inhabited multilingual and multi-religious worlds and created an effect profound enough to withstand the hatred evoked by Partition from India in 1947. This, I would argue, was made possible by the way *pirs* (Sufi teachers and masters) and poets of Sindh simply adapted the theology of Sufism to mean simple stories of love and surrender evolving out of Sindh, Punjab and Gujarat. The permeation of such stories of divine love from different languages and religions as diverse as Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism created Sindh’s version of Sufism as a composite reservoir of traditions that co-existed in multiplicity. It refused to become, once and for all, a fixed and final target text not through conscious strategies, but a non-hierarchical acceptance of multiplicity. This, to my mind, is ‘being-in-translation.’ The question would then be how did Sufism in Sindh escape reification? Subsequent discussion in this paper shows how Sindh, by virtue of being a frontier region, attracted immigrant people who brought diverse religions and multiple languages. Also, by being culturally and geographically distant from mainland India, the region evolved its own eclectic religious outlook without privileging any particular religious ideology (see Kothari 2007). We shall turn to Sindh again, but meanwhile what follows below is an overview of Sufism and its extended uses in the Indian subcontinent.

Sufism: Origins, tenets and movement

The origins of Sufism are generally attributed to Persia and Islam, although scholars also attribute additional influences from Hinduism, Neoplatonic and Christian sources. The spiritual descent of the Sufi masters can be traced in an unbroken chain back to the prophets, with Ali Bin Talib (599–661), the fourth Caliph and beloved of the Prophet, as the first Sufi. He marked the beginning of the first phase of Sufism (seventh to tenth centuries C.E.). In this classical context, the etymology of the word ‘Sufi’ lies in *suf* or wool. According to this meaning, a Sufi is one who has donned woollen clothes as a mark of ascetic pietism (see Burckhardt 1990: 15). In general, Sufis work to overcome the appetites and desires of the human body and thus purify the heart in preparation for union with God. The final goal is to become so close to God that human consciousness becomes totally absorbed in

posit ‘tolerance’ as a Sufi term, but one that I find appropriate to use for the version of Sufism described below.

godliness, a state imbued with the feeling that God is present everywhere and there is no ‘otherness’. This final state is known as *fana*—the annihilation of one’s self and its dissolution in the love of God. In Islamic history, the most celebrated Sufi to achieve this goal was the Persian mystic Mansur Al-Hallaj (858–922), who in a state of *fana* declared “I am Truth”. Although Hallaj had to pay with his life for what appeared to be heresy, by the twelfth century there was by and large a consensus that Hallaj need not have been punished, and the doctrine of *wahdat-al wujud* (the unity of being) had come to stay (Jotwani 1996: 2; also see Misra 2004).

Thus Sufism or *Tasawwuf* represents an esoteric part of Islam that emphasises direct knowledge of the eternal and the concept of *tariqah*, the path of union with God. It grew as an offshoot of *fiqh* (traditional Koranic jurisprudence) and traditions of the Prophet. At times, however, it is also in conflict with Koranic injunctions. When Sufism traveled from Mecca to Baghdad and on to India it underwent translation at each step, creating new local forms of Sufism while also retaining something of the old. Sufism’s relations with the Shariat (Islamic law) were thus variously defined, depending upon the thrust of each *silsila* (order) and the local culture.

The theological nuances of different Sufi orders are beyond my expertise and the scope of this paper, but it is possible to talk of certain tenets that are by and large common to Sufi beliefs around the world, such as the doctrine of ‘disinterested love of God’ first espoused by Rabia Basri, the first female Sufi. This was substantiated in her prayer where she asked to be burnt in hell or shut out from the gates of paradise if she sought God for fear of hell or hope of Paradise, but to be granted communion with God if “I worship thee for thine sake” (Vaswani 2002: 14). In Sufism this disinterested love can take the form of ecstatic longing, and it may also use human love as a metaphor for divine love. In the Sufism of Sindh, for instance, the concept of *ishq haqiqi* (earthly love) as a route to *ishq mizazi* (divine love) has been very frequently employed.

Sufi practices in the Indian subcontinent evolved in peculiar ways. These practices interacted with and were influenced by, among other things, the Bhakti (devotional) traditions of India. Bhakti focuses on unquestioning devotion to the point of annihilating selfhood, and Sufism also believes in surrender (*tawakkul*) to the divine will. Similarly, the Bhakti concept of *gnan* (knowledge) or *gnosis* corresponds to *ma’rifa* (direct knowledge of God) in Sufism. As noted above, one of the most enduring tenets of Sufism is *wahdat-al wujud* (the unity of all beings, and also a stage where the seeker and the sought become one), and it too has resonances in Bhakti poetry. In fact both Bhakti and Sufism became popular in the subcontinent through poetry, rather than a circulation of theology and social ideology. This is not to divest Sufism of its social practices. Sufism in the subcontinent (including Sindh) may be seen as a manifestation of what Ahmed and Reifeld (2004) call “lived Islam”. In regions as distant as Rajasthan and Karnataka, Kashmir

and Gujarat, Sri Lanka and Sindh, Islam redefined itself in opposition to the abstract theology of the Koran. Symbolically and anthropologically, this redefinition is manifest in common places of worship such as shrines with which both Hindus and Muslims affiliated themselves, thereby creating ‘fuzzy’ identities. At different times in different regions, such fuzziness has succumbed to more rigid forms of identity, and Sindh is no exception. Nevertheless, the concept of “Sindhayat” (a political and cultural assertion of being Sindhi) that has become the bedrock of anti-establishment Sindhi nationalism in Pakistan continues to embrace Sufism as a secular tradition of love and brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims.

Shades of such syncretic tradition were evident even during the testing times of Partition. Motilal Jotwani, the well-known (Hindu) Sindhi writer, begins his study of Sufism in Sindh by recounting a personal incident during Partition, an incident that helped sustain his scholarly interest in Sufi literature.

It was January 8, and I was barely 12 at that time. Our country had been divided into India and Pakistan on a narrow religious basis on August 14/15 1947. After the Partition communal frenzy raised its ugly head and cities ran amuck, their streets roaring ‘Allaho Akbar’ and ‘Har Har Mahadev.’ We were in Karachi those days, for my father had taken up a teaching job there. We lived in a rented set of two rooms in a building belonging to a devout Muslim. Things were never bad in Sindh before the Partition, for the people bred and brought up as they were on the Sindhi sufi soil, lived in peace and harmony. But on the fateful day of January 8, 1948, it looked like the world would come to an abrupt end for us. The rioters were at the gate and demanded of the house owner to quietly hand over all the kafirs (non-believers) in his premises. Huddled along with other members of the family in a small store room of the house, I waited with bated breath for destruction and death. I knew what could happen to us in such circumstances, but my younger brother and sister in the cellar would not quite know that they lurched between life and death. Presently our house-owner lied to them, saying, “The people you are looking for sailed to India yesterday.... The poor creatures couldn’t even take along with them their possessions Do you want their belongings?” (Jotwani 1996: vii) (my translation)

Jotwani then goes on to mention how the Muslim house-owner let the rioters take what they wanted, but spent the rest of the day singing songs of Kabir² with Jotwani’s father:

Main kahta hun ankhī dekhi
Tu kahta hai kagad ki lekhi
 I am saying from experiences of life
 You claim it’s written in sacred books. (Jotwani 1996: vii) (my translation)

2. Kabir (c. 1440–1518) was a mystic and poet revered by Muslims and Hindus alike.

Another writer, K. R. Malkani, a strong advocate of the Hindu nationalist organisation Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) in Sindh and later in India, also begins his book by recounting an incident. According to Malkani (1984: 4), a few days after Partition he and his RSS companions were stopped by an unknown Sindh Muslim woman who asked them, “Are you also going away? Of course, you are banias (traders), you will make money wherever you go. But Sindh will be empty without Hindus.” This kind of incident, in Malkani’s view, could have happened only in Sindh, where the longstanding tradition of Sufism kept communal hatred in check even in the heat of Partition.

When the Congress President, Acharya Kripalani, visited Sindh after Partition, he noticed that Sindh was calm on the whole and there were few instances of communal hatred (Kripalani 2004: 703). He too attributed this to a Sufi influence upon the Sindh Muslims. Sindh was a land in which “the Hindu ceased to be a Hindu, and the Muslim ceased to be a Muslim. Islam came to Sindh in the form of Sufism, Guru Nanak’s Sikhism came without its Khalsa element, all forms of religious thought changed their nature.” (Ramwani 1987: 136).

To understand this hybridity of Sufism in Sindh, we need to see why Sindh had non-textualised versions of Hinduism and Islam, so let us now turn to that topic.

Sindh: A region of Muslim *yogis* and Hindu Sufis

Geographically speaking, Sindh was a frontier region. Attached in its east and south to the margins of the Indian subcontinent and in its west to the Arab world, Sindh was exposed to influences from both sides. Prior to its conquest in 711 C.E. by the Syrian Arab Muhammad bin Qasim, Sindh had two dominant religions—Hinduism and Buddhism. Over the centuries, however, Sanskritic Hinduism in Sindh became considerably diluted because Sindh had more prolonged contact with Islam than did other regions in the subcontinent, whereas its exposure to Hinduism came in spurts, as and when local Hindu rulers (such as the Sumras and Sammas³) ruled Sindh. The province was also exposed to diverse practices of Islam through migrants from Iran, Iraq, Baluchistan and other parts of West Asia. According to David Cheesman (1997), all this made Sindh a country of immigrants, and this is largely why it has had fluid religious identities. From the fourteenth century onwards, the Hindus and Muslims of Sindh also responded to Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the Sikh founder whose teachings were simple and soothing.

3. The Sumra dynasty ruled Sindh in the eleventh to twelfth centuries, while the Samma dynasty ruled Sindh and neighbouring areas from 1351 to 1551 C.E.

Nanak appealed to the householder and did not prescribe a set of rituals (see Thapan 2005: 210).

As a consequence, Sindh gave rise to hybrid identities, making it possible to find Sindhi Hindus worshipping the traditional Hindu pantheon of Gods and also visiting *dargahs* and *gurudwaras* (i.e., places of worship used by Muslims and Sikhs respectively). It is equally possible to find Muslims imbued with love for Guru Nanak and Hindu *yogis*. In fact, such eclectic religious practices of the Sindhis, and especially the Sindhi Hindus (who migrated to India during Partition), made mainstream Hindus in Gujarat and Rajasthan doubt their Hinduism (see Kothari 2007). This legacy of hybridity and non-fixity (what I prefer to call ‘being-in-translation’) is diminishing in post-Partition Sindhi generations in India, but it is possible to see its remnants in ‘the generation that crossed the border’, who had witnessed a fluidity of spiritual and ideological borders, a zone of liminality which is neither this nor that. The well-known Sindhi Hindu writer Jethmal Parsram calls this “a state of negation”, or rather a state of being simultaneously this and that (Parsram 2000: 49).

Over time all three religions—Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism—were trans-fused into a Sindhi adaptation of Sufism, a philosophy of love communicated in more than one language and more than one religion. Sufism in Sindh may be part of a long-standing indigenisation process that dates back to the tenth century, when missionaries from the Ismaili branch of Shiism visited the region. According to Thapan (2005: 208), the Ismailis did not “resort to force to win over converts. Instead they used local beliefs to spread their own message”. She cites Pir Sadrudin’s version of the Dasavtaar, a Hindu pantheon of ten Hindu Gods that shows Ali (a holy figure from the Quran revered by the Shias) to be the last incarnation of Lord Vishnu! According to Lari (2002: 64), it was in the fourteenth century that Sufi saints belonging to the Suhrawardiyya order mounted a successful challenge to the Ismaili missionaries in Sindh. Two other major orders—Naqshbandi and Qadri—also planted themselves on the soil of Sindh. Over time, many smaller orders or independent *pirs* also emerged, so that the landscape was dotted with *pirs* who wielded both spiritual and political control (see Ansari 1992). Their influence was far from uniform, at least as far as Hindus were concerned. For instance, the orders that adhered more closely to the Shariat (known as *ba-shara*⁴) attracted Hindus only to a limited extent, whereas the *be-shara pirs* (those who went against the Shariat) had Hindu disciples. On the whole, everyone in Sindh (Hindus and Muslims alike) would have affiliation with some Sufi *pir*, and to be without such affiliation was a matter of some embarrassment. Schimmel (1969: 168) notes that “In Sindh, the borders between Hinduism and Islam were not hermetically closed,

4. The *ba-shara* are those ‘with the law’, while the *be-shara* are those ‘without the law’.

and the biographical works about the Sufis of Sindh contain also several names of Hindus who became attached to a Muslim Shaikh—and the first thorough studies of Sindhi mysticism have been made by Hindus.”

If the Hindus were imbued with Sufism, the Muslims of Sindh and especially the Sufis were in turn deeply imbued with Hinduism. For now we turn to some Sufi verses by two of Sindh’s most iconic Sufis—Shah Abdul Latif (1689–1752) and Sachal Sarmast (1739–1829), poets whose work epitomises the syncretic nature of Sufism in Sindh. Regardless of class, gender, or religious and ideological persuasion, every Sindhi-speaking person internalises the Sufi poetry of Latif and Sarmast. Folk tales about famous lovers who for reasons of class or religion could not have a union (for example, Sohini and Menhwal, Sasui and Punhoon, Moomal and Rano) provided allegories for a human relationship with God in the Sufi poetry of Latif and Sarmast. At the same time, references to the prophet, the *yogis*, Guru Nanak, and Ram⁵ and Mira⁶ also co-exist in their poetry, making their texts a hybrid experience.

Linguistically speaking, the verses by Latif and Sarmast did not belong to a single ‘original’. The Sufis themselves recited them in at least five different languages—Sindhi, Siraiki, Punjabi, Arabic and Rajasthani. Thus the experience of migrancy and translation was written into the articulation and internalisation of Sufi thought in Sindh. In the process of travel, Sufism-the-text was translated into local codes of signification but without becoming unrecognisably new, and hence it carried the meanings of the original but in translation. The discussion below attempts to illustrate this hybridity and being-in-translation through the spirit of verses, mainly those by Latif.

Being-in-translation in the poetry of Latif and Sarmast

Shah Abdul Latif is a towering figure in the consciousness of Sindh, where every Sindhi-speaking person remains touched by his *Shah Jo Risalo* (Message of the shah). It is said that Latif himself was unhappy to be read and preferred to exist in the oral tradition, because fixity leads to dogma. On finding his disciples compiling his verses, he threw the manuscript in a lake, but the disciples again sought permission to compile his verses and put together the *Risalo*. The manuscript was published by Ernest Trumpp in Leipzig in 1866, 114 years after Latif’s death. Many

5. Ram is the hero of the Hindu epic *Ramayana* (c. 700 C.E.). He is regarded as an ideal man and king and worshipped as the seventh incarnation of God.

6. Mira was a great sixteenth-century Hindu saint-poet.

versions and translations of the *Risalo* followed. Interestingly, the most enduring contribution has been made by Sindhi Hindus (see Gajwani 1996: 3).

As mentioned earlier, the hybridised tradition of Sufism discussed in the foregoing sections is epitomised in the *Risalo*, which is recited in at least three languages—Sindhi, Siraiki and Arabic. This multilingualism is matched by a multiplicity of religious traditions that include the Koran, the Hindu *Gita*, and the teachings of Sikhism. The *Risalo* also played a pioneering role in making the Sindhi language (hitherto associated with pragmatic and everyday speech among the merchants and artisans of Sindh) a vehicle of philosophical thought and lyricism. The *Risalo* is anchored to the territory of Sindh, and it interweaves Sufi divinity with folk stories, drawing imagery from the collective imagination of the people. At the same time, its geographical identity expands to places outside Sindh, because the *Risalo* has traveled, through oral tradition, in the regions of Western India. From the people of Sindh to the desert of Kutch in Gujarat and to Rajasthan, the verse of Shah Abdul Latif traverses multiple worlds, intersecting every now and then with Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. Latif's verses are to be found among the Sidis (African slaves) brought to Gujarat, the Muslim tribes of Sodhas and Mutwas, and 'liminal' tribes (neither Hindu nor Muslim) such as the Langhas and Manghaniars of Rajasthan.

Traversing through regions, classes and religions, the *Risalo* also occupies an in-between space as far as sexuality is concerned. Recited by a male, it takes the subject position of a woman in folk stories. This in itself might not be unusual in mystical tradition, where the devotee assumes the position of a bride or beloved and the idea of 'God' is invested with masculinity. The point I am trying to make, however, is that no dominant position is allowed to be reified in Sindh's Sufism, and this is most evident in the hybridity of Shah's *Risalo*. Compare, for instance, the opening lines in Persianized Sindhi:

Awal Allah Aalim Allah, Aalam jo dhani
Kadir pahinji kudrat se, kaimu aahe kadamu
Vaali, vaahid, vahdah, raazik, rabbu, rahim
So saarahi sachho dhani, chai hamdu hakim
Kare paan Karim, joru jor jahaan jee. (Latif, in Hardwani 2006: 2)

Without beginning
Without end
All knowing monarch
Of the universe
Omnipotent and benevolent
The one and only
Lord
Utter his name

Sing his praises
 The ever compassionate
 Creator of the cosmos. (in Makhija and Dilgir 2005: 29)

These lines evoke in an almost primal but specifically Islamic manner the name of Allah (unfortunately flattened out in the English translation). What is interesting is that these lines are cast in a specific meter and rhythm drawn from musical traditions of India. The *Risalo* is arranged in the form of chapters (*dastan*) of different musical *raga* (compositions) to be sung at different times of the day. Thus while the sense of unity and oneness so central to Sufism and the name of Allah connect the *Risalo* to an Arabic tradition, its form is very subcontinental. This contrast of traditions in the form and content persists in different ways throughout the *Risalo*. For instance, the self-image of a Sufi in lines such as those below,

Unhappy
 Is a sufi
 When he gets something
 Happy is a sufi with nothing (Makhija and Dilgir 2005: 55)

or the lineage claimed through the thirteenth-century Sufi philosopher, Rumi, in the verse below,

The beloved
 A sea of splendour
 The world
 A gathering of solicitors
 Says Rumi
 This secret
 Once known
 Seals the lips
 Forever. (in Makhija and Dilgir 2005: 56)

contrast with allusions in another chapter to Hindu yogic practices and Vedantic thought:

When there is no heaven, no trace of earth,
 Where the moon and the sun neither rise, nor descend
 That far the yogis have set their tryst with the Supreme.
 They see the Lord in Nothingness. (in Makhija and Dilgir 2005: 36)

Elsewhere, Latif says about the *yogis*

They wear loin-cloth and need no ablutions,
 They hear the subtle call
 That sounded before the advent of Islam. (in Makhija and Dilgir 2005: 131)

Allusions to high traditions of Islam and Hinduism are juxtaposed with popular imagination and references. According to Motilal Jotwani (2006: 2), the *Risalo* is a “long wail of separation”—the poignant longing of the female protagonist (a role Latif adopts for himself) for her male lover. Latif allegorically depicts the mystical union of man with God in many *surs* (sections). In the tales of Sasui and Punhoon, Sohini and Mehwal, and Moomal and Rano there is a merging of irreconcilable lovers kept apart by class and religious differences. Their merging is not physical, but spiritual, symbolising the union with God. At that point Latif’s Sufism moves from the plane of a common folk tale to a mystical communion with God, but without becoming alienating for Sindh’s common people. In the lines below from the folk tale of the Brahmin maiden Sasui and the Muslim prince Punhoon, Sasui realises that there is no ‘other’ called Punhoon. The seeker also becomes the sought, achieving complete union.

As I turned inwards and conversed with my soul,
There was no mountain to surpass,
No Punhoon to look for,
I myself became Punhoon! (in Makhija and Dilgir 2005: 3)

This notion of unity is also consistent with the concept of *advait* or non-dualism in Hinduism. Realisation is possible only by becoming one with the object of realisation. The influence of Hinduism is most evident in Sur Ramkali, one of the sections of *Shah Jo Risalo*. Once again Latif returns to a folk tale, that of Moomal and Rano. Moomal loves Rano, but there are insurmountable hurdles in her path. Longing for Rano in his absence, Moomal asks her sister to dress like a man and sleep next to her. Unfortunately, Rano visits her abode and assumes that Moomal is sleeping with a man. He leaves Moomal forever, and there is no physical union between the two in future. Moomal pines for her lover, but eventually rises above the bondage of mind and body. She realises that there is no duality between herself and the other—who should seek whom then?

Where should I drive the camel?
All around is His glory (in Makhija and Dilgir: 2005: 33)

Latif’s disciple Sachal Sarmast also blended multiple languages and traditions, creating for himself a state of migrancy in both language and culture. Yet Sarmast also moved beyond Latif in his radicalism. It is said that on visiting the village of Daraaz, where Sarmast was born to a Sufi *fakir* (spiritual miracle-maker), Latif predicted that “This boy will lift the lid off the cauldron we have set boiling.” Sarmast openly condemned temples and mosques, which in his view were the haunts of sectarianism. He was so influenced by the teachings of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, that he named his favourite disciple Yusuf Nanak. Both Sarmast’s

radicalism and his openness to Sikhism are evident in the lines below (note the use of the Sikh term *satguru*,⁷ or true guru):

Never mind the Kaaba,⁸ never mind the kabila,
 All these are pretexts
 The sacredness of the Kaaba may well be in taverns
 Sachal says, satguru is here, drink for him. (in Advani 1970: 8) (my translation)

On another occasion, Sikhism meets traditional Sufism:

Satguru rightly said, you are the emperor
 Yours is the true glory
 There is no otherness. (in Advani 1970: 5) (my translation)

In the above discussion on Shah Abdul Latif and Sachal Sarmast, we see that what came to be known as ‘Sufism’ in Sindh was really a gamut of stories about love, surrender and unity concretised through images from the collective consciousness of the people of Sindh. This degree of adaptation or localisation might raise questions about whether this cultural or spiritual phenomenon is indeed ‘Sufism’. The present paper is not, however, concerned with the ‘original text’ of Sufism, but rather the way this is disseminated and becomes acknowledged as Sufism without being appropriated by a dominant religion or language. It is not being suggested that this kind of indigenisation of Islam, or even its cross-fertilisation with other traditions, was peculiar only to Sindh. Nevertheless, the history of Sindh shows that by and large Sufism did not privilege either of the dominant religions of the Sindh region, but created a third space, a zone of liminality where identities are simultaneously Hindu and Muslim, or perhaps neither in exclusive terms.

Conclusion

It would seem from the above that Sufism acquired a life of its own in Sindh and lived effortlessly through stories and legends, becoming part of everyday consciousness. Informed by the post-nineties use of the term “translation” to understand ethnography, my use of this word embodies cultural negotiations, a dynamic between religion and social memory. Sufism in Sindh emerged as an ‘impure’ target text and in the process chose its own definition. It also, however, intangibly defined the Iranian *Tasawwuf* (Sufism) and showed how the seams of a defined tradition can come undone through translation.

7. Literally meaning ‘the true teacher’, this is a reference to God, especially in Sikhism.

8. This building in Mecca is the holiest place in Islam. “Kabila” refers to a community or clan.

Cultural negotiations of this nature obviously do not happen wholesale; they happen in bits and pieces, now faithful, now free. The shift of a mystical and abstract philosophy to a folk, everyday philosophy of love that linked the Hindus and Muslims of Sindh was a result of the migrancy of Sufism from one region/reality to another. This is illustrated by the ‘bilingualism’ of the ‘text’ called Sufism in Sindh, a text that is never fully translated. For instance, the same Sufi *pirs* are available in two different idioms/languages/religions in Sindh. The twelfth-century *pir* Lal Shahbaz worshipped by both Hindus and Muslims has a Hindu name, Bhartari Raja; similarly, the eleventh-century Jhule Lal worshipped by the Hindus is called Khwaja Khizr by Sindhi Muslims. Both communities visit the same mausoleums and celebrate the birth and death anniversaries. This represents the co-existence of two different versions that do not see the need for one final ‘target text’. It is for this reason that I see Sufism in Sindh as a site or locus of being-in-translation—one whose boundaries (at least up to the nineteenth century) were not closed and whose ‘textuality’ was not definable and immutable.

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